



Firebird 24

Reborn From Our Ashes

NTEU Chapter 24 Newsletter

Volume 5

May 2005

Membership Meeting

A General Membership Meeting for Metro Detroit is scheduled for Tuesday, May 23, 2006, at Nemo's, 1384 Michigan Avenue, Detroit. The meeting will start at 5:00 PM. Door prizes and a 50/50 raffle. Food and beverages provided by NTEU.

NTEU SCORES MAJOR VICTORY

**-Ronald E Woytalewicz
Chapter President**

NTEU has won an arbitration victory ordering IRS management to give more than 1,400 "priority considerations" to employees who were not treated fairly or legally when competing for promotions over the last two years. This largest grant of priority consideration in federal sector history is the result of NTEU's 60 local chapter grievances (including those in Chapter 24), a national grievance, arbitration, and an exception appeal to the Federal Labor Relations Authority. Priority consideration entitles an employee to be considered for a promotion vacancy before any other candidates and it places a heavy burden on management to select the priority candidate. Employees entitled to a priority consideration should have received a letter from the agency. The letter is very brief, does not provide much information regarding priority considerations and does not mention that NTEU got this for the employee (big surprise). Chapter 24 has received the national list of all employees, although the

format chosen by management makes the list difficult to use. We have identified those from Michigan and sent them all an email asking them to contact us so that we can explain the somewhat complicated rules that apply to priority considerations. We have about 23 employees so effected in Michigan. Several PODs are involved as well as numerous different positions applied for.

This victory is the most recent example of NTEU's efforts to protect the interests of our bargaining unit employees. Management appears to be determined to create artificial impediments and other obstructions to prevent our present employees from advancing their careers. They prefer hiring people off the street and giving them some plum assignments such as Grade 13 jobs in LMSB rather than to those who have worked here for years and suffered the insults and pressures created by the never ending reorganizations and Management's total disinterest in the satisfaction of our working force. NTEU has fought and will continue to fight and win the battles necessary to protect the hard fought rights we have in our contract.

SURVEY 2006

THE ENGAGEMENT IS OFF!!

Internal Revenue is continuing with its effort to disregard the **dis**Satisfaction that IRS employees and NTEU has with the whole **SURVEY** fiasco, and is going ahead with another survey this April.

IRS claims that taking the survey is the only way employees can let their voices be heard. Commissioner Everson states, “The information you provide via this survey **helps management** [emphasis added] perform its role in employee engagement. We need to know your concerns ...Employee engagement is about making progress on all three of our balanced measures—customer satisfaction, *employee satisfaction*, and business results.”

However, after years of disregarding what employees have been saying in these Surveys, does IRS really expect employees to continually participate? There’s an old adage, “Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.” Colleen Kelley’s letter to NTEU members states, “Late last year NTEU informed IRS management that the Employee Satisfaction Survey was not serving its original intent and had turned into a waste of valuable time and money. Management’s response was to turn its back on the idea of employee satisfaction and insist that we all get ‘engaged’. Top officials **decreed** [emphasis added] that the ‘employee satisfaction’ was a concept that was no longer relevant and that everyone would be better off if we focused on ‘employee engagement.’ ...Last year, more than 60,000 IRS employees refused to take the survey and I hope that they will again refuse to participate. If you did take the 2005 survey, did it make a difference? I suspect the answer is a resounding no. This year, I hope everyone will consider joining your 60,000 coworkers and refuse to play along with the engagement game.” NTEU has now filed a National Grievance over Survey 2006.

News from National Training -Daniel J. Itchue, Steward

I recently attended NTEU National Training. I am a relatively new Steward and this was the first formal training that I had ever attended. The agenda for the meeting included training on Labor Law, Legislative Issues and the Hatch Act, Employee Discipline and Adverse Action responses, Stewardship, Competitive Outsourcing, Appraisal Grievances, and National Grievance Issues.

