

“Breakthrough” brings improvement to Boeing’s college assistance program



SEATTLE – Ongoing efforts by the Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace (SPEEA), IFPTE Local 2001, resulted in The Boeing Company this week announcing an improvement to its employee college assistance program.

The “breakthrough” came Wednesday (Aug. 18), when Boeing announced that starting Sept. 1, it is eliminating funding limits for employees using its Learning Together Program (LTP) to pursue a master’s degree or certificate programs in Computer Science, Physics, Chemistry, Math and Engineering.

“We have had a team of SPEEA leaders and staff engaged with Boeing in serious, sustained and substantive effects bargaining since December 2009,” said **Ray Goforth**, SPEEA executive director. “That has led to process improvements as well as this recent funding breakthrough.”

Funding limits were part of broad changes Boeing made to the program in January. SPEEA, the union representing engineers and technical workers at the aerospace giant, has worked since then to restore the program. More than 700 SPEEA members were using the program to further their education at the time of the cuts. Engineers and technical workers are taking classes at 44 different schools.

“I must congratulate Boeing for taking these negotiations seriously,” Goforth said. “To date, we’ve made a number of process improvements as well as this recent funding breakthrough.”

Goforth noted that input from union members was vital to achieving the recent improvement.

“We used our leverage to force a dialogue that resulted in a vastly superior decision to what the company produced without employee input,” Goforth said.

SPEEA continues to pursue a multi-pronged effort to keep and restore the program as an avenue for employees to maintain and enhance their careers. The effort includes continued bargaining to address the changes. An arbitration hearing is scheduled for October. The union also filed an unfair labor practice charge which is on hold pending the outcome of the arbitration.

A local of the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE), SPEEA represents more than 24,400 aerospace professionals at Boeing, Spirit AeroSystems in Kansas, Triumph Composite Systems, Inc., in Spokane, Wash., and at BAE Systems, Inc., in Irving, Texas.

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