



Firebird 24

*Reborn From Our Ashes
NTEU Chapter 24 Newsletter*

Volume 1

June 2005

This Place Stinks

A verdict rendered in U.S. District Court in Detroit in May of this year should put local IRS management on notice that employee complaints about being overwhelmed by a co-worker's cologne, aftershave, or fragrance, can no longer be ignored.

Erin Weber, who worked for WYCD-FM (99.5), was awarded 10.6 million dollars in the federal lawsuit over her claim that she was sickened by a colleague's continuing (over-) use of cologne.

A similar, very long running incident within Internal Revenue Service has consistently been dodged, ducked, and pooh-poohed by IRS management, despite years of complaints by employees, who have been sickened by a certain person's overwhelming and nauseating use of a fragrance.

Employees have been left to attempt to resolve the problem by themselves. This has been through fruitless complaints to IRS managers, leaving the office for the day (when possible), taking sick or annual leave. Some have gone so far as to request a Reasonable Accommodation to move to another work area within an office, only to be informed that there is no space available and no funds to accommodate them. Some employees are seeking assistance from other government agencies (OSHA and EEOC), and these complaints are pending.

Management should take notice of this lawsuit. The State of Michigan now has "fragrance free zones", as does the government of Canada. Is IRS management so callous, petrified, or intimidated on this issue that Michigan IRS employees must resort likewise to filing a lawsuit in federal court? Would that be less painful, repulsive, or disagreeable to management, rather than addressing the issue, and person, themselves?

UNAX Continues

According to the Special Agent in Charge of the Midwest Area Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA), UNAX violations continue to be the number one employee violation investigated by their office. SAC Pete McConney, addressing Chapter 24 officers and stewards, was mystified by this continuing problem, and why IRS employees continued to make unauthorized accesses on IDRS. He was quite certain that the message had been sufficiently conveyed to employees that such unauthorized access was not allowed and would be pursued by TIGTA.

Steward of the Year Award

Lillie Jones of ACS was awarded the Steward of the Year award at the Chapter 24 training session in Grand Haven May 19th. Lillie, however, was unable to attend the awards portion of the training session because she had returned home to attend a presentation of a scholarship to her daughter to attend Bowling Green University. Chapter President Ronald Woytalewicz presented her the award the following day. Karen Johnson of Mt. Clemens was awarded the New Steward of the Year at the session, as well. Mary Cook, David Hauenstein, and David King were given specialized awards.

Legislative Updates

There are many issues pending before Congress that could greatly affect your job. Privatization of Social Security could have an enormous, and perhaps devastating, effect on the pension of FERS employees. While it appears that Michigan Taxpayer Assistance sites were spared in the most recent cut, privatization of government jobs is a threat looming over our heads every day; believing that "it can't happen to me" will not stop it from becoming so. The President has again asked for a lower pay increase for civilian employees (2.3%) than military personnel (3.1%). This is pending before Congress right now; nothing like flooding your congressmen or women with letters. Federal Employee Health Benefits Program premiums continue to increase. Since 2001, FEHBP premiums have risen by more than 50%. Expansion of personnel policies from Department of Homeland Security to other sectors of the federal workforce (your job?) could completely change your rights as an employee of the government. You can take a stand by supporting NTEU, and writing your elected officials. Your steward has form letters to your U.S. Senators and Representative, awaiting your signature, for you to register your opinion on this issue. See them, or contact the Union office at (313) 628-3652. Or, you can access Capwiz.com from the NTEU website, nteu.org.

NTEU Summer

Membership Campaign

Win **\$100.00** when you get a non-member to join NTEU during the summer membership campaign, which runs from June 21, 2005, through September 20, 2005. Contact your local steward for Form 1187, and then return it to you steward or the Chapter office. Recruiters and new members are also eligible for winning an IPOD at the next membership meeting.

Chief Steward Report

I was appointed Chief Steward approximately a year ago, when Victor Jackson retired. I thought you might want to know about the grievances and other cases that are pending in our Chapter. I can also tell you about issues we have closed this past year.

We currently have 49 open cases. 5 of these cases are pending arbitration, meaning we have taken the grievances as far as we can with Management. Since Management has refused to provide an agreeable resolution, we have the option to have an arbitrator hear the case and render a decision. In addition, we have 10 cases regarding performance appraisals, 9 for promotion disputes, 8 for disciplinary and adverse action, and 9 cases involving TIGTA. The balance involves other violations of the National Agreement.

In the past year we have closed 63 cases. 13 of these cases were related to performance appraisals. The ratings were completely or partially restored in 11 of these case. One member withdrew their request and the other case involved a non-member who chose to represent herself. We were also successful in mitigating many disciplinary and adverse actions.

