O3s on Campus:
Shame on UMass

CAMPUS – Ever hear about *Equal Pay for Equal Work*? Supposedly a cornerstone of our American Democracy? Supposedly one of our key civil rights? Supposedly a benchmark in court cases that address discrimination on the job? Well, you may have heard of *Equal Pay for Equal Work*, but apparently the University hasn’t. Talk to any 03 on campus and ask them about *Equal Pay for Equal Work*. The University has hundreds of 03s working in the dining commons and the Campus Center. Many of them are doing exactly the same work as our own union members. The difference? Well, there are a few. Take pay for example. The 03s we’ve talked to earn less per hour for doing exactly the same work as AFSCME members. Take benefits. The 03s that we’ve talked to have no health insurance through UMass; they have no dental coverage; they get no vacation days, no sick days, no personal days. Take job protection. One 03 that we talked to was promised a fifty-week 03 position. UMass broke that promise. This 03 is getting laid off (probably without a chance to collect unemployment); she is being replaced by student help this summer.

What’s it like to work under these conditions? Said one 03, “They cheat us. They scare us. They tell us we can fire you anytime. Say something wrong and they remember and they hold it against you. UMass doesn’t care that we have bills to pay. They’re killing us. This shouldn’t be happening.”

**North Apartments Overtime**

HAMPShIRE HOUSE – Housing Chief Steward Mike Soya reports that Management and the Union have reached a third step compromise on a 2007 grievance filed over the subcontracting of summer work in North Apartments. Housing employees, on a trial basis, will get one of the four buildings to do overtime. Management will be looking at how we did the job. And see if it was cost effective and if we could handle more in the summer of 2009.
BARGAINING  As of early June your Local 1776 bargaining team has met across the table several times with Management to hammer out a new contract that, when signed, will take effect July 1. We’ve presented our assembled package of non-financial bargaining proposals to management. As we go to press we and all public unions across the state that represent state workers are waiting to hear what the Governor’s wage increase guidelines will be. All unions on this campus are together advocating for honest wage increases that take into account rising fuel, food, and healthcare costs. Our chief negotiator is Gordon Blacquire from Council 93 headquarters in Boston. The management team is headed by Don Teres of Human Resources. I want to thank the members of our union’s bargaining team for their good work: Randy Boivin, Al Beaulieu, Dick Zaluga, John Hawley, Steve Mushenski, Art Goodhind, Carol Taylor, Dottie Taillon, Mike Soya, Jim Wysocki, Patty Dushane, and George Dragon.

UNION PICNIC  In late May the Local’s Executive Board voted money to hold a picnic this summer. As we go to press, it looks like the Picnic will be held on Friday, JULY 18th (one of the few days available to schedule the event). Last year’s picnic was a big success... and a lot of fun. I’m pleased to announce that Patty Dushane has again agreed to coordinate games and prizes. Thank you, Patty.

MIKE SOJA — Slip and Fall Injuries Summer Overtime

Mike Soja is Chief Steward for Housing Maintainers.

Mike, I understand that there are quite a few injuries among Maintainers. The Safety Committee says that the leading cause is slip and fall injuries. I have seen first hand how quick injuries can happen.

Any idea how many slip and fall injuries per year? In Southwest in the past year I have known at least a half a dozen serious slip and fall injuries. According to the Safety Committee Report there’s a lot more injuries happening on campus that I’m not even aware about. For example, there are approximately 140 injuries per year among Housing employees. And the Maintainer title continues to be the title hardest hit by injuries.

When someone slips and falls what do they typically injure? In our area the slip and fall injuries mostly affect the wrist and back. Lacerations are common. We have two workers who recently broke their wrists. One lady had to get electro-nerve therapy, where they stimulate your nerves with electricity. It was a six-month ordeal for her.

Why do you think this is so? The tile floors are very slippery when they’re wet. Our job has a lot to it and sometimes you have to rush to get things done which contributes to slip and fall injuries. Management needs to address this and make accommodations to prevent these type of injuries.

How do you think we could prevent them? One way would be for management to start honoring the Contract and buy no-slip safety shoes. Another way: get the joint labor/management Housing Safety Committee up and running again, so they can work on these problems.

What could Maintainers do? A lot of accidents go untold. I think that when you have a slip and fall injury you need to report that injury immediately to your supervisor even if it’s not a serious injury. Management needs to know that this is a huge problem and needs to be addressed immediately.

What do you think the benefit of the Housing Labor/Management Wellness Program is? I think that strength training and keeping your muscles in good shape will prevent injuries. I believe that there is a lot of info in the wellness program to build your body up so it can be both more resistant to these injuries and able to better cope with these type of injuries.

Do you see a stress reduction benefit to the Wellness Program? People are put into job situations where they have to get the job done in a certain amount of time. They push themselves beyond what is reasonable. That’s stressful. Wellness helps deal with that stress.

