

NEWSREEL

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TEAMSTERS LOCAL 399 • SECRETARY-TREASURER LEO T. REED

Local 399 Teamster Donates Two Police Cruisers to Hurricane-battered Police Department



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Happy Holidays From Local 399

Enjoy some time off with your families and greet the new year with new energy. We have a very busy and exciting year ahead of us. Let us work together in 2006 to achieve all of our goals!

Wishing You a Happy
Healthy and Prosperous
New Year!

TEAMSTERS LOCAL 399

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Dick Austin Retires after 40 years as Local 399 Teamster

These days, Local 399 Teamster Dick Austin has a fishing rod in one hand and a suitcase in the other. Although Austin has been front row for 40 years of cinema history as a Local 399 Teamster at Universal Studios, these days he's more concerned with how he's going to spend his retirement.

After putting in 117,000 hours at Universal, Austin retired in February, after working his final job on *Bad News Bears*. It was a grueling shoot as the crew weathered last January's heavy winter storms, and Austin said the elements contributed to his decision to hang up his Teamster hat. "I worked 12 to 14 hours a day in the pouring rain," he said, adding that perhaps both traveling and fishing are on his agenda in the coming years.

"I'm going to do the typical retirement stuff," Austin said, not afraid of slipping into retirement doldrums. "Even if it gets a little boring, it's better than getting up early to an alarm clock and going to work every morning."

Austin started his Hollywood career in 1965 at the Tour Center at Universal Studios, taking camera-tot-

ing tourists backstage for an up-close view of Hollywood movie-making magic. After five years behind the wheel, Austin became a dispatcher, and soon found himself driving for some of Hollywood's most recognizable faces.

"I drove for Elvis Presley on *Change of Habit* in 1969," Austin said. "I met Bette Davis — she was a neat person and very nice." He also took silent movie star Mary Pickford on a tour. "A lot of people won't remember her," Austin said of the woman who made 236 films in Hollywood's early days.

Austin was eventually promoted to transportation planner, giving out jobs on the various studio projects. "The biggest deal I had, there were 855 jobs in one day," said Austin. "It was busy, and we had to call the police departments and fire departments for off-duty people to fill the jobs." That became a trend, he recalled, in the 1970's when television shows gained in popularity and jobs were plentiful. "Universal had 14 or 15 hours of television and they had a lot of features going," Austin remembered. "It was really busy all

the time."

After five years as a planner, Austin began captaining shows and eventually became a coordinator. "Back then, with seniority the way it was, you couldn't go on location unless you were a captain," he said. "I liked being captain — I did jobs in the Bahamas and spent a couple years in Hawaii." Austin also worked on several *Magnum P.I.* shows on the Big Island.

Almost a decade ago Austin gave up coordinating and went back to driving and captaining — the positions he said he enjoyed most during his career. "Back then we'd just load up a tram, give them a back-lot tour, and that was it. Today it's kind of a big deal," he commented, about the theme-park environment of today's back-lot tour.

Although he will enjoy his retirement, Austin said he'll miss the friends and close relationships he developed on the job. "When you work 117,000 in the industry, they become as much a family as your family at home," he stated. "We would spend 16 hours a day together, and I do miss those people."

Disability Insurance Issues

By Carole Stepp

Local 399 has been receiving a lot of complaints from members concerning the disability insurance plan run by Entertainment Partners, the large payroll company commonly referred to as EP. As the individual at Local 399 who handles most of the benefit issues, most of these complaints have been referred to me.

As you know, disability insurance pays you a weekly amount for injuries or illnesses that you contract while not at work. (Workers Compensa-

sation pays for injuries and illnesses sustained while you are at work). Recently, the law was amended so that disability insurance will also pay you for certain family medical leaves, such as caring for a sick spouse or bonding with a new child. All of the disability insurance premiums are paid by the employee, and none by the employer.

Most of the time, employees pay their disability insurance premiums to the state (the "SDI" deduction on

your paychecks) and the state then pays the benefits. Employers are allowed to set up their own disability plans if the benefits are at least as good as those offered by the state. This is what EP has done, claiming that its disability plan is better than the state's plan. To some degree, EP is right. But I will explain that later.

The problem most members are having is not with the amount of the

Continued on page 8

Local 399 Teamster Donated Hurricane-battered

Like many who watched the events surrounding Hurricane Katrina unfolding on national television, Local 399 Teamster Michael Walsh was particularly moved by the story of Waveland, Mississippi. While many Mississippi towns suffered heavy damage during Katrina's landfall, the town of Waveland was nearly washed off the map. Forty-foot-high waves crashed through town, leveling the city center and knocking even the most sturdy houses to the ground.

Among the heaps of wreckage left by the Aug. 29 storm surge were the gutted remains of the Waveland Police Department. A total of 33 department cars were ruined and 27 of the department's 30 employees were left homeless after the waves tore through town. Officers on duty in the station as the storm hit were left clinging to trees after the waters rushed

"These cops were there to protect and serve the community and rescuers couldn't even get to them for two days," Walsh said. "They lost everything — their guns, their handcuffs, their cars. There was nowhere they could get replacements — the dealerships were completely flooded."

Through his industry connections, Walsh secured state-of-the-art police equipment. His team installed everything from new sirens and light bars on top to gun-locks and grille straps to cages inside the vehicles. "These guys had never seen some of the stuff we installed," Walsh laughed. "I had to show them how to run the car with all the new stuff."

The cars traveled down to Waveland on a three-car carrier, packed with clothes, toys, emergency supplies and diapers. "We packed the cars and the whole storage bay,"



through, finally taking refuge from the flood on the department's rooftop, where they were found by rescue teams.

Having made his living providing screen cars to Hollywood studios through his Premiere Studio Rentals company — and many of the vehicles are fully-functional police cruisers — Walsh decided to extend a philanthropic hand to the officers at the Waveland Police Department. Pulling two Crown Victoria police cruisers from his fleet, Walsh retrofitted the cars and personally donated them to the Waveland PD.

Walsh said. Additionally, the Burbank Police Department and the San Fernando Police Officers' Association donated new uniforms, handcuffs, flashlights, billy-clubs, and other police equipment.

Walsh even went the extra mile and commissioned one of his shop graphic designers to create a graphic design for the exterior of the cruisers. The final design is a waving flag that wraps around three-quarters of the car. The town eventually adopted the graphic as their official town logo.

For Walsh, the whole operation represents what being a Teamster is all



tes Two Police Cruisers to Police Department



about. "We didn't have to go through an organization — we did it all ourselves," Walsh said. "When I told the police chief what I was doing, the man was highly moved and got choked up when we arrived," he remembered. "We drove one of the cars through the community — people were waving and cheering. It was really something to see."

Retired Local 399 member Ed Tucker, also a former Mississippi police officer, drove the car carrier.



Annual Shop Stewards Holiday Party

Once each year, at this most festive of seasons, Local 399 honors its shop stewards. These are the men and women who show their concern for their fellow members by constantly devoting their time above and beyond the call of their jobs. All members owe them a debt of gratitude and we take the opportunity to express our appreciation.



