



SPIRIT OF 1776 NEWSLETTER



UMASS EMPLOYEE'S LOCAL 1776 - COUNCIL 93 / AFSCME, AFL-CIO - 545-2831
116 HAMPSHIRE HOUSE, AMHERST, MA 01003

Special Edition May 2015 2014, VOLUME 49, NUMBER 8

With 01 Contract Ratified, Next Battle: Funding

89% say yes to contract

HAMPSHIRE HOUSE – We all voted for a contract that calls for pay raises retro to July 2014. UMass is saying they don't have that money. The legislature says UMass does. All of us in the union just might have to make a lot of unpleasant noise about this. Stay tuned. In the meantime, here are some highlights of the 01 contract:

- Retro pay raises to July 2014. Salary increases of 1.5% twice a year for three years (for an overall compounded wage increase of 9.34%)
- Overtime language to exclude sick time in the 2015 calculation of overtime pay. Beginning in 2016 the restriction on sick time exclusion from overtime calculations will ease up a bit.
- An increase in how many maximum vacation days you can hold: from the current 45 day cap to a 64 days cap
- A crackdown on taking a sick day before or after a holiday. Do it four times in a year and the 4th time will require a doctor's note
- A conversion from the current paper job application system to a phased in job application system
- An increase out of title work pay from \$9 per day to \$12 per day. Also, an additional \$8 for each 4 hour block of overtime worked in a higher pay grade,
- A change in tuition/fee benefits to spouses and dependents: from the current remission of tuition only language to waiver of fees only language

03s VICTORIOUS 99% Vote Ratification Say Yes to Raises/Benefits



Welcome 700 New Members!

HAMPSHIRE HOUSE — On Tuesday, May 5th, AFSCME 03 members made history with the ratification of their first contract ever on campus. The vote was 277 yes, 4 no, and 60 contested (mainly voters not on the UMass 03 list). It was a long effort, going back some fifteen years, with several complaints filed with the Massachusetts Labor Board. It's been four years alone since 03 workers voted to join AFSCME. Please see page 10 for some highlights of the first AFSCME 03 contract.

Workplace Bullying

Across campus we are seeing managers taking notice that it's not business as usual anymore when it comes to bullying. Nine AFSCME members to date have filed bullying cases. Slowly, slowly their cases are working their way through the hearing panels.

Interview with Senate President Stan Rosenberg,

see page 6



Many Local 1776 Arbitration Settlements

BOSTON -- Over the past year or so, Local 1776 and the University have reached settlement on scores of arbitration cases. Many of those settlements are confidential, many have included money settlements. In 2013 we had about 150 active cases in mediation, arbitration, or before the state Labor Board. Currently, we have less than 30 active cases. What this means, in part, is that we are reducing wait times for cases to be heard.
See Grievance Update on page 11

President's Report

by Joe Malinowski

Well, finally some warm weather and another class graduated from UMass. Again the people who make UMass what it is don't get a lot of credit. All of our members contribute in some way to student success on campus.



Winter was long and dark. Like bargaining it seemed like it would never end.

Our 01 and 03 units both ratified their contract by strong margins. Both units ended up requesting help from an outside mediator, which proved to be very positive for the 03 unit. Now that the 01 contract is ratified the question of funding is an issue.

Governor Patrick, before leaving office, was asked for money to fund contracts that had been ratified. He informed the UMass Presidents office that he had already funded these raises in the UMass budget. I guess it was ok for outgoing president Caret to give himself a 10 percent raise, plus a bonus, as well as doing the same for his cronies. Yet Caret and his cronies are trying to take away our hard-earned benefits. Council 93 is taking UMass to court for failure to fund the signed collective bargaining agreements. We are owed our raises and retro money, plain and simple.

The brand new 03 unit, which is officially being referred to as Unit B, has somewhere around 700 members, a far cry from the 350 or so that were here when 03s voted to join the union in 2011. My feeling is, and will always be, that if these folks are needed to help care for the students here they should be our equals. I have had the opportunity to speak with many 03s the past few weeks; these folks work hard, and, like all of us, are far more than just a low-paid hourly employee. I met 03s in Auxiliary Services who are registered health care providers in their homeland. As we welcome this unit to our union we will fight to do blend unit B into Unit A: these folks deserve the same pay and benefits as the 01 unit.

