

Steel Squeezing Seniors

By Woodrow Wilcox

The front page of the “BizNews” section of “The Times” (www.nwitem.com) on October 25 had two stories about Mittal Steel.

One story reported that Mittal Steel is buying a steel company in Ukraine for \$4.79 BILLION. The other story reported that Mittal Steel will cut the medical benefits of 2,700 retirees and surviving spouses in order to save \$2.5 MILLION annually. So, it seems that Mittal Steel wants to hurt retirees to save \$2.5 million while it spends \$4.79 billion to acquire more assets. Wow! Maybe “The Times” could have combined the stories with a headline like “Greedy Steel Company Executives Squeeze Blood From Retirees”.

Mittal Steel executives decided to cut off medical benefits for 2,700 retirees – just to show how much they care about our community and its people. These were non-union retirees – the secretaries, office managers, foremen, and other people who worked in positions that were not represented by a labor union. The only reason the unionized retirees have not yet had their medical benefits cut off is that a labor union contract still protects them – so far.

Recently, a friend asked me for help because she had gotten a bill for a service that she never received. Every time I called the company to discuss the problem, they hung up on me. I did some checking. The business that sent the bill had not filed all the papers legally required for doing business in Indiana. I am very civic minded. So, I sent a letter to the U.S. Postal Inspector and the county prosecutors in the counties where the firm did business or to which it mailed bills. Also, I gave them copies of everything I had learned about the company.

Both Indiana and local communities have laws that businesses must follow to do business here. People who want to conduct business must get a business license to do business. In most communities, when a person or company has a bad reputation about doing business or hurting people in the community, the business license is refused or revoked. Often, the grounds for refusing or revoking a business license are that the party seeking the license has a reputation of misleading, defrauding, or harming people in the community. The message to the party that wants the business license is, “We don’t want you doing business in our community because you do business in ways that hurt our community and its citizens.”

So, I just wonder about what is stopping East Chicago and Indiana from revoking the business licenses of Mittal Steel. Without a business license, Mittal Steel could still make steel and store steel as it gets ready to do business after it regains its business licenses. But, without the business licenses, Mittal Steel could not legally sell any steel. Maybe that would make the Mittal Steel executives rethink how they want to treat their employees and retirees.