

Businesses and union press GE to reinvest in Lynn

By Guthrie Scrimgeour
ITEM STAFF

LYNN — Dozens of signs have been popping up in the windows of local businesses throughout the city reading: “GE Lynn: Love Us, Don’t Leave Us!”

The signs are part of a broader campaign from the General Electric River Works union IUE-CWA Local 201 — along with faith, business, veterans, health, labor and other local leaders — to urge GE to reinvest in their Lynn facility after years of offshoring jobs, according to Local 201.

John Stephanides, who has owned the Super Seven Sub Shop across from GE River Works for more than 50 years, said that he supported the campaign because of the importance of the plant to local businesses.

“When I came here in the 1970s, GE had more than 17,000 or 18,000 employees. Slowly they began to move their business overseas or to the South. Now they’re down to less than 3,000,” said Stephanides. “Business is way down — 30, 40, 50 percent. Every year, it is getting worse and worse. There used to be all kinds of diners and sub shops around here. I’m the only one left.”

He said that continued disinvestment in the plant would affect not just his business but many other places as well.

“It’s going to hurt everybody,” Stephanides said.

The campaign comes after GE workers were informed last Friday that the plant would be shipping manufacturing work to other plants, including a facility in Romania, Local 201 President Adam Kaszynski said.

“GE has been weakened by years of disinvestment,” said Kaszynski. “We need massive new investment, not nickels and dimes. For decades, aviation has been the engine generating profit for GE. We need our elected leaders to compel GE to reinvest profits here in Lynn.”

In response, GE spokesman Richard Gorham said, “During a meeting with the union we announced our intent to transfer some non-core manufacturing work from



From left, Leonidas, Dimitrios, John, and Kosta Stephanides of Super Seven Subs and Pizza are supporting a campaign to convince General Electric to reinvest in their Lynn plant. (Julia Hopkins)

our Lynn plant to other GE sites and qualified suppliers.

“We do not expect any adverse impact to our site headcount related to this initiative, and this proposed action will help us improve our military customer deliveries.”

Gorham said the transfer would help the Lynn plant meet its production goals, avoiding “delinquency,” which he said has become a problem for the plant.

He said the company has hired approximately 400 hourly employees over the past five years, which he said has nearly kept pace with the level of attrition of employees.

He also said that GE plans to invest \$36 million into the infrastructure of the plant, which represents an increase over the past few years.

Coalition members are calling for a larger investment, specifically bringing more jobs to the city to revitalize the economy.

“This is about our future,” added Jeff Crosby, executive director of the New Lynn Coalition, which is involved in the campaign. “Lynn was once a thriving city, built around good manufacturing jobs at GE.”

The coalition has been circulating a petition in local stores calling on GE to “Build Better in Lynn” and will be participating in an upcoming May Day event, which will link the issue of GE reinvestment with a

push for affordable housing.

“Our efforts to tie jobs with affordable housing is in the long, proud tradition of social justice movements in America,” said Kaszynski. “In 1963, many Lynn residents and Local 201 members joined the tens of thousands on the historic March on Washington for Jobs and Justice, where the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King gave his famous ‘I Have a Dream’ speech. Today, people in Lynn have a dream of a community with a vital economic base that provides good jobs, good affordable housing and meets the needs of all of our people.”

According to coalition members, racial justice issues are also driving them to demand an increase in jobs.

The leadership of IUE-CWA Local 201 has been working with community leaders for years to convince GE to increase minority hiring so the workforce reflects the diversity of Lynn, Kaszynski said.

But those efforts are more difficult to achieve as the workforce continues to shrink.

“Lynn’s minority communities suffer grievously, as we have traditionally been the last hired and the first fired,” said the Rev. Kirk Bryon Jones, pastor of St. Stephen’s Memorial Episcopal Church. “Breathing new life into this plant is a way to eliminate these inequities.”