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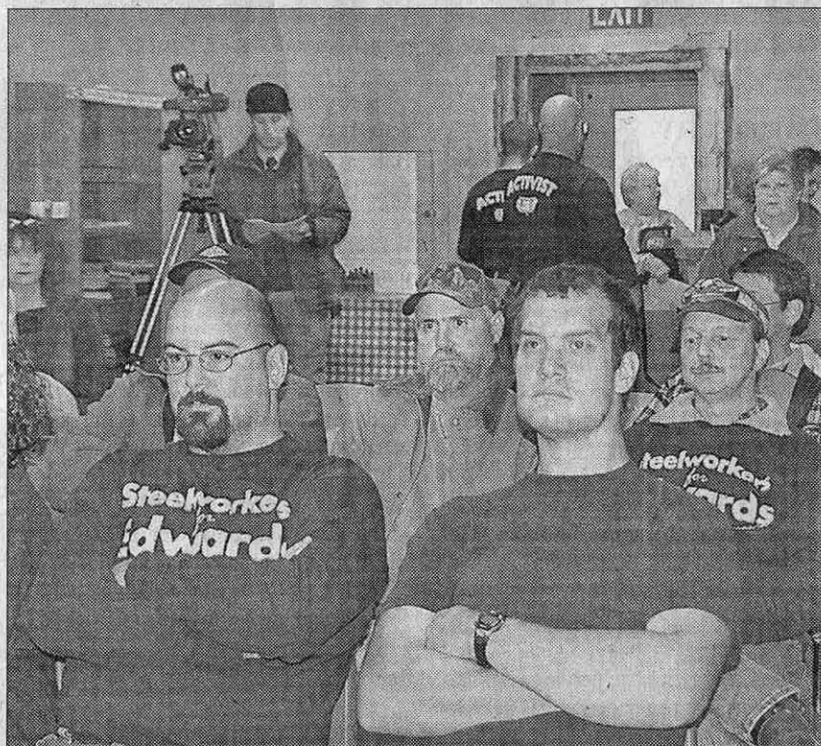


PHOTO BY AMY NIXON

Members of the United Steelworkers Local 61, who all face losing their livelihoods when the Wausau Paper mill in Groveton closes its doors at the end of the year, listen to speakers during a press conference in the union hall. The union appealed on Thursday for help in finding a company to operate the plant, hopefully as a paper mill, but to have some industrial use come to town and help the workers and the community.

## Union Makes Plea To Keep Mill Alive

BY AMY ASH NIXON  
Staff Writer

GROVETON, N.H. — The union hall of Local 61 of the United Steelworkers was packed Thursday morning with workers and concerned community members to hear the union's position on the severance packages offered to the 303 Wausau Paper Corporation workers who will lose their jobs at year end.

Ron Pickering, Local 61's staff representative and sub district director for Maine, Vermont and half of New Hampshire, began the press conference and didn't mince words in criticizing the severance packages being offered by Wausau.

Workers are being offered from 12 weeks of severance for those with 20 plus years of service down to four weeks of severance, if they have less than 10 years of service, Pickering said. The medical benefits will be extended for the same number of weeks for which employees.

"Our first desire is to keep the mill running so that jobs stay in the North Country," Pickering told the group. "Gov. Lynch's office is working hard to do just that for us. Wausau Paper told us the decision to close the mill is final. Hearing those words prompted the union to request what is called effects bargaining over the closure, or as I call it, effects 'begging.' The Closure Agreement offered by Wausau Paper is pathetic. Without getting into every detail of the agreement, we want to talk about two areas of the agreement which the union believes is extremely inadequate — those areas are severance pay and continuation of medical insurance."

David Atkinson, vice president of operations at the Groveton plant, said he was unable to comment on the union's

charges, and referred questions to Stu Carlson at the Wausau main office in Wisconsin. Attempts to reach Carlson on Thursday were not successful.

Pickering said the union has obtained severance packages from other companies which have shut down and hopes to negotiate better severance options for the Wausau employees.

Murray Rogers, president of Local 61, said when the company was asked about giving more weeks of pay and benefits, the union was told Wausau has only owned the company since 1993.

Pickering also lambasted the nation's trade policies. He said the government is the culprit in the demise of manufacturing jobs in America, and the tragedy now playing out in Groveton is a direct result of those policies.

Union members made it clear at the press conference that presidential candidate John Edwards has their allegiance — he has been in touch with workers and the union and is the son of a mill worker himself.

In the statement read on behalf of Local 61 by Rogers, he said that employees have made many sacrifices in recent years trying to keep the company open.

"One of the reasons that we are doing this press conference today," Rogers said, "is to appeal to Wausau Paper or anyone else who can help, to keep this mill open, making the 550 different grades of paper that this facility and this work force are more than capable of making. The other reason is to ask Wausau Paper to show some sort of decency and to recognize every year of service that the employees' salary and union and have dedicated to this facility."

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oke our hearts," he said.