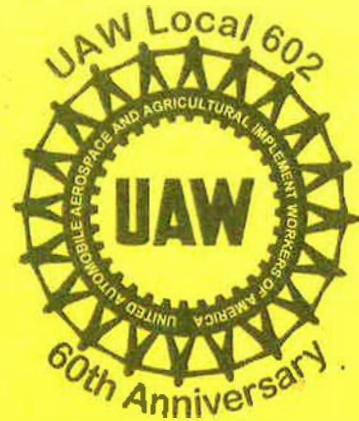


UAW Local 602



Sixty Years of Struggle





Our local's First Flag is on display at our union hall. It is black and gold, our local's official colors. It contains the date the International UAW was first chartered by the American Federation of Labor, **August 26, 1935**. The car in the center precedes the current UAW symbol of people joining hands to form a wheel.



UAW Local 602's original charter signed on January 18, 1939



The 60th anniversary of UAW Local 602 is a time for us to pause and reflect on our rich and colorful history. Our Local was founded during the difficult times of the Great Depression and has prospered because of the hard work, dedication, and sacrifice by the many members who have belonged to UAW Local 602. We owe much to those who went before us and who risked their very lives so that we could enjoy a better future today. The following pages tell some of the stories and the events that have shaped our local's history over the last 60 years.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Garry Bernath".

President Local 602



Stephen Yokich
International President



Cal Rapson
Regional Director



Garry Bernath
President Local 602



The Fight for Rights 1935 - 1940

The 1930's will always be remembered as a period dominated by difficult economic conditions. It was also a time when the trade union movement grew substantially as a result of many hard struggles. The union organizers fought the police, company spies, and fear among workers. Many companies denied workers the basic rights that had been guaranteed by the legislation passed as part of Roosevelt's "New Deal."



Franklin D. Roosevelt

The early years of Fisher Body were very difficult for the workers. The Great Depression still gripped the country. President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal policies and Fireside Chats sought to bring relief to the high unemployment and large number of bank failures that characterized the times. Inside the plant, before the union was organized, workers received breaks only when a gap in the line occurred or the line broke down. If there was a dispute between a worker and a supervisor, the supervisor would take the employee over to the window and would show him the long line of people trying to get hired. He would tell the worker, "if you don't want to do the job my way there are plenty of people out there who will." In these difficult times, workers banded together and fought for their basic rights.

The story of the founding of UAW Local 602 begins in 1935, four years before our charter was issued. Two important events occurred that year impacting the history of UAW Local 602. The first event was the passage by Congress of the Wagner Act. The Act's official title was the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA). The bill was signed into law by President Franklin Roosevelt as part of the New Deal in 1935. The primary purpose of the Act is stated in Section 7:

"Employees shall have the right to self-organization, to form, join, or assist labor organizations, to bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing, and to engage in concerted activities, for the purpose of collective bargaining or other mutual aid or protection."

Prior to the passage of the Wagner Act, labor relations were governed by the court system and only 11.6% of the workforce belonged to unions. The Wagner Act paved the way for the growing army of production workers to form industrial based unions. Union organizers such as John L. Lewis, head of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), told workers that, "President Roosevelt wants you to join the union." Twenty years after the passage of the NLRA, 35% of the civilian U.S. workforce was organized.



John L. Lewis

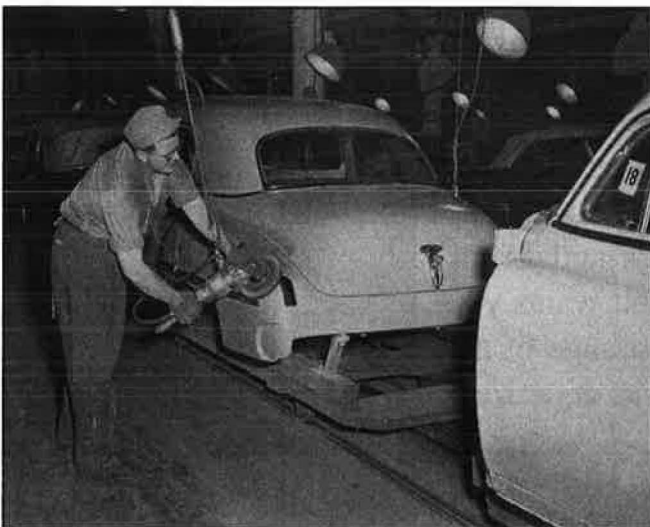
The second event in 1935 that would forever shape UAW Local 602 occurred when Fisher Body began pro-



duction of car bodies at the former Durant Plant on Verlinden Avenue. Prior to 1935, Fisher Body had leased floor space from the Olds Motor Works. However, Billy Durant had built a factory in 1922 on a site located on the western edge of Lansing. Verlinden Avenue that runs in front of the plant was named after the first General Manager, Edward Ver Linden. The plant originally cost about 3 million dollars to build. Durant's company went out of business in 1931 and was purchased by Fisher Body in 1933. The purchase of the Durant facility made the Olds Motor Works the 4th largest in the automotive industry . The installation of new equipment and the moving of the old equipment from the Oldsmobile Main Plant to the old Durant Plant was a large endeavor that involved several thousand men. The expansion boosted output at Olds from 900 to 1,500 cars a day and at least 4,000 new employees were hired. The reopening of the Durant Plant as Lansing Fisher Body was capped off by an open house that was attended by nearly 3,000 people.

While many people in the Lansing Area were excited about the new home of Fisher Body, the workers were busy organizing. Fisher Body employees organized and became members of the Amalgamated Local 182 Allied Industrial Workers (AIW)-CIO. Working conditions were difficult at the plant as the new union organized around health and safety issues as well as seniority rights that were non-existent at the time. There were many industrial spies present in the plant who would identify workers as being sympathetic to unions and they would be discharged immediately with no right of appeal. The management at Fisher Body formed a company union to compete with the independent CIO unions that could legitimately represent the interests of the workers. It was a very difficult climate for union organizers.

