CONTEMPLATIONS

JOB COMPATIBILITY

My first job was working in an orange juice factory, but I got canned... couldn’t concentrate.

Then I worked in the woods as a lumberjack. I just couldn’t hack it, so they gave me the ax.

After that I tried to be a tailor. But I just wasn’t suited for it, mainly because it was a sew-sew job.

Next I tried working in a muffler factory, but that was too exhausting.

I wanted to be a barber, but I just couldn’t cut it.

Then I tried to be a chef. I figured it would add a little spice to my life, but I just didn’t have the thyme.

I attempted to be a deli worker. But any way I sliced it, I couldn’t cut the mustard.

My best job was being a musician, but eventually I found I wasn’t noteworthy.

I studied a long time to become a doctor, but I didn’t have any patience.

Next was a job in shoe factory. I figured to be a shoe-in. I gave it my soul, but the boss was a heel.

TO BE CONTINUED.....

USA NEWSGRAM
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110 Hampshire House -- 413-545-0165 -- usa@external.umass.edu -- http://www.umass.edu/usa

CONTEMPLATIONS

Dear USA members,

I would like to thank all of you that have shown your support and given your input during the negotiation process. We have reached a tentative agreement which has secured our retroactivity. A special edition of the Newsgram will come out soon detailing the changes to the new contract. At this time I would also like to thank the members of the bargaining team: Bob Whalen (MTA), James Plaza, Rosemary Riley, Amanda Alix, Sue Couture, James Kierstead, Mark Daigle.

Be assured that all of these people worked very hard on your behalf. I really appreciate all of their hard work and their support. Ratification and information meetings will be forthcoming. Watch your mailboxes and have a safe and restful summer.

In solidarity,
Donna Johnson, President

PERSONAL DAYS EXTENSION

By now you’re all seen the memo or noticed in your paycheck that renewal of personal time has been extended until December 2002. Mention was not made on whether we still have to use the personal days by June 2002 but I’m sure they’ll tell us eventually. This coincides with the arrival of bi-weekly checks in January, 2002.

DENTAL PLAN RENEWED

You all recently received a mailing recently about renewal of our very unpopular dental plan. This wasn’t good news for any of us. Patience, at this point, is important. Delta does claim to be trying to bring more dentists into this plan. We are preparing an article about just how the trust fund works and how a plan is chosen. We hope to have this published in the September/October Newsgram. In a nutshell, although USA has a representative to speak for us, we do not choose the provider, nor does the money come from USA or from you, the members. The state puts $8.00 per employee, per week into this fund.

ITEMS OF INTEREST

USA T-SHIRTS HAVE ARRIVED!

The new, fabulous USA t-shirts have arrived and are selling quickly! Please stop by the office if you’re interested in purchasing a t-shirt. Sizes M, L, XL are $10.00 and sizes XXL and XXXL (in limited supply), all in navy blue, are available for $12.00.

In researching the purchase of these t-shirts we discovered that most t-shirts made in the U.S. are made in Mexico. This means those well-known names Hanes and Fruit of the Loom. We were pleased to be able to find t-shirts made right here in the US by union workers. These are good quality cotton t-shirts. Come see for yourself. Arrangements can be made for purchase if you’re a long ways from the USA Office. Please call Jane in the office to arrange payment and she can mail the shirt through campus mail. 5-0165 or e-mail her at usa@external.umass.edu.
MTA Annual Meeting, Boston, May 18-19 2001

One of the biggest issues facing the delegation this year was a proposed partnership arrangement between our national parent organization, the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers. The MTA delegates discussed this proposal to prepare delegates for the final vote at NEA’s July convention. This partnership proposal follows on the heels of a proposed merger of the NEA and AFT, which was voted down by the NEA delegates in 1998.

During the discussion session at this Meeting, there were many concerns raised about the apparent inequity of power distribution in the partnership, where both AFT and NEA would have equal representation on the partnership implementation committee, despite the fact that NEA has more than 2 ½ times as many members as AFT. It was feared that money could be diverted from NEA dues to fund projects that would primarily benefit AFT projects.

A number of delegates also expressed concern about the perceived authoritarian nature of AFT’s governance, with locals being issued instructions on what to do, rather than NEA’s tradition of following the direction of their members through the Representative Assembly. Many delegates from merged NEA/AFT locals had harrowing accounts of turmoil and upheaval after their mergers, with AFT board members taking a dominant position.

A vast majority of delegates speaking opposed the partnership because it appeared clear that this was intended as a first step towards a merger in the near future, one that may benefit former AFT locals at the expense of those within the larger NEA. A business item was submitted to have the MTA delegation formally oppose the partnership, but was not discussed because the quorum was lost before the item could be brought to the table.

One of our USA delegates, Frank Olbris, introduced a business item calling on the MTA leadership to discuss methods of implementing a preferential voting system whereby people voting would rank all candidates for each line of a ballot from most favored to least favored. These preferences could then be used to conduct instant runoffs should no candidate receive an outright majority or in the event of a tie, ending the need for cumbersome mail runoff elections. This proposal was passed by the delegation.

The USA delegation again opposed any dues increase, but unfortunately a modest increase was passed by a majority of the MTA delegation ($6.00 per year), and we made sure our voice was heard. On a more positive front, we were heartened to witness increasing recognition of the needs of Higher Education personnel, and most particularly the people whom USA represents, the Educational Support Personnel. Being in a state (and national) association consisting primarily of schoolteachers, this recognition has been a long time coming and is most welcome. The MTA also extended their public relations campaign by voting to fund another series of television and radio advertisements; this year they will be more hard hitting and issue oriented. We also supported the teachers’ major concern, opposition to MCAS testing, which will have an indirect impact on us as well, as these arbitrary tests affect the students who will be entering the University in the coming years.

