

LIFE AFTER FORD

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conservation area. They pick up trash, paint signs, trim weeds, and load hundreds of clay pavers into baskets at the loading ramp. The work brings purpose and structure to their days as Ford considers their requests for transfers to Kansas City. Plus, it's an escape from the mall meeting room.

"I quit about three days there, and I thought, 'Man, where am I volunteer?'" Ranney said as the crew prepared to pile into a Ford F350 pickup for a tour of the former Army outpost. "The lady said, 'Well, we've got about 14,000 acres - you can volunteer all you want!'"

Ranney and fellow GM member Greg Medlock started in October and spent the first few months picking up trash - including discarded drywall, kitchen sinks and appliances. Most of the dirt roads through the lush forest and winding meadows were spotted as the F-350 rumbled through the park.

As teenagers, Ranney and Medlock worked the park together. Now, layoffs have brought them back, reuniting as they pick up trash trails and soda cans. "All these days you're working 10-hour days and you're so busy, you can never imagine that you'll lose your job," said Medlock. He worked seven years at St. Louis Assembly, eventually making it to the plant's prime positions. He was laid off a year and a half ago.

Analysis estimates that the job banker cost the Big Three automakers and Delphi Corp., the big former General Motors unit, more than \$1 billion annually - or \$13,000 per worker in wages and benefits.

Before the latest round of closings, Ford said it had 1,100 workers in the program.

Medlock reckons he would have gone home without it; Ranney said he could not afford medication for his autism as otherwise.

"It's going to be hard to go back to the train shop after working outside as long," Ranney said. "But it'll be a mental relief to have a job again."

At 2:45 on a Tuesday afternoon, Walter Boyd was early for class at Waterloo College, a small trade school campus west of St. Louis where he is studying ventilation systems.

So he sat in the back of his Ford

"I don't miss the work, but I do miss the people... There's guys I haven't seen since they closed the plant, and I miss them so much."



John Shelton, 56, job repair, stock department, 28 years at St. Louis Assembly

What now? Retired with full pension

For Shelton, the end of the line gives new signifi- cance to old habits. On this Thursday night, he's perched at Bluewood Bowl across the street from St. Louis Assembly as he'd been many times before retiring at the end of March. He retired on a Friday and started working at the bar - just one day a week - the next Monday. It's a way to keep a grip on friendships forged over nearly four decades.

"I'm an old-timer, and most of us could see it coming," Shelton said of the March shutdown. On Thursdays, Shelton, who retired with a full pension and medical and other benefits, meets at the union hall with a few other retirees to play bocceball, eat at a nearby grill and a trash-filled barbecue pit. "When the boss was a boy, his father moved to the area from the cotton fields of Arkansas to take a job at St. Louis Assembly. Shelton followed him into the plant in 1968. Of the 40 workers who started at that time, he's the only one who hung on until the end, he said.

"I was insecure about what I would do if I wasn't working, truthfully."

-Jennifer McMillan

Range whittling a wood light-house. The pipefitter learned the skill in Ford-sponsored classes before being laid off in March.

Boyd jokes several former co-workers four times a week for a 68-week course on installing and repairing air conditioning and heating systems. Although he has requested a transfer to Kansas City, he is tapping Ford's standard tuition aid program and money from the state of Missouri while he waits.

"The always takes advantage of what Ford offers - you'd be stupid not to," said Boyd, who put in 17 years at the plant.

"How many companies will pay you to go school or get training? Ford Motor Co. is good to people - I don't care what anybody says."

The classes have helped Boyd deal with the hole in his schedule.

"The first week, I was sitting at home smoking cigarettes, gaining weight, and I said, 'I can't do this.'" Boyd recalled, standing on the sidelines at his classroom's first job blowtorch.

Four years ago, when Ford first said it would shut the plant, he started paying off his motorcycle and credit cards, "and just waited

for it to happen."

He suggests Ford workers in Norfolk and others facing layoffs do the same.

"I'd recommend that everybody should get their hearts checked," he added.

Boyd said he's lost two buddies from St. Louis Assembly to heart attacks since they were laid off. "We were going to carve wood together," Boyd said of one friend. "I never made it over to his house."

Like Ford workers across the St. Louis area, Boyd is trying to navigate an uncertain future while keeping the past in perspective.

"I'm just still in limbo. I try not to stress out about it. This stuff happens - you can't do anything about it."

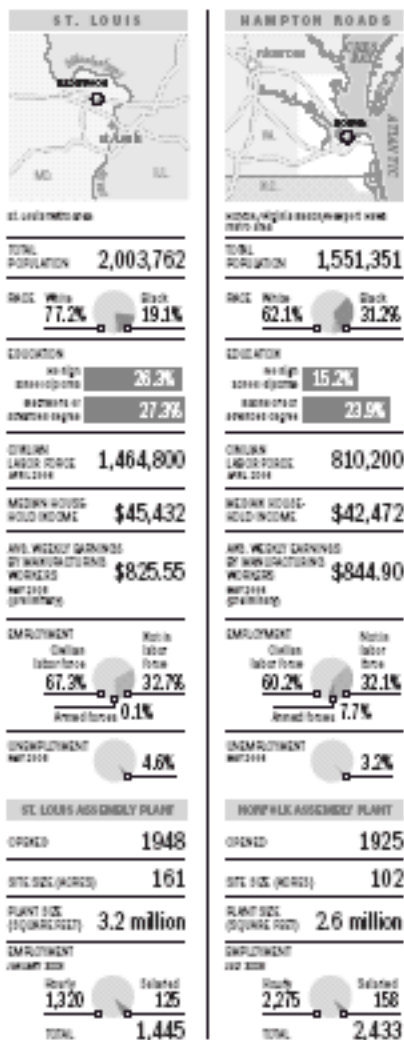
News researcher John Riga contributed to this report.

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Wants to reassemble: About a week ago, Tom Ranney and Greg Medlock learned they would be transferred to Kansas City.

COMPARING ST. LOUIS TO HAMPTON ROADS

The economy of metropolitan St. Louis is significantly larger than that of Hampton Roads, although Hampton Roads compares favorably in terms of wages and unemployment.



Manufactures per 2010 wage rates used. Data figures don't add up to 100 percent because of rounding. SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Bureau of Economic Analysis, Ford Motor Co., Census Bureau, 2008

PHOTOGRAPHS



Defies a claim in ventilation systems, Walter Boyd passes the time by whittling. He has requested a transfer to Kansas City and is tapping Ford's tuition aid program and the state of Missouri while he waits.