I wish 01 unit members got out to vote like the 03 members did. The enthusiastic response we got was overwhelming; with many saying that the contract was long overdue — they were proud to vote. But I also heard stories of 03s afraid to vote; more on that later. With the help of Council 93, we look forward to getting Unit B up and functioning this fall. I would like to acknowledge the hard work of our staff rep, Martha Fila, who was the lead negotiator on both contracts; she put in long hours both off and on the campus. These contracts would not have happened without her.

Governor Baker tried to increase our health care payment to 25 percent. So far the increase has been rejected by the House. The Senate is also expected to reject this increase.

As many of us watched, I am sorry to report that the early retirement bill for Group 1 employees excluded higher education employees. The Governor's bill calls for only one hire for every five retirees.

The local has been successfully working to cut down a backlog of pending grievance and arbitration cases.

Again, we are adding new stewards, and in the near future we will be setting up steward training. I would like to urge members to get involved with our union; we are looking for not only reps but people to serve on committees.

Continued on page 4

Student Labor Action Project (SLAP)



Dear 1776, on behalf of SLAP, I would like to thank you for your support that enabled us to attend the USSA Legislative Conference in Washington D.C. The UMass delegation won the award for campus of the year in activism and we lobbied legislators around cuts in higher education funding, saying no to the TPP, and supporting the Robin Hood tax. We also gained so much from the many workshops offered throughout the weekend. This entire experience would not have been possible without your support.

We look forward to using the new skills we gained in future campaigns at UMass.

In solidarity,
UMass SLAP (Rebecca Kanter)

To the editor:

I've been the Local's treasurer for seventeen years. I've been the election chair for nearly as long. It never ceases to amaze me how so many allow so few to decide their fate where their contract is concerned. The vote among the Physical Plant trades was very low, to be kind. These are people I talk to everyday, some of our most vocal members, with excellent questions and concerns, who in the end did not exercise their right. What that does is take away any protest you might have as to the outcome, which is your right, but still mystifying to me.

Our 01 members could take a valuable lesson from our 03 hourlies who voted in impressive numbers on their initial contact with passion.

Randy Boivin
Treasurer

OUR UNION IS ONLY AS STRONG AS THE INVOLVEMENT OF OUR MEMBERS

Here are Some Ways for You to Get Involved



We Need Translators

With 700 new members, we have new union brothers and sisters whose first language is not English. Many are taking our English classes in our Workplace Education program. But, in the meantime, we need members to step forward who are fluent in English and another language, like Chinese, Spanish, Cambodian, Hindi, Vietnamese, to name a few. We will pay you to communicate with your co-workers so that all of our members understand our union posters, emails, and newsletters. If you'd like to apply to be a translator, please call the Union office at 545-2831(mornings).



We Need Your Email Address

Every other union on campus can instantly send out news and information to their members. We depend upon campus mail. Now campus mail can deliver to a department in a day or two, but some departments sit in mail for days and even weeks at a time. In some departments our members have no mailboxes. Here's how you can help. Email us at local1776@external.umass.edu with your name and email address. We will add you to our address list. We will not give away your email address to anyone.



We Need You to have:

- Basic Computer Skills
- Basic Workplace Skills
- Basic English Skills

We don't want to give UMass any excuse to contract out our jobs on campus. Basic computer skills, basic English, and workplace skills (like problem-solving, leadership, working together) help you become better workers and better union members. Each one of us benefits from education. Please take the time to improve your skills, your knowledge, your mind. And support your co-workers in their educational efforts as well.



Thank you!

In solidarity, the AFSCME 1776 Executive Board

Raising Wages Works



AMOS DENNIS Interview



Amos Dennis is an 03 worker, who works at Franklin DC. He's been in this country for almost twenty years.

Amos, you were born in Jamaica? Yes, I was born in Jamaica in the parish of St. Ann; Bob Marley and Marcus "Messiah" Garvey (our first national hero) were born there too. St. Ann is the garden parish and the reason why it's called the garden parish — it's pretty and have everything you would probably find in the other parishes. Climatically it's good for everything. I was happy kid growing up and very socialized. Pretty much I just lived by my dad's rules and regulations.

How did you come to work at UMass? My mom's first child, my eldest sister, is now working at Amherst College; she filed for me to come to the states. Luckily, the process, through INS, only took eight years. I came to Amherst 1996, September, with my son and my daughter. They were 9 and 11 then when I came here: Adrian and Deidr-Ann. They went to Crocker Farm, then high school, and then UMass. I think I chose the right town to grow them up. Adrain graduated from Isenberg, and is now a manager at Target. My daughter graduated from Boston and is now a nurse. I came in 1996, September.