On the whole, the Annual Meeting was exhilarating, but exhilarating, and was over all too soon.

NEA Representative Assembly
Los Angeles, CA, July 1-7, 2001

Six delegates were elected by USA to attend the National Education Association annual Representative Assembly at Los Angeles. The RA is the national convention of the largest union in the United States, of which we are a part.

Like the MTA, NEA members are primarily schoolteachers, and a majority of their concerns center on educational issues such as standardized testing, low-performing schools, certification, and charter schools. But many of the issues were of concern to Educational Support Personnel as well: pay equity, job security, merit pay, equal opportunity, and respect for workers’ rights.

The schedule was exhausting: Two days of caucus meetings followed by four days of the main Assembly. Typical schedule included 7:00-9:00 am caucuses at the hotel, followed by 11:00-7:00 pm main assembly with lunch breaks ranging from ten (!) to 45 minutes. This year, we passed 85 new business items, a new budget, our 2001-2002 legislative program, an extensive series of resolutions, and several bylaw amendments, and the RA issued its first comprehensive policy on charter schools. All of this in a marathon meeting of nearly 10,000 delegates, any one of which could speak to or make motions. The logistical challenges of such a complex event were astounding, but somehow we completed the entire agenda, albeit this included a 14 hour session on the final day. Needless to say, delegates had little time for any sightseeing!

Educational Support Personnel (that’s us!) continue to gain recognition and clout within the NEA; several items approved dealt specifically one officially changing the term to “Educational Support Personnel” in recognition of the value of the work that we do. This will not affect us at USA unless the MTA passes a similar change at next year’s meeting. The RA also passed the controversial NEA-AFT Partnership agreement which calls for closer collaboration between the NEA and the American Federation of Teachers (see article on MTA above). The Massachusetts delegation formally opposed the partnership in a caucus vote, but the RA passed it 58% to 41%.

One featured speaker was the actress Jane Curtain, currently national ambassador for the U.S. Fund for UNICEF. We also heard from several educators working to end school violence through a series of innovative programs; these people were honored as the “strongest links”.

Also speaking was Lieu Tran, a young student who arrived as a refugee from southeast Asia six years ago. She arrived in the US at age 12, speaking no English, but graduated this spring with honors. She attributed her miraculous educational progress to the opportunities provided by the public schools which she attended.

Elected USA delegates: Rosemary Riley, Frank Olbris, Jim Kierstead, Jacqui Gentl, Linda Merrill, Dave Litterer. Regional delegate: Bill Coleman.
STATE RETIREMENT BOARD MAKES POLICY CHANGE IN THE TREATMENT OF PART-TIME CREDITABLE SERVICE

By Bob Whelan

In a memorandum, dated February 16, 2001, the Massachusetts State Retirement Board announced an important change in policy regarding the treatment of part-time creditable service. Any member of the Retirement System with less than full-time creditable service before January 28, 1993 will now receive full-time creditable service for that time. This means that the pro-rated creditable service earned for part-time work prior to January 28, 1993 will no longer be pro-rated.

The State Retirement Board’s decision came about because of a Supreme Judicial Court decision in the case of Madden v. Contributory Retirement Appeal Board, litigated by Massachusetts Teachers Association Attorney Sandra Quinn. The Madden case involved the Massachusetts Teachers Retirement Board (MTRB). Prior to 1990, the MTRB policy was to give a full year of creditable service for every year of part-time employment for teachers in the system. In 1990, the MTRB approved a new regulation providing for pro-rated creditable service for part-time employment. The MTRB then began to pro-rate all creditable service for part-time service, even that earned prior to 1990. MTA challenged the new policy as it was applied to a teacher through the administrative and judicial fora, ending in the decision by the Supreme Judicial Court, which found that the MTRB could only pro-rate a member’s part-time creditable after the regulation went into effect – after 1990.

The State Retirement Board’s policy change is in direct response to that decision. Why January 23, 1993? That was the date that the State Retirement Board approved a regulation analogous to the MTRB regulation at issue in Madden. The State Retirement Board regulation reads:

Part-time employees shall receive credit for service based on the number of hours worked in proportion to a regular work week (i.e., a person working 30 hours per week in an agency which has a regular week of 40 hours, would receive 9 months of service for each year of employment).

All of the implications of this change for USA members are being reviewed. The MTA Division of Higher Education has requested a legal opinion from MTA Legal Services. When that review has been completed the information will be reported in the Newsgram, so keep an eye on upcoming editions if you believe this policy change may apply to you.

If you believe that your creditable service calculation will be affected by this change, it is recommended that you contact the State Retirement Board and request an updated creditable service calculation. If you feel there is a discrepancy, please contact the USA office.

Any questions about this can be directed to Bob at the USA Office. 545-0165
RECIPE EXPLANATION AND REMINDER

The USA recipe books is still badly in need of your recipes. We need recipes in the following categories: xxxxx, xxxxx, xxxxx, xxxxx, and xxxxx. Questions have arisen about the cost of this recipe book. The recipe book will not cost USA anything. Time is being donated and printing costs will be covered by the sale of the book. It’s as simple as that. We will keep you all updated on the progress of the book and will take orders when we’re ready to go to print. Feel free to e-mail recipes to lindah@wost.umass.edu or if you have any questions.