

Clothing Factory Layoff

Veronica Berry and about 300 other workers were laid off permanently when the Lawrence Clothing factory here closed in May.

Although Berry's smooth black skin and spry step keep her 65 years a secret, her round, brown eyes tell a story of worry, frustration and anxiety.

"This whole year I only put in 300 hours and I should have 2,000," said Berry, who tapes and cuts the fronts of men's coats.

She has been nipping and tucking and dipping into her savings to make ends meet. Finally, Lawrence shut down for good. And two weeks before her birthday, she found herself standing in an unemployment line, bewildered.

"I have to work," said Berry who has been in the clothing industry for 27 years. "All my life I've been working."

Two days after her birthday, she rushed out of the state employment services office clutching a carefully folded piece of paper. It was an assignment to work at another clothing factory.

With that slip of paper, Berry was luckier than most of the more than 1,670 men's clothing workers who signed for unemployment checks the third week in May. The South Street state employment office, which services only people in the men's clothing industry, found assignments for about 200 workers -- less than 10 percent of the people looking for jobs.

About 90 percent of the workers here in Philadelphia's clothing factories are women and about 60 percent of those workers are black.

The Philadelphia membership in the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (men's and boy's clothing) has dropped rapidly from 23,000 in 1974 to 12,000 this year.

There are several factors hurting the clothing industry: an inflated economy, imports and poor management. The northern factories also compete with unorganized southern factories which pay lower wages.

Industry spokespersons say imports threaten them most and they want to control the amount of clothing imported.

With much lower labor and material costs, clothing can be made cheaper outside the United States.

"The clothing industry in Philadelphia looks bad," continued Berry. "They let them make everything overseas and send it back to us to buy with no jobs."

"The clothes we make we can't afford," said Berry. "We have to buy cheaper clothes, so you work against yourself."

Ruth Ballard does piece work bookkeeping for B & J, Inc., a men's apparel factory. Ballard has been employed in the industry for more than 20 years.

"Most people buy imported goods," began Ballard. "That means the American label sits on the shelf and people get laid off."

Ballard said about one-half of the 150 workers in her factory were laid off temporarily for two weeks in February. She was allowed to stay on during that period. But she did not seem to be as confident that she would continue to be so lucky.

Thelma Baker has a proud, stern face. She kept a sour look on her face as she spoke. As a collar setter with B & J clothing, she has been laid off before. She was out of work in April for about five days.

"Cut my living half in two," said Baker, holding back on the details of her experiences. She would just say she had "to sacrifice," with a look that meant she had done a lot of it.



WORLD IS A BIG WIDE BALL

By Michelle McIlveen Albert, Age 7

I want to talk about how the world is, the big wide ball with all the cities in it.

At first, Jesus said, "Let there be light," and he said, "Let there be sun," and he kept saying "Let there" and there was a man and a woman and the world got beautiful, when it was trees and a man and a woman . . .

And one time I climbed a tree and it was magic and I saw money on the branches and I saw me picking up the money, then I threw the money into the car. I drove to the house, MY house -- there was furniture and food and tv's and beds and rooms, it was a three-story house, I had seven bedrooms and three guest-rooms and I had a doll and she had her room and I had mine and we had FOUR guest-rooms, it was big, big!! FIVE bedrooms, FIVE bathrooms, two stoves, five refrigerators and one big, big, big, big backyard with a swing set and a little playhouse with the things from the old house, old rugs, the old ice-box . . .

And it only lasted one hour and then I was for real. And then, and then, all my wishes went away and I'm back in the tree. I climb down and I tell my mama what happened, I tell my daddy. And if they don't believe me I take them to the tree -- but the tree is gone, everytime I bring them, it's gone, only when I'm there the tree isn't gone.

The Green Side of Black \$ NEED

There's a Sleeping Giant right here. A Giant that's got \$92 million in power! That's right, \$92 million worth of collective buying power, just in the Special Impact Area (SIA). But there are no services or goods manufactured near all that power. There should be. That \$92 million, as we have said before, is a conservative estimate. But it's flowing to businesses outside the community. It doesn't have to.

The entire Las Vegas Valley area is growing. According to 1975 estimates, 35,000 people resided in the SIA. That means some 8600 households existed, with a median of 4.6 people per household. And each wage earner had a median income of about \$9800 annually. So the \$92 million figure has grown, as the area has expanded in the last three years.


That \$92 million in collective buying power is like an untapped well, each of those 8600 households needs goods that can only be purchased outside the community; each of those 8600 households needs services that are only offered from businesses outside the community. Those households also need specialized services that are not offered at all in the general market. And they need all of these services closer to home.

But let's look at the Sleeping Giant from still another angle: his awakening, through business development, works in another way that is just as positive. If there are businesses in the community, there could be a variety of jobs, jobs that call for all kinds of skills and training. That means employment for SIA residents out of work. It also is an opportunity and an invitation to the young and talented to remain in the community.

But where do you start? How do you begin to pull together that \$92 million so it's as powerful as the calculations show? For any business to start, it takes money to get off the ground. But there are the means within our community that have the size to take this task head-on. The churches, for example, has a membership that is continuous, and accounted for. It's a good example of an existing institution that could be used as a business structure. The Catholics and Mormons faired quite well using their religious structure as a backbone for business ventures. Black churches on a national level have done it. The majority of privately owned Black colleges and universities are financially sponsored by Black denominations.

So the base does exist, we only need to utilize it. That \$92 million Sleeping Giant won't be dormant for long. He'll grow quickly, too, as will the community, when the goods and services, needed and desired, are placed within close reach of the SIA residents. It's a market in that Giant, which means there business potential. Next week we'll talk about developing that business potential.

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