By December of 1936, Lansing began to feel the effects of unrest at other General Motors sites. The sit down strike was under way in Flint and it affected Lansing in two ways. First, production was disrupted and workers were laid off. By January 11, 1937,



A scene from the early days at Lansing Fisher Body.

6,000-7,000 were out of work in Lansing. Secondly, GM ran a series of full page advertisements in the Lansing State Journal to try to sway worker opinion about the strike in Flint. The ads were signed by Alfred P. Sloan Jr., the President of GM. Sloan appealed to what he perceived as workers self interest and urged people not to be misled. "Have no fear that any union or any labor dictator will dominate the plants of General Motors Corporation," Sloan wrote. Workers were not swayed by Sloan's rhetoric. When the agreement



was reached in Flint, it was good news because 12,000 GM workers in Lansing received a 25 cents an hour raise.

The labor unrest that started at GM plants in Flint soon spread to Lansing. While 1937 began with the well known sit down strike in Flint, that summer brought the most famous event in Lansing labor history. On June 6, 1937, a general strike was staged that closed the City of Lansing and put 12,000 workers on strike. This strike became known as the "Labor Holiday." The General Strike was precipitated by the arrest of Mrs. Lester Washburn, wife of the Local 182 President, and eight others by Sheriff Allan MacDonald. The sheriff had cut the telephone lines leading to the Washburn house and left their three children alone after the arrest of Mrs. Washburn. Workers were outraged by this action and delivered the following statement the next morning: "In celebration of Sheriff MacDonald's bravery, the workers of Lansing have called a Labor Holiday so that the world will never forget his courage." The general strike was highly ironic for Lansing which promoted itself as "totally free from union influence" and "no serious strikes have occurred for a number of years." By the summer of 1937, the UAW had arrived in Lansing for good.

The founding of UAW Local 602 is not a simple story to tell. Originally, Fisher Body workers were members of AIW-CIO Local 182 which was an amalgamated local containing workers from REO, Motor Wheel, Olds, Fisher Body, Lansing Stamping & Tool, and Lansing Co. Eventually, events would unfold that would cause the Fisher Body workers to break away from Local 182 and seek a separate charter. However, the history of the Fisher Body branch of Local 182 is an important part of our heritage. Early organizing drives and contract negotiations were conducted under the banner of Local 182.

It took tremendous courage to be a union organizer as the risks were great. Union organizers put the interest of the union before their own personal safety and well being. Don Fahler, a Paint Department employee is credited with calling the first UAW organizing meeting at Fisher Body. The first organizational meetings were held in small groups disguised as prayer meetings. They met in the plant and in people's homes. The wives and daughters of the pioneer members of Local 182, the forerunner to Local 602, formed a women's auxiliary. Dues were \$1.00 per month and members wore their dues buttons proudly.

In November of 1937, the Fisher branch of Local 182 took a local strike vote. There were three main issues: discrimination among employees and against union members; speed up of the lines in violation of local and national agreements; and violation of the seniority agreement. The union sent out 3,000 postcards announcing a special meeting to discuss the issues. Local 182 President Lester Washburn noted, "There is an increasingly evident policy on the part of GM to break down the union and create a condition under which it will be unnecessary for the company to bargain collectively with its employees."



Local 182 stood in contrast to locals in Flint and Pontiac where strikes occurred that were not authorized by the international union. Lansing Fisher Body workers voted unanimously “to hold in abeyance a strike vote and support Homer Martin, President of the International Union.” Three thousand workers out of a total of 3,300 employed at the plant turned out at the meeting. However, support for President Martin would not last long with Fisher Body workers.

By the end of 1937, the Fisher Body branch of Local 182 was in full revolt. President Washburn cut off funds to the Fisher branch and charged that members of the Communist Labor League were in control of certain sections of the local. Fisher branch officers and members told Washburn, “they would run their own affairs.” Washburn and Vice President Feldspausch were kicked out of a Fisher branch meeting and told to stay away from all future meetings. On Christmas Eve day, Floyd Ryan and Emerson Rice from the Fisher branch were suspended for the following reasons:

1. Public denunciation of International Officers and the policies of the International Union.
2. Exposing private union matters in the public press.
3. Refusal to abide by decisions of the International convention and the International Executive Board.
4. Issuance of fake statements regarding a split in the local union.

Needless to say, workers at Fisher Body became disillusioned with Local 182. Five months after the split between the Fisher branch and Local 182, Fisher Body UAW members requested a separate charter. The original organizing committee that spearheaded the drive for a separate charter included Senator Pritchard, Lyle Stone, Chester Cowan, Jack Price, Horace Logan, Steve Gmazel, Jess DeCair, and the Eno Brothers. The Committee was chaired by Archie Perry. On January 18, 1939, UAW Local 602 was chartered becoming the first local to split from Local 182 and be granted a separate charter.

Floyd Ryan was the first president of UAW Local 602. There was no union hall and conditions in the plant were difficult at best. The main priority of the local was to improve working conditions since there was no relief time, no benefits, no seniority provisions or wage agreements. Management frequently engaged in production speed ups and workers were discharged for minor violations of company rules. Fisher Body was an open shop and committee persons contin-



1938 Plant Protection personnel made life miserable for the first union organizers.



ued to collect union dues of one dollar per month from each member. Ryan would eventually resign as president in order to accept a position on the UAW's International staff.

Thomas Eno was the second president of UAW Local 602 taking over for Floyd Ryan after he went on staff. During his tenure, the first union hall was established on South Washington Street. It was a small building that also housed UAW Local 652. There were no full time officers and the local faced difficult challenges. Since Fisher Body was an open shop and membership in the union was not required, membership drives were conducted. The Cushion Room was the first department to become 100% union. Working conditions were still difficult. Wages were poor and the Bargaining Committee worked to establish a written Local Wage Agreement. On June 24, 1940, a local wage agreement was signed as the result of a directive from the International UAW. Workers were not happy with the agreement and in December of 1940, there was a petition circulated that demanded pay increases for all job classifications that received less than \$1.00 per hour. An agreement was reached in February of 1941 to pay the increases retroactively to August 1, 1940. With the new agreement, most wages were increased to a maximum of \$1.15 per hour.

