

COMMERCIAL VEHICLE

FACTORY CLOSURE

AFFECTS EVERY CITIZEN IN COMMUNITY

BY ED GOOD

Trustee, Mead Township, Ohio

In my years as a utility worker and union member in rural southeastern Ohio, I've seen the highs and the lows of the American industrial economy.

In my 38 years spent at work, as well as more than two decades as a local township trustee, I've also seen the failure of elected leaders, especially those in Washington, D.C., to stand up for good-paying, family-supporting American jobs in places like Mead Township, which I call home.

Thanks to failed deals like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), I have seen members of my community go from gainful employment – the kind that allows workers to care for their families, put their kids through college and retire with dignity – to being displaced from those careers and ending up grasping for any work they could get their hands on just to make ends meet.

These stories have become way too common in towns throughout my home state of Ohio and in other towns – big and small – across the country.

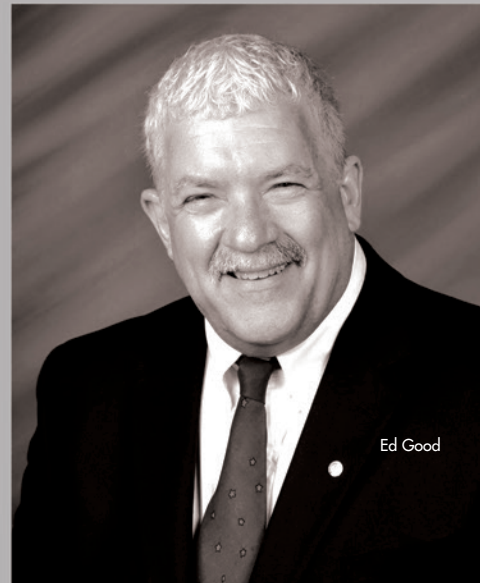
Just this year in Mead Township, a small, mostly rural community in southeastern Ohio, we saw the Commercial Vehicle Group (CVG) stamping plant, which had been a fixture in our community for years, announce plans to

close its doors and move operations to Mexico. The 170 workers at CVG, who were members of United Steelworkers Local Union 9419, stamped body parts, such as fenders and cabs, for large commercial trucks for customers that included Mack and Navistar.

This may seem like an isolated incident, but the sad fact is that there are many, many dots that people in Washington don't connect when things like this happen.

To them, 170 jobs might not sound like much. But to a small community like mine, that's 170 families that are going to struggle to put food on the table and to provide health care for their families.

Not only that, when these companies close, that means people are spending less money at our grocery stores, our



gas stations, our local restaurants.

Churches, charities, non-profits, they're all taking a hit, too.

The ripple effect is just huge. When a company like CVG picks up and leaves, it even affects utility workers like me.

When even one company moves out, that means our community needs a lot less electricity. That means that people who work for power companies can be in danger of losing their jobs as well.

As for tax revenue, while we haven't seen the full impact of CVG's closure in our community yet, I have no doubt it's going to mean smaller budgets for our municipality and our schools. This will have an effect on every single person in the community, young and old alike, as we will have less money to spend on libraries, roads, parks, law enforcement and other essential services.

As a trustee, I see this first hand. In some cases, we have had to impose special levies to make sure we could preserve some of these services.

It's important to remember that the CVG story and the story of Mead Township is just a drop in the bucket compared to the devastation that NAFTA has inflicted on manufacturing towns all over the country.

For me, the story is kind of personal – my father-in-law worked at the plant years ago. My brother-in-law worked there, too. I had friends and neighbors who worked there. It was one of the larger employers in the community.

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For people who worked there 20, 25 years, that might have been the only job they ever had.

And then they're in a situation like that, where they are unemployed for the first time in their life. That's a tough position to be in at that point in your life.

Even the process of applying for unemployment is hard for a lot of people. Some people in an area like this, they may not have a computer, or an internet connection. That alone can be a problem.

Some people in this area, thanks to the recent natural gas drilling boom, haven't suffered as much as some others have, or as much as we might have if we didn't have those natural gas jobs to fall back on.

But those jobs can't replace everything that these bad trade agreements like NAFTA have taken away from us.

Now, some people have to work two jobs to make what they were making at one job before. Imagine what that does to a family.

Also, look at Ormet, an aluminum smelter located nearby that employed more than 1,000 workers until it closed in 2014. That had a huge impact on us, too.

Our economy shouldn't be a race to the bottom. But when we sign bad trade deals like NAFTA, that's exactly what happens.

American workers have proven to be the most productive in the world when we give them a fair, level playing field. We just need to make sure that the playing field really is level.

