



...from the Hall

Issue # 2
April 2004

A newsletter by and for the members of *PACE* Local 8-237
Tacoma, Washington

The President's Corner

—by Chuck Whitt

The news was bad, but it wasn't totally unexpected. On March 16, 2004, representatives from our local, as well as the other locals of the mill, met with the Company and their insurance representatives to discuss the proposed increases to our medical plan. The monthly premium for our medical insurance with Premera will increase from \$777.41 to \$1,053.82, a 35.6% jump. As a result of our labor agreement, we pick up 25% of the \$276.41 monthly increase, or \$69.10 more per month out of our pockets, for a total of \$167.05 per month. (Obviously, the Company picks up the other 75% (\$207.31 per employee per month) of the increase.)

At the meeting with these brokers, we discussed ways to bring these medical costs down. Some of the options presented were increases in prescription co-pays, increases in office co-pays, and increases in the out-of-pocket maximum. Adding up all of the savings would only amount to about \$22 per month, easily eaten up by a doctor's visit and getting a prescription filled. When this was discussed at the last union meeting, there was no desire to make these changes.

Other suggestions were to control our usage of our insurance. The idea here is that one of the factors used to calculate our premiums is our usage history. Though it would not have an impact on our increases this year, exercising a little restraint in deciding to go to the doctor, opting for generic rather than brand name when getting prescriptions and using mail-order pharmacies to cut costs (you save directly here by only paying two prescription co-pays for three months supply), would save the plan money, and theoretically, save us money in the future. You'll have to decide for yourself if this makes economic sense to you. It does seem logical that this affects our cost though.

Another option presented by the Company would be to charge different premiums based on the number of dependents. Currently we pay a composite rate for employees and retirees, each paying \$97.95 per month. With the proposed new contribution rate of \$167.05 was a proposal to break that up into tiers where a single employee/retiree would pay \$75.60; an employee/retiree with one dependent would pay \$151.19; and an employee/retiree with two or more dependents would pay \$225.79. The Company would still pay the same amount.

This, again, was unacceptable to the members at the last meeting. The last thing we want to start doing is dividing our membership up into the haves and have-nots.

So in the end we're victims once again to the medical insurance industry and its escalating medical premiums. It's affecting all businesses equally, most definitely in a negative light, and there seems to be no end in sight. Our premiums and employee contributions will continue to go up until they reach a point that neither the Company nor the employees will be able to afford much of a medical plan. And then we'll have nothing, or at most catastrophic medical insurance, like over fifty million of our fellow Americans.

I would note here that America is the only major industrialized country in the world to not have universal medical coverage for its citizens. And though we will tout our advanced medical care and spending on medicine (over \$1.3 trillion), in the end we're not as well off as many other countries in the areas of life expectancy, infant mortality, and other indicators of a healthy populace. We're spending more and getting less, and every day 1000 hard working Americans like you and I lose their medical coverage entirely. If this political problem is not solved, we too can soon expect that the employees and retirees of Simpson Tacoma Kraft will one day join the ranks of the uninsured.

There are many plans out there for implementing and paying for universal health coverage. If we spent no more on universal medical coverage than we spend now (as previously noted, the highest amount in the world), we could spread the costs out among those who are already insured and those 50 million that are uninsured (or under-insured) to effectively lower the rates for everyone.

Make no mistake about it; America does have universal access to health care. When those who have no coverage get sick, they go to the hospital and get the treatment they need (the most expensive kind of treatment). When they can't pay the bill, the hospitals and insurance companies raise our premiums to make up the difference (ever wonder why you pay \$10 for an aspirin at the hospital?). Why not have the Wal-Mart's and other companies (big and small) who

(Continued on page 3)



Vice President's Corner

— by Bob Jones

In the last newsletter I stated, "Living in the big time is not an act of living, but a state of mind." The best way to describe that statement is with a narrative:

A chicken farmer lived next to a tall mountain. One day as he was on his way to pick up supplies, he noticed a eagles nest upside down on the ground, so he stop, picked up the nest and there underneath was an eaglet. He took the nest and the eaglet set them on side of the mountain in hopes the father, or mother would return. Several days later the farmer was on his way to pick up supplies and saw the same nest on the ground faced down. He stopped his truck went over to the nest and turned it over and noticed the eaglet was still there. The farmer took the eaglet home and situated the eaglet in the hen house.

