

AMERICAN-MADE WIND

Meet the Wind Workers

Ed Bernat

Company: Gamesa, Ebensburg, PA

Years in Industry: 40 years

Position: Finisher/Unit President, Ebensburg, PA

Ed Bernat works for Gamesa, a company that manufactures parts for the wind industry at two facilities in Pennsylvania. As a finisher in the Ebensburg plant, Bernat puts the final touches to turbine blades before they leave the plant, inspects the blades for surface imperfections and applies reinforcement lamination for installment. He's been at his current position for six years.

Prior to his current job at Gamesa, he was a welding inspector in Pittsburgh, a position that he lost to layoff. He started in the manufacturing industry at a steel mill 40 years ago at Bethlehem Steel. Over that time he's witnessed the devastating effects of outsourcing and the economic slowdown on jobs and his community in Pennsylvania.

At the beginning of last year, 194 employees worked at Gamesa. Soon the facility will be down to 24 employees. Bernat has seen people from all walks of life affected by the layoff including older workers not quite ready for retirement to younger ones who have recently purchased a house and now are out of work.

“There's a lot at stake for a lot of people, not only those people, but the people they do business with. A whole lot of people are connected to this company.”

-Ed Bernat

Bernat urges action from Congress on the Production Tax Credit before it expires in December. “The PTC has to go through,” Bernat said. “It helps to provide good paying jobs to hard working Americans and we can't afford to let that go. This should be a priority, to nurture our manufacturing economy. There has to be manufacturing to make this economy work.”

Brad Molinick

Company: Gamesa in Ebensburg, PA

Years in Industry: 9

Position: Quality Technician

In the nine years that Brad Molinick has worked in the manufacturing industry, he's seen a lot of changes in manufacturing and at Gamesa in Ebensburg, where he's worked for almost seven years. Out of high school, Brad worked as a diesel mechanic for a few years and then worked in sheet fabrication.

Today as a quality technician, Brad inspects all of the wind turbine blades, the turbine shells and the finished blades before they leave the Ebensburg facility.

Since late summer, more than 70 workers have been laid off from the Ebensburg Gamesa facility. Over the next two months, an additional 70 plus workers will be laid off due to the effect the expiring Production Tax Credit has had on turbine blade orders. Workers at the Ebensburg facility were producing 10 wind turbine blades per week and now they're currently down to only three turbine blades per week.

“It's affecting so many jobs in the Cambria county area, it has a significant trickle-down effect for people spending money in the community, going out and spending money and groceries and gifts for Christmas,” said Molinick. “It's something Congress really has to get going on.”

The U.S. wind industry employed 75,000 people in 2010.

- “U.S. Wind Industry Annual Market Report: Year Ending 2010,” AWEA, 2011.

Henry Redding

Company: SKF Industries, Hanover, PA

Years in Industry: 22

Position: Henry works on manufacturing the spherical turbine bearings that allow turbine blades to spin.

SKF Industries, where Henry Redding has now been working for 22 years entered the wind industry six years ago. The company made the transition by investing in machinery to make specialized, quality bearings for wind turbines. This specialized equipment allowed the company to manufacture specially sized bearings that fit wind turbines and allows the blades to spin.

The first year the company made bearings for the wind industry, they made 3,425 bearings. This year production is down to less than 400.

“Six years ago, the company was manufacturing bearings seven days a week, 24 hours a day...

Today it’s a one shift operation with six operators, where before we had 35 operators.”

-Henry Redding

company has gone from 340 employees six years ago, to 183 active union employees as of December 10, 2012. Over the last three years, 30 SKF Industries employees per quarter, on average, have been voluntarily laid off at the Hanover plant.

“We were swamped six years ago. Now, no one is buying,” said Redding.

When Henry’s employer starting manufacturing bearings for wind turbines, the company attracted business and investments from major wind energy companies such as General Electric, Vestas and Gamesa. Now the work has disappeared. As a result, the number of employees at the

Donn Pendergrass

Company: Union president, representing wind industry manufacturing workers at ATI Casting Services in LaPorte, IN

Formerly worked at Dodge Foundry as an Iron Pourer – Dodge closed in 2006

Position: Union President

Donn Pendergrass is the president of the union that represents workers at ATI Casting Services in LaPorte, Indiana. ATI Casting Services manufactures iron castings for the housing hubs on wind mills, the cap and the basing for the wind turbine. He’s worked in the manufacturing industry all of his life. Prior to his current position as union president, he worked at Dodge Foundry for 10 years as an Iron Pourer. Dodge Foundry manufactured parts that are making the Hoover Dam function today even though the plant closed in 2006.

At the height of production at ATI Casting Services, the company was making three castings per day. Today it’s not making any castings for wind turbines. Just 12 years ago, the company employed over 500 workers and today employs less than 100. The biggest round of layoffs by the company affected 350 people.

The reach of the layoffs went beyond the workers and their immediate families. “I’ve seen a lot of plant shutdowns,” said Pendergrass. “The layoffs devastated LaPorte and the community.”

Without the PTC, annual wind installations will drop from more than eight gigawatts (GW) in 2012 to two GW in 2013, and the jobs supported by wind will drop by nearly half.

- “U.S. Wind Industry Annual Market Report: Year Ending 2010,” AWEA, 2011.



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