In future articles I would like to address more specific topics, such as performance appraisals, TIGTA interviews, promotions and disciplinary/adverse actions. Please contact me with any comments or suggestions. I can be reached at the Union office at (313) 628-3562 or via e mail at jeri.l.burger@irs.gov

Chapter Elections

The last day for submitting nominations was June 13, 2005. The candidates have until June 27th to accept their nominations. Chapter elections are scheduled to start July 8, 2005. A ballot package will be mailed to your last known address on that date. All ballots must be ***received***, not postmarked, no later than 3:00 pm, August 25, 2005. Counting and tabulating votes will begin at 4:30 the same day.

The candidates are:

President- Ron Woytalewicz—unopposed
Vice President-Jeri Burger and Henry Morrison

Treasurer-John Copenhagen-unopposed
Secretary-Marianne Gordon and Catharine Kelley

Members of the Board-Mary Cook, Carol Engelsman, Cynthia Harris, Victor Jackson, Lillie Jones, Kathleen McHugh, Zondra Rhim, Phyllis Vidler, Scott Whitehead, and Mary Williams.

This is your chance to directly influence the Chapter's direction. When you receive your ballot package, VOTE!!

Have you moved in the past few years? Did you give NTEU your new address? Notifying IRS does not mean that you have notified NTEU. If you have not notified NTEU, you need to do so to receive the ballot package (did you receive the nomination package?). To do so, you can go to the NTEU website (www.nteu.org); speak with your steward, who can forward the information, or FAX your change of address to the Chapter 24 office, at (313) 628-3658.

Don't forget to VOTE!

Employee in the Spotlight ***Lillie M Jones***

Lillie was selected for the initial edition's spotlight because she was already in the news for Chapter 24, winning the Steward of the Year Award. And, as previously mentioned, as this was being announced in Grand Haven, she had returned home for the awarding of a scholarship to her daughter. Lillie is a Contact Representative in Automated

Collection System (ACS), at the Detroit Computing Center in Detroit. Lillie has worked for Internal Revenue Service for 14

years, 6 months. She has been a steward with NTEU since 1997.

Her daughter, Paunita Jones, was awarded an 89,000 dollar scholarship for academics and softball at Martin Luther King High School, to attend Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio.

Of interest to fellow employees, Lillie has driven to California via the northern, Midwest, and southern routes, as well as taken the bus there by all three routes.

Her advice to fellow employees: Always bring a positive attitude to work. Support a work environment free from harassment and discrimination. Learn as much as you can about the NTEU contract. Keep good communications with both employees and managers. Never give an employee or manager an "off the top of your head" response; research the contract, ask the chief steward, vice president, or president, and don't be ashamed to say, "I don't know, but I will get back to you."

In Memoriam

Patricia Grant, a Revenue Officer in the Mt. Clemens office, temporary assigned to Detroit as a on the job instructor passed away this May.

Cheryl Mitchell from the Benton Harbor office passed away unexpectedly in early January.

Robert Bednarczyk passed away last year. He had been retired for four or five years. Also, Shelly Feiderspel and Gladys Love are no longer with us.

Retiring Members

Virginia Cummins, Dick Madras, John Rankin, Mary Thomas, Diane Greiner, Susie Binion, Ken Winston, Jerilyn Gurley, Gene Reeves, Jearldene Hamblin, Richard (Dick) Bright, Gary Diehl, Theodore (Ted) Godfrey, Larry Bergquist, Warren Ingersoll, Nancy Bailey, Gilberto Font, Jr., Sally Gavin, Steven Linder, Mary Pasquantoni, Richard Patrick, Ronald Schmidt, and Lovely White. Boy! Will the last person left turn out the lights?

Understanding the VERA & VSIP Process*

Given the recent re-structuring of the IRS, many employees have been hearing the terms VERA/VSIP. However, many of those same employees have no idea what they stand for or what they mean to them. These programs are two different types of incentives offered in an effort to reduce the number of involuntary separations, and to minimize any adverse impact on employees. In certain situations, an employee may be eligible for both VERA and VSIP.

VERA (early out) and VSIP (buyout) are two different types of incentives that can be used to offset the impact of involuntary separations. A VERA allows an employee to opt to retire even if they do not meet the age and years of service required. A VSIP is a lump sum payment made to an eligible employee who voluntarily separates from the IRS through resignation, optional retirement, or early retirement. Depending on individual circumstances, an employee may be eligible for and receive either or both incentives.

VERA (Voluntary Early-out Retirement)

What is an early out?

