

**JANUARY, 2007**

**SUBJECT: NEW CHALLENGES FOR A NEW YEAR**

**FIRST AND FOREMOST**, I want to extend greetings on behalf of the officers and staff, a Happy, Healthy New Year to all our members.

■ **WHAT AN ELECTION!**

For the first time in a long time, working men and women's voices were heard at the polls on November 7th. A clear pro-worker message was sent to our elected officials across the country and here in Missouri. Republicans and Democrats alike voted for change. Local 655 will be there at every crossing to make sure our interest is heard by the legislators in Jefferson City, Springfield and Washington, DC. While many good things happened in the election, it most certainly will not solve all of our issues in the year to come.

■ **A CHALLENGING YEAR AHEAD**

I will not pull any punches: this is going to be a trying year for everyone. Especially impacted will be our members in the Retail Division, of which the largest single group – employed at Schnucks, Dierbergs and Shop 'n Save – fall under the Greater St. Louis Food Employers' Council (GSLFEC) contract that expires May 13. We all would like to avoid a repeat of the last contract showdown that led to our first-ever food industry strike. Unfortunately, negotiations promise to be as tough as they were before. We will, however, remind the employers that without our proud Union members in the workforce, Schnucks, Dierbergs and Shop 'n Save would not be the companies they are today.

The GSLFEC contract impacts most every Local 655 member because it sets the health care standard for the majority of our contracts. Because of this, we have over 30 other contracts expiring this year, – Straubs, Kroger, Western Plastics, Holten Meat, Elsberry IGA ( to name a few ) – most of which are on hold until the GLSFEC contract is settled.

■ **GETTING READY FOR NEGOTIATIONS**

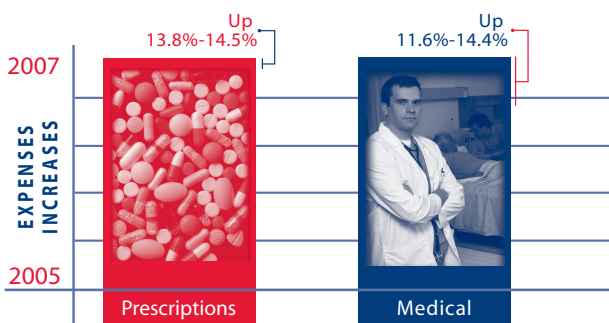
The opening GSLFEC contract meeting is set for Sunday, February 11 at the Machinists Hall, 12365 St. Charles Rock Road in Bridgeton; there will be a choice of sessions — *Morning @ 9 a.m. / Evening @ 7 p.m.* It's important that all members employed at Schnucks, Dierbergs and Shop 'n Save attend. Recently many members received a survey asking about contract concerns, issues and priorities. If you received a survey and haven't returned it, please do so quickly. We want our members input as to what you consider are the critical issues in the upcoming talks. So please stay informed, attend Union meetings and bring your thoughts to the opening contract meeting February 11.

■ **THE 800 POUND GORILLAS ON OUR BACKS**

Two critical issues – 800 pound gorillas – we face this year:

1. Health care costs and
2. Wal-Mart's continuing sprawl and its effects on our industry.

**Health care costs:** You can't pick up a newspaper or turn on the television without hearing about the national crisis in health care. Over 46 million people in the country don't even have coverage. Our key issue of 2003 has not gone away. In fact, it has gotten worse. Figures from our own healthcare consultants show health care costs soaring:



A major issue in negotiations will probably be cost sharing of premiums — many Union plans have some form of it. Local 655's plan is unique in our eight-state UFCW region, in that the employers still pay the full monthly premium — that is the cost to provide you and your family with health insurance. To give you a feeling for the magnitude of the cost of our health care, over a two-year period, the Health & Welfare Fund paid out \$101,722,623 to cover the claims of Local 655 members and dependents. Our consultants tell us that on average, employees in 2005 (the latest national figures) were paying about 25% of their premiums for family coverage. Currently, our members with health care coverage pay out-of-pocket costs such as deductibles and co-payments, and nothing for the premium.



