



Pennsylvania

## My name is John Shelkons.

Driver • Beaver County Times • Beaver, PA

We drove company trucks at night; we would load the trucks and go and deliver the papers. It was all part-time. The most anyone ever got was 17 hours per week. Most people worked 3 or 4 days. On regular days we were guaranteed 4 hours. On Sundays when the papers were bigger, we got 5 hours.

Some guys were retired and they were doing it to supplement their retirement income. We had 8 out of 40 with college degrees. Some hadn't finished high school.

I started there in October of 1997 to help pay for my kids' college tuition. For a while the relationship between workers and management was decent but in 2003 it began to change. Management limited new employees to 3 hours/night guaranteed, cut some routes and froze our pay.

We started talking in January 2005 about bringing in a union to protect what rights we had left and to get a contract. I pulled 7 guys together to work on the committee and we began to get union authorization cards signed. The company was furious when they found out and hired an anti-union firm to defeat our effort. They failed.

Out of 43 people in our unit 28 voted for the union and 12 against. This election was supervised by the NLRB. They hired a law firm from Nashville to conduct their negotiations and we began to meet in June 2005. We negotiated from then until summer of 2008. We never reached an agreement.

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We continued to maintain solidarity even as months stretched into years and even as the company attempted to get us to decertify. One day management came in and said they were closing down the printing, shipping and delivery departments. They contracted it all out. We weren't able to gain a contract, however, the USW was able to negotiate for our severance.

The *Beaver County Times* subcontracted out the driving to West Penn and some of our guys took jobs there. They don't have any benefits now.

We won all the charges we took to the NLRB. One guy was fired illegally and he got back pay plus a monetary settlement.

I have a day job working for the health department. I ended up quitting the driving and just sticking with my day job. I had been a steward with another union for years. The company didn't mess with me, probably because I worked for the government.

If we had the Employee Free Choice Act, the *Beaver County Times* would have had to negotiate with us. Instead, the paper hired a union busting firm and paid them instead of working with us. They held mandatory meetings and talked about how bad the Steelworkers were. They fired that one guy and that scared people. If there were actually money penalties, it would have more of an impact on the situation. If they had negotiated and hammered out an agreement, we would have had a contract. The majority of our group definitely wanted to do it, but the company never really bargained with us and there was no way for us to force them to the table.

**We need the**

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