Tell us about your family... My dad was a great influence on my life. He passed away, but he's still surround me every day. I still feel that he's protecting me. "Never judge people," he said. "Let's live and respect everyone around us." He always says, "The world is like a mirror, reflecting what you do. And if your face is shining it's shining back at you."

Tell us about your job... I work at Franklin. I'm a morning cook from 7-3 every day Sunday through Thursday. I like to know that I cook something and the students appreciate, which they do. I get a lot of feedback. Lots of compliments, "The food is great!" I do three major things there: grilled cheese, grilled chicken, and hotdogs and burgers. I'm pretty much the grill guy. Also, I push out a lot of breakfast, pancakes and eggs, etc.

What's the hardest part of your job? I've been stuck upstairs with all this work. I worked without break for a period of four years. Just recently I started takes breaks. God bless this guy named Joe from Southwest who basically split my job so I can get a break. They couldn't get away with not giving breaks to 01s... only 03s. I want to mention that I've only called out sick two times in seven years.

Why did you vote for the 03 contract? I didn't vote for the 03 contract cause it's a good contract. I voted for the contract because it's a step above. If I vote for the contract, I tell myself, maybe I'm paving the way for the future, for future generations. I don't want to see people go through what the 03s have been going through! 03s are hard workers, maybe the hardest workers on this compound!

Words of advice? In Jamaica we always say "Forever ever, backward never!" So, you learn to move forward no matter want. There's always gonna be a lot of obstacles in your way, in life. But steadfast and hold on.

Lend a Hand with the Newsletter

We could always use extra help with writing, editing, graphics. See page 12 for how you can help. Call 545-2831.

New 01 Members

Come by the Union Office to pick up your orientation package and to sign up with the union and get on our listserv.

Things you'll discover: Did you know that a great dental and eyecare plan kicks in for new members the first of the month following six months in the Unit. Learn how to enroll.

New 03 Members

We are working on your orientation package and should have it ready soon.

President's Report continued from page 2. As most are aware, the annual picnic is taking a break for the time being. I would like to hear from members about what types of activities we could sponsor to involve even more members. So far bus trips to a ballgame, casino, Boston and NYC have been suggested. Call the office at 545-2831 with ideas. Thank you.

Have a safe and fun summer and we will send out flyers and email notifications on any new developments.

My Father, Anthony Grimaldi by Ann Sieber

... Anthony loved to tell jokes and had an amazing sense of humor, which came in very handy being married to my Mom (just kidding). He was social by nature; he never met a stranger because he made friends with everyone he spoke to. If you stood in a line with my Dad anywhere, you were great friends by the time you reached the end of it...

... He loved all the years he spent being a Union Representative at the University of Massachusetts. He loved negotiating and arguing with some of the most educated people at the university because he was good at it. Everyone he dealt with was impressed by his ability to articulate his thoughts and to negotiate wisely on behalf of the other workers at the college. Even as the disease progressed and his memory faded, he was still trying to organize all the checkout clerks at the local grocery stores...

Excerpts from

The DEMOLITION of WORKERS COMP



Below is an excerpt from an article written by Michael Gabell and Howard Berkes that first appeared in ProPublica, co-published with National Public Radio. To read the full story go to... <http://billmoyers.com/content/demolition-workers-comp/>

Dennis Whedbee's crew was rushing to prepare an oil well for pumping on the Sweet Grass Woman lease site, a speck of dusty plains rich with crude in Mandaree, North Dakota.

It was getting late that September afternoon in 2012. Whedbee, a 50-year-old derrickhand, was helping another worker remove a pipe fitting on top of the well when it suddenly blew.

Oil and sludge pressurized at more than 700 pounds per square inch tore into Whedbee's body, ripping his left arm off just below the elbow. Coworkers jerry-rigged a tourniquet from a sweatshirt and a ratchet strap to stanch his bleeding and got his wife on the phone.

"Babe," he said, "tell everyone I love them."

It was exactly the sort of accident that workers' compensation was designed for. Until recently, America's workers could rely on a compact struck at the dawn of the Industrial Age: They would give up their right to sue. In exchange, if they were injured on the job, their employers would pay their medical bills and enough of their wages to help them get by while they recovered.