While much of the training that I received was specific to my duties as your Steward, such as

grievance procedures, timeliness, research, etc., one of the most beneficial aspects of the training was meeting and talking with Stewards from around the country. I was able to hear their stories and learn how they have been dealing with a **noticeably more aggressive and adversarial management cadre.**

Some of the issues of concern that are emerging and are either being grieved (locally and at the National Level) or are potentially going to be negotiated for the new contract include the 5 accounting course requirement for RAs (20,000 promotion packages will probably wind up being reviewed), classification criteria for RO GS 12 and 13 promotions, competitive selection of Non-Bargaining unit employees in violation of the contract, unilateral termination of locally bargained AWS agreements, re-emergence of ROTERS (Record of Tax Enforcement Results—statistical evaluations), Embedded Quality Management Systems, and so on. Please visit the national web site at www.nteu.org to keep informed on emerging issues.

The most lasting impression that I came away with from the training is that we (the rank and file members of NTEU) couldn’t ask for better advocates when it comes to contract negotiations and prosecution of grievances than we have in Frank Ferris, National Executive Vice President and Chief Negotiator, and his staff. They are aggressively protecting our rights and ensuring that we maintain all of the rights that have been previously earned.

Contest Time, Again?!

It’s not too late to enter Chapter 24’s contest to win a first prize Dinner for Two, or second prize Chapter 24 travel mug. Send in your idea of: ***How to get non-members to join NTEU Chapter 24***, to Ronald.E.Woytalewicz@irs.gov. The newsletter, ***Firebird 24***, reserves the right to re-print any and/or all entries.

Steward in the Spotlight



This issue's "Steward in the Spotlight" is **Mary Cook**, Steward in the East Lansing office and Member of the Board.

Mary tells us:

"I was hired in the Detroit District's mass Revenue Officer hiring of 1982. I never thought I'd last the first 10 minutes (and I'm sure my OJIs thought so, too) and here I am, so many years later...

I have worked as a Revenue Officer, an OJI Coach, and of course, an NTEU Steward.

I did my training in Detroit and then transferred to Jackson, where I was given the opportunity to meet many fascinating taxpayers who were virtually a "captive audience" at Southern Michigan Prison. My Jackson co-workers always found it amusing when I would receive letters from prisoners asking me to visit them anytime. I transferred to the Lansing POD in 1985 and have been there ever since.

I joined Chapter 24 when I was a Revenue Officer trainee on the advice of one of my OJIs, Chuck Fitzgerald.

In 1991, the Lansing steward had stepped down and everyone that would have been a steward had already done it. I was approached by (then) Chief Steward Warren Ingersol and (then) Chapter 24 President Larry Baugh to take the steward job temporarily, not more than a year, until a permanent replacement could be found. I had been in training with Larry Baugh, and had worked in Jackson with Warren Ingersol so I had a history with them. I agreed to take on the job until someone else could be found. Larry Baugh, if you are reading this, I'm still waiting...

I currently serve as Steward representing all divisions in the East Lansing and Jackson PODs.

I am also an elected Member of the Board for Chapter 24 and am proud to say that I have served in that capacity for several terms.

Probably the most interesting thing I have done in my life was not when I held a Tasmanian devil in Tasmania, or saw the giant stone heads on Easter Island, or rode an elephant in Zimbabwe, but when I went to the Arctic Circle village of Kemi, Finland, and saw where my ancestors had lived. Their life was a hard one and the climate was brutal, but they made the best of it and carried on. The Finns have a name for that tough spirit, 'sisu', and I'd like to think I have some of it, too.

This is a job. This is only one aspect of our lives, not the entire definition of who we are as people. Be respectful, kind, and honest. My philosophy of life is, 'what goes around comes around'. I've seen it happen so many times. I am single and my other interests (other than tax collecting) include riding my Icelandic horse, working with the local Humane Society, and live theater. I am also an ailurophile (cat lover). Any interested parties may submit a dating resume and credit report to the Union Office (just kidding, no, maybe not)."



Grinch Awards

**-Ronald Woytalewicz
Chapter President**

--A bargaining unit non-union member has so much time on their hands that they can spend the day eavesdropping on fellow employees, including hiding in a vacant cubicle to hear another employee's conversation. What price glory?