Months later, the farmer's friend came for a visit and said to his friend" you need to take that eagle out of the hen house."

They promptly took the eagle out into the barnyard, and proceeded to toss it up in the air, in hopes the eagle would spread its wings and fly away. Plop! The eagle hit the ground and ran back into the hen house. Perplexed! The two men said at the exact same time this eagle thinks it's a chicken. The two men decided to take the eagle to the top of the mountain and throw it off, hoping it will fly away. Whoosh! They threw the eagle off the edge of the mountain. Down, down, down! Went the eagle never spreading its wings. Both men stood there in fear knowing they had killed this eagle. Suddenly! The eagle spread its wings, and begin to soar on the current of air; heading straight for the hen house. As the eagle came closer to the hen house it flapped its wings and flew off into the distances never to be seen again.

The analogy of this story is this, are you a chicken, or are you an eagle?

It takes perseverance, dedication, and motivation to expand your mind. To be an eagle requires vision, strength of heart and strength mind. Strive to be an eagle, and your success in life will not be far behind. Vince Lombardi once coach of

the Green Bay Packers stated "a winner has the desire for excellence and the will to augment himself in the process."

It doesn't take a lot of vision, or motivation to be a chicken, you just hang around the barnyard all your life.

Grievances

Listed below are some of the grievances that have been filed. Any questions please let Bob Jones know.

Shift coordinators performed work in Lime Kiln rather than calling for additional help: Active

Individual makes comments in meeting that management thought was disruptive: Active

Individual cited for inattention to details: Active

Shift coordinator performed bargaining unit work instead of calling for additional operator: Active

Supervisor helped in rigging instead of calling for extra personnel: Active

Junior person called in place of senior loader: Active

Any comments or thoughts please contact Bob Jones at ext. 449

Don't forget: Our union meetings are now held at the Pierce County Annex on 35th Street (behind Titus-Will Ford). The meetings start at 4:30 PM We'll meet on April 12th and 26th this month.



(Continued from page 1)

don't insure their employees pay their own way, rather than have us paying for their medical access? Reasonable? I think so.

I would urge each of you to get involved in the political debate on health coverage. Quite literally, the life of you and your family depends upon it.

The Family and Medical Leave Act

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) was signed into law in 1993 by President Clinton. It is one of the last great acts to come out of Washington that benefits the unionist. Upon its enactment, the FMLA became a powerful tool for the working man and woman. Employees immediately gained the hard fought for right to care for themselves and their families without fear of losing their jobs.

The FMLA can be broken down into two components: The Medical Leave component, where you have the right to care for yourself; and the Family Leave component that gives you the right to take care of your family. Most of the aspects of the Act are shared by both components and we'll cover those in this limited space.

The FMLA allows the employee to take up to 12 weeks per year of unpaid leave to care for themselves or their family. This leave can be taken all at once, for days at a time, or even for part of a day. This time can be taken off without fear of getting an incident and finding yourself in trouble with the attendance program. It also gives you the right to refuse light-duty assignments for the first 12 weeks of an injury or illness. You also have the right to use this for the birth of a child and for the placement of a child with you for adoption or foster care.

In order to utilize the FMLA, all an employee need do is state a qualifying reason when they notify the Company they will not be coming into work. This is important to understand. Contrary to what the Company may lead you to believe, **you do not need to ask the Company's permission to utilize this Act!** You do not need to state that you're exercising your FMLA rights when calling in, nor are you automatically required to fill out Company paperwork when you have used these rights. In fact, as I like to say, you don't even know how to spell FMLA to use the Act. ☺(Seriously, the Act stipulates that the user does not even need to know of the existence of the Act in order to enjoy its protections.)