North Apartment Overtime... How did all this start? On May 17th, at the Housing Labor/Management meeting, it was brought up that Housing was subcontracting summer work in the new North Apartments. We were hoping to head off the sub-contracting to make sure our people would get overtime while the subcontractor was there. All this did not work and on June 5th 2007 I filed an ACE grievance to address this problem.

Are you happy with the compromise [see front page]? For the moment. We’ll have to see if this works out.
Karen Delisle — Another Maintainer Injured

Karen started at UMass in 1995 as a food service line person. She was first promoted to an assistant cook and then to a Maintainer I in Housing Services. Along the way she also did landscaping in the summer. Two years ago she was injured on the job. She has yet to fully recover. Karen and her husband live in Hardwick.

Karen, how did you get injured? Well, on July 28, 2006, I was working in Baker Dorm, it was after lunch, and we had been assigned to wash, scrub, and strip floors. At 12:30 our assignment was to carry the floor cleaning machines and tools up two flight of stairs. So we lugged the buckets and the mops, and we lugged the scrubber and the machine which sucks up the water.

How much did the scrubber weigh? It’s gotta to weigh enough. And the machine that sucks up water weighs a lot. Both machines are very cumbersome. These machines are very hard for two people to lift. It’s even harder when it’s two small women who have to do the lifting. I’m five-two, 115 pounds.

What happened? While carrying one of the machines I started experiencing back pain. It got worse and worse.

How bad was the pain? Pretty bad. I had to go home. And within a couple days I was at the Infirmary Emergency Room. They said that I had a very bad back strain. I was referred to my doctor.

What was your doctor’s diagnosis? He first told me that I’d possibly be out of work a couple weeks. But on my MRI’s he found that I had two herniated disks. There was also a sciatic nerve problem too.

How are you doing at the moment? Right now I have difficulty sitting up and driving car, although walking seems to help. I sleep OK. But I can’t do any lifting at all. I’m very limited especially when I have flare-ups. For example, if I do a little too much around the house, I get a flair-up. Right now, I’ve had the pain five days a-running.

What’s your future look like, Karen? My doctor advises that I don’t return to this particular job. I’m not quite sure what I’ll be doing in the future. I can’t get light duty. I have back problems working in Housing over the years. I had requested light duty and was denied... because Housing doesn’t offer you light duty unless you are 100% able to do your job.

Any recourse? I was offered vocational rehab through Workers’ Comp. They offer you up to two years’ worth of training, training that the insurance company for the employer pays for. If you need more than two years of training you end up paying for it yourself. Once you submit your application for training, that’s when the two year clock starts ticking. I’m not at my “medical ends” yet... that’s when you’d apply for it.

What’s the worst aspect for you in all this? Well, there’s physical, economic, and psychological pains that go with an injury on the job. I’ve always been a worker. So, sitting around for a year and a half has not been fun.

Any ideas on how to make the workplace safer? First, realize that bumping totters down stairwells unnecessarily opens workers up to injury. To avoid moving totters up and down the stairs, Housing should ask students in the dorms without elevators to bring their trash to a designated area. Otherwise, it causes a dangerous situation for workers. I’m sure totter-related injuries to workers has to be high. Second, there are many injuries that occur during summer work assignments. In the summer we have to move furniture around and stack the bunk beds... and moving furniture on rugs is very difficult. People get injured particularly during the summer. Third, I’d recommend that Housing and the Union really look at the equipment that we have to carry up to floors in buildings where there are no elevators, to think of better ways to limit exposing workers to injury.

Karen, what do you miss most about working here on campus? I enjoyed working here. I enjoyed the people, especially my co-workers up in Orchard Hill. I’m really sad that I probably won’t be coming back.

EXECUTIVE BOARD after 2008 Elections

President Francis Martin
Vice-president Art Goodhind
Treasurer Randy Boivin
Recording Secretary Jim Wysocki
Sergeant-at-Arms Patty Dushane
Chapter Chair Al Beaulieu
Chapter Chair John Hawley
Chief Steward Dave Mitchell
Chief Stewards Dick Zaluga
Chief Steward Carol Taylor
Chief Steward Martin Burry
Chief Steward Mark Grabiec
Chief Steward Mike Soya
Chief Steward Dave Kellogg
Patty Dushane is the Union’s Sergeant-at-Arms. She is a member of the Union’s Executive Board. In the past she helped chair the labor/management Apprenticeship Program. Every year she helps coordinate the Union Picnic. For the past sixteen years she has been an electrician on campus. Patty is also a mother. In January she suffered a mother’s worst nightmare when her 18-year-old son, JJ, died suddenly in a car crash. After her son’s death Patty accessed the Sick Leave Bank. Patty just returned to work after an absence of 10 weeks.