--A returning manager in one of our PODs on their first day back apparently had nothing better to do than listen and time the calls made by one of our employees. The manager apparently timed the calls and then went and reported that the employee was making long personal calls to the employee's manager.

--Some of you may recall the memorable experience of manager **Charlotte Wiley**, who was in the District several years ago. Her most indelible impression was created when she was a

manager for Collection in the Lansing office. Among many, many stories of her was that she had a frig, microwave, and coffee maker in her own office, allegedly so she would never have to talk to another IRS employee. Recent news out of the eastern areas indicates that Ms. Wiley is no longer with the IRS. Furthermore, the word is that she did not leave voluntarily. Let us all bow our heads in unison and then emote an energetic, "YES".

Long time Group Manager **Judy Gleason's** parting comment to me, as union steward, at her retirement luncheon was, "Take care of my people for me." Attitudes like that amongst more group managers could almost make the union superfluous. Hats off to Judy; we wish her a wonderful retirement and honor her with an "Anti-Grinch Award."

Membership Benefits

NTEU offers three different types of health benefit plans to its members that go beyond the Federal Employees Health Benefit Plans.

1) *American General Critical Illness*

Insurance-Critical Illness insurance pays a lump sum benefit if you or a family member is diagnosed with a serious illness, and can help protect your savings or assets by providing coverage for potentially catastrophic costs. As an insured, you will receive a lump-sum benefit upon initial diagnosis and you can use your lump-sum benefit any way you choose.

The covered illness and conditions are: heart attack—stroke—major organ transplant—carcinoma in situ—renal failure—coronary artery bypass surgery—cancer.

The critical illness plan includes a health screening benefit that pays up to \$50 per calendar year for qualified health screening tests for each adult insured. This additional benefit covers more than 15 different tests including mammography, Pap smear and colonoscopy.

To enroll in this plan or for more information, contact the Enrollment Center at (800) 498-0207.

2) **Long Term Care**—NTEU Long-Term Care (LTC) plan offers skilled, intermediate and custodial care in a nursing facility. The plan also covers non-confinement services such as adult day care, home health care, and respite care. Members, spouses, parents and parents-in-law under 80 are eligible to apply.

The plan includes: Return-of-premium feature, allowing a portion of the premium to be returned equal to premiums paid if the plan participant dies without using benefits or discontinues coverage. Benefits are available for costs incurred up to \$100 a day for confined care and up to \$50 a day for non-confined care. An Automatic Inflation Option and Benefit Increase provision. Premiums are based on age at the time of enrollment, with no increases as age increases. Long-term care premiums are tax deductible like health insurance premiums.

To enroll or for additional information, contact Chapter 24 or send an e-mail to Tamara.Schultz@nteu.org.

3) **Hospital Cash Plan**—Federal Employee Health Benefits insurance pays up to 80 percent of hospital care expenses; the rest is paid by you. NTEU offers additional protection through FlexCare Hospital Insurance Cash Plan. The plan pays from \$40 to \$100 per day cash payments directly to you. Dependent children may be covered until age 25, as well as a member's spouse. The benefits are also not currently subject to state or federal income taxes. Members must be under age 65, and cannot be turned down.

To enroll, or for details, e-mail Tamara.Schultz@nteu.org, or contact Chapter 24.

Further details can be obtained by going to the NTEU website, www.nteu.org.

disEngagement

On March 23, 2006, Commissioner **Everson** sent an E-Mail to all IRS employees, extolling the merits of SURVEY 2006. Replying directly to Mr. Everson, Chapter 32 Steward **David R. Larkin** of Colorado wrote back:

"Commissioner Everson,
Thank you for letting me hear about SURVEY 2006 from your perspective.
Our stewards and members here in Colorado and our fellow NTEU members around the country would be quite pleased to participate in SURVEY 2006 if we were respected enough to be actively engaged to participate fully in the survey process as we were in 2004 and prior years. NTEU members who are IRS employees are motivated, committed, and involved in helping the agency meet its mission everyday. But this "Employee Engagement" as you call it, does not equal "Employee Satisfaction". When employ-

ees and their legal representatives are excluded from being active participants in the survey creation process, then employees plainly see the value and respect they are given.