February of 1941 saw more labor discontent at Fisher Body. There was a slow down in the Trim Department that idled 4,200 day shift employees at Fisher and Olds. It was the second time in 24 hours that operations were stopped. Local 602 President, Thomas Eno said, "there was a lack of manpower. The company agreed to put on more men but then pulled them off the job." The stoppages ended when nine men, who were laid off in connection with the slowdown, were brought back to work.



The War Years 1941 - 1945

World War II dominated every aspect of our society between the end of 1941 and 1945. The fight against the Axis powers (Japan, Germany and Italy) took brave Americans to every corner of the globe. Walter Reuther, who was president of the UAW from 1946 through 1970, had the idea of retooling auto plants to produce war material. Reuther's vision of U.S. preparedness was written in his study "500 Planes a Day." The study consisted of a plan for converting the auto industry into defense production. The "arsenal of democracy" was realized as many factories produced ammunition, guns, and equipment needed to defeat the fascist threat.



When Lyle Stone began the first of his four terms as president, World War II interrupted car production in Lansing and Local 602 thought that management was dragging their feet on procuring a war materials contract. The workers were laid off and the plant was idled. Shockingly, management had no plans to produce war materials. In January of 1942, the leadership of Local 602 organized a march from the plant to the capitol. This marked the first mass labor demonstration since the Labor Holiday in 1937. Thirty-five hundred workers participated and they were addressed by Mayor Sam Street Hughes. The *Lansing State Journal* noted that the march was “an orderly peaceful protest by labor against unemployment.” Night shift workers began the procession at the union hall on Williams Street and marched to the main entrance of the plant on Verlinden where they were joined by the day shift. The plant management had no comment on the event.



Women workers during the war years

The march was successful as two months later in March of 1942, Fisher Body received a contract for war materials. On May 26, 1942, there was a large explosion that killed three and sparked an interesting controversy. Police prevented the press from covering the scene and confiscated film from some of the photographers. There was some question whether martial law or civil law was in force since there was immediate suspicion surrounding the cause of the explosion. After an extensive investigation it was ruled an accident. The blast occurred when a worker was flushing out an old gasoline tank. It is interesting to note that Local 602 conducted its own separate investigation. The local drew the same conclusions as the official investigation that sabotage was not a factor. The blast did not delay the start up of war material production.

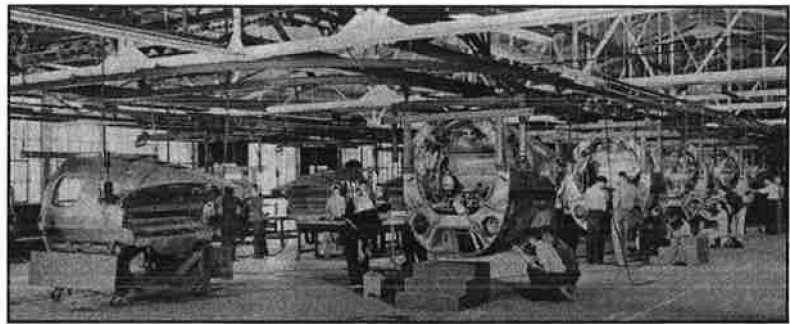
Production of war material posed an interesting challenge for auto makers. Walter Reuther was the first to propose the retooling of the plants into the “arsenal of democracy.” However, most of the current workforce that was predominantly male was pressed into military service. This resulted in a vastly different workforce composed primarily of women. Four thousand people would be employed and extensive training would accompany the effort. The local struggled during the war years as strikes were outlawed and management ignored union suggestions to improve health and safety for the workers and to further the war effort.

Conditions during the production of war material inside the plant were very different due to several factors. For example, there was one foreman for every three workers. This



created a very difficult environment for the workers and the union. Four hundred women remained laid off. Management claimed there was no suitable work available for them to perform. Thousands of square feet of floor space remained empty and un-utilized. This created more friction between the union and management. Workers consistently complained about the cafeteria. Work speed ups were another source of complaints as well as the lack of adequate relief time. Management was accused of ignoring seniority rights and committeepersons only got 15 hours off the line to perform their job which also included collection of dues. The overall picture from a union perspective was one of a difficult place to work. It should have been a time of increased partnership focused on a common enemy; however, management's intransigence made it hard for our local to cooperate.

Between 1942 and 1945, the plant produced B-29 control surfaces and nacelles, parts of a 90mm gun, a five-inch naval gun mount, and assemblies for various types of tanks. By the end of the war, the plant had produced more than 43 million dollars worth of war material. On June 16, 1944, workers cheered the announce-



Aircraft nacelles were produced at the Lansing Fisher Body plant during World War II

ment of the first bombing raid on Japan since they built B-29 parts that were used in the raid. In June, 1945, Lansing Fisher Body was recognized with the Army-Navy "E" for Excellence pennant for its outstanding production record during the war. With the end of the war, the plant reconverted for automobile production and by September of 1946 automobiles were again rolling off the assembly line.

During this period, the Ingham County War Fund (the forerunner of the United Way) was formed. UAW Local 602 member and later president Oscar Wade was elected by the Lansing Area UAW Locals to serve on the Executive Board of the War Fund as the UAW representative. The union requested payroll deduction for workers contributions to the War Fund; however, management denied the request.

The UAW had to tackle the difficult issue of racial discrimination. During the mid 1940's, it became clear that black workers would not achieve equality without the active support of their union brothers and sisters. UAW Local 602 President Bill Ingram demanded that Fisher Body hire black workers. Ingram and the Shop Committee took this demand into local negotiations in 1943. While the Shop Committee faced bitter opposition from management and many of the rank and file, they held firm and management finally agreed to change their hiring practices.