An “early out” is an opportunity to voluntarily retire in advance of meeting the age and/or service requirement normally needed for retirement.

Some of the eligibility requirements include:

- You must be in a covered position in an IRS organizational unit with approved VERA authority from OPM.
- You must be separating from a position subject to Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) or Federal Employees’ Retirement System (FERS) coverage.
- You must be at least 50 with 20 years of creditable service or any age with 25 years of creditable service when you leave. At least five years must be creditable civilian service.
- If you are retiring under CSRS, you must have been covered under CSRS for one of the last two years before retirement.
- You must retire by the last day of the early out period.

How will my annuity computation be affected if I take an early out?

If you are retiring under CSRS, your annuity will be reduced by one-sixth of one percent for each full month (2% for each year) you are under age 55. This reduction does not apply if you are retiring under FERS and only have been covered by FERS. However, if you transferred to FERS, the reduction would apply to the CSRS portion of your annuity.

How do I apply for an early out?

You must first be offered the opportunity in a formal written notice. If you are approved to separate under an early out, you would then complete a retirement application.

VSIP (Buyout)

What is a buyout?

A buyout is a lump sum payment made to an **eligible** employee who voluntarily separates from the IRS through resignation, optional retirement, or early retirement.

Who is eligible for a “buyout”?

Employees serving under an appointment without time limitation and currently employed by the Federal Government for a continuous period of at least three years, including non-pay status are eligible.

However, there are exclusions including but not limited to reemployed annuitants, employees with a disability who are or would be eligible for disability retirement, employees who have been notified they will be terminated for misconduct or unacceptable performance (*this is only a partial list of exclusions).

Who will be offered buyouts and when will they become available?

The Service will target the use of buyouts to employees, who cannot be placed within the organization that are directly impacted by continuing business, technology, and organizational changes. Buyout “windows” will be determined by each individual IRS organizational units approved to offer buyouts.

How do I apply for a buyout?

As with early-outs, you must be offered the opportunity in writing and you must meet the eligibility requirements.

What is the repayment requirement for a buyout?

It is important for anyone considering a buyout to understand that there is a

repayment requirement if, after taking a buyout, you return to work for the Federal government (as an employee or through a personal services contract) within 5 years of separation. If this occurs, you will be required to repay the entire amount of your buyout. Regardless of the agency you will be working for, you must make this repayment to the IRS prior to the first day of your reemployment.

For more information on VERA/VSIP: <http://erc.web.irs.gov/docs/202/awss/ps/eprg0200/index.html>.

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In Our Opinion

It is time for all members to take an active, aggressive part in persuading non-members to ante up and join NTEU. Leaving the task to the local stewards is not getting the job done; perhaps peer pressure will.

Non-members have many excuses why they don't join, while working under the umbrella of protection and embracing the benefits that NTEU provides. Many claim they cannot afford it. Some dwell on one or two issues, why they are upset with the union. Others feel it is a matter of principle.

But how many of them abstain from the benefits that NTEU affords them? How many refuse award money negotiated by NTEU? They could send the money to the U S Treasury Bureau of the Public Debt. They could decline working credit hours or flexi-place, both negotiated by NTEU.

If their convictions were really sincere, they would represent themselves before management, or TIGTA, in performance or other grievance issues. A few people have had this sincerity of conviction, a laudable undertaking, but have they also declined the other benefits of NTEU's efforts: awards, etc.?

People who do not comply with the tax laws of the United States often express similar reasons for their actions, for not anteing up and paying their fair share. Are they patriots or parasites?

If you know of a non-member, ask them, encourage them, implore them, pressure them, to join. The more of us there are, the greater our influence, a united front to management.

This section of the newsletter is intended for our readers to forward their thoughts and comments, on anything they want. What would you, the reader, like to see in future issues? How do you feel about Internal Revenue Service, management, MITS, NTEU (national or local), etc? Do you have an opinion or editorial you want printed? We encourage our readers to write, call, FAX, or E-Mail their thoughts. You can do so at:

Internal Revenue Service
1270 Pontiac Road
Pontiac, MI 48342
Attn: David Hauenstein
(your own postage!)
Ph # (248) 874-2210
FAX # (248) 874-2255
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Detroit, MI 48231
(again, your postage)
FAX # (313) 628-3658

Editor's Note: *This inaugural newsletter is for members of NTEU Chapter 24. It is inspired by the NTEU Chapter 24 newsletter "Wolverine" of the 1970s and 1980s. We can only hope that this publication can faintly mirror the "Wolverine" in its sagacity, and utility to its readers.*

Finally, to those who have contributed and assisted in the production of this first issue, a very special "Thank you."