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They've been called the mighty Machinists.

In 2008, they were the striking Machinists.

But the 26,000 members of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers who work for the Boeing Co. here want to be known by another name: the helping Machinists.

“We live in this community, we work in this community, and we volunteer in this community,” said Jon Holden with the Machinists union in Everett. “We're showing we're not just those people who go on strike every three

years.”

Holden and more than 25 Machinists showed up on a recent Saturday morning to build a wheelchair ramp at the home of Pete Caldwell, a Lake Stevens resident. Working with the Puget Sound Labor Agency, the union usually helps install about one ramp per month for a member of the community. The person selected typically is not a union member, but in this case it was. A former union steward, Caldwell retired from Boeing due to health reasons.

Machinist volunteers from as far south as Puyallup began showing up at Caldwell's home around 10 a.m. Within 45 minutes, the basic frame for the ramp had been installed. Altogether, ramps tend to take between two and eight hours to build, said Garth Luark, who's with the union's Seattle office.

As Luark and Holden focused on the ramp, Machinists fanned out across the property. They power-washed the top of the shed, cleaned moss from the rain gutters, and weeded the flower beds and back yard.

Caldwell greeted as many of his former co-workers and fellow union members as he could. Caldwell used to volunteer for events like the one at his house; he never thought he would need to be on the receiving end of the Machinists' goodwill.

The camaraderie that comes from working and volunteering together is one of the things Caldwell enjoyed most about the Machinists union. Before going to work at Boeing, Caldwell belonged to other unions in the state, like the boilermakers and cabinetmakers' unions.

“Just belonging to a union is a big plus,” Caldwell said.

Union members in Washington earn about \$3.05 per hour more than non-union workers and are more likely to have both health insurance and retirement benefits.

“We stand for a better standard of living,” Holden said.

But Machinists like John Lopez, who works at the fabrication facility in Auburn, want the community to know the union cares about more than just wages and benefits. Besides the wheelchair ramp program, union members have lent their muscles to building playgrounds at area schools and greenhouses for a Volunteers of America summer camp. They volunteer at the Everett Gospel Mission and do work that helps local food banks.

“Everybody gets the benefit of it, not just the Machinists,” he said.

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