

# Getting to know you

With their skills and industries adding to our union's diversity, in May Community welcomed nearly 2000 new members from the National Union of Domestic Appliances and General Operatives (NUDAGO). Here we find out how two of them help keep us warm and in hot dinners!

Rob Billyeald (*pictured here*), 36, works at Vaillant Industrial UK in Belper, Derbyshire, assembling some of central heating boilers that we're all so thankful for during the winter months. Belper is Vaillant's largest UK final product assembly plant and employs around 340 staff.

'I've been with Vaillant (formerly Hepworth Heating) for 14 years and a NUDAGO member all that time. My dad worked here for 40 years and my uncle was a shop steward – so there's a family tradition of both working here and joining the union,' Rob says. 'I started off in the spares department and six years later moved into the foundry. Then I went onto the assembly line, where a more experienced assembler took me through the process until I'd picked up the job. You need a fair amount of dexterity and concentration to do it.'

'After the change in legislation in April this year, we now make only high-efficiency boilers – wall-hung, condensing and combination versions – for Glow-Worm and other brands. My first act of the day is to clock on for the shift. Then I get a trolley to move the chassis – the starting block for building the boiler – onto the assembly line. The boiler has about 20 components that need to be assembled; some are produced on site, others come from Vaillant's plants around the world. My first job in assembling the boiler is to rivet the hydroblock onto the chassis, then put on the water tank. That done, it's time to add the heating engine and the pipes for the gas,' he explains. 'Then I add the electrics – the control box and wire up the connecting cables. Finally I add the vent – and you have the skeleton of your boiler.'

'Once I've finished with it, the boiler is then pushed down the line to be tested by another team member. I work with five others on the assembly track. If there are any problems, it goes back to a repairman and then back on the line where another team member adds side panels and a door before it goes off to the packing department. Then it's onto the next one for me. I make around 30 boilers a day and the team has a target of around 340 a week. That keeps us busy!'

'Chances are that many Community members will have cooked on one of our cookers at some time,' says Paddy Reynolds, a press setter at Glen Dimplex Home Appliances in Prescot, Merseyside. 'Our company is one of the biggest electric heating and home appliance suppliers in the country.'

At this plant we make a wide variety of gas, electric and dual-fuel cookers, ranges and hobs for Stoves, Belling and New World brands – from top-of-the-range to cheaper models. We make around 10,000 appliances every week.

'I've been with the company for 46 years and a union member all that time. There are around 1,250 staff here, a third of whom are now Community members,' adds Paddy who is also vice-chair and treasurer of Community's NUDAGO section. 'I work in the press plant and it's my job to manually set the presses to the right specifications – the right depth, width and length – for the cooker components we are pressing out of sheet metal. These might include hobs, cooker sides, and fascias.'

'As well as setting the presses, I also ensure that they are in good working order and check for any problems on the previous shift. These machines can press from 30 tonnes right up to 400 tonnes of sheet metal so they can inflict serious injury if not properly maintained. We work in teams of four or five on a shift – I'm generally on 6am-2pm or 10pm-6am,' Paddy explains.

'After checking the presses, I make sure the first-off component meets the spec and quality we need. If not, I make any necessary alterations and we test it again. We work to tight deadlines so getting it right first time is important,' he adds. 'I might reset the presses 30 to 40 times a day for different components. It takes about four or so years of on-the-job training to pick up the skills, and you need to be thorough and organised to get it right.'

'Once the presses are set, it's down to the press operators to produce the components. Once that's done the components are then sent to another part of the plant to be enamelled or painted a range of colours, and then assembled, checked, packed and transported to warehouses and high-street retailers in the UK so you can take your pick!'