Since the IRS is not working cooperatively with NTEU to create appropriate survey questions again this year, I am confident SURVEY 2006 is not going to be as successful as it could be for either the employees or the agency.

There can be no meaningful “Employee Engagement” or progress on “Employee Satisfaction” without the cooperation, input, and support of the employees’ ‘Best Friend at Work’—the National Treasury Employees Union.

Respectfully,

David R. Larkin

--Reprinted with the permission of **David R. Larkin**, Steward, Chapter 32

In Case You Missed It

From the National Association of Retired Federal Employees (NARFE) Legislative Update: A new Republican Study Committee plan has a proposal, part of Operation Offset, to require future retirees with less than 30 years of service to pay higher Federal Employees Health Benefits Program premiums; specifically 2 percent more for each year less than 30 years.

Also, the plan proposes an overall cap on entitlements, except Social Security, on “entitlements” which include Federal retirement and the government’s share of annuitants’ FEHBP. Have you written your Senators and Representative?

Our Contest Winners

In Volume 3 of this newsletter, we announced a contest for our readers to write why they joined NTEU. In Volume 4, we announced the winners. Below, we have reprinted those winning entries:

I joined the union because I wanted to be part of our office. I came on as a college intern and was the youngest in my office. The office had a great bunch of employees and I wanted to belong to that group. As it turned out, I was glad I did because I was caught in a Catch 22 after I graduated and we were in a hiring freeze. The rule was you had to become a full time employee within so many months of graduation. Even though my manager wanted me, the freeze was

on (1981) and everyone said there was nothing they could do. I contacted the Union and my congressman, and between the two, my name was added to an “exception” list and I was officially hired with 2 weeks to spare! That is why I joined the union!

And:

The NTEU Chapter 24 President spoke at my Unit I class about the same time Jimmy Hoffa disappeared during the summer of 1975. I signed up for the union that same afternoon during the next break. I came to the IRS after a four year career at GE Credit where the general management rule was to divide and conquer. Not only did we each have to negotiate our annual raises by ourselves, the company generally found a way to replace us with cheaper new employees after five or six years. Nobody was immune. The manager that hired me in 1971 got the axe in 1991 for the same reason.

We are now hearing great things from our Commander in Chief about a new merit based pay system. While this may sound like a great idea in theory, in practice the government could decide to reduce funding for pay raises –maybe by 75%. Under such a system those employees with the highest evaluations could find themselves with raises at our current or lower levels while many of us get nothing. And since when was our evaluation system ever objective anyway? It would be the same system of divide and conquer that I knew in the early 1970s.

Due to the civil service laws our union could never achieve the results of the trade unions or UAW during my IRS career. But it did speak for all employees in one voice and has made things better for us. While I personally do not agree with everything our union has fought for at the national level over the years, it is my view that the trade-off between what IRS management and the union wanted has been about right. As a KMA [Kiss My@&#] employee working at the highest grade level I could possibly achieve, I don’t need the union to do anything for me personally at the local level. I remain a NTEU member because I believe that we need a voice in Washington speaking for us more than ever.

We Get Letters

A member of Chapter 24 in Case Processing was facing a RIF recently and chose not to take a buy

out. He discussed job applications and KSA (Knowledge Skills Assessment) narratives with his Union Steward and ultimately was placed in a position in the Cincinnati Campus in SB/SE Exam.

He writes,

“Thank you for the help you have given through the years. I realize how important it is to be in a union and the difference it makes...”

This member is now a member of NTEU Chapter 73.

-And

“It is with deep disgust and bewilderment to hear of the neo-Nazi rally in Lansing on April 22. One only has to remember the over 280,000 Americans who died, the countless thousands and thousands who were physically and/or mentally maimed and wounded, and the millions of Americans who had their lives disrupted to fight Nazism, Fascism, and Totalitarianism. And yet, we should celebrate the assembly of this lunatic fringe. While we may abhor their message, it is testimony to our freedoms under the Constitution; even if these people would take those freedoms from us. Freedom of expression is the soul of a free society; all other rights and freedoms flow from the free and unhindered exchange of ideas of its citizenry. Equally, free expression, when hindered by legislation or warrantless monitoring, impacts every facet of a society, including the organization and function of labor unions. People like the neo-Nazis and Al Qaeda are only our acknowledged enemies. Across the nation, and within the heart of our federal, state, and local governments, there continues an assault upon are freedoms guaranteed us under the First Amendment: the freedoms of free speech, assembly, and the inherent exchange of ideas. One wonders if the Founding Fathers would recognize America today as the democratic and free society they envisioned. Without the freedom of expression, how are we to know that people like the neo-Nazis are bizarre and odious people.

Ratified 1791, Amendment I—Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free press thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble,

and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

-name withheld at request of author

Did You Know?

-Marianne Gordon

Under the IRS EAP (Employee Assistance and Work-life Program), not only can you receive confidential, no cost counseling, support, and information services on personal issues: relationships, children, substance abuse, stress, job pressures, marital conflicts, among other things. You can also receive confidential legal services; a free 30 minute consultation, with a 25% reduction of customary fees for legal issues, such as: divorce, debt, landlord/tenant issues, real estate transactions, bankruptcy, criminal actions, civil suits, and contracts. You can also receive financial information, such as: debt, retirement, tax questions, and estate planning.

You can call toll free at: (800) 977-7631, or go online at guidanceresources.com.

You cannot use time-off awards after your official retirement date, nor receive credit for such. If you have not used this time-off award, you lose it.



Sour

Grapes

We have received an awful lot of feedback on the “Grinch Awards” and “Overheard” columns. Most of it has been positive, employees enjoying a small chuckle at management’s expense. We have also heard negative comments, threats to “sue for slander” [slander is spoken, libel is written—both regard falsehoods]. Additionally, there was the comment, “I hope the readers are smarter than the writers.” [Is that sour grapes, or what?—thanks for the idea for this column.] We

stand by what was written; none of the occurrences were made up, embellished, or in any other way distorted from what was heard, or written. And, we look forward to more opportunities to have a little fun...at management's expense, bargaining unit employees, perhaps NTEU, or even Firebird 24, when and if appropriate. If you don't want a guest appearance in the Grinch Awards, Overheard, or Sour Grapes, don't do the deed.

Overheard

Regarding our own Vice President and Chief Steward, we heard at a retirement luncheon, "Jeri beat out Linda for most black shoes." [They counted them?] Linda has demanded a rematch, which is scheduled for July.

A Clinton Township POD manager wrote in a workload review, "I would like to suggest required improvements."

A manager in the Farmington Hills POD stated, "...credit hours should not be used in lieu of annual leave or sick leave." Huh???

If you read or overhear a comment, directive, or gaffe from management or a fellow employee which you think readers might enjoy, please let me know at david.b.hauenstein@irs.gov.

History of the S.O.A.R Coalition (Save Our Annuity Retirement) -Courtesy of Marianne Gordon Chapter Secretary and Steward

"In 1976 the U.S. Government was running short of money to keep the Social Security Administration afloat. So they decided to do away with the annuity run by the Civil Service Commission and put the Postal and Government employees under Social Security in order to put more money into the Social Security coffers. This outraged Postal and Government employees so much that they started an organization in Washington, D. C. to fight them all the way. The heads of all Postal and Government employee unions and organizations got together and formed an Organization called F.A.I.R. (Fairness for An Independent Retirement). F.A.I.R. fought to keep our annuity completely separate from Social Security.

At the time F.A.I.R. asked us to get together and form a local chapter. Thus, the beginning of

S.O.A.R. (Save our Annuity Retirement) came to be.

In Detroit, **Lou Smiertka**, President NALC Branch # 1 and **Doug Holbrook**, President APWU Detroit, got together and formed one of the first S.O.A.R. Coalition Chapters in the country.

