

Elmira rally to demonstrate impact of factory closings



Residents of Elmira (downtown pictured here) and surrounding Chemung County have been hit with at least two more plant closings in July. A rally is planned Sept. 6 to announce the impact of these and other plant closings on the community.

By Teresa A. Parsons

Charging that government unemployment statistics create a false impression and that companies have a moral obligation to treat their employees justly when closing a plant, a coalition of Chemung County residents are planning a rally for Friday, Sept. 6, to announce "the real jobless rate."

"Unemployment is probably twice as high as the figures for Chemung County indicate," said Joe Bucci, the director of the Greater Elmira Unemployment Council. "And I would say that's true throughout the U.S."

Organizers also plan to release information on the impact of plant closings in the county, including American LaFrance and Moore Business Forms, which both closed in July. Nationally, plant closings during the years 1979 to '84 cost more than 11 million workers their jobs.

"I would hope that we can create some energy and move discussion forward on new possibilities," said Tony Barbaro, director of the Southern Tier Office of Social Ministry, who plans to take part in the rally. He said he believes that the demonstration of community support may encourage a company considering the purchase of an abandoned plant like American LaFrance's or employees that try to form worker-owned cooperatives. "When you unite people, there's great spiritual energy released," he noted.

The coalition of labor, religious and community groups, including the Greater Elmira Unemployment Council, the Southern Tier Office of Social Ministry and the Chemung County Coalition for Equity, chose the date to coincide with the U.S. Department of Labor's announcement of monthly unemployment statistics for August. The Elmira rally will coincide with similar events around the country.

"The percentage they (Department of Labor officials) consider employable, who are signing up for unemployment checks, doesn't take into account those people who are long since removed from the unemployment lists," Bucci said. He cited employees of the A & P plant in Horseheads that closed two years ago as an example. While some people have found new jobs, those who haven't are no longer eligible for compensation and so are not included in government statistics. Others are un-

deremployed skilled workers earning minimum wage now as compared to the \$13 or \$14 per hour at which their skills were valued before.

Rally participants will gather at the gates of the former American LaFrance plant at 10:30 Friday morning carrying large padlocks and a banner that states "Don't Lock Us Out of Jobs." Mary Lehman, an extension associate from the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University, will be the rally's main speaker.

Participants will also stop at the offices of Congressman Stanley Lundine, State Senator William Smith and Assemblyman George Winner to urge their support for a bill in the state legislature, H.R. 1616, that would require employers to provide 90 days notice to employees pending a plant closing.

"It's the moral responsibility of big business to let people know the facts," Bucci said. In one of the worst examples locally, he noted that when Thatcher Glass closed in January, 1985, the company's 650 employees were given only two weeks' notice. "There they were, laid off without warning in the middle of winter," he recalled.

Thatcher was recently reopened by its parent company, but only as a shadow of the past when it employed more than 1,200 people. "They seemed to choke the life right out of it," Barbaro said of the new owners.

Organizers of the rally also hope it will draw attention to the toll of unemployment on individuals and families.

"Unemployment is bad, but what comes with it is worse," Bucci said. "People who have been wage earners and faithful employees for 20 or 25 years lose faith in society completely ... They give a lifetime to an employer more interested in bucks than in their employees," Bucci said. He added that displaced workers' feeling of betrayal is reinforced when they look to the government for help through unemployment compensation or for retraining and find that once again money is the bottom line — that there's only so much to go around.



Along the Way with Bishop Matthew H. Clark

I am writing on Wednesday morning this week. That's a few days earlier than usual because the Labor Day observance changes the work schedule of our Courier-Journal staff.

It's 11 a.m. now and very quiet here at Sacred Heart. The only sounds I hear are the hum of cars passing by on Flower City Park and the bold tick of the old-fashioned, wind-up alarm clock sitting on my bookshelf.

Until now it's been an active morning. I celebrated the Eucharistic liturgy with our friendly and faithful 6:30 a.m. assembly. Following that, I enjoyed some juice and toast and coffee while reading the morning paper.

At 9 a.m. Father Jim Moynihan came by and in his generous and able manner worked with me to prepare an agenda for the first Priests' Council meeting of the season, to be held on September 10.

As Jim was leaving, Bishop Rafael Garcia Gonzales and Lourdes Perez-Albuerne came by to continue our discussion about how best to deepen our relationship with the Church in Tabasco.

In between times, I was on the phone with several people, went through some paper work and put a few letters and memos on tape for Arlene Jones.

Right now I'm happy to be alone, thinking about those who have just left and addressing these words to you.

I have been trying, as my experience in this ministry grows, to make continual adjustments that will allow my relationship with you to be the

center and focus of my life as a bishop. It is a conviction growing in me and seconded by evidence coming in from many sources that this is how my energies are best expended.

To be honest, I have to be careful that I don't order my life in that direction out of pure selfishness, because there is nothing that brings me greater joy than to be relating to individuals and groups in a direct and personal way about matters that are dear to all of our hearts.

I also need to be aware that there are limits to what can be done. I do have to spend some time at my desk. I cannot relate to all people in the same way by virtue of sheer numbers and by virtue of my own very real limitations.

But I can work at keeping my work person-centered and person-directed rather than task- or issue-oriented. I think that's part of the reason I enjoy these moments of writing so much. It's one way I have to keep in touch with a potentially large number of you in a way that is quite personal to me.

For similar reasons, I'll enjoy the several rounds of meetings at which I'll be seeing so many of you in the weeks ahead. I'll be meeting with you to talk about the Thanks Giving Appeal, or the preparation of our national pastoral letter on the concerns of women in the Church and society, or to discuss religious life. I hope that when we move through all of the issues — even the very difficult ones — we'll be able to meet and converse as friends whose deepest bond is the desire to be faithful and loving disciples of the Lord. Peace to all.

Charismatic Programs

Sister Joan Kellenberg, r.c., will return to the Cenacle for a Charismatic Evening of Prayer on Wednesday, Oct. 2, from 7:30-9:30 p.m. Sister Joan and Sister Joan Drinkwater, r.c., will lead the Fall Charismatic Inner Healing Retreat at the Cenacle, Oct. 2-4. The retreat begins on Friday at 7:30 p.m. and concludes Sunday at 3:30 p.m. The offering is \$55.

For more information or reservations, write the Cenacle Ministry Office at 693 East Avenue, Rochester, N.Y., 14607, or call (716)271-8755.

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