

SOAR 2-PC-7
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SOAR Chapter 2-PC-7 is located in Ft.Wayne, IN. We are retirees and spouses from USW Local 903, representing workers at the Dana Holding Company, Light Vehicle Division plant. "Dana Holding", is a new name, replacing the former "Dana Corporation" after bankruptcy and reorganization in 2006-2007. We produced most of the light truck, 4-wheel drive, and SUV axles for the US auto industry for many years. Our Ft.Wayne workforce has been reduced by outsourcing, both abroad and to "RAF's" or Regional Assembly Facilities, (other smaller Dana plants, close to customers and primarily non-union!), but we are proud to have produced the finest axles, gear-sets, and axle components in the world.

Many of us worked as Allied Industrial Workers (AIW), then United Paperworkers International Union (UPIU), and finally, Paper, Allied-Industrial, Chemical and Energy workers (PACE), and then with the merger in 2004 we became STEELWORKERS! While some of us questioned another merger at the time, becoming USW and SOAR members was one of the best things that could have happened. Not only were we represented by the USW in bankruptcy, retaining our pensions and gaining a VEBA funded healthcare agreement when Dana walked away from their obligation, but many of the RAF's where our jobs had gone were organized by the USW or UAW under the BK settlement's "Neutrality Agreement", and capital investments and JOBS have returned to the Ft.Wayne plant.

Our Chapter is fairly small, averaging around 25 members attending the monthly meeting, but we are locally active. In May 2010 we were represented at the Rapid Response National Conference in Washington, DC by Sec'y/Treas. Dave Kobiela. Dave presents a RR report at each monthly meeting, and we have signed petitions and called our elected officials on several issues.

June brought one of our largest meetings of the year with the annual chicken dinner. This event is sponsored by Local 903, and attended by the Local bargaining Committee and Executive Board. Rachel Bennett-Steury, a USW sister and AAM representative was the guest speaker.

July and August meetings were suspended by vote, but that brings us into the election season. We had several members participate in parades, rallies and other events in support of local. USW endorsed candidates. Dr. Tom Hayhurst, running for election to Congress in Indiana's 3rd District, was very appreciative of our support, as was Codie Ross, a local State Representative candidate. Unfortunately both were defeated by the Republican's surge, but we will be back fighting for those candidates who stand up for working folks and the middle class again.

The December meeting is also a big annual event, with SOAR's support for the "Toys For Tots" program. Local 903 and our retirees have a long history of supporting this cause, with in-plant raffles, prizes donated by local businesses, and cash donations. The Dana plant even has a matching donation, and our members sell tickets to management and retired company employees. The best part may be actually shopping for the toys, led by SOAR's "Santa" John Bobay, (also our VP). John was chairman of this event for many years before he retired, and continues to play a huge role. This year he had children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren helping to shop!

I would also like to recognize President Manuel "Manny" Fernandis. Local 903 had a very active "retiree's auxiliary" for years before the PACE-USW merger came along. To be honest, many of our members didn't see the need for SOAR or anyone to "take over", or change what they already had been doing well. Manny saw the value of being affiliated with the USW and SOAR and has been one of our strongest supporters, attending Lobby Day, local rallies and marches, in spite of what amounts to a full-time job as an American Legion Post Commander.

Several others deserve mention as well. Brother Tom Braun is our representative on the Dana VEBA Committee. A highlight of every SOAR meeting is Tom's report, helping to keep us abreast of changes in this new healthcare system and spending countless hours of his own time answering questions and tracking down information, which seems to be constantly changing. We'd be lost without him. USW Local 903 President Dennis Leazier, and his executive board, deserve a special thanks. They provide us with a meeting place each month at the Union Hall, support us financially, and Denny personally attends our meetings to report on news from the Ft. Wayne Plant. Even though we are retired, it's still a topic of great interest to hear what's going on in the place we spent much of our lives.

Finally, I want to thank Local 903 Office Administrator Lynnette Price. If you contact the USW 903 hall, it will probably be Lynnette's pleasant voice you hear first. She is helping our retired brothers and sisters every day, taking messages and forwarding information, typing notes and meeting minutes, and making darn good coffee! Thank you, Lynnette, for all you do.

The biggest challenge facing 2-PC-7 is growing our membership. Two factors work against us. Many of our brothers and sisters retired long before we became Steelworkers, so they knew nothing about SOAR. And having a "30 and out" retirement in our contract means many more recent retirees are young enough to be working a second full or part-time job. Our commitment is to double our membership this year, and hopefully we can learn from our other chapters and reach that goal.

In Solidarity,

Dave Kobiela
SOAR 2-PC-7 Sec'y/Treas
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