

Keep K-C's Cold Spring facility alive: 'Taking that job changed my life'

Jessica Schiessel, Guest columnist

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(Photo: Maureen Wallenfang/USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin)

Eight years ago I would never have imagined what my life is today.

I was working for a temp service, barely making \$10 an hour, sharing an apartment with two other people and struggling to make ends meet. Because of the low wages, I was going to local food banks and relying on community services to get by. Like many in our community who are struggling in low-wage jobs, I saw no relief in sight.

Then I got the opportunity for a job at Kimberly-Clark. Taking that job changed my life. I was able to buy my first house and, most importantly, regain custody of my son because I could now provide for him. I became a successful, contributing member of the middle class who could now give back to my community.

The workers at Kimberly-Clark understand how fortunate we are and we pride ourselves on being able to both provide for our families and support our community. I am proud to say that now I am the one contributing to the food banks.

Working together here at K-C gives us the opportunity to make a pretty big impact. We do school supply drives for every school that our members belong to, coat drives for the Salvation Army, toy drives for the local homeless shelters, make blessing bags for local women's shelters, donate business attire for people to wear to job interviews, donate our steel-toe shoes for people who are going into new factory jobs, help put on a festival for the community on Labor Day, donate to local youth sports teams so that they can buy supplies to keep their programs going, participate in local races, like the Sole Burner, to raise money to cure cancer and other diseases, and we are the Fox Valley's No. 1 most generous giver to the United Way. These are only some of the things that we all work together on. Many of us do even more that no one even knows about.

Keeping our mill open is not just about the workers and our families, but also ensuring we can continue giving back to the community.

The Neenah Cold Spring Facility is one of K-C's most profitable plants. Our products are in high demand in a market that is only growing. However, we're facing steep competition. As such, workers at the facility have made huge sacrifices to make sure we can continue operating here in the Fox River Valley. We have agreed to massive concessions in order to stay competitive. We've worked with the company and done our part.

Now, it's time for the state to follow through.

Recently, as I was struggling with this situation, one of my neighbors told me that she would rather have her tax dollars go toward helping keep good-paying jobs here than having them go toward assistance for us if we don't have jobs. She understood how much good-paying jobs put back into the community.

Over the years, many Wisconsin companies have received subsidies and tax breaks to stay in our state and contribute to our communities. K-C is not the first to leverage a potential move for state support, but it is the most important to us, the workers, and our families.

We've negotiated with the company and taken cuts. Now, it's time for our state representatives and senators to follow through and do their jobs. When K-C first announced plans to shut down the mill, members of the state government jumped in to put together a bailout package. Ultimately, state leaders convinced K-C to listen to their plan. At the same time, workers agreed to millions of dollars in concessions. Now, those state incentives that initially spurred us all into action are in jeopardy.

This isn't just about us, we need to consider the local businesses such as the gas stations, the restaurants, the beauty shops and the studios where our children take dance classes. Losing K-C would devastate these businesses and jobs.

Our community is relying on our leaders in Madison to follow through on their promises so we can keep these family-supporting jobs here in Wisconsin.

Jessica Schiessel is a machine operator at Kimberly-Clark's Cold Spring Facility.