In order to help us get started and continue to operate monetarily (because we have never had any dues or assessments), F.A.I.R. in Washington, DC offered to match any dues or assessments we took in up to \$5,000 per year.

This was the beginning of the S.O.A.R.

BREAKFAST'S at Roma Hall on Schoolcraft in Livonia. Our aim with these breakfasts then and now is to get people out and to show our Michigan Delegation of U.S. Senators and Representatives how angry we were after all these years of paying a much higher rate into our Civil Service retirement plan, and now we are told we would only receive a small Social Security retirement.



In the private sector, Social Security was paying about 2% of their earnings while Postal and Federal employees were paying about 6% of their earnings into our retirement plan. As said before, we fought them tooth and nail all the way. Word spread throughout the country as to what we were doing in Detroit. Many others started to have different types of fund raisers to raise awareness to save our annuity. We continue our S.O.A.R. Breakfasts and try to keep the price of the breakfast at \$8 like we have for the past 27 years.

Due to rising cost and the fact that we were not

able to break even, we were forced to raise our price. S.O.A.R. to this day does not charge any dues or have any assessments. The breakfast is our only income. We are doing it because we still want as many people to attend these breakfasts as possible. It is our belief that the more people that attend, the more of our Senators and Representatives in Congress will attend and hear our voices.

For the first 12 years that these breakfasts were held, the Honorable **Bill Ford**, Chairman of the House Post Office and Civil Service Commission was our principal speaker. He was also very instrumental in helping us to get other members of the Michigan Congressional Delegation to attend and speak at our annual breakfasts. He also got member of Congress from West Virginia, **Claude Pepper**, the ageless one from Florida, and our good friend **Mary Rose Oakar** from Cleveland.

We also had two presidential candidates **Paul Simon** from Illinois and **Dick Gephardt** from Missouri. Also, Governor **Dukakis's** son was present supporting his father for the presidency of the United States.

Many top officials from Washington, DC attended and spoke on various subjects of interest to Postal and Federal employees. We have had as many as 1,500 Postal and Federal employees attend our breakfasts. This included many retirees. It would be nice to see these crowds again. We have always been non-partisan. When we invite our members in Congress, we invite all of them regardless of their political affiliation. However, we have always maintained that if a member of Congress supports our issue(s), we would support them no matter what party they represent.

When we invite the members of Congress, we ask them to come and tell their constituents how they vote on issues pertaining to Postal and Federal employees. We have gone so far as to arrange special meetings with groups of attendees to meet with their Representatives.

In 24 years of having these breakfasts, we only missed one year (2001) because of the attack on 9/11, when all members of Congress had to remain in Washington, D.C.

There are many organizations (branches, locals, chapters, etc.) and individuals that have helped to keep the S.O.A.R. Coalition alive and active. As far as we know, we are the only group of this kind in the entire country still active.

To each and every member and organization that has helped to keep S.O.A.R. going, we give our thanks and gratitude."

This year's S.O.A.R. breakfast was attended by NTEU National Vice President **Phyllis Vidler**, Chapter 24 Vice President **Jeri Burger**, Chapter 24 Secretary **Marianne Gordon**, and Chapter 24 Board Member **Cynthia Harris**. The total attendance was approximately 600.

Congressional attendees were Senator **Debbie A. Stabenow**, Congressman **John D. Dingell**, Congressman **John Conyers, Jr.**, Congresswoman **Carolyn C. Kilpatrick**, and **David Allen** from Senator **Levin's** office.

Larry Baugh is the treasurer for S.O.A.R. S.O.A.R. sells 10 tickets to Chapter 24 every year. To attend the S.O.A.R.'s annual March breakfast, contact the chapter office. Additional S.O.A.R. meetings are held every first Monday of each month at the American Postal Workers Union (APWU) Hall on Southfield Road, just south of Eight Mile Road.



Firebird 24

Ronald Woytalewicz, President
Jeri Burger, Vice President
Marianne Gordon, Secretary
Henry Morrison, Treasurer

David Hauenstein, Editor

Chapter 24 Website, www.nteu24.org
Caroline Trinkwalder

NTEU
The National Treasury Employees Union