

WHAT IS SOAR? (And why should I join??)

Greetings and Best Wishes to all my fellow retirees and your spouses! I thought "Best Wishes" were appropriate because if you watch television, read the newspaper or internet, or just talk to your friends and neighbors at the coffee shop or grocery store, it is clear that we are facing a pretty difficult stretch, (as if the past year or two wasn't bad enough!). You may have already read the report from President Leazier or Chairman Myers about the situation at the Ft. Wayne Plant. As of last week's Union meeting, layoffs at our plant had reduced the number of active members to 266 souls, and it could be fewer by the time you read this. What you may not realize is that the Bargaining Committee is continuing to struggle with the company over benefits, healthcare, and other issues, and with the automotive industry and Dana facing the challenges of our economy, things will probably get worse before they get better.

Ft. Wayne Dana retirees have always been well represented, whether it was AIW, UPIU, PACE, or USW. As a recent member of the Bargaining Committee, I know that representing and serving our retirees is seen as a responsibility and a privilege. Those brothers and sisters still working owe their good contract and their very jobs to those of you who did an outstanding job for so many years. However, with all of the layoffs, the daily plant issues, and continuing problems with benefits for those still working, the Committee cannot always provide all of the service they would like. The company has also taken good care of the retirees in my experience, especially at the Ft. Wayne Plant level, and I thank those men and women who took pride in providing that service. However, most of those people have been let go and now we must depend more on Toledo, or some subcontractor hired by Dana. Need I say more? Finally, Brother Tom Braun has done an outstanding job as a member of the VEBA Committee, putting in many hours of his own time and answering calls day and night to help us with problems as they arise. As Tom will explain in his VEBA report, he will no longer be able to act as the "advocate" for retirees, due to the VEBA attorney's ruling citing possible conflicts of interest.

The bottom line for us as retirees is this. We are going to have to do more to represent ourselves. Fortunately, SOAR, the "Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees" is already in place. One very important point to remember. Our current "Retiree Auxiliary" has always done an outstanding job and will continue to meet and function as it always has. SOAR membership will not change that fact. There will just be more resources and more support to do what needs to be done. Here's a description from the USW website:

SOAR was established in 1985 to organically link the USW's active members with those in retirement so that both can work on common problems. SOAR has proved to be a true partner of our active membership in the pursuit of economic security.

In recognition of this partnership the delegates to the 30th International Convention voted unanimously to add an amendment to the USW Constitution recognizing SOAR as an affiliate organization of the USW. The amendment also encourages the formation of SOAR chapters, establishes direct communication between the local union and the chapter and gives SOAR chapter leaders input into negotiations on retiree issues. Until SOAR came along, there was no strong advocate to focus attention on the special problems and needs faced by USW pensioners and their spouses. SOAR made these problems very visible and helped fashion USW policy to deal with them. Our relationship with the United Steelworkers is based on shared values.

The major purpose of SOAR is to deal with the Social, Economic, Educational, Legislative and Political developments and concerns of its members and spouses. We fight for the preservation of Social Security, Medicare, for better health care protection, as well as for federal laws to better serve the elderly. Our structure gives USW retirees a special place in their union.

With the election of President Barack Obama, our country is going to see many significant changes in the next few years. What those changes are, and how they affect us will be determined significantly by the voices of "We The People". SOAR provides us a strong, unified voice as retirees and can help to shape this legislation. Policy on Medicare, Social Security, Pensions, Health Care, Energy and the Environment will be shaped by the voices that our lawmakers hear. Dana UNION people have never backed down from a challenge and have never been shy about letting their voices be heard.

In addition, SOAR will give Ft. Wayne retirees a strong, direct influence on the VEBA committee, which will be making decisions about our health care which affects us all.

SOAR dues are \$12.00 per year for retirees, and \$3.00 per year for spouses, with 44% of this amount returned to the Local Chapter. Please take the time to sign up and encourage those fellow retirees who may not have seen the newsletter to sign up as well. With over 1,300 retirees, Local 903 could have one of the largest and most influential SOAR Chapters in District 7.

In Solidarity,

Dave Kobiela, USW 903 Retiree