**Wal-Mart:** Local 655 has dramatically slowed Wal-Mart's expansion into our region with a vigorous political, social and economic campaign. I want to extend my thanks to those members who are committed to giving their time and energy to this worthwhile cause. Yet, Wal-Mart is determined to open more Supercenters that directly compete with our Union supermarkets. We all know Wal-Mart is a lousy employer, pays "slave" wages, and has little or no benefits (dependent health care is entirely paid by the employee, and it's a horrible plan). Remember, every Wal-Mart worker not covered by the company plan is a cost to you and all taxpayers. Wal-Mart often forces people to work in unsafe working conditions and discriminates against women and older workers. That saves them billions, and creates unfair competition for Union employers and small independent retailers. Regrettably, your own employer has resorted to cutting hours, using more part-timers, and demanding more work on the same manhours. Even with these drastic changes, Wal-Mart has an unfair advantage.

*While we don't like it, Wal-Mart's competition is impacting us more than ever before.* In St. Louis there are 6,000 less Union food jobs because of the effects of Wal-Mart. We can't stick our head in the sand. Our goal has always been to maintain our jobs as career jobs for those who want them. Local 655 has built up wages, pensions, and benefits to make that possible. But, if Wal-Mart continues to expand in the St. Louis market, we may be forced to find new ways to ensure the future of your job. It's a reality we have to face.

■ **WE NEED YOUR HELP!**

Local 655's priority is to continue to make this Union the best it can be! The key to the strength of any organization is the strength of the members. Therefore, we are calling on ALL members to join the fight against Wal-Mart. It's a great campaign and we have been joined by many statewide organizations but we need your help — for handbilling, calling city leaders, attending local community and political meetings (such as planning and zoning where permits are sought). This is EVERYONE'S FIGHT because your contract, regardless of where you work, is at stake! If you want to maintain a living wage, paid holidays and vacations, and health care, YOU have to get involved. How? Call Sec.-Treasurer Dave Cook, our local WakeUpWalMart coordinator (636-736-2702), or Assistant to the President Judy Davidson (636-736-2703) and tell 'em, "Count on Me!" It's your job, it's your future, it's your decision.



■ **DO YOU KNOW YOUR SHOP STEWARD?**

Your shop steward at the work site is the hands-on go-to person, whether a member has a question or is in need of Union representation. Your steward maintains the Union bulletin boards and keeps the membership in touch with

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ongoing Union activities. Your steward contacts the Union Representative when something goes awry at the store.

Local 655 has been credited with conducting one of the finest Shop Steward's educational conferences throughout the UFCW International. Our annual conference provides your steward with updates on changes in our labor laws, contract interpretation, health care trends, grievance handling, communications and the skills to better represent our membership. It is imperative for Local 655 stewards to take an active role and stay informed.

On February 19 and 20, your steward has been invited to attend the 2007 conference being held at the Downtown St. Louis Holiday Inn Select Convention Center at 811 North 9<sup>th</sup> Street. It is equally important for every work site and every company, where 655 members are present, to have someone attend this educational opportunity. Make sure your steward will be attending. If you are interested in becoming a work-site shop steward, contact your Union Representative.



■ YOU ARE THE 'U' IN UNION

*I am proud to be leading the finest and largest local Union in Missouri. It is a big job and no one can do it alone. I am asking for your help and I am asking you to get involved. Join us at a rally, a conference, click on our local website ([www.ufcw655.com](http://www.ufcw655.com)) or come to a Union meeting and be a part of your Union. While we have challenges ahead of us, we will remain UNITED and we will find the right way to best meet your needs and the needs of ALL Local 655 members.*

Sincerely and Fraternally,

Jim Dougherty  
President

# The Challenges in 2007

— DETAILS INSIDE

Address Correction Requested



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