

A Perspective: Looking back...and forward

By **DAVID COOK**
President

Part 1 of 2 Parts

Your current leadership team has been in place nine months now and that time has been exciting, interesting and challenging. In that short time, we have taken many crucial first steps to fulfill our responsibility: provide you and your family with the best contracts, the best wages and benefits you deserve so that together, we can look at a more secure future.

And while I'm proud to say that we have accomplished a great deal in nine short months, candidly we have much more to do in order to reach our goal.

And when I say "we" have much to do, I mean that literally – myself as your President, our Staff and Officers ... and most importantly, YOU, as our member. If we are going to be a GREAT UNION, it has to be a team effort, and that means YOU have to be involved. And rest assured, there will be plenty of opportunities for you to help secure and improve your own future!

This perspective will be in two parts: both will be partially a look back at 2011 and a look into 2012 with the aspirations I have for myself, for our Union, and for engaging you, our members. Part 2 will run in our January 19 issue.

A QUICK LOOK BACK

Last February 28, I assumed the duties as your President. On March 28, your Executive Board elected your new leadership team with myself to fill the unexpired term of our then retiring President and Dave Politte to fill my prior position as Secretary-Treasurer. Together we were charged with the responsibilities to move our Union in a new direction. Along with your Executive Board of staff and rank-and-file members, the new leadership team enthusiastically accepted the challenge.

And what a challenge it was from the git-go!

In the legislative session that had just begun in Jefferson City, workers' rights came under a vicious attack by the Missouri Legislature, an attack on workers we in Missouri had not seen since 1978 when we defeated the anti-worker, phony "right-to-work (for less)" law that would have crushed workers' ability to earn a decent living.

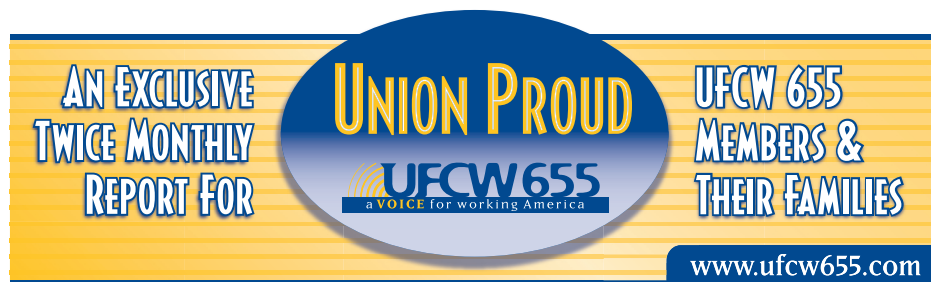
That attack last year included attempts by your lawmakers to:

- Initiate "Paycheck Deception," an effort to prevent public employees from participating in the political process, modeled on the Wisconsin attacks;
- Eliminate prevailing wages being paid on public projects, a direct attack on the construction trades which would have opened Missouri to a flood of unskilled workers coming in to undercut their standard of living by undercutting their union-negotiated wage levels;

- Once again tried to pass the anti-worker "right-to-work (for less)" which would weaken every Union and lower the standard of living of ALL workers in the state, YOU included.
- Severely cut workers' compensation and unemployment benefits so that if you were hurt on the job or lost your job you wouldn't have much help

To combat this trend, we need to increase Union Density in our jurisdiction so that we can resist going backwards and instead move towards better contracts. That is absolutely necessary for our future.

Thus, even as we launched head-on into the political fight for workers' rights, we initiated two significant changes within our Union, one internal, one external:



while trying to recover, making all of us more "pliable" to take whatever the employer wanted to dole out.

LABOR SAYS 'NO!' & LOCAL 655 STANDS UP

In the face of this unprecedented attack on working families, union and non-union alike, Organized Labor stood up and said "NO WAY!"



Unions across Missouri united. And I'm proud to say that there was not a more active Union in this

state, fighting for the rights of all workers than Local 655. We not only talked the talk, we walked the walk....

... At any one time, we took as many as 30 members off their jobs, paid their lost-time wages and had them working with Local 655's Staff and UFCW Staff from other parts of the country knocking on doors, talking to people to educate them on the effects the legislation would have on ALL working Missourians.

Through our efforts and the efforts of the entire Labor Community we were effective in stopping those attacks during last year's session. As a member of Local 655 you can, and should, be proud of the part your Union had in this huge success.

A 'NEW' UNION EMERGES

But that was only the beginning of the new identity of your Local Union.

First we set a major strategic goal – increase the Union Density within our core industries.

This is vital to everyone's future. As the non-union encroaches into our traditional areas, it puts major cost pressures on our Union employers to cut costs...that means they look to us to give-up benefits and/or reduce wages. That's not what we are all about.

Internally...

We revamped our Organizing Department because growing the size of Local 655 is a top priority since Union Density in our key industries is directly related to our ability to attain strong contracts for our members, now and in the future.

Several viable campaigns are now underway.

It is a slow process, and we face an uphill battle but we will work hard to help the unorganized win the same rights and protections we have as organized workers. Ultimately we will prevail!

Externally...

We launched a new, bold campaign built around the core issue of this Union – We are PROUD Union members willing to stand up for our rights.

This has a direct correlation to our goal of increasing our Union Density. To do so we have to organize in our core industries. And that means making people aware of our Union.

To make that point to our entire membership and to the public as well, we launched the loudest, proudest and most visible aspect of our changing Union -- our new Union button/logo. It capsulizes the essence of our new direction -- UNION PROUD – while making a statement to potential members that come through our stores every day.

We have a major advantage over most other Unions: the majority of our members are always in front of the public. These buttons advertise our message to everyone coming through your workplace: you are a UNION PROUD member of Local 655.

ESSENTIAL TO UNION DENSITY

There is no better way to make the public aware of Local 655 than to have the non-union public talk to you while you're checking them out, or stocking shelves, or responding to a question. Wearing your UNION PROUD button will encourage that opportunity.

And it's working!

First, I'm excited to see more and more members proudly wearing UNION PROUD on the job. Remember, you have a right to wear that button, so don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

Second, I'm getting strong feedback from people who see the button and appreciate that our members are proud to be union members. It enhances credibility with everyone. And it makes those who would like to be a Union member start thinking about how that might happen, which is the first step towards increasing our Union Density.

If you're not wearing a button yet, see your Shop Steward or Union Representative and we'll get you one, PRONTO.

WE ARE MOVING TO THE FOREFRONT

The new aggressive leadership of Local 655 in the past nine months has changed the opinion of our Union both in the Political World and in the Labor Community.

For years Local 655 was thought of as a large Union with a quiet voice. Because of our actions these past nine months and our direct involvement in everything that we see as important to making our Union stronger, we are now considered a driving force in the Political and Labor worlds.

I am proud to say that Local 655 has had a major impact on the issues that affect our members, which is what you deserve.

Our new leadership team has made one thing clear to everyone: We should not, and we will not, rest on our laurels of just being "big." We will and we already are having a positive impact on the decisions that are being made in the St. Louis area and in the State of Missouri!

As always, and Proud to be your President...



David M. Cook

David Cook

(PART 2 in our January 19 issue)