Patty, how are you doing? It’s like waves in the ocean. The sadness comes and goes.

Compared to a month ago... As time goes by it becomes more real, so a month ago it was probably easier than it is now. With every passing day it’s more and more real.

What do you remember most about JJ? JJ was kid with a learning disability and he never let it slow him down from doing things. He never wanted to be labeled. He was a teenager; we had this teenager mother-son relationship. I remember him most from the ages of eight to thirteen... those were the days of going to all his sporting stuff. He was a really good athlete. Packing a lunch. Having lunch. Just making a whole trip of it. I miss those days. And what I miss most is that I won’t get the chance to know him as an adult and that bothers me a lot... because he was starting to come out of those teenage years. He was starting to grow into a man. A young man. And I could see some changes and I was looking forward to having an adult relationship with him.

The teenage years can be hard. My last conversation with him was at 9:30 pm, three hours before he died. I was babysitting for my niece. I had called him on the phone. And asked him to go home and turn the heat on in the house, so the house wouldn’t be cold when his sister and I got home from babysitting. He said, “Sure mom, I’ll do that. I love you, mom.” “I love you too, Jay.” Those were our last words. Just those little words meant a lot. I still hear his voice. My daughter has a hard time because she says she can’t hear his voice anymore. Danielle [Patty’s daughter] and I had a talk the other day; we still don’t accept that he’s gone. It’s hard to believe he’s gone. We’re still waiting for him to come through the door. Or be at the computer. I have a hard time going downstairs because his room is down there. There’s no normal. They’re calling it, in the books I’ve read, “the new normal.”

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Patty, tell me about the vision. My son died around 12:30 am on Tuesday, January 15. For the next thirty hours the pain was so unbearable, I couldn’t stand up straight. If anyone touched me it was excruciating pain. But during that thirty hours I kept thinking over and over “My son is alone; I need to be with him.” Partly it was because JJ died alone. The police told me that the car was going an estimated 70 miles per hour when it crashed into a telephone pole. At that speed it crashed with such impact that the other person in the car with JJ was hurled through the back window. He landed safely in a fresh snow bank and then, confused and injured, walked for help. The idea of my son dying alone, and then alone even in death haunted me. I desperately wanted to be at his side. It was during this particularly hard time that I was with my niece and my daughter, both of whom had been very close to JJ. It was the day after the crash, Wednesday, around 10 am. They put on a record “I Can Only Imagine.” I sat on the couch and closed my eyes. A vision came to me. I saw my son, without clothes, but not naked, slowly walking way from me. He was with God. JJ was totally at peace... and rest. You have to realize that my son was always a ball of energy, he couldn’t sit still through anything. To see him at peace, to see him with this powerful spiritual force was reassuring. I never got to see my son until four days later. I know that God gave me that sign that day, to ease that awful pain.
I remember that immediately after JJ died, you were on television. I remember hundreds at the wake. Hundreds at the funeral. How did you get through it? The wake was three in the afternoon until nine-thirty at night, non-stop. I didn’t take any medication. I didn’t want to have to relive it again. Just medication to sleep at night. They say that taking anti-depressant medication just prolongs the healing (unless you’re suicidal).

Patty, how did you do it? The help of God? I still don’t remember everything. Every once in a while I get glimpses. Or I see people who were at the funeral and they remind me. Flashbacks are very hard, because it makes it real.

How important was the sick leave bank to you? Extremely. My department, OIT, was very helpful.

What would you advise AFSCME members who are not members of the bank? Join, it’s the cheapest disability insurance you’ll ever come across. It’s the smartest decision you can make. I’ve been a member for eight years; never used it until now.

How did it work for you? First, you need to know that they take everything except two weeks of vacation. I filled out the paperwork. So much sick time, personal time, and bereavement. Once all my reserves were done the sick bank leave kicked in. The sick bank leave took away the burden of worrying about health insurance, my pension, my pay, being off payroll. You should apply to the Bank as soon as anything happens. If you have to have surgery, for example, tell them as soon as possible. Fran [Phelps] was wonderful, very helpful.

How did the leave help you? It allowed me time to grieve without pressure.... financial pressure, physical pressure (just having to get up and go to work each day). Whether you do hard physical work or you sit at a computer all day, any work can be draining; you don’t realize how draining it can be on your body.

Many people don’t associate bereavement with sick leave. In what ways is bereavement connected to sick leave? What’s been your experience? Emotionally your body shuts down. You can’t concentrate on anything. You have a hard time remembering things. I lost my father, but losing my son is a whole different ball game. It’s much harder.

I think that losing a child is probably the hardest thing in the world. And people think... go back to work and it’ll get better. It doesn’t. Going back to work immediately just fills up time. But for weeks I couldn’t concentrate. I was extremely tired. I was sleeping twelve hours a day. Emotional pain is extremely draining.

