



'ANGUS BARKS'

By Jeff Francis
AEG Executive Board

Updates

EMPLOYMENT- Close to 100 new-hires joined our union's ranks this year. Some openings remain to be filled. If this trend continues, the total hiring in 2005 may equal the total number of retirements, for the first time since 2001.

UPGRADES- Two pieces of advice the union has repeated this year to our members: *1) keep a copy of any upgrade application you submit and 2) apply for all the jobs you may be interested in, don't wait for a posting.* Local 201 is still waiting for the Company's response to our request to modernize the application procedure. More terminals and flat screens appear each day on the shop floor. This makes the Union's request more practical, and the Company's resistance more frustrating.

PAYSTUBS- Due to Local 201's efforts, Corporate agreed to return the CPARS info. we need to our paystubs, starting this Thursday. It will appear in the lower left corner of your stub. The nonsense Peoplesoft payrates will still appear in the upper left corner, but you should ignore them, and *use the hours listed in the lower corner, when calculating whether you were paid properly.* A more permanent fix is under discussion, but currently is causing disagreements between IT managers. Why Corporate wants to change a system that works, for a system that may not, only Corporate can answer.

CAPE WIND- Despite our membership's strong support, the forces of bureaucracy are winning this battle. After 3 years of delays, we expected a final report from the Army Corps of Engineers this past summer, and start-up of the project. Instead, Congress added a further study by the Interior Dept of Minerals that will begin in spring of 2006 and be finalized in 2007.

For working people in New England there will be no delay this winter in rising energy costs. For elderly and poor people in Massachusetts, home heating costs will hit hard. Already, state officials want to relax pollution restrictions on oil burning power plants to avoid electricity blackouts.

The urgent need for a new independent source of clean, renewable power for Massachusetts residents has never been clearer. Just as clear, is the control oil companies exercise over our politicians. Both the leading Democratic and Republican politicians in Massachusetts oppose Cape Wind, and not one of our incumbent Congressional reps. came out publicly to support this project.

MEDICARE PART D- Medicare is offering a new prescription drug plan to our retirees over age 65 and our disabled retirees. Our retirees are already covered by the GE pensioners prescription drug plan. Medicare rules allow retirees a choice between staying with the employer's plan, if it is better than Medicare's plan, or signing up for Medicare Part D, if it is better than the employer's plan.

In our case the GE prescription plan is superior to the Part D plan. Our retirees should stick with the GE plan, and not enroll in Medicare Part D.

For example, Medicare plans will cost an additional \$28-50/month, whereas the GE plan requires no additional contribution. Co-pays for generic and brand-name drugs average more under the Medicare plans, whether at the pharmacy or mail-order, compared to the GE plan. All but the most expensive Medicare plans have a donut hole, where coverage ends after \$2250 in annual drug costs, and the retiree must pay all prescription costs until out-of-pocket expenses reach \$3600. GE's plan has no donut hole, and it features a safety net that covers all standard co-pays after a \$2000 annual limit.

The Union's National Negotiating Committee made protection of retirees a priority in 2003 contract negotiations. As a result, we maintained post-65 medical and drug prescription plans for GE retirees, while many large companies are eliminating those plans and abandoning their retirees. In 2007 contract negotiations, this will again be a crucial area.

jfrancis@local201iuecwa.org

