

# **This Labor Day, local workers are struggling**

**By Bob Martinez**

Labor Day is an important occasion for our nation, a celebration of working men and women and what they've done for our nation. However, things have changed drastically for Wichita since we celebrated Labor Day one short year ago. A year ago, the aircraft business was strong, and we worked with the city and state to provide training so the industry in Wichita could have the skilled work force it needed for the future.

Things changed so quickly. Now we are just hoping to see the bottom of the downturn, but it doesn't seem to have arrived yet. Thousands have lost their jobs in the past year, and many more jobs may be in danger. The staff and members of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers are working toward saving aircraft jobs to strengthen the community.

The IAM has been in Wichita since the 1940s, and we are intertwined with this community and surrounding areas. The contracts we have negotiated have made these jobs the best around, the kind of jobs you can raise a family on — and many have. The good IAM pensions have allowed our members to retire in dignity and respect.

These jobs fuel our economy, as their paychecks flow through the businesses of the community. Now, with the sharp downturn, we all suffer together.

As aircraft workers lose their jobs, they are never forgotten by this union. We work with them to find new jobs to make ends meet, sometimes with companies elsewhere that we have contracts with. We also work to lobby on Capitol Hill so that they are not forgotten, so that the working family has a voice. We lobby for stimulus money, for extended unemployment benefits, and working in partnership with the aircraft companies for help from the federal government to help save the aircraft industry. We are proud of the aircraft our members make, and defend those aircraft from unwarranted attacks.

Our members have donated millions and millions of dollars over the years to the United Way. We are now working with the United Way to help the newly unemployed, and I'm proud of that association.

Of course, the support we offer goes beyond just our members. As Labor Day celebrates the working family, the IAM continues to lobby for the aircraft industry, and for all workers to get the help they need to survive this downturn.

Corporations have many organizations they fund to lobby on their behalf. Working families only have their unions, and we will work tirelessly to make their voices heard.

The IAM feels the greatness of the working person is ahead of us, if we stand together. We also feel the greatest days of the aircraft industry are ahead of us. But we must pull together as a community for it to happen.

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*Bob Martinez of Dallas is southern territory general vice president of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers.*