No longer.

Over the past decade, state after state has been dismantling America's workers' comp system with disastrous consequences for many of the hundreds of thousands of people who suffer serious injuries at work each year, a ProPublica and NPR investigation has found.

The cutbacks have been so drastic in some places that they virtually guarantee injured workers will plummet into poverty. Workers often battle insurance companies for years to get the surgeries, prescriptions and basic help their doctors recommend.

Two-and-a-half years after he lost his arm, Whedbee is still fighting with North Dakota's insurance agency for the prosthesis that his doctor says would give him a semblance of his former life.

The changes, often passed under the banner of "reform," have been pushed by big businesses and insurance companies on the false premise that costs are out of control.

Passages from the report include:

- Since 2003, legislators in 33 states have passed workers' comp laws that reduce benefits or make it more difficult for those with certain injuries and diseases to qualify for them. Florida has cut benefits to its most severely disabled workers by 65 percent since 1994.
- Where a worker gets hurt matters. Because each state has developed its own system, an amputated arm can literally be worth two or three times as much on one side of a state line than the other. The maximum compensation for the loss of an eye is \$27,280 in Alabama, but \$261,525 in Pennsylvania.
- Employers and insurers increasingly control medical decisions, such as whether an injured worker needs surgery. In 37 states, workers can't pick their own doctor or are restricted to a list provided by their employers.
- Employers are paying the lowest rates for workers' comp insurance since the 1970s.

A Shift in cost from Employers to Us What's Really Happening

From the Report: "All the while, employers have found someone else to foot the bill for workplace accidents: American taxpayers, who shell out tens of billions of dollars a year through Social Security Disability Insurance, Medicare and Medicaid for lost wages and medical costs not covered by workers' comp."

Who is Behind This?

(You won't be surprised)

