

Pushing Forward Together

Some seek victory by uniting, others by dividing. Proudly, your union believes in working together to get things done. Recently, I was invited to be "principal-for-a-day" at the Boston Teachers Union School, an inner-city school run by the Boston Teachers Union. I was the product of a public education and I put my three children through the public school system. My experience with the Union School reaffirmed my faith in our system. The Boston Teachers Union negotiated an agreement with the Boston School Committee in 2005 to open a new teacher-run school to showcase their commitment to educating Boston's children. The Union School opened in September 2009, limiting enrollment to specific grades, aiming at beginning students and those entering transition years. I was overwhelmed both by the commitment of the teachers and the enthusiasm of the young students. At the next meeting of NAGE Charities, a self-funded subsidiary of your union, we proposed that the charity make a \$5,000 contribution to the school and "adopt" the school to help ensure it continues to grow and succeed. The vote was unanimous. At a time when public employees are being used as scapegoats and vilified, we thought it important that everyone see the work public employees accomplish when you remove politics and the media from the equation.

NAGE Earns Seat On Federal Labor-Management Relations Council

I proudly accepted President Obama's appointment of me to a seat on the Federal Labor-Management Relations Council on behalf of all NAGE federal members. The council was created in December 2009 by executive order of the President, with the purpose of establishing a non-adversarial forum where employees, labor unions, and management can look for ways to improve efficiency and effectiveness of government operations. The executive order requires federal agencies and departments to submit written plans to the council describing how each will implement labor-management forums to help the federal government better deliver services while cutting costs. I was appointed to a subcommittee, along with the AFGE president and two management representatives, charged with providing the initial review of the implementation plans.

White House Visit Provides Opportunity For All Members

I recently was invited to join President Obama, the First Lady, and their policy teams at the White House Forum on Workplace Flexibility. The invitation was extended by the White House Council on Women and Girls, which is overseeing the work/life agenda for Vice President Joe Biden's Middle Class Task Force. On behalf of all members of our organization, this forum provided me the opportunity to present suggestions about the evolving needs of 21st century workers. The goal is to better serve the interests of working families, while continuing to ensure employers' success.

IBPO Builds Framework For New Atlanta

Please take a moment and visit our web site at www.ibpo.org to view the construction underway for our new IBPO/NAGE regional office in Atlanta. The foundation has been poured and the framing is starting to go up. It took the cooperation of many to keep this project on track during the economic downturn. The new building, expected to be completed in late summer, will house the offices of IBPO/NAGE staff, feature a community room for neighborhood use, and a break room for Atlanta police officers. Our organization continues to grow in the South thanks to strong local leadership.

Arbitrator Reverses CO's Suspension

IBCO Attorney Timothy Bailey challenged the suspension of a correctional officer for sick leave abuse, pointing out that management failed to abide by the terms of the contract to which it agreed. Attorney Bailey showed that management at a county house of correction unilaterally implemented new requirements for using sick leave, without explaining the policy to the COs, negotiating with the union, or explaining the consequences of failing to abide by management's policy. As a result, a CO who followed the rules and submitted medical evidence of illness earlier in the year was suspended for one day when he used a single day of sick leave later in the year. According to management, he had triggered a requirement by using sick leave earlier in the year even though it was medically documented. That, they said, demanded he produce medical documentation for any future sick leave. The problem was nobody ever told the correctional officers. The arbitrator agreed with Attorney Bailey, saying management lacked just cause for the suspension and ordered the suspension and any associated losses borne by the CO reversed.

Louisville Meetings Produce Results

Deputy General Counsel Gina Lightfoot-Walker and National Representative Mark Bailey joined me in Louisville, Kentucky, to meet with the leadership teams of Locals R5-189 and R5-191, representing workers at the Metropolitan Sewer District. Our meetings were productive, centering on developing a cohesive legal strategy to provide services to the two longtime NAGE locals. Ideas developed at the team meetings will result in a more robust union presence in western Kentucky as we move forward.

NAGE Organizes Goodwill Employees In Election Win At Fort Lee

Stick with me on this one. NAGE represents many contract workers at federal military bases across the country, some for more than 30 years. When work is contracted out under the Services Contract Act, NAGE follows the employees and continues as their bargaining agent. Recently, we have seen a spate of these SCA contracts suddenly reclassified and regulated by the Javits, Wagner, O'Day Act, which limits employment to those who are blind or live with severe disabilities. Under the SCA, when a federal contract goes out to bid and a new employer is picked, employees holding jobs can follow their jobs to the new employer. Last fall at Fort Benning, Georgia, members - some with more than 20 years seniority - had their employment terminated with two weeks' notice when their jobs were reclassified under provisions of the JWOD Act, and Goodwill, Inc. was awarded the contract. Now, for the first time at NAGE, National Representative Teresa Jones tackled Goodwill and organized their employees at Fort Lee, Virginia. In an election conducted by the National Labor Relations Board, NAGE received nearly 90 percent of the Goodwill employees' vote.

Florida EMS Professionals Notch Legal Victory

Members of IAEP Local R5-533, supervisors with Lee County EMS, returned to their normal work schedules after winning a court battle with management after a unilateral change in their scheduling and overtime policies. Bargaining unit members were also made whole for any lost overtime. When management unilaterally changed members to "exempt status," it effectively made them ineligible for overtime pay. Members chose to bring a lawsuit on their own, while at the same time organizing with the IAEP to protect their rights. Now, public employee members in Florida are organizing a campaign to fight back against attempts to drastically cut the Public Employee Retirement System. For more information, please go to our web site at www.iaep.org.

Charleston Two-Step

I had the pleasure of visiting three NAGE locals in Charleston, SC, thanks to an invitation extended to me by Fletcher "Phil" Truesdell, president of Local R5-136 at the Ralph H. Johnson VAMC, who wanted me to see the work the local unions face. President Truesdell, along with Kate Smith, president of Local R5-150 representing RNs at the medical center, arranged for me to sit down with the center's new director, Carolyn Adams. The Charleston VAMC provides service to 40,000 veterans from South Carolina and Georgia. The hospital is now experiencing a six percent annual growth rate in services required by veterans. Our local union leaders are fighting to ensure that staffing and funding increase by like amounts to ensure that patient care does not suffer. Later that afternoon, I drove to North Charleston to see operations at the VA Consolidated Mail Order Pharmacy and met with Local R5-145 President Tom Sherer. That facility is currently filling 24 million prescriptions annually, a federal government practice that would have been deemed impossible in the not too distant past.