On January 14, 1944, Emanuel Parker was the first African-American worker hired at Fisher Body. Four days later another African-American worker, Dave Truehart was hired and within a year four more African American workers would be employed at Fisher Body. They were placed on sanitation and denied transfer rights. Management resisted hiring African-American workers because of their biased view that “most of them are winos and would not work regularly.” Unfortunately, not all UAW members understood the importance of solidarity. When Monroc Buchanan was put on a welding job, the Body Shop workers sat down in protest. Attitudes changed over time and the same workers who protested Buchanan’s assignment to their department later elected him District Committeeperson. Through the persistence of the union and the courage of the first African-Americans hired, the first steps on the trail had been blazed and the stage had been set for future gains by minority workers.

Continuing the pursuit for equality and fairness, former Local 602 President Bill Ingram was a guest on WJIM radio and spoke about management’s unfair bargaining practices. He said several hundred women were owed back pay in accordance with War Labor Board directives. These directives set minimum training and production rates for a certain class of airplane work at the plant. The company opposed the rate of 89 cents per hour for training and 99 cents per hour for production. The War Labor Board affirmed those rates after a long drawn out case. While checks making up the back pay were ordered by the board, management flatly refused to pay what the women were owed. In retrospect, it is difficult to understand the reluctance of the Fisher Body management to actively embrace and promote the production of war material at our plant.

The role women played in the production of war material was crucial to the war effort. Without their contribution, World War II may have been even more costly in terms of the amount of human suffering. However, their contribution was not relegated to the shop floor. Women also played an important role in our local during this period. In 1944, LaVanch McKouen was elected to the shop committee. Several different women served as Financial Secretary. Clearly, women were very active in our local and the fight for equal pay and rights was just beginning.



Walter Reuther

The UAW Comes of Age 1946 - 1970

The post war period was characterized by a growing domestic economy driven by increasing consumer demand. This era witnessed the continued struggle for economic justice, the fight for civil rights, and the growth of the UAW. While the economy grew, there were still a number of recessions as well as the threat posed by the spread of Communism.



The postwar period brought more challenges to the relationship between the UAW and GM. Workers who labored under difficult conditions during the war and lacked the right to strike, were looking to make up for the four years of tough circumstances. On October 7, 1945 GM took out a full page advertisement in the *Lansing State Journal* after the UAW voted to go on strike. The advertisement warned of rising prices and slow delivery for new cars. The stage was set for a battle over wages and working conditions.

On November 21, 1945, the UAW struck GM over the lack of progress in negotiations at the national level. This strike was a very significant event in Lansing. While one or two stoppages had occurred around events like the Labor Holiday and various stoppages at Fisher that affected Olds, this was the first time that there would be a prolonged work stoppage. There was great concern on the part of local authorities that violence could occur so the bars near Olds and Fisher were ordered to close. The leadership at Local 602 made it clear that they would not tolerate drinking on the picket lines.

The UAW enjoyed support from many in the Lansing community. Strikers were visited by a rabbi, priest, and a pastor. They had lunch with the strikers and visited the picket lines. Rabbi Fineberg stated, “my sympathy is with labor and has been down through the years. I hope you will win in this struggle not for yourselves but to set a pattern for all labor.” Father Flanagan noted that the Catholic Church condemned “GM’s attitude towards the wage earner” and added that the union’s demands are “just, fair, and reasonable.”

Mayor Ralph Crego also tried to get involved in the strike. Tensions rose when GM recalled salaried personnel to work and the union was urging them to stay at home. Mayor Crego attempted to bring the two sides together to avert any violence. He also canceled leaves for policemen and ordered taverns closed. When police showed up in force at factory gates, there was little for them to do as less than half of the salaried personnel tried to cross the picket lines. While Crego failed to get the two sides together, it was obvious that the UAW enjoyed a large degree of community support.

Discussions over who should be able to cross the picket lines, and the picketing continued despite the harsh winter weather. The union requested a certified list of who was to enter the plant. Management countered by offering to let the union inspect the factory. On December 18, the company got a temporary restraining order restricting the UAW from interfering with the movement of GM workers to and from the plant. Shortly after the restraining order was issued all Fisher Body salary personnel were back at work. In arguing for the restraining order, management cited concern about rust and deterioration of machinery and equipment. They were also concerned with perishable materials that could result in thousands of dollars in damage.



The workers' level of organization was very impressive as the strike dragged on through the winter. The strikers built shanties to provide shelter to picketers. Each shanty had a captain who assigned duties. Strike majors patrolled the area as pickets served four hour shifts. Rules prohibited card playing, gambling, and drinking. Each picket had a name card. Pickets ate at the auxiliary kitchen located on St. Joseph Street where entertainment was provided. The performances were not amateurish, but were given by entertainers of proven ability. Occasionally, outside groups would entertain. These included musicians, singers, comedians, magicians, and orchestras. There were also Saturday night dances. Workers contended that the stories of hardship were exaggerated. They were used to long layoffs with no money coming in and as a result, they learned to be very resourceful. UAW Local 602 received numerous contributions of food, money, and clothing. As one worker put it, "GM themselves taught us to be efficient."



The Verlinden gate during the 1945-46 Strike. Workers picketed for 113 days for wage increases



Members sign up for strike pay

The strike finally ended on March 13, 1946 after 113 days. GM workers won a 16.5% wage increase. It was the longest and most far reaching strike in Lansing's history. Walter Reuther spoke at West Junior High after the settlement. The Lansing State Journal called Reuther's speech, "the highlight of the local strike scene." However, while things were settled at the national level, the local contract at Fisher Body was not even close to being settled. Fifteen hundred Local 602 members attended a marathon five hour meeting and voted to continue the strike until local issues were settled. The outstanding issues concerned the grievance procedure, smoking areas, rest periods, and production schedules. The lack of a local agreement at Fisher Body meant that Oldsmobile could not build cars.