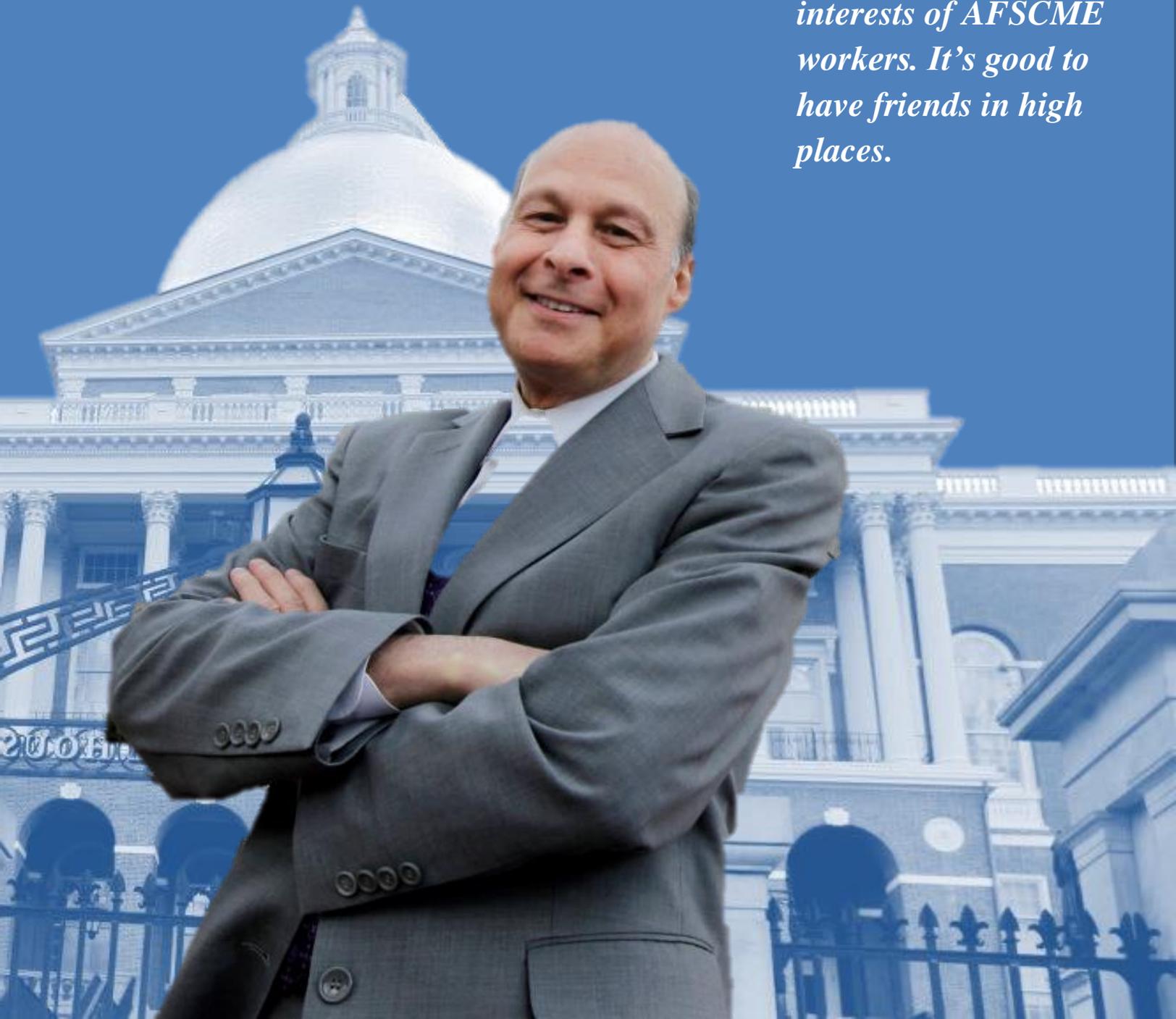
What this Means for Us

See page 12

PRESIDENT of the SENATE

**In Conversation with
Stan Rosenberg**

In January Stan Rosenberg (Amherst) was elected to the powerful position of Senate President. For almost three decades Stan has been looking out for the interests of this campus and the interests of AFSCME workers. It's good to have friends in high places.



***Spirit:* Senator, you are the first-ever person from our area elected to the position of Senate President. I've read that you grew up in foster care. It's seems that every challenge has made you stronger. Looking back, what do you make of your career trajectory?**

Like most people, my life so far has had a lot of ups and downs. My experiences have shaped who I am as a person, as a legislator, and now as Senate President. I try not to compare my life to others because I see people as people, not as an interest group, or play into identity politics. I am humbled by the support of my colleagues in the Senate who voted for me to serve as Senate President.

You have served our region with the highest distinction. To date, what ranks among the proudest moments in your career?

All the support I have been able to secure for my constituents, especially for education at all levels, services to those in need, and protections to our environment. I am also proud of our accomplishments in the areas of economic and social justice.

Senator, you're a UMass graduate, you've always been a friend to both the campus and to the working people on this campus, what drives you when you wake up in the morning? — Advocating for us, advocating for those in need across the state, must be wearing sometimes.

I want what is best for the people that I represent and what is best for Massachusetts. I am driven by a sense of fairness and equality, providing opportunities for our residents to succeed and the best outcomes from our work in the Senate. Our job is to make policies that do the most good for the people of our state.

Senator, from your perspective what are the most pressing near-term challenges confronting the Commonwealth? UMass?

While Massachusetts is a leader in education, biotech, and healthcare we still have our challenges. We have some of the highest energy, healthcare, and housing costs in the nation. These costs are eating up a larger percentage of family budgets, hindering economic growth, and pricing people out of the middle class. Couple that with rising income inequality, which is reaching historic levels, and Massachusetts has some problems to solve. My hope is, through our work in the

Senate, that we can tackle some of these issues head on. UMass continues to strengthen its reputation as one of the premier state universities in the country and I could not be happier. We have successfully kept tuition



Senate President Rosenberg, USA President Johnson, 1776 President Malinowski at the 2014 Union Picnic

costs steady over the past two years and I know I will be supporting continued state support for the UMass system. We need to keep UMass graduates in Massachusetts to grow our state's economy with homegrown talent. I will continue to help create partnerships with local businesses to move graduates into jobs in Western Massachusetts.

In the present moment, nationally, labor rights are under assault everywhere. Michigan just went right-to-work. Big money is ascendant. What are your thoughts on these realities?

People should have a right to organize and a right to collective bargaining. The anti-labor laws across the country are troubling. Eroding workplace protections and union busting do not help workers move into the middle class and maintain a decent standard of living. I hope the trend reverses so we can build a strong economy together.

Continued on next page

Rosenberg continued from previous page

What are your legislative hopes for the next couple years?

Working with the members of the Senate, Governor Baker, and Speaker Deleo we can move Massachusetts forward with strong public policy in a number of areas. I hope we can address the pocketbook issues of energy, housing, and healthcare costs while also tackling criminal justice reform and income inequality.

