

## Unilever plant winding down

# Closure an emotional roller-coaster but long-term worker remains positive

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He said they have either found jobs with Unilever plants in Peterborough, Bramalea, Rexdale and Simcoe or left for other employment.

Fifty employees, like Young, will lose their jobs when Unilever ceases several production lines Dec. 22. The rest will continue working until the remaining production lines are closed in March.

"It's been a real mental and emotional roller-coaster since the closure announcement was made in February but you have to be optimistic that there is something out there for all of us," Young said.

"With Kellogg's coming, give us a call," he laughed.

Young said he's determined to find new employment in 2007.

"You have to keep your spirits up, otherwise you'll be no good to yourself or anyone else."

What makes his situation more "shocking" is that Young has never been without a job since the age of 19.

"This is my first real job and it's been like one big family here. We plan on keeping in touch with a scheduled reunion next July."

Young has used the services of a career transition centre established within the plant and staffed by Elizabeth Wray, hired by Right Management Consultants to assist Unilever workers find new jobs.

"Elizabeth, to me, is the light at the end of the tunnel," he said. "She has built up my courage to face the days ahead."

Dave Meldrum, 44, is facing his second plant closure in Belleville. He lost his job 17 years ago when Westwood Squib closed its doors. Back then, he took six months off before deciding to move to Toron-

to for a new job.

Not this time, he said.

"I'm actually hoping to go back to work in January somewhere in the Belleville area. I won't leave this area again," he said.

Meldrum has been with Unilever for just over five years. He too will be out of work after his shift ends Dec. 22.

"I'm optimistic about employment in Belleville," he said. "There are jobs out there and you have to look for them."

Meldrum is planning on having "a good Christmas and a long Christmas break" before resuming his job search next month.

Jan Vickers will continue working at Unilever until March. The 43-year-old Stirling resident has been with the company for almost six years.

"I was devastated when it first happened but I think everyone is OK with it now and are ready to move on," she said.

Vickers said she's hoping to transfer to Unilever's plant in Peterborough and, if successful, will move her family there.

"If that doesn't work, I'll look for a job in Belleville, Stirling or Trenton. We have food service experience and that makes our workforce attractive to other food service companies in this area."

Vickers is also philosophical about the plant closure.

"Things happen for a reason and change is probably good for us," she said.

Human resources manager MacNab, who will be moving to its Bramalea plant, had nothing but praise for Unilever's workers.

"We had three goals after February around productivity, safety and quality and we're on track to meet them all despite our closing,"

he said.

The workers' safety and quality record is second to none, noted MacNab.

"This plant has been one of the highest quality rated plants in Unilever North America and we have been able to maintain that this year."

He said Unilever employees have a distinct advantage because they're trained in a 'total productive manufacturing' system.

"We have a highly skilled workforce focused on safety, quality and productivity," MacNab said. "If those are the things employers are looking for, they will find them from this plant. They are just a great group of people and I wish them well."

Consultant Wray said Unilever "has made an exceptional effort to support employees through the transition period."

The company established the career transition centre this past summer. She has provided individual counselling, resume preparation, job interview coaching and job search skills for her clients.

Wray is also launching a unique initiative in mid-January on behalf of her clients. She is collecting employees' resumes on a voluntary basis and putting them on a CD.

"We're going to mail these CDs with cover letters from plant manager Roger Blair to about 50 major employers in the Quinte area to promote the availability of good people to the local marketplace," she said.

Wray said she's impressed with Unilever staff who are losing their jobs.

"The employees are well-trained and dedicated and would make excellent employees for whoever hires them," said Wray.