



Livonia plant union honored for volunteerism

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UAW Local 182, the union representing Ford Motor Company's Livonia Transmission plant, was honored Thursday with the Ford Volunteer Corps Volunteer of the Month award.

The union was recognized for its annual "Labor of Love" Christmas party for underprivileged children Sunday, Dec. 11, 2006. The union hall received a framed, signed award from Ford Chairman Bill Ford. It was the first time since the award's inception in 2005 that a group rather than an individual was honored.

UAW 182 community service chairman Terry Chitwood said the effort benefits underprivileged kids from several counties.

"We invite 150 kids every year," he said. "This year we had 132 attend so we sent the remaining gifts to organizations like Livonia Headstart, Whaley Child Services and Starfish Family Services."

The children got gifts, a meal and entertainment throughout the day including a visit from Santa Claus. All of the people twisting balloon animals, serving food and wrapping presents donate their time.

"Everything is donated," Chitwood said. "We get the funds from car shows, can collections at the plant, our golf outing and personal donations."

He said the event costs about \$8,500 to put on, more than half of that going to purchase gifts. The party has its own budget at UAW 182 and none of the money used comes from union dues.

Some of the money and other services are donations from area businesses like Bill Brown Ford, Blackwell Ford, the Shrine Clowns, **Mainstay Capital Management** and Little G's Pizza.

UAW Local 182 President John Caizza said it takes a lot of hands to put together an event like the Labor of Love.

"You should have seen the first year. It takes so much support, so much volunteer work," he said. "But it's easier to do once you do it the first time."

He said the management team at the plant was very much a part of the annual Christmas effort.

Nancy McCauley-Branstetter is the manager of Ford Volunteer Corps, an organization that was launched by Bill Ford in the wake of Hurricane Katrina -- which inspired creation of the Volunteer of the Month award.

"It started in August of 2005 to acknowledge exceptional people who do things for others," McCauley-Branstetter said. "There was a woman in Texas who took in 22 foster children, there was the work the Rouge Plant did for hurricane relief."

Historically, the union hall puts on the Christmas event without much fanfare beyond what it takes to corral volunteers and generate donations.

"Normally we don't seek recognition," Chitwood said. "But we thought that if the idea spreads, it would be a good thing."

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