



Firebird 24

Reborn From Our Ashes

NTEU Chapter 24 Newsletter

Volume 6

Members' Edition

June, 2006

What Does NTEU Do for You?*

“NTEU is widely known as a highly focused, smart, tough organization, well-respected for its knowledge of federal employee issues. And for its determination to work with federal agencies, with Congress, and in the courts to protect, promote and expand the rights of those it represents. On Capital Hill, NTEU is leading the fight for fair pay and benefits and for laws that improve the quality of work life for federal workers. At the Bargaining Table, NTEU is known for the most innovative contracts in the federal sector. NTEU’s bargaining expertise is reflected in such gains as alternative work schedules, flexiplace, transit subsidies, performance awards, and much more.

In the Courts, NTEU’s Office of General Counsel has a history of establishing major legal principles.

In the workplace, experienced attorneys serve as the direct connection between NTEU chapters and the National Office, and represent members in grievance arbitrations, unfair labor practice hearings, and more. Highly-trained stewards work to resolve employee issues at the lowest possible level and negotiate over local changes to working conditions.”

But you say you would have received these benefits, anyway, without NTEU. In future issues of this newsletter, we shall demonstrate that, in fact, you would not have received them. It is only through the efforts of NTEU in Congress, the Courts, in arbitration and grievance meetings, that you enjoy the pay and benefits, and not through munificence of Congress and the President.

*Reprinted from [NTEU The Voice of Federal Employees](#)

FREE DINNER!



Chapter 24 wants to give away a free dinner for 2, but there are no takers. The previously announced contest of, “*What is your idea to get non-members to join NTEU?*” has gone unanswered. So, you still can claim the prize of dinner for 2. Second prize is an NTEU travel mug. Send your idea(s) to Ronald.E.Woytalewicz@irs.gov

Chapter 24 Statement of Principles

The strength of our union is its members. We advance the welfare of the men and women of our membership in a partnership environment with the Internal Revenue Service. The issue of the quality of work life will always come before issues of productivity and efficiency. We balance and temper the IRS concern with systems and structure with our concern for the men and women of the IRS. We believe in and stand for the following principles. This is our credo.

- 1) Foremost among these principles, we believe in caring and concern for others. Although we support the IRS mission, we believe human issues come first.

- 2) We respect each other. We respect the fundamental human dignity in all of us. We value civility, kindness and courtesy in our relationships. We see a duty to be a good citizen. We value the diversity of a multi-cultural work force. We support the principles of equal employment opportunity.
- 3) We value the courage that leadership requires. We believe in a personal responsibility as an ethical principle.
- 4) We work to earn trust. We strive to keep our word. We strive to honor our promises. We are sensitive to confidentiality requirements. We pledge secrecy on private matters that become known to us in the course of our representational duties.
- 5) We believe in honesty. Our integrity is our most valuable possession.
- 6) We believe in fairness. We do not believe in winning at any cost. We do not believe “the end justifies the means.” We strive for justice and equitable resolutions in our representation.

**Annual Steward Training
-Jeri Burger, Vice President
And Chief Steward**

Chapter 24 held our annual steward training the week of May 15, 2006. One of the primary goals for the Chapter is to serve the members with well trained and knowledgeable stewards. Training has become even more important, as one third of the stewards have been appointed in the last two years. Some of the topics covered were; Grievance handling, Family and Medical Leave Act and other sick leave procedures, Formal Meetings, and Contracting Out. Chapter President **Ron Woytalewicz** gave his report on Chapter and National issues. Chief Steward/ VP **Jeri Burger** updated the stewards on local and national grievances. We also had a speaker from the Employee Assistance Program give us a very informative overview of this valuable program. Several stewards were acknowledged at the annual awards ceremony: Pontiac POD steward, **David Hauenstein** was recognized as Steward of the Year. In addition to his excellent representational abilities, David has almost single handedly resurrected the Chapter 24 newsletter. We appreciate his efforts and expertise as the editor of the Firebird 24. We

congratulate him as the recipient of this year’s special “Perry White Steward of the Year” award.

Farmington Hills steward **Marianne Gordon** was awarded the “Best Left Hand – Hand” for her tireless contributions to the Chapter office. Officially, she is the Training Director, the Chapter Address Coordinator, the Cooperative Efforts Coordinator, and your elected Chapter Secretary. Unofficially, Marianne is always willing to “give a hand” (she is left handed) with whatever is needed. Thank you and congratulations to Marianne.

We had two “New Stewards of the Year” **Kimberly Longstreet**, McNamara Building, and **Daniel Itchue**, Pontiac POD.

Kimberly was recognized for her enthusiasm, initiative and negotiating abilities. Kimberly is very interested in NTEU legislative activities. She attended the Legislative conference in Washington DC and sponsored a Lunch and Learn for her members about the legislative issue. She represents members in SB/SE Collection – Insolvency.

This area has experienced many changes in the last year and Kimberly has been proactive in negotiating the impacts.

Dan is the Exam steward in the Pontiac POD. Over the past year Dan has worked many complicated grievances. He does not hesitate to confer with a member, thoroughly research the issues, and make the appropriate decisions in the grievance process. Dan also volunteered to join the Oral Reply Committee, where he will be defending members with proposed Disciplinary and Adverse Actions. Dan is also an excellent negotiator, often solving problems before grievances are necessary.

Congratulations to all the award recipients! I would also like to take this opportunity to thank and recognize all the Chapter 24 stewards. Their hard work and dedication as stewards, and at the training session, are appreciated.

**Writing an Effective Rebuttal
And a Self-Evaluation**

You’ve received negative recordation, or a threatening case review. You’re depressed. Your first reaction is to say, “Oh sh@#!” So, what next? Human nature says to stuff it in a drawer, and don’t worry about it right now; deal with it later. Or worse, you think that if you do

respond, your manager will be offended, and that will only make matters worse. If you're fired for performance deficiencies, will your non-offended manager pay your bills for you?

Like it or not, you need to write a rebuttal. The National Agreement gives you up to four hours of administrative time to do this on any performance appraisal. If this is a case review, you may need to take more time than that; this will be your own time, off duty.

Now; what is your strategy?



--First, don't make it personal, even though you feel very personally offended. Address the recordation or review. Don't attack the manager personally. Furthermore, don't try to say that someone else did the same thing, or doesn't work as hard, or whatever. Those things do not help your case, whether they are true, or not.

--Next, review your Critical Elements and Standards, even if you already know them. These are what you are evaluated on, not the personal whims of your manager, or some special emphasis of the month.

--Attack the manager's review. Are there technical mistakes? Did they miss something in your case file, in your case notes? Did they note the correct dates? Chances are, your manager isn't as technically proficient as they might be; their responsibilities lie beyond case work. Are they pyramiding items? If you did not make timely contact, is the manager thereby also saying that you did not protect the government's interest, