

1201 Sheridan Road Escanaba, MI 49829

21 NEWS

Editor: Gerald Kell **WWW.USW2-21.COM** March, 2016 Contact Editor at: djgribble@gmail.com or 906.869.7943

21 News is a periodic publication of USW (United Steel, Paper and Forestry, Rubber, Manufacturing, Energy, Allied Industrial and Service Workers International Union) Local 2-21, 1201 Sheridan Road, Escanaba, Michigan 49829. The views and opinions expressed in this publication are not necessarily that of the International Union, the Local 2-21 membership, or the officers of these bodies. The editor reserves the right to refuse any article that is detrimental to the Local Union or the USW. Article accuracy and content is the responsibility of the author.

Important Information & Events

Employee Assistance Program (EAP) www.freckmanandassociates.com (800) 331-3226

Retiree Get Together First Wednesday of month 10am at the Union Hall

Union Meeting: Second Wednesday - 7 pm – Dinner 6 pm

Steward's Meeting: Fourth Wednesday - 3 pm at the Hall **Welfare Club Meeting:** First Monday of the month - 7 pm at the Mead Rod & Gun Club

Total Benefit Solutions: Union Hall hours on the first two Wednesdays of each month. Call 1.877.265.2212 to schedule an appointment.



Committee Members

Work	Cell			
President	Steve Benoit		.233-2529	399-4195
1st Vice	Chuck Way		233-2705	280-1698
2nd Vice	Bob Larson			420-2256
3rd Vice	Jeff Skorupski			399-5472
Insurance	Gerald Kell		.233-3062	869-7943
Comp	Ross Strand		.233-2549	280-1494
Secretary	Brandon Stromber	g	.233-2714	284-1604
Treasurer	Guy Trudell		.233-2534	399-9143
Rapid Resp	onseBra	ndon Stromberg	233-2714	284-1604
Rapid Resp	onseGer	ald Kell	233-3135	869-7943
Hall Rental	Stev	e Kennedy		. 789-1933



www.pacelocal21.proboards.com



In the Know

Steve Benoit, President

To say the least, this last month has been busy. Between bankruptcy, grievances, and the changes being put in place at the mill, it can be difficult to keep your head above water.

Phone: 906.786.1846

Fax: 906.233.9250

One of those grievances involved the Crane Crew. They had informed us earlier in the month that they were concerned about staffing due to an upcoming surgery. The crew was on the brink of going down to a three man crew and there was no evidence to suggest the Company was going to post the job. The Crane Crew is normally a five person crew. The work they do is vital not only to our production capacity, but more importantly to our safety. There was a standing grievance related to their staffing shortage from last summer when the Company failed to fill the position that was vacated when one of our members passed away unexpectedly. Information in the contract states that permanent positions will be posted simultaneously with the vacancy. Over the past month we collected and presented crucial documentation the Crane Crew had done a fantastic job of retaining over the years and successfully persuaded the Company to hire another person. This hire will put the Crane Crew back to a five member team. This grievance was a great demonstration of the importance of keeping accurate records for everything you and your co-workers do, because when it comes to a grievance it very well could prove to be the catalyst for success.

The Committee has been informed by the Company of its successful request to hire 21 more people into our labor pool. Additionally, you may have also seen the e-mail from mill manager, Matt Archambeau, stating they plan to bring more people into the E&I and Maintenance groups—unofficially, we may possibly see six in Maintenance and two in E&I.



Visit us at www.marksautosalesup.com Escanaba – Gladstone – Wells

We've recently prepared to take five of our grievances to arbitration. Two of them have been settled prior to actually going to arbitration. The remaining three concern disciplines and a termination. Keep informed on their progress by following the Union Message Board and attending the monthly meeting!

Verso Senior Vice President of Manufacturing and Energy, Lyle Fellows, met with the Union committee and local mill management last month where he shared information concerning many topics including the bankruptcy proceedings and his opinion on the future strategies and viability of our mill. He stated that Verso will come out of bankruptcy with a much better financial structure and will emerge as a single entity. We will no longer be operating under two separate fiscal silos; referring to the Newpage and Verso debt structure prior to the

bankruptcy. The outlook for Escanaba is good with E1 on heavy weight and TruJet, E3 with the Unisil and Opti-Label, and there are teams working on strategic plans for E4 that sound promising for a strong future. A significant part of that plan revolves around our unique asset, the RMP mill. The RMP mill

offers an alternative pulp source that most facilities simply do not have.

On the bankruptcy front we should soon see the 401(k) Company Automatic Contribution that was being held up by proceedings. The funds are slated to be deposited into our accounts in the next few weeks due to the favorable court decisions. The following is a letter from the USW general counsel:

I am pleased to report that the Bankruptcy Court in Delaware has entered an order authorizing *Verso and its affiliates to pay the obligations* owing to its employees and retirees. Because no objections were filed, the court entered the order approving the motion without need for a hearing tomorrow on the issue. The only carve-out relates to severance payments owing to company "insiders," meaning, the top level of executives. Insider severance issues are usually dealt with separately, which will be the case here. With this Final Wage Order, the company will now be authorized to pay all obligations owing to our members and retirees, including the Wickliffe severance payments, which had been held up.

"The ignorance of one voter in a democracy impairs the security of all."

-John F. Kennedy

Strike for Hunger, Buy Local!

Brandon Stromberg, Secretary/Rapid Response

We have the date set! The 3^{rd} annual USW Local 21 Strike for Hunger is slated for June $3^{rd} - 5^{th}$ beginning at 5pm outside Elmer's County Market in Escanaba. Last year we raised over 3,200 pounds of groceries and over \$3,300 in cash donations. With so much success helping the community, it's key to

remember that it cannot happen without all of you. We've had growing involvement each year and we'd really like to see more people step up and participate. There's no requirement and there's many ways to help.

This month, I want to focus on the small business economy in our community. Small

businesses are the heart of the American economy and make up more than 90% of all employers. There are over 28.2 million small businesses and they are in virtually every neighborhood. A recent study revealed small businesses create 75% of the net job growth. That's incredible! Have you ever thought about from who or where you buy products? When you go grocery shopping, do you know the owner's name? What do they support? When you buy that new book or magazine, do you know the store

The 3rd annual
USW Local 21
Strike for Hunger
June 3rd – 5th

owner's family? Do their kids go to school with your kids? When you buy a jacket, do you know if the owner supports the surrounding community? The harsh reality is many small businesses in Escanaba,



and across the Upper Peninsula, are struggling and we can help them. You may be surprised how many are elated to see you purchase an item from them simply because they can now pay their

rent, or employee, or vendor, or utility.

As consumers, USW members have tremendous We can decide who benefits from the purchases we make nearly every day. Will it be the mom and pop shop on Main Street? Or will it be the big box store headquartered in Alabama, or worse yet, overseas just to avoid taxation? As we approach our next event to assist those in need, let us also think about our entire community and how we all can support each other to prevent more need for help. It require a complete disregard doesn't modernization, but giving a local business the opportunity for your business is often all it takes. Instead of immediately seeking out Amazon or eBay for your purchase, go check out the locally owned retailer who may even be able to beat that internet special.



Pension FAOs

Steve Benoit, President

options

The following are questions asked of Corporate HR on the Pension and Lump Sum. Questions are in black and HR responses are in red.

- 1. If a person retires now or before coming out of bankruptcy;
- a. Can they take the lump sum? No, the bankruptcy places a restriction on the Lump Sum payout (greater than \$5,000) per ERISA guidelines. b. Can they take 50% of their lump sum and the rest in an annuity? This is not allowed under the current IRS guidelines even though you've shared that it was available last time under the NewPage bankruptcy. c. Is only the annuity available? Single life or any annuity equivalent to or less than single life. The 101(j) notices that will be sent to retirees will detail which options are restricted and which annuity
- 2. Will the lump sum be available after bankruptcy?

still

permitted.

are

3. Will those who are unable to take the lump sum under bankruptcy be able to take the remainder after? Yes, if they receive an annuity while under bankruptcy, they'll receive an opportunity to select the lump sum once the company emerges from bankruptcy.

If you may have more questions either post them on the message board, facebook or email unitedsteelworkerslocal21@yahoo.com.

Need People to Make Paper

Ross Strand, Workman's Comp Advocate

Good labor is the #1 need to make just about any product well, and paper is no exception. Hopefully Verso begins to understand this soon, since they were not interested in my recommended Kaizen event which involved returning the Summer Student Program. We are desperately in need of more people and they need to take into account that vacations, job bids, training, illness and injuries, FMLA, bankers, and retirements are going to leave us well short of sufficient staffing. With that said, everybody needs to work safe and keep your mind on task. Here's to hopefully hiring more people soon. The Company hiring 21 new employees soon is a good start, but we still need more.

Total Benefit Solutions

Gerald Kell, Insurance Advocate

Progress can be slow sometimes, but that's better than a regressive alternative. We've had our share of hurdles this year in regards to all facets of our benefits package. Fortunately, we seem to be on our way to resolving them and emerging with a clear understanding of the changes and subsequent effects.

We'll begin with the commotion around valuebased medications. In the past, a member would need to complete a series of health coaching sessions to qualify for the free medication prescribed for blood pressure, cholesterol, etc. Moving forward, Verso has decided to eliminate this requirement. There has also been a seesawing trend in the coverage of specific diabetic drugs over the last few years leaving many members in a nearly constant state of transition. To address this, Verso is considering covering both medications rather than forcing members to switch back and forth. This progress is already being seen or will be soon. Some positive improvements that we may anticipate for 2017 include returning to a debit card for the Flex Spending Accounts and the implementation of a shared resource system allowing BCBSTenn and ExpressScripts to seamlessly process the automatic HRA/FSA deductions for prescriptions. I can tell vou that most of the heartburn over the carrier changes this year revolve around these topics and I'm elated to see they're being addressed. I think we need to simultaneously applaud the willingness of the Company to address these problems and our membership for voicing their concerns and experiences with the changes to our plan. It's a great testimonial for that harmonious relationship we're tirelessly pursuing. Thanks to everyone who shared their experiences, good and bad with the many new changes.

In regards to retirement benefits, the progress came at a snail's pace. Most members (and myself) had been left in the dark for many weeks while awaiting information on the Premium Reimbursement Option. After multiple carrier changes—for a slew of reasons—and additional rulings needed from the bankruptcy court, we've finally concluded that the new carrier will be Ameriflex and the money needed to fund the program has been approved. This a great program and is beneficial to members and the Company alike. I was elated to see a fortuitous outcome from the bankruptcy judge.

Amidst all the changes around our corporate insurance, I think it's necessary to point out that

we've been able to essentially avoid such dilemmas with our optional, union-sponsored supplemental benefit coverage offered through TBS Insurance. For those of you who are already enrolled and have had to utilize the benefits, you're well aware of the success and relative ease of processing claims and follow-ups. Those who are not enrolled or may not even be aware of the benefits option, I encourage you to take an opportunity to look at the availability and what it may provide for you and your family. Paul and Hristina from TBS have worked diligently to secure an optimized plan and continue to work tirelessly to ensure we get the benefits we need. The claims process for the member is painless.



Money for Nothing, Checks for Free

Gerald Kell, Insurance Advocate

Are you looking for an effortless way to earn more money for your Health Reimbursement Arrangement (HRA)? You may already know that each year a specified amount is placed in the HRA account on your behalf to cover the initial cost incursions associated with your healthcare. The deposited amounts are determined by your coverage and are as follows:

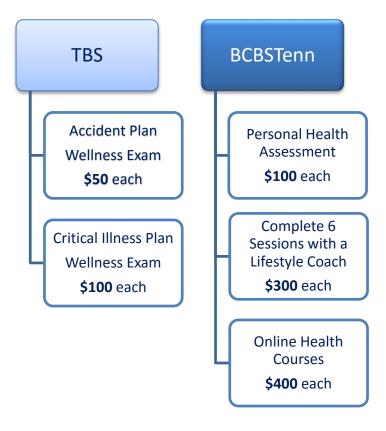
- \$500 for employee only
- \$750 for employee+spouse
- \$750 for employee+children
- \$1000 for employee+family

The corresponding deductibles for each plan is twice the initial HRA deposited amount (single plan deductible is \$1,000, family plan is \$2,000). In order to mitigate the financial burden of getting from the HRA balance to the deductible, many choose to utilize the Flex Spending Account (FSA) and have pre-tax dollars set aside for qualifying expenses. This is a great way to save money when a member is pretty sure they'll be reaching their deductible that year. The caveat to this, of course, is that FSA funds do not rollover, HRA funds do. A great solution to this is to maximize the amount

funded through the HRA. Not only is this a financially lucrative endeavor, it also incentivizes members to look at some great health options for themselves and

family members. If you and your

spouse each take the online Health Assessment, you'll receive an additional \$200 in your HRA account. If you enroll in and complete an online Health Course, you'll receive \$400. That total will get you that much closer to your deductible being completely paid. Complete six sessions with a Lifestyle Coach and you can actually fund expenses beyond the deductible and start working at diminishing your maximum out-of-pocket expense! And remember, any of these funds that go unused, will rollover each year. Fortunately, the incentives don't stop with our corporate insurance. The good people at TBS have also secured incentives tied to the supplemental plan to encourage healthy practices. If you and/or your spouse go in for their annual wellness check (which is currently available at no cost through the corporate insurance preventative care) you will receive \$50 cash in hand if you're enrolled in the Accident Plan, double that if you both get the physical and are enrolled in the Accident Plan. Furthermore, if you're both enrolled in the Critical Illness Plan, you'll each receive an additional \$100 for the same exam! That's potentially \$300 in your pocket. If you consider the minimal cost of the premiums themselves, this could very well offset your premiums for a good portion of the year. It's like free coverage. Reminder: when you schedule a preventative exam or physical with your doctor, be sure they bill it as 'Preventative Care'.





Vested Interest

Bob Larson, 2nd Vice President

I was having difficulty deciding a topic for this month's newsletter and someone suggested I write about the *blankity blanks* that currently own us. Sure, they may own the plant, but only the non-The Company continues to living inhabitants. demand more and more of our time. unilaterally equalize vacations, schedule off-shift safety meetings, demand training on our days off, and force overtime on a daily basis. They're eager to invoke disciplinary action for minor infractions and fail to reward employees for going the extra mile to keep the plant running smoothly. A former Human Resources director told me it was his "job to get as much work at as low of a cost as possible." The current HR department believes that employees should trade shifts and eagerly work days off without additional incentives like overtime. I've worked at the mill for 27 years. The average person hired at the mill hopes to retire from the mill. Many of the people have family that work there also. The union employees at this mill have a much greater interest in the long term viability of this plant than the shortterm employees in the front offices. The long term success of our mill depends on us, not the temps up front and in NO way do they own us!

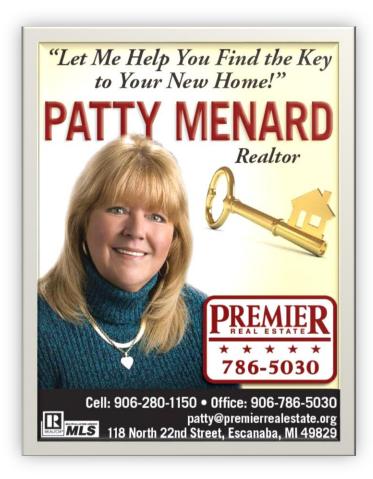
"Most American workers earn less today than they did forty years ago, adjusted for inflation, not because they're working less hard now but because they don't have strong unions bargaining for them.

--Robert Reich, Economist

Staffing and Sledding

Charles Way, 1st Vice President

The Union and the Company have made a concerted effort to settle past grievances included a major one as we settled the 2013 grievance for E&I that was slated for arbitration. The agreement was beneficial for both sides and we avoided a costly battle that either could have lost. The Yard had several procedural grievances settled by payment to our members. A job well done by our stewards. The Maintenance areas have also settled several grievances with payments being issued.



Mechanical Maintenance bids are complete while E&I has yet to bid due to complications surrounding areas that are self-managed and people receiving different pay rates for same job. Local 979 and Local 21 are working on this and we hope to see an amiable outcome. There is also a problem with the tour vacations as they do not have the same guidelines as dayshift E&I as is spelled out in their 12 hour agreement. The Company wants to cut down the number of employees off per week. We are in discussion about this as well.

The Solidarity Sledding Party was a great success as fun was had by all. There was not an extra tube to be had on the slopes with so many children and adults going down the hill having a blast. We all enjoyed

cookies, hot chocolate, cappuccino, coffee, and hot dogs. Congratulations to the numerous prize winners. It was great to see the many smiles on the children's faces and there were plenty of gifts to go around. Even the adults had a chance at some great gifts. I would like to thank all



who volunteered their time to set this up, especially John and Patti Dubord, Stacey Bingham, Stan Constantino, Lisa Menard, Paul Sheedlo, Ross Strand, Robert Larson, Tony, Bob Lamarch and family, Sally Way, Steve and Kristi Benoit, Scott Nelson, Chris Doughman, and all the Gladstone Recreation people who went above and beyond in all

aspects to make this a great success and of course anyone I failed to mention. Hope to see all of you at the next Union sponsored event!



Safety Meeting Reprimands

Steve Benoit, President

There are a number of members that have missed safety meetings in the last month and received reprimands. We addressed this in Safety

Leadership and expressed how we felt it was wrong that people were disciplined for missing being safety meetings. The HR Department has agreed that the Safety Attendance **Policy** Guidelines do not allow discipline. See the following excerpts from an If you've received this discipline it should be removed but you will need to complete the meeting in Convergence. If the is not completed in meeting

Convergence you will receive a reprimand. We will be talking further with HR Manager, John Donahue, about additional avenues for completing a missed meeting. You can contact a Union steward or committee member if you have any further questions concerning safety meeting attendance.

Steve, this is to follow-up to our discussion at the Safety Leadership Committee meeting on February 23 during which you expressed concern that our recent disciplining of employees for failure to attend a mandatory safety meeting was improper based upon the attached Safety Meeting Attendance Policy, in particular item 6. Your point is well taken.... A number of employees were issued reprimandsand the reprimands will be pulled. They must make-up the missed meeting by the end of the calendar month following the missed meeting or they will be disciplined per Mill Rule 30. In order to make-up the missed meeting they must complete the

safety meeting material that has been placed in their Convergence account. It is the Company's intent to suggest modifications to the Safety Meeting Attendance Policy. John Adrihan will present these at a future meeting of the Central Safety Committee.

Please make every effort to make it to your scheduled safety meetings. If you're unable to, be sure to make up the meeting in Convergence.

The Good, the Bad, the Ugly

Jeff Skorupski, 3rd Vice President

I've recently had several conversations with members out on the floor that have shared a common theme. Over and over again I hear how bad things are here. I agree things are different than they have been in the past, and there is always some difficulty with ongoing concerns; but in the big picture, are things really that bad? In the last six months we have

added 37 new employees to our

labor pool and are about to add another 21. Could we have used them sooner? Sure. But it's better late than never. In the last year we've also added 10 jobs between the Pulp Dryer and Woodyard. Granted the Pulp Dryer is not exactly working out as planned due to their excessive amount of downtime, but the jobs are still

Attend Your

Meetings!

there.

There are some exciting plans that Verso is considering for the Escanaba mill. There has also been a rise in the amount of discipline being handed out by management and with that being said, I ask everyone to take the time to review the work instructions you have for your job and follow them because we've had recent situations where discipline was overturned because the work instructions were very unclear. Training, or the lack thereof, may be the worst I've seen. I don't believe the Company has any idea how bad it is as a result of preventing people from moving to their job bids all winter long. The effects will continue to be felt throughout the summer and most likely into fall. The elimination of primetime vacations is just compounding the problems with our lack of training. Don't forget to use our area trainers as a resource and not a punching bag. They are here to help.

ODR Champ

Steve Benoit, President

Change is hard and sometimes we want to fight something new the company brings forth. In today's market we must effectively and efficiently prioritize what to challenge and what to support. The Operator Driven Reliability Champ is a prime example of this educated approach. For a number of years, our membership has expressed our concern about the lack of preventive maintenance. We've made it clear that the lack of preventative maintenance would come back to bite us in the rears and it's clear that has come to be.

The new position is intended to help with the mill's preventative maintenance program by creating routes where they do not exist and/or improve the routes that do exist to address reoccurring issues. There will now be a device used for these routes to measure basic vibration, heat reading, oil level, leaks, etc. These rounds will not take work away from our members that currently hold vibration or lube positions. The information gathered will address problems and bring them to the appropriate areas to be followed up and corrected. This position should also alleviate document concerns that many have shared in regards to motors, pumps, fittings, etc. I sincerely believe this addition will help improve our mill

I want to thank Tony Millette for the passion he's shown in this new position, he's clearly dedicated to making this work. If you have any questions about ODR, feel free to contact Tony. Before we shoot something down collectively as a Union or individually as a member we need to make sure we understand all aspects of the change.

"One of the penalties for refusing to participate in politics is that you end up being governed by your inferiors."

-Plato

MARCH'S LOCAL BUSINESS FEATURE

Our membership has a significant impact on the local economy. Let's keep that impact a positive one by shopping locally and being sure to frequent establishments that give back to our community. Shop at a local small business and much more of the money stays local. Remember to let them know you saw them in our newsletter!