The workers at the Lansing Fisher Body plant ratified their local agreement ending a 126 day walk out. The ratification cleared the way for full scale production to run in Lansing. It took 131 days for production to resume after the initial walkout. This strike remains to this day the longest dispute between the company and the union.

Within one year of the settlement, there was another labor dispute at Fisher Body that affected operations at Olds. Thirty-one Body Shop employees failed to show up for



work on the day shift causing Fisher to cease operations at 8:00 am. Three employees in the affected area had been disciplined for plant rule violations the day before. The union denied that a strike existed. Lyle Stone, former Local 602 President and UAW International Rep. stated, “contrary to current rumors, the union states there is no strike at Fisher Body.” The dispute lasted one day and the 31 workers who did not show up for work were disciplined.



Family dinner at the union hall

A walkout in the cushion room in September 1949, by the day shift, shut down production at Fisher and Olds. Pickets were set up at all the factory gates. The walkout was settled at 4 a.m. after an all night bargaining session. The dispute arose when two women were dismissed as a part of a disciplinary action. The two were believed to have lead a work slowdown in the cushion room and were subsequently rehired.

The next big battle for the UAW was the attempt to win the union shop at GM. Petitions were signed by 136,000 GM employees and presented to the National Labor Relations Board. In February of 1950, a nationwide vote of GM workers was conducted and workers overwhelmingly approved union shop provisions by an 8 to 1 margin. The union shop provisions would require workers who were employed for 60 days to join the union or lose their job. This marked a big change for the union since it eliminated the problem of the “free rider” or the person who enjoyed the benefits that the union won but did not pay any union dues. The union shop also further legitimized the union in the eyes of the workers and institutionalized the union in terms of the company.

The 1950’s were a time of hard bargaining over basic issues such as getting the company to obey seniority and wage agreements. The local also continued to organize internally. For example, in 1951, a special committee was formed to look into why members were not attending meetings. An example of low attendance was the ratification vote taken on the seniority agreement in 1952. Only 73 workers voted out of a possible 4,243 eligible to vote. Later that same year, a poor turnout of slightly over 400 voted in elections for officers. However, whenever there was a hot issue, workers would fill the hall. On May 2, 1954 the hall was filled to overflowing for a meeting concerning shift preference. The meeting lasted four and half hours and ended in a split vote of 322 yes and 333 no. Speed ups were also a major problem. In 1953, the Lansing Labor News ran a series of articles on speed ups and what UAW members could do in response.

The postwar period witnessed a further integration of the rank and file as well as more women and minorities holding union office. In 1948, Laura Brooks received an appointment to the staff of the International UAW to help handle unemployment com-



pensation. In 1950, Fisher Body management was still determined to keep African-American workers in the most undesirable jobs such as booth cleaners, deadner booths, and welding. In 1952, African-American workers were assigned to the trim department which had the highest paid jobs. The following year, the plant hired its first African-American female, Velma Dukes. During this period, African-American workers were elected to the Executive Board, integrated the service groups such as material handling, and entered the Skilled Trades. The UAW was viewed as a progressive institution that had relevance to peoples lives, struggles, and aspirations.



Ground breaking ceremonies during July of 1952



Dedication of the union hall, December 1952

In 1952, it was decided that our local needed a new and permanent home. The Building Committee, with the approval of the Executive Board and the membership, purchased the land where our current hall is located. The ground breaking took place in July and the hall was dedicated in December of 1952. Fifteen hundred attended an open house at the hall that cost \$80,000 to build. Bricks were sold to members for 50 cents apiece to defer the cost of the building. The members literally owned the building after its completion. Governor G. Mennen Williams and Mayor Ralph Crego attended the dedication ceremonies. The lettering on the front of the hall is reflective of the 1950's art deco style. The hall was used for union business and hosted a number of social events.

There were several other concerns outlined by Walter Reuther for the membership in the late 1950's. Automation was an increasing concern. Reuther pointed out the Hudson engine plant where the lowest seniority employee had 28 years. This stood in contrast to GM where 42.5% of the workers had less than 5 years seniority. The International UAW released a film in August of 1958 entitled, "Pushbuttons and People." The profits of the Big Three were another major concern of the UAW. Shop committees around the country continued to face a number of problems with speed up, seniority and wage agreements not being honored, and difficulty classifying jobs according to the contract.

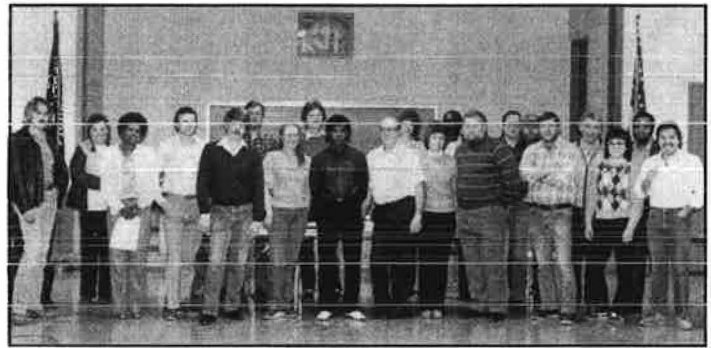


G. Mennen Williams, Democratic Governor, spoke at the dedication of our union hall in 1952



Locally, there were still separate seniority lists for men and women. Management felt that women could not perform certain jobs in the plant, thus, women were restricted from those jobs and seniority groups were established. This caused problems during the recession of 1958. There were layoffs at the Fisher Body plant. Management surveyed the plant in an attempt to get “all female employees who have the necessary seniority to be integrated.” The problems stemmed from the fact that Lansing Fisher Body had a separate non-interchangeable seniority group and sub-groups where women acquired seniority. On April 7, 1958 there were 477 laid off Fisher Body workers. The plant seniority date to hold a job was 12-20-54 for men and 1-15-53 for women, nearly a two year difference. Local 602 wrote a substantial number of letters to other UAW/GM locals researching to see if other locals had the same problem and how they were dealing with it. By the end of the 1950’s, the separate seniority lists were abolished and women received equal pay as well as equal seniority rights.