In this age of cynicism and temporary employment, many of our members have lost hope that their voices make a difference. What do you say to a single-mother of two who is eking out a living in the dining commons? Or to the exhausted two-job janitor (maintainer) who struggles to make ends meet, and who doubts that his children will climb the ladder of success?

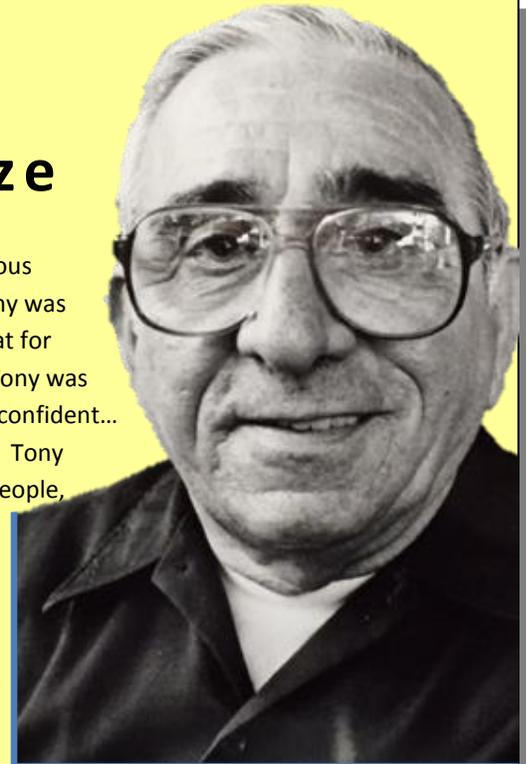
Massachusetts is a national leader in education, healthcare, and innovation. I am committed to providing opportunities and help for our residents so they can climb the ladder of success. But we can't let people lose hope. It is our job as public officials to communicate how we are working to help our residents. Conversely, it is the job of our residents to let us know how we can do a better job for them. Your voice matters to us and please let it be heard.

Thank you very much.

TONY GRIMALDI: Eyes on the Prize

Tony Grimaldi had the gift. Sitting down with various state political leaders and campus chancellors, Tony was Mr. Eloquence. Time and again, he would go to bat for janitors, trade people, and food service workers. Tony was smart as a whip, charming, persistent, and totally confident... confident enough that he had no attitude, no ego. Tony treated everyone, muckety-mucks and everyday people, the same, with the greatest respect.

In 1977, Tony stepped up and was elected President of the local. Later he served as vice-president. Still later, he served a good decade as chief steward for Plant Trades. He was the face of AFSCME trades during those years.



Tony got things done. The Plant/AFSCME Apprenticeship Program may be kind of anemic now, but when Tony launched it, it was a strong, effective program intended to move our janitorial and food service staff into higher paying trades jobs. Persistence? Tony pushed for an apprenticeship program for years before its inception in 1985. The focus was on women and minorities, in particular. Tony was a great proponent of social justice. He fought for all of our members, maybe even a little harder for women and minorities. He mentored one of the first women in the trades, Linda Pirog. Tony was a WWII veteran, and like a lot of those vets, he was pro-union all the way. In his blood, you might say. Tony had gone through the Great Depression, the New Deal, the Roosevelts (husband and wife), he knew which politician running for office was pro-worker and which was pro-business.

It was Tony who pushed for a regular union picnic, where large numbers of members and retirees would come together and work shoulder-to-shoulder together. He knew that sweat begets pride. Tony co-launched the picnic in 1984, and chipped in diligently year after year. When Tony retired, he, alongside of Roland Messier, headed up the 1776 retirees unit, a great advocate for our retirees. And then, with Roland, Tony worked for Labor/Management Workplace Education. Tony was a critical resource to our education program, and a natural teacher; he taught me a lot. He initiated an oral history project with western Mass union leaders, capturing their voice and their struggles for future generations. I remember Tony and Roland sharing laughs and battle stories with Harvey Friedman, the esteemed director of the UMass Labor Center. This was the time that Harvey, on behalf of the Labor Center, was bestowing Tony and Roland with achievement awards for union leadership, for a lifetime of service to the labor movement.