Just what is a qualifying reason?

The Act says that you or a family member must have a *Serious Health Condition* (SHC) in order to utilize the FMLA. A Serious Health Condition is defined as "*an illness, injury, impairment, or physical or mental condition that involves one of the following:*

1. *Inpatient hospital care (i.e., an overnight stay at a hospital or similar facility).*
2. *An injury, illness, or other condition lasting more than three consecutive calendar days that involves continuing treatment by a health care provider.*
3. *Pregnancy.*
4. *A chronic serious health condition.*
5. *A long term or permanently disabling health condition.*
6. *A condition requiring multiple treatments to prevent a period of incapacity of more than three consecutive calendar days."*

From the FMLA Handbook by Robert M. Schwartz – Work Rights Press

Most of the time you'll find you qualify under 1, 2, and 6 above. If you or a family member are involved in a car accident and are hospitalized, you're qualified. If you or a family member are injured and are incapacitated for more than three days (this means on the fourth day) you're qualified. (Here's a difference between Family Leave and Medical Leave – if your family member is incapacitated for more than three days, even if you only take one day off to care for them, you're qualified. You still need to be off work for more than three days to qualify for your own illness.) The Act does not cover minor illnesses such as colds and flu, headaches, routine dental work, etc. (unless they turn in more complicated illnesses).

There are as many aspects of qualifying as there are variations in illnesses, too many to cover here, so it's best to check with me or a shop steward if you have questions about your own qualifications.

As stated earlier, to use the Act all you need do is state a qualifying reason. That's as easy as saying when you call in that a family member has been in a car accident and is going to the hospital; or that you've twisted an ankle and will be off for a few day; or you're taking your husband to the hospital; or stating what ever medical condition of yours or your family will qualify you under the FMLA. There are many ways to exercise your FMLA rights, but the important thing to remember it to say more than just "I won't be in tonight." Do this and you'll be protected from getting an incident under the attendance program.

(Continued on page 4)



(Continued from page 3)

The Company does have the right to verify your FMLA status. Within 48 hours of you calling in the Company has a right to ask for documentation. Sometimes they'll do this, sometimes they won't. After 48 hours they lose the right to require documentation unless they have reason to believe you're not being truthful. The onus is upon the Company to do this, it's not your responsibility to seek out their approval.

For the most part, FMLA issues are discovered when we sit in on an attendance warning and review reasons you called in sick. If we see a qualifying reason on the attendance summary, we point this out to the Company and in most cases the warning is pulled.

Aside from the SHC requirement, the only other requirements that would be of interest to STK employees

would be that you need to have worked here for one year and have had 1250 hours in the preceding 12 months. Further, if you know that you will need to use FMLA (pregnancy, adoption, scheduled surgery, etc.), then you are required to give the Company advance notice of your need to be off work.

The Family and Medical Leave Act affords us the comfort to take care of ourselves and our families without fear of reprisal. It's a tool to protect you and your family. Know that it's there; know how it can work for you.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at your discretion. If you're web enabled, then the Department of Labor web site (www.dol.gov) has some great tools to help you get the most out of the Act.

— Chuck Whitt —

APRIL 2004

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1 CBA	2 CBA	3 DBA
					Payday	
4 DBA	5 DBA	6 DCA	7 DCA	8 DCB	9 DCB	10 ACB
11 ACB	12 ACB	13 ADB	14 ADB	15 ADC	16 ADC	17 BDC
Easter	Union Mtg.				Payday	
18 BDC	19 BDC	20 BAC	21 BAC	22 BAD	23 BAD	24 CAD
25 CAD	26 CAD	27 CBD	28 CBD	29 CBA	30 CBA	DBA
	Union Mtg.				Payday	