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## Drama verite

### Jobless steelworkers tell their story on stage

By Howard Goodman  
Inquirer Staff Writer

**T**hey were unlikely actors: six steelworkers among 2,000 who lost their jobs when the plant went under.

But at the coaxing of an actress, and with the moral and financial support of Bruce Springsteen and other show-business celebrities, they have forged their story into a piece of theater that tells what the collapse of an industry feels like.

"It was a pitiful sight to see, our old plant on the block, a proud lady on her dying day," says Cruz G. Montemayor on stage. For 37 years he was the pit boss in the electric furnace at Bethlehem Steel, Vernon, Calif.

"All that remains of her now is a huge rusty shell — what once used to be the bread and butter for 2,000 men and women."

The six former steelworkers play themselves, reciting lines they wrote, in a lament for their livelihoods called *Lady Beth*. Their jobs were "ungodly hot," dangerous and tiring. But they provided the support for wives and children and homes. And, in the words of Spring-

steen's "My Hometown," featured in the play at the Boss' suggestion, those jobs ain't comin' back.

The remains of the plant near central Los Angeles are being slowly dismantled and shipped to Japan to make new steel.

First performed in March and now drawing interest from television producers, *Lady Beth* played Saturday night at the Hospital & Nursing Home Employees Union Hall in Center City (proceeds from the \$10 tickets were to go to various labor-oriented organizations) and was to play last night at the Stone Pony in Asbury Park, N.J., Springsteen's old haunt.

This morning the troupe is to perform at the Boss' alma mater, Freehold High School. Springsteen's New Jersey home town has been a well-publicized victim of a 3M factory closing in May, costing 364 jobs, and he is the major bankroller of the project.

The troupe's current Midwest and East Coast tour has taken it to schools, union halls, a Baltimore church and the Sam Rayburn Office Building in Washington.

"Everywhere we go, people come up to us and say, 'We're so glad you're doing this, because it's happening in our industry, it's happen-

ing across the board,'" said cast member Frank H. Curtis, 41 and already the veteran of two shut-downs. Before working at Bethlehem Steel, he had lost a job when an American Bridge factory closed.

The play — part therapy exercise for the men, part agitprop for the union movement — was conceived by Susan Franklin Tanner, a Los Angeles actress who defied the stereotype of steelworkers as practically the last people on earth who would ever bare their feelings or even go to a play.

"People thought I was crazy," she said.

But Tanner said she had been moved by their "incredible story" when she met a few of the steelworkers in 1982. Starting a workshop on a grant, she drew the men out with acting exercises, encouraged them to write down their thoughts, recorded group discussions. Their words became a script with the help of writer Rob Sullivan.

"The value of a piece of theater is that it can shed light on something that's happening over and over again," Tanner said. The six voices in *Lady Beth* are meant to speak for 700,000 American steelworkers who



"Lady Beth" players include Lloyd R. Andres (foreground) and (from left) Cruz G. Montemayor, Hermes Paiz, Frank H. Curtis, Tony C. Garcia and Richard Carter.

have lost jobs since 1976:

"If Bethlehem had gone ahead and modernized, they could have run the plant at a profit," says Hermes Paiz, boltmaker operator for 33 years. "So why didn't they? I'll tell you — greed. The greed and mismanagement of companies. That's

what did it."

"She was good to us, that plant. Helped us raise all our families. She was good," says Richard Carter, crane operator and floor manager in the electric furnace for 24 years.

"The last day we all felt anger and sadness and bitterness, which

we all tried not to express," says Lloyd R. Andres, head packer, checker, telecontrolman and burner in the 10-inch mill for 19 years.

"The actual people who make all the things, the actual people who do all the work," Curtis says, "are forgotten."