Tony liked to laugh. He enjoyed making you laugh. His humor was never mean-spirited. He put you at ease. Tony was proud of his family and Italian background, laughing that he descended from the royal Grimaldis of Monaco fame. And he was proud of Local 1776. Tony was a great guy, highly respected. Not one to act first and think afterwards, Tony always had his eye on the prize. Tony will be missed. We extend condolences to his wife Ida, and his three daughters.

Joe Connolly

UNION NEWS ILLUSTRATED



All-union rally at Cape Cod Lounge. Topic: funding our contracts.
That's 1776 prez Joe Malinowski and Faculty Union prez Randy Phyllis addressing the crowd.



Abi LaPan, from the University Club, with AFSCME 93 Rep Martha Fila, after Abi was awarded a job upgrading



Tony Korzec casting his vote at the 01 contract ballot box



New union steward Steve Kuchyt, bringing in 03 dues cards

UMass Unions United on the march against racism.



HIGHLIGHTS

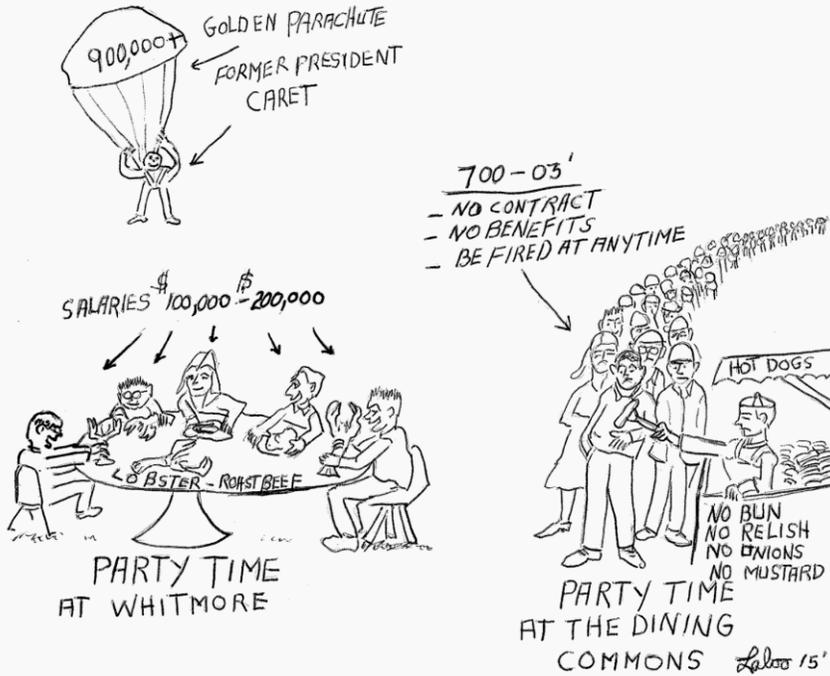
NEW 03 CONTRACT

- **Wages:** 03s will receive a fifty cent per hour increase retro back to July of 2014, with additional thirty cent pay raises in years two and three of the contract.
- **Paid time off:** 03s can now take a total of five days each school year in the form of sick time, vacation time, holiday time, **or** personal time.
- **Seniority:** UMass has finally agreed to recognize 03 seniority time when promotions are decided, when time off is approved, and when UMass reduces its workforce through layoff. Initially UMass had agreed to seniority then backed off from seniority, which at the time, several years ago, triggered an AFSCME complaint with the Labor Relations Commission in Boston.
- **Grievance process:** 03 members can now grieve non-selection if the 03 applied for an 03 position and was denied. 03 members can also grieve disciplines for the first time, whether a verbal reprimand or a termination issued during the school year.
- **Just Cause standard:** UMass has to have just cause for taking action against an 03 in a disciplinary matter. What that means is that there has to be a legitimate reason for the reason. An 03 member and the Union can file a grievance if there is any suspicion that there was no good reason for the discipline. Before this contract a boss could discipline an 03 employee for absolutely no reason... and nothing could be done about it.
- **Health Insurance:** With the new contract UMass has agreed to pick 75% of the costs of health insurance for 03 workers. UMass will not pick up the cost of 03 spouses or dependent children.

Photos from the 03 Info Sessions



WHERE DOES THE BUDGET MONEY GO?



Some things change. Some things don't.
Now, at least, AFSCME 03s have their first contract...

REMEMBER!

After 30 days employment, you are responsible for paying either union dues or an agency service fee. To avoid back payments, contact your union steward or the Local's office at 545-2831. Thank you.

