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'The Monthly Yarn' told some real tales

The American Thread Co.'s newsletter, "The Monthly Yarn," of November 1979 is a reminder of ATCO's central role in the community's everyday life less than a generation ago. These company publications first appeared in the 1920s, and continued under a variety of titles until ATCO left Willimantic in 1985.

This particular edition revealed

the company's critical condition and provided signs that its 120-year sojourn in Willimantic was ending.

It featured a drawing of ATCO's Mill No. 2 by local artist Editha Spencer. Page 2 included a message from plant superintendent Andy Sabo, followed by a page of internal promotions and appointments, a page of suggestions

awards, a page of pictures of retirees, credit union news, a safety report, photographs of the annual outing to Ocean Beach and pictures of modifications taking place in the Package Dye House.

By the fall of 1979, ATCO had transferred several major operations to Sevier, N.C.. The Willimantic plant was manufac-

turing industrial threads and knitting yarns. In his monthly editorial, Sabo explained why he had implemented a four-



Tom
Beardsley

day working week and why he

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was laying off workers.

The automotive industry purchased ATCO's industrial thread output for its vehicles' interiors, but Sabo pointed out that the major automobile manufacturers had not been able to sell new vehicles, so they had suspended orders for industrial thread.

This caused the implementation of a four-day week, so Sabo found it necessary to lay off workers in order to reintroduce the five-day working week.

However, he envisaged no layoffs of workers producing knitting yarns, despite the competitiveness in the business.

In order that the ATCO plant in Willimantic could compete with competitors, Sabo was installing a gas heating system to cut down on overheads. Also, to automate the whole operation, the remodeling of the package dye mixing room was well under way. This would, Sabo stressed, result in "better working conditions, consistent quality product and reduced costs." Moreover, to reduce costs and increase efficiency, Sabo was introducing filament synthetic twisters, a new bonding machine, a new printing press and plastic cones to replace the paper cones.

Despite the unsure economic environment, the magazine recounted internal promotions, including that of Richard Bernier promoted from the supervisor of package dye's third shift and Gabrielle Bergeron's advancement from tube winding to third-shift supervisor in finishing.

"The Monthly Yarn" dedicated further pages to a suggestions award, plus pictures of those due to retire. Bill Lovejoy and Lucien Desrosiers presented Vail Freeman with an award for improvements he proposed in the cone and tube department.

The retirees included Chester Stygar, who had begun work at ATCO in 1932, John Rusek (1939), Louis Vertefeuille (1939), Constance Insalaco (1946), Gladys Durkee (1958), Esperanza and Luciano Alonso (1965), Francis Lamoreux (1968) and Gail Freeman (1976).

Safety was a paramount issue and the magazine gave a page to introduce "Charlie Klutz." General Supervisor Nick Carchildi is shown introducing Charlie, who was in fact a mannequin with a slovenly attitude, to a group of workers.

The facing page includes pictures from that year's company annual outing to Ocean Beach in New London. Unfortunately, although ATCO's workers and their families look cheerful enough, it rained heavily on the day and umbrellas are in much evidence.

The newsletter's back cover included photographs of the modifications taking place in the package dye house, along side a list of service anniversaries. Those with the longest employment records included George Oulton in the finance office who started at ATCO in 1939, along with Constance Cook (1954) in finishing and Wilfred Adams (1954) in sales and service.

Just six years later after the publication of this particular issue of "The Monthly Yarn," the curtain came down on ATCO's Willimantic plant.

If you have any copies of these newsletters, be sure to deposit copies in local archives at the Willimantic Library and the Windham Historical Society Windham Textile and History Museum, as they provide irreplaceable historical documentation of the company that put the Thread City on the map.



Charles Stygar, center, poses with two ATCO officials at his retirement in 1979 from the dressing department after 47 years of work.