"The Best Service on the Best Products" is exactly why Northgate Equipment & Sales has been in business for over 30 years. Locally owned by Al and Brenda Gartland, we offer quality product lines from leading manufacturers like John Deere, Ariens, Gravely, Husqvarna, and Echo. Whether you're in need of something to cut your lawn, trim a tree, till your garden or blow some snow, we have what you're looking for!

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Customer support, community pride, and great products allow Northgate to excel in our community which reaffirms our commitment to many local charities, youth baseball, hockey, and 4-H.

Stop in and let us prove why Northgate is known for "The Best Service on the Best Products." We're located at 6687 US 2 & 41 right across from the Buck Inn. Or give us a call at 906.789.9812. We're open M-F 8am to 5pm and Saturdays from 9am to 1pm.

Rapid Response

Gerald Kell, Rapid Response

It's becoming clear that our nation's political scene has become a parody of itself. We have candidates who represent walking contradictions of

themselves. Manic pandering to an unforgiving base can often leave most of us wondering exactly which one is the lesser necessary evil. It's easy to become disenfranchised by the political strategies that appear to

be necessary in today's headline viewership. I hear it all the time, "They're all terrible." While disputing such a claim is often not worth the effort, we must accept that it is us who have allowed it. The government is not some third party untouchable administrator, they're us. We're them. Quite literally, we *can* control what they do. But the method to do so seems to be forgotten for many. VOTE. It should be no secret that the right to vote is constantly under attack. Flex that muscle and practice it as often as you can.

If you regularly attend union meetings or are an avid reader of the newsletter, you're probably already aware of Rapid Response and what it is we aim to achieve. For others, the simple answer is that Rapid Response is the political arm of the USW. Our goal is to address legislation and legislators that impact our jobs. It's a bipartisan approach; we don't care if you're a registered Democrat, Republican, Independent, or even associate yourself with Jesse "the Body" Ventura's very own Reform Partyyeah, in case you forgot, we had a former WWF Wrestler actually become a governor...of an actual state....in the modern day United States.....I'm not joking. If you support labor and the idea that middle class employees are assets and not liabilities as many would want you to believe, we want to hear from you and simultaneously tell you what we believe.

Rapid Response has been around for just over 20 years and was, quite honestly, probably tardy. The systemic attack on organized labor (and unorganized labor) has been going on for over 40 years. We've watched union membership plummet, and with it, the median wage and middle class population. Chances are you're currently making less than your counterpart made in 1980 with inflation. This isn't a coincidence, or some fluke of the market, it's the direct result of a long-term campaign aimed at disabling what was once the most powerful voice in our nation. The voice that stood for the working man

and woman, not the spoiled rich kid who was born on third base and eagerly brags about scoring a run. It's almost cliché to say it, but the result has been the rich got richer and the poor got poorer. If you land somewhere in between, you're picking up the tax

load due to an unethical but intentional deferment of the top earners and the inability of the bottom to do so. While I certainly wouldn't want everyone to necessarily lose sleep over this trend, it's pretty obvious that too

many have become complacent or unaware. Let's fix that

Rapid Response needs help! It's an important political season and getting involved doesn't require a poli-sci degree nor even a full understanding of the legislative system. We just ask that you get involved and ask how you may help—you might be surprised by how much an extra discussion with a co-worker, family member, or friend can really make a difference.

USW Worker's Memorial 5K Run/Walk

Steve Benoit, President

help. when you need it.

On Saturday, April 23rd, our union will be sponsoring a 5K run/walk beginning at10am from Beauchamp's Grove in Flat Rock - a cross country course located at 7681 J Road, Gladstone. Rolling

hills, bordering farmland, and trails through the forest will make this run not only challenging but visually appealing. All proceeds will go toward the Worker's Memorial in Rose Park located in the



Sheridan/Stephenson/Washington Avenue round-about. The entry fee is \$20 if pre-registered by April 11th (this guarantees an adult shirt) or \$25 April 12th through the race date (no shirt guarantee). Awards will be given for overall male/female, 18 and under male/female, 19-35 male/female, 36-50 male/female and 51 and over male/female. Registration forms can be found on the Union website www.uswlocal2-21.com, at the mill Union office, or the Union Hall. Please be sure to check out our Facebook page and 'share' the post so we can spread the word throughout the community. If you have any questions please contact Steve Benoit at 399-4195 or Adrienne St. Vincent at 280-6268.