OFFICE HOURS

We're open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and we are closed on holidays.

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 filed by other members. What follows are some recent grievance/reallocation developments.

We're catching you up on some grievance cases that have resolved the past two years...

Physical Plant Chapter Chair **Mike Townsend** reports that the Union successfully resolved several grievances concerning **out of title** work assignments. Several disciplines have reached **settlements**. Also, the Union filed a grievance affecting a lot of members concerning the University directing people to **stay in town during a snowstorm** and then failing to compensate per past practice. Also, the Union is investigating complaints arising from a major Plant division involving **harassment, unprofessional behavior, favoritism, and bullying**.

Auxiliary Services Chapter Chair **Don Sabola** reports that a grievance concerning taking **vacation** during the summer was partially settled. Also the Union was able to win a grievance concerning a **denied promotion** and a grievance concerning **out of title work**.

ResLife Chapter Chair **Al Beaulieu** reports that as a result of a grievance settlement the Union was able to **reduce** a discipline so that the grievant receive several days back. There were several money settlements for members unfairly denied **overtime**. Also the Union brought a **licensing violation** to the attention of management; the case was favorably resolved.

Termination Cases Recently, the Union reached favorable settlement with the University concerning three different termination cases. The details are confidential in each instance.

AFSCME Local 1776
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The Spirit of 1776 is a publication of AFSCME Local 1776. We aim to be a voice of the membership. Moreover, our goal is to advocate for the membership. We believe that communication between members is a means to that end. To be effective, we need your participation. How can you participate? Send us ideas for stories. Angry? Write us. Someone deserves congratulations? Write us. Read something of interest to members in a magazine or newspaper? Clip it, and send it in. Original articles, editorials, news items, cartoons, criticism, and praise are always welcome. All materials should be forwarded to the Union office. We strive to publish four times per year. If you are interested in writing, reporting, cartooning, editing, typing, or layout, please contact us. Empower yourself. Empower us.

Who is Behind the Gutting of Workers Comp? continued from page 5

Here are excerpts from a report by Molly Redden that appeared in *Mother Jones*. To see her full article go to: <http://billmoyers.com/2015/03/31/walmart-lowes-safeway-nordstrom-bankrolling-nationwide-campaign-gut-workers-comp/>

“Nearly two dozen major corporations, including Wal-Mart, Nordstrom and Safeway, are bankrolling a quiet, multistate lobbying effort to make it harder for workers hurt on the job to access lost wages and medical care — the benefits collectively known as workers’ compensation.

“The companies have financed a lobbying group, the Association for Responsible Alternatives to Workers’ Compensation (ARAWC), that has already helped write legislation in one state, Tennessee. Richard Evans, the group’s executive director, told an insurance journal in November that the corporations ultimately want to change workers’ comp laws in all 50 states. Lowe’s, Macy’s, Kohl’s, Sysco Food Services and several insurance companies are also part of the year-old effort...

“ARAWC’s mission is to pass laws allowing private employers to opt out of the traditional workers’ compensation plans that almost every state requires businesses to carry...

“...In Texas, the only state that has never required employers to provide workers’ comp, Wal-Mart has written a plan that allows the company to select the physician an employee sees and the arbitration company that hears disputes. The plan provides no coverage for asbestos exposure. And a vague section of the contract excludes any employee who was injured due to his ‘participation’ in an assault from collecting benefits unless the assault was committed in defense of Wal-Mart’s “business or property.” It is up to Wal-Mart to interpret what “participation” means. But the Texas AFL-CIO has argued that an employee who defended himself from an attack would not qualify for benefits.

“A 2012 survey of Texas companies with private plans found that fewer than half offered benefits to seriously injured employees or the families of workers who died in workplace accidents... (The state plan, which Texas companies can follow on a voluntary basis, covers both.) Half of employer plans capped benefits, while the state plan pays benefits throughout a worker’s recovery.”

Where is Massachusetts?

Our workers comp benefits were cut a good decade ago, in the name of “reform.”

Odds are that the destruction of workers comp will sweep through all the low-union areas of the country first (the South and the Mountain states) before hitting us. But as Michigan reminds us, even in once staunch union states, the forces of big business are calling the shots.

What You Can Do

Stop by a Lowe’s, or Macy’s (right here in Hadley or Holyoke) and ask a customer rep about workers comp. See what they say... or don’t say. Call your state rep or senator and ask the question.