In 1965, there was another work stoppage in the cushion room. The night shift walked off the job and set up pickets at lunch. Poor working conditions were cited as the reason for the walkout. Management had set up the production process and did not include anything for the workers. There were no fans, drinking fountains, or rest rooms. The walk out achieved its goal and conditions improved.



Union awareness held in 1983. These classes were started the 1970’s.



1970 Strike outside the south entrance to the Lansing Fisher Body plant.

During the 1960’s and 1970’s, Local 602 held a number of activities. A Retirees Chapter was formed and held meetings and social events. There was a series of new member orientation dinners at the Union Hall. These dinners were education programs that were aimed at making union members better citizens as well as educating them about union history. The strike of 1970 was the second longest by the UAW against General Motors. Strike information classes were held at the union hall and the International staff was impressed with Local 602’s efforts. Leaders of the local during this period were very much steeped in Walter Reuther’s tradition of education. This tradition began when Reuther, his brother Victor, and a young economist, Eliot Janeway spoke in Lansing on successive Sundays in 1939 under the banner of the League for Industrial Democracy.



Crisis and Global Challenge 1971 to Present

The last several decades have witnessed many changes in the auto industry and our local. This period began with massive layoffs in the auto industry due to the OPEC oil embargo of 1973. The 1980's witnessed concessionary bargaining at the national level and the appearance of non-union auto assembly plants in North America. GM nearly declared bankruptcy in 1992 because of a change in the law requiring corporations to set aside funds for retiree health care. The globalization of the economy and increased competition was made possible by improvements to information technology, ease of global travel, and increased access to capital and markets.



UAW president Owen Bieber visits with Paint Department workers during his 1985 visit.

The early 1970's were a time of crisis. The war in Southeast Asia was ending and the Watergate scandal rocked the nation. The auto industry was hit by lay offs as the price of gasoline rose, and car sales plummeted. The local responded to increased sales of imported cars with a series of articles in the *Lansing Labor News*. Local 602 also distributed "Buy American" pins and bumper stickers in an effort to create awareness about the foreign import issue with the entire community as well as the membership. When

the U.S. Olympic Committee designated foreign cars as the "official vehicles of the U.S. Ski Team," the local organized a letter writing campaign in protest.

There was major controversy for the local in 1984 during negotiations of the local the relief agreement in general and the coffee wagons in specific. Coffee wagons were a form of mass relief where the line shut down for six minutes and carts containing coffee and snacks were rolled out to production areas so workers could refresh themselves. It was obviously a practice that preceded vending machines and was a constant source of grievances concerning poor service, bad coffee and high prices. The 1984 local agreement saw the removal of the wagons as Lansing Fisher Body was the last plant in GM to lose the wagon as a form of relief. However, it was a controversial decision with the first contract settlement being turned down by the membership. It is fitting that by the end of 1984 not only would the coffee wagons be gone, the name Fisher Body would be replaced by Buick-Oldsmobile-Cadillac (BOC) Lansing Car Assembly Body Plant.

There was more than just a name change at the plant in 1984. The products that we built also changed significantly. The familiar line up of Oldsmobiles that included the Cutlass, Eighty-Eight, and Ninety-Eight were replaced with the "N" cars. The "N" cars were compact cars designed to get good gas milage and compete with the imports. In addition to the Oldsmobile Calais, the plant produced the Pontiac Grand Am and the Buick Somerset. This change meant that our plant was no longer solely identified with Oldsmobile. We also no longer produced a mix of large and mid-sized autos.



Waiting room in the recently remodeled Local 602 Union Hall.

June 14, 1992 marks a fateful date in the history of labor relations at the LCA



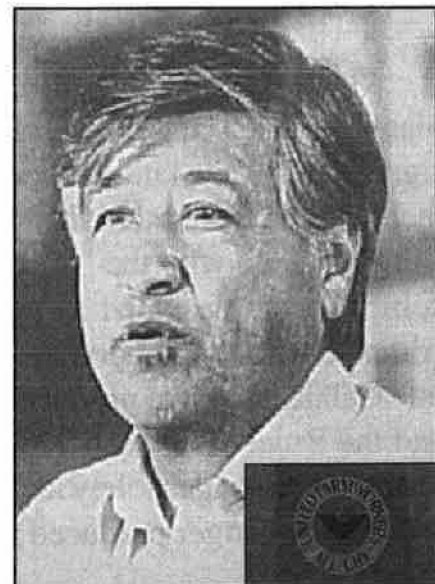
Local 602 employees exit the plant at the beginning of the 1992 strike.

Body Plant. An announcement was made over the public address system inside the plant stating that mass relief would begin on August 31. The announcement, for a variety of reasons, created tremendous confusion among the workforce at the LCA Body Plant. First, the public address system was difficult to understand and many were unsure of what was actually said. This led to many rumors being started. Second, the timing of the announcement was very suspect since the union leadership was in

San Diego for the UAW's Constitutional Convention. Management gave the perception that they were going behind the backs of the shop committee. Finally, there was no explanation why this move that would eliminate 300 jobs was suddenly necessary. The "N" cars produced in Lansing were selling well with the Pontiac Grand Am inventory around 30 days which is very low by automotive industry standards. Thus, the timing and the manner which the announcement was made aroused a new level of suspicion and distrust among the members of Local 602.

This situation eventually escalated into a four day strike in September. This marked the first authorized work stoppage that lasted longer than one day that was not related to national contract negotiations. The ratification of the strike settlement was by the very narrow margin of 55% of the members voting to accept the agreement. Part of the agreement called for a special election to settle the question of mass vs. tag relief. Management campaigned hard for mass relief and there was a solid argument that could be made that it was in the workers' best interests to vote for mass relief given contingencies in the national contract for laid off workers. However, workers were still upset at the series of events and opted for tag relief by a 54% to 46% vote.

