

April 14, 2004

City elections, a blizzard and ATCO jobs

Part three of three

This is our final look at events in Willimantic during the fall of 1967. The city elections were in full swing, downtown Willimantic was buzzing with Christmas shoppers taking advantage of the nice weather. However, this ended with a heavy snowstorm on Dec. 23. Finally, see if you can remember some of American Thread Co.'s management team from 37 years ago.

It became a three horse race for

Willimantic mayor, when an Independent candidate, Willimantic born Florence MacFarlane, a retired educator, threw her hat into the ring. The other two candidates were Democrat Albert Harvey and Republican Stanley Kokosa.



Tom Beardsley

Harvey was born in Canada and educated at Willimantic's St. Mary's School. He had served 10 years as a state representative, and was currently self-employed in the furniture and antique business. Kokosa was born in Meriden and educated at Woolsey School, Fair Haven Junior High, Hillhouse High School, the University of Connecticut and the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. He was employed as the assistant (City, Page 10)

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director of the Manpower Development Training Division of Vocational Education at the state Department of Education.

Kokosa became mayor after a landslide victory. He gained 2,161 votes to Harvey's 1,531 and MacFarlane's 205. Kokosa was 36 years old and had been a resident in Willimantic since 1958, when he came to teach at the Windham

Regional Technical School. He was born in 1931, one of 12 children of a Polish immigrant foundry worker. In 1951 he entered the U.S. Air Force and was stationed in Korea, where he won a Bronze Star. Kokosa was Willimantic's first GOP mayor since John Wrana defeated Florimond Bergeron by 86 votes in 1961. The voter turnout was disappointing, only 3,887 of 6,487 eligible voters bothered to turnout.

The Yule shopping rush was in full swing in downtown Willimantic, and it looked as if 1967 would be a record-breaking Christmas for local businesses. Opening hours were extended for one week until December 23, with stores staying open until 9 p.m. every night. John Wrana, director of the Willimantic Chamber of Commerce, urged shoppers to "Try Willimantic First." These were the days before the East Brook Mall, and Willimantic boasted five men's shops, two sporting goods stores, seven shoe stores, seven women's shops, six department stores, four hardware stores and a wide variety of eating places. Kokoska announced that all city parking was free until Christmas and Police Chief Martin Viullermet added that traffic had been very heavy because of the extremely mild weather. He also announced that he was organizing extra patrols to help out of town shoppers find parking lots.

Heavy snow on Dec. 23 ensured that it was a white Christmas in Willimantic. A heavy storm deposited five inches of the white

stuff onto the city streets, beginning at 2 am. Public Works Superintendent Alexis Caisse announced that plowing, sanding and salting commenced at 3. 30 a.m., but there was still a large number of minor auto accidents during the early morning. The snow did not bother employees of Electro-Motive Corp. They had just received a generous Christmas bonus. It was calculated that nationwide, Electro-Motive's 1,600 employees had received a total of an extra \$298,000 in the wage packets to help them celebrate Christmas.

ATCO promoted John Love and William Burton. ATCO President E.B. Shaw announced that Love would be ATCO's new executive vice-president, and Burton would be responsible for all of the company's finishing operations in Willimantic, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Maine. Love began his career in Willimantic in 1947 as a management trainee. He became assistant manager of the Willimantic plant in 1954 and general manager in 1961. In 1963 he was named director of general executive services and transferred to ATCO's New York office where he was promoted to the board of directors in 1966.

Burton had been serving as assistant to the vice president of manufacturing. He was a textile engineering graduate of North Carolina State University, and held a law degree from the University of North Carolina. He began his textile career with J.P. Stevens and Co. as a management trainee and became a plant superintendent in 1952. Before joining ATCO, Burton was the vice president of the Abney Textile Mills in Greenwood, S.C.