Is this interview too draining? [through tears] It’s draining, but okay. If I can help just one person, it’s worth it.

How can people help in a situation like this? People tend to not say anything and not ask and that’s hard. It may be uncomfortable but the best question to ask me is, “How is your day going?” Close friends ask that question. Ignoring is the worse. Not even being able to say hello to me happens. Some people walk the other way. When that happens it’s like you’ve got leprosy or something. Some people just don’t know how to deal with it. But a hug, a handshake, a hello... It’s also nice to hear my son’s name, “I’m sorry about JJ.”

How do you go on? One foot in front of the other. There’s a group called Compassionate Friends — all people who have lost children. This helps a lot. And one-on-one counseling.

You’re a member of the AFSCME bargaining team. A member of the Executive Board. It what ways does getting back involved with the Union help? Distraction is a good thing. Make sure it’s a healthy distraction. Exercise helps, a lot! And, thank you, Cathy Collins.
Dear AFSCME Local 1776:
I’d like to call your attention to these wonderful summer school opportunities for women members, activists and leaders.

Your union office now has brochures for the week-long UALE Northeast Regional Summer Institute for Union Women and the WILD (Women’s Institute for Leadership Development) Summer Institute - a program for union and community women in Massachusetts.

This year’s Northeast Summer Institute will be held August 3-8 at the University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT. WILD’s Summer Institute will be held at Clark University in Worcester, June 20-22. These programs offer an opportunity for union women to take courses in leadership development and a range of other skill and information areas, and to meet with women activists and leaders from locals around the Commonwealth or the region. The theme of this year’s WILD Summer Institute is 2008 Elections: What’s at Stake for Working Women? The UALE school’s theme is Union Women Taking Back America.

Members come back from these schools with energy and enthusiasm for union activism, ready to bring what they’ve learned into their work within their locals. You can find additional information about these programs and download applications at the following web sites: UALE Summer Schools: www.uale.org; WILD: www.wildlabor.org;

Please consider sending members, or coming yourself, to one or more of these summer programs. And please circulate this information to your members and anyone else you think would be interested.

If you have any questions or want more information email me or call at (413) 545-6166. Thanks, Dale Melcher

Happy and Deserved Retirement to

WHITEY SOVINSKI
former vice-president and long-timer union activist

Best Wishes to Judy Lisewski!
Grievance News

Grievance Officer
At any one time the Local has dozens of grievances and reallocations going. Since a number of these are class-actions with more than one unit member involved, a lot of us have a direct stake in these actions. In addition, many of us are affected by grievances filed by other members. What follows are some recent grievance/reallocation developments.

Nine EH&S Cases to Arbitration
HAMPSHIRE HOUSE – In April the Executive Board voted nine more cases from EH&S to arbitration. As related on the front page of our last Spirit, union members in Environmental Health & Safety are very upset over the continuing failure of that department to respect Contract language concerning overtime shifts. Not surprisingly eight of these cases relate to overtime violations or to failure to provide overtime minimums. Grievants include Chapter Chair John Hawley and union members Mike Bellino and Ed McGlew. In addition, two of these cases are ACE grievances. The ninth grievance, for member Richard Sawin, has to do with violations of seniority language around shift transfers.

Maintainers and Raw Sewage Case
ORCHARD HILL/CENTRAL – On May 14 Maintainers in Orchard Hill/Central were assigned to clean up raw sewage. Housing made sure to protect students from the back-up. Maintainers were not so lucky. They were assigned work out of their classification. One union member repeatedly vomited during the clean-up. A safety violation grievance is being filed by the Union.

Reprimand Grievance Settled
CANCE – Chief Steward Mike Soya reports that three grievances have been filed concerning Contract violations over time and attendance issues. One of those grievances maintains that Housing is harassing a union member over usage of sick time. The member in question has repeatedly provided Management with doctor notes to verify her illness. The grievance is over whether this member is singled out for harassment by management.

Want to get on the Local 17766 email list?
Want to hear the latest news from Labor/Management Workplace Education? Email local1776@external.umass.edu with your address and we’ll put you on both lists.
Is a better job in your future?

Career Advising for AFSCME workers

- Could you do almost anything if you only knew what it was you wanted to do?
- Do you know what you’d like to do, but need help getting there?
- Are you wondering how to get on a track that will lead to a better job?
- Would you like some help with educational goals and direction?
- Are you looking for a way to put your life goals to work for you?

Interested? Call Leslie Fraser, Career Coach
LABOR/MANAGEMENT WORKPLACE EDUCATION
545-2031 (afternoons), 413/775-3908 (cell)
email: lfraser@admin.umass.edu

Thank you, Beth Berry, for all your editing help!!