This period also witnessed more new ground being broken for our local. Alvin Pressley was the first African-American elected as President of our local. The local also held programs celebrating African-American and Latino history. These programs presented guest speakers, recognized the achievement of our members, and featured cultural performances. The events were well received and supported not only by our membership, but also the community at large.



Cesar Chavez, President of the United Farm Workers visited our local in 1987



There are several important aspects that have been consistent threads of our local's history throughout the last sixty years:

- Solidarity with the trade union movement
- Support for social causes
- A generous community spirit



Members of Local 602, attending a rally in support of the Melling workers in November of 1997 are tear gassed by the Lansing Police

Through the years, Local 602 has provided support for many unions as well as participating in rallies for various social causes. The local's support of other unions is not limited to the UAW. Local 602 has supported coal miners, WJIM radio and television workers, Trailways bus drivers, Detroit News/Free Press, and Hoover Aluminum, just to name a few. It is important to note that solidarity for striking unionists means more than simply giving money. In 1997, Local 602 members were tear gassed at a rally for striking Melling

Forge workers by the Lansing Police. Our membership has consistently followed the labor credo, "an injury to one is an injury to all."

Local 602 has also participated in numerous rallies through the years. Whether marching on the State Capitol to protest the lack of a war materials contract during the 1940's or going to Washington D.C. to protest unemployment during the 1970's, we have focused on our broader interests. Local 602 participated in picketing area supermarkets in support of the table grape boycott, the Poor Peoples' March on Washington D.C., and Solidarity Day in 1981, again to just name a few. Our local has consistently answered the call to advance social justice in our society.

UAW Local 602 has given consistently and generously to the Lansing community. Over the years our members have given money, clothes, food, books, toys, and even blood to various organizations and in-



Local 602's annual picnic has long been popular with our membership and attracts thousands of people.



dividuals in need. Many charities such as the United Way, the Lansing Food Bank, Toys for Tots, and the “Old Newsboys” have relied on the generosity of our members. Local 602 has also taken our own members who have suffered a lost or tragedy. While some view unions as organizations that attempt to win economic gains from an employer, our membership has demonstrated a community spirit that makes Lansing a better place to live and work.

The history of UAW Local 602 has been forged by courageous people who have fought, sacrificed, and struggled to create a better future for their families and our community. We have achieved many gains during our first sixty years. We have improved wages, benefits, pensions, vacations, holidays, insurance coverage, working conditions, and job security. We have also given generously to the community and contributed to improving the quality of life in the Lansing Area. However, now is not a time to rest. There is much work to be done if we are to continue to fulfill the aspirations of those who went before us. We owe the founders of our union a great debt. Where their goals have not been realized, we need to carry the torch to the next generation. Our union has traveled far during the last sixty years and we can continue to make history as long as we remember, “Solidarity Forever.”



SOLIDARITY FOREVER

When the Unions' inspiration through the worker's blood shall run
 There can be no power greater anywhere beneath the sun
 Yet what force on earth is weaker than the feeble strength of one?
 For the Union makes us strong.

Solidarity forever Solidarity forever
 Solidarity forever For the Union makes us strong

It is we who plowed the prairies, built the cities where they trade
 Dug the mines and built the workshops, endless miles of railroad laid
 Now we stand outcast & starving, 'midst the wonders we have made
 But the Union makes us strong

They have taken untold millions, that they never toiled to earn
 But without our brain and muscle, not a single wheel would turn
 We can break their brutal power, gain our freedom when we learn
 That the Union makes us strong

In our hands is placed a power, greater than their hoarded gold
 Greater than the might of armies magnified a thousandfold
 We can bring to birth a new world from the ashes of the old
 For the Union makes us strong

Have we anything in common with the greedy parasite,
 Who would lash us into bondage, who would crush us with his might -
 Is there anything left to us but to organize and fight?
 For the Union makes us strong!

All the world that's owned by idle drones is ours and ours alone
 We have laid the wide foundations, built it skywards, stone by stone,
 It is ours not to toil in but to master and to own -
 For the Union makes us strong!


And here are a few non-traditional verses, to add a necessary dimension to the struggle:

We're the Women of the Union and we sure know how to fight We'll fight for women's
 issues and we'll fight for women's rights
 A woman's work is never done from morning until night
 And Women make the Union strong!

It is we who wash dishes, scrub the floors and chase the dirt
 Feed the kids and send them off to school, and then we go to work
 Where we work for half mens wages for a boss who likes to flirt
 But the Union makes us strong!



UAW Milestones

- 1935 - The UAW holds its first convention in Detroit on August 26. There were 200 delegates present and Francis Dillon is appointed President.
- 1936 - Homer Martin elected President at the UAW Convention held in South Bend, Indiana.
- 1937 - UAW ends Flint sitdown strike after GM agrees to negotiate with the union.
- 1939 - UAW Local 602 is granted a separate charter breaking away from AIW-CIO 182 on January 18. UAW wins "strategy strike" led by skilled trades workers at GM facilities. The company recognizes UAW's right to bargain for GM workers, establishes seniority rights, and lays the ground work for the apprentice program. R.J. Thomas is elected the third President of the UAW.
- 1940 - UAW wins the first paid vacation in negotiations with GM. Workers with one year of seniority receive 40 hours of vacation pay per year.
- 1941 - UAW International Executive Board adopts no strike pledge after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the Congressional Declaration of War against Japan, Italy, and Germany. The no strike decision was later reaffirmed by a membership poll.
- 1942 - UAW wins doubling of paid vacation time for workers with five years of seniority. GM contract also provides a four cents per hour wage increase with six cents per hour increase for tool and die and some maintenance classifications. Federal Government establishes War Production Board Labor Division. UAW President R.J. Thomas serves on the board.
- 1944 - First UAW Women's Conference calls for full employment and equal pay for women.
- 1945-46 - UAW strikes GM for 113 days. The contract provided an eighteen cents per hour wage increase, dues check off, and other gains.
- 1946 -  Walter Reuther elected fourth President of the UAW.
- 1947 - Six paid holidays established in the GM contract setting the pattern for other companies
- 1948 - UAW wins first Annual Improvement Factor (AIF) raise. The AIF recognizes




workers contribution to productivity increases. Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) is also secured during negotiations.