Alicia James — ABC



Enrique Erique — Universal



Sharon and Jim Brighan — Universal Studios Tour Driver



Brad Draper — Warner Bros. and Guest Buddy Hunter



Roscoe Molina and Alahandro Salomon — NES Studio Equipment



Alfred Rodriguez — Sony Courier and guest Oscar Robles



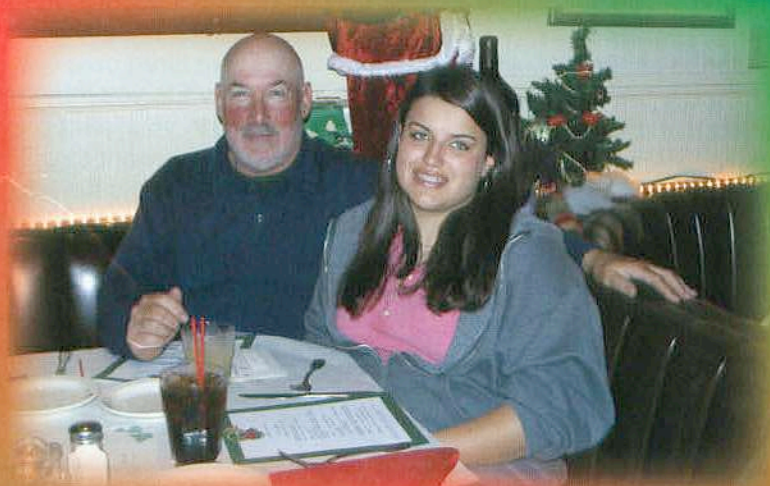
Peter and Caroline La Roche — Sony



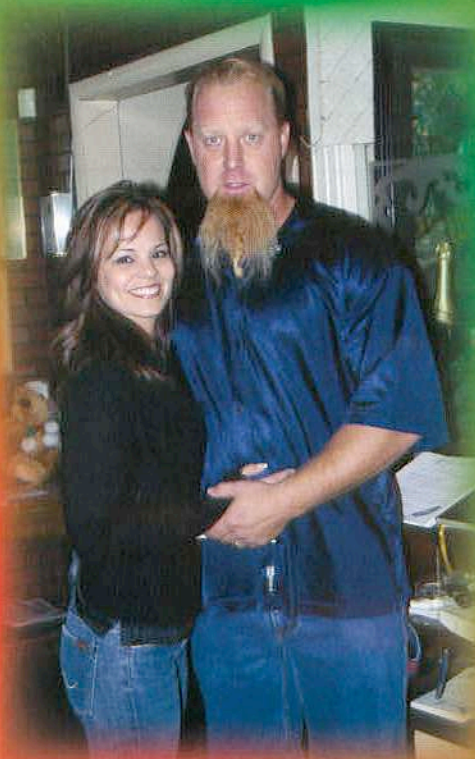
Tom Varela — ABC TV



Steve and Maggie Arriola — ABC



George Tuttle and daughter Allison — NBC Studios



Lisa and Mike Starns — Universal



Karl Perez and Douglas Perez — Classic Courier

Disability Insurance

Continued from page 3

benefit, but in getting paid the benefit at all. A lot of these problems relate to whether you must file a claim with EP or with the state. I will now try to answer this question.

EP's plan is your disability plan if (1) you did not sign a form saying that you wanted out of its plan and (2) either you are currently on a show being payrolled by EP or you were laid off or quit the show yesterday (that is, one day before the injury). That is, if you are paid by EP, you get its disability plan unless you "opt-out" of it (check your pay stubs; if you have a "VPDI" deduction and no "SDI" deduction, you did not opt out and you are in EP's plan), in which case you get the state's plan. Also, starting January 1, 2006, the one day is being expanded to one week, so that if you are injured within a week after being laid off or quitting, EP will be your plan and you must file your claim with it unless you opted out of its plan. If EP is not your plan because you either opted out or have not worked on an EP show for more than a day (or for more than a week as of January 1, 2006), then the state plan is your plan and you must file any claim with the state.

The next problem members are having is with the state. The state's knee-jerk reaction to every claim appears to be to try and dump it on EP, even if under the rules outlined above, EP is not the member's disability plan. EP then takes too much time kicking it back to the state. Unfortunately, I have no magic wand to make the state act properly, but Local 399 has gotten EP to promise to clean up its act in getting it back to the state in a timely manner. It has also promised to install a new 800 number than you can call with questions. Let me know if EP isn't keeping its promises.

Given the confusion generated by having the EP plan as your plan, two fair questions arise: why shouldn't you opt-out of the EP plan all of the time and, if you should, how do you do it?

As I mentioned above, EP claims that its plan is better than the state's plan and I noted that it is partially right. Right now, the maximum benefit under both the state plan and EP plan is \$840 per week. You max out under both plans if you earn, on average, at least \$1,525 per week. Remember, this is an average, meaning that you may not hit this average even if some weeks you make more than this amount if more times you

make less than this amount. If you usually make more than \$1,525 per week, you are probably better off with the state plan because you will avoid the hassles.

If you make less than \$1,525 per week, the EP plan pays a higher benefit than the state plan and the payments begin a week sooner. For example, if your average weekly earnings are \$1,000 per week, the state plan will pay you \$550 per week while the EP plan will pay you \$667 per week. That's an additional \$117 per week, something you should not sneeze at if you get hurt.

If you do decide to opt out, either because you have maxed out or because you don't think the extra money is worth the hassles, you have to tell EP that you want out of its plan. If you do nothing while on EP's payroll, you are in its plan. Currently, every time you are hired on a new show payrolled by EP, you must sign a form contained in your start paper work stating that you want to opt out. Starting in 2006, you only have to opt out once for the entire year. But you do have to opt out each year or you will be in EP's disability plan.

I hope that this little article has been helpful to you.

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