1950 - UAW wins union shop provision in a vote of the workers. First paid hospitalization (partial) and medical benefits won at the bargaining table.

1955 - Supplementary Unemployment Benefits (SUB) won at Ford. This benefit represented an effort to win a guaranteed annual wage for workers.


1961 - UAW wins fully paid hospitalization and sickness benefits as well as a no discrimination clause.

1963 - UAW joins the March on Washington and lobbies for the passage of a Civil Rights law.

1970 - Walter and May Reuther die in a tragic plane crash.  Leonard Woodcock is named the fifth President of the UAW. Following a ten week strike, the UAW

wins a “30 and out”  early retirement program, uncapped COLA, and up to four weeks paid vacation.

1973 - UAW Health and Safety committees are established.

1977 -  Douglas Fraser succeeds Leonard Woodcock as the sixth President of the UAW.

1982 - UAW wins profit sharing, Guaranteed Income Stream (GIS), a moratorium on plant closings, and company funded training/retraining programs.

1983 -  Owen Bieber elected the seventh President of the UAW.

1984 - GM contract sets new job security pattern. Eligible workers with one year or more seniority are placed in a “job bank” instead of being laid off.

1996 -  Stephen Yokich elected the eighth President of the UAW.



UAW Local 602 Presidents



Floyd Ryan
President
1939-40



Thomas Eno
President
1940 - 41 & 1948 - 49



Lyle Stone
President
1941 - 42; 1949 - 51; 1961 - 63



Bill Ingram
President
1942 - 43



Oscar Wade
President
1943 - 44



Chester Cowan
President
1944 - 45



Arch Perry
President
1945 - 48



Joseph Santoro
President
1950 - 56



Don Steere
President
1956 - 57



Webb Ewing
President
1957 - 61



George Smith
President
1963 - 65



Lloyd Cain
President
1965 - 66



Richard Sandborn
President
1966 - 75



Robert Somers
President
1975 - 84



Terry Ward
President
1984 - 87



Al Pressley
President
1987 - 91



Ted Hartman
President
1991 - 93



Garry Bernath
President
1993 - Present



UAW Local 602

Current Leadership

EXECUTIVE OFFICERS & SHOP COMMITTEE

Garry Bernath	President
Michael Bennett	Vice President
Matt Strickling	Recording Secretary
Steve Bramos	Financial Secretary/Treasurer
Connie Swander	Trustee
Stephanie Gordon	Trustee
Rod Murray	Trustee
Rusty Ziegler	Guide
Don Willems	Sergeant-at-Arms
Doug Taylor	Zone Committee, Chairperson
Ken Michaud	Zone Committeeperson
Bob Morgan	Zone Committeeperson
Mike Guthrie	Zone Committeeperson
Asa Bigelow	Skilled Trades Zone Committeeperson
Dan Smith	District Shop Committeeperson
Roger Stevens	District Shop Committeeperson

CHAIRPERSONS OF STANDING COMMITTEES

Art Luna	Citizenship & Legislative
Marilyn Coulter	Civil Rights
Pauline Fernandez	Community Services & Welfare
Harold Brown	Compensation/Unemployment
Sam Warren	Conservation & Recreation
Phillip Woodward	Constitution & By-Laws
Kevin Beard	Education
Dorothy Stevens	Retirees
Bruce MacConnell	Strike
Doug Rademacher	Union Label
John Fryover	Veterans
Judy Bolton	Women's

INTERNATIONAL OFFICERS

Cal Rapson	Regional Director
C. Richard Bennett	Regional International Rep



Notable Quotes

“All that serves labor serves the nation. All that harms is treason... If a man tells you he loves America, yet hates labor, he is a liar... There is no America without labor, and to fleece one is to rob the other.”

Abraham Lincoln

“Whatever there is of greatness in the United States of America or indeed in any other country, is due to labor. The laborer is the author of all greatness and wealth”

Ulysses S. Grant

“If I were a worker in a factory, the first thing I would do would be to join a union.”

Franklin D. Roosevelt

“Only a fool would try to deprive working men and women of the right to join the union of their choice.”

Dwight D. Eisenhower

“Trade unions have done more for humanity than any other organization of men that ever existed.”

Clarence S. Darrow

“Show me a country that has no strikes and I’ll show you a country in which there is no liberty.”

Samuel Gompers



In Praise of Unions

Those who would destroy or further limit the rights of organized labor—those who would cripple collective bargaining or prevent organization of the unorganized—do a disservice to the cause of democracy.

Fifty years or so ago the American Labor Movement was little more than a group of dreamers, and look at it now. From coast to coast, in factories, stores, warehouses and business establishments of all kinds, industrial democracy is at work.

Employees, represented by free and democratic trade unions of their own choosing, participate actively in determining their wages, hours and working conditions. Their living standards are the highest in the world. Their job rights are protected by collective bargaining agreements. They have fringe benefits that were unheard of less than a generation ago.

Our labor unions are not narrow, self-seeking groups. They have raised wages, shortened hours and provided supplemental benefits. Through collective bargaining and grievance procedures, they have brought justice and democracy to the shop floor. But their work goes beyond their own jobs, and even beyond our borders.

Our unions have fought for aid to education, for better housing, for development of our national resources, and for saving the family-sized farms. They have spoken, not for narrow self-interest, but for the public interest and for the people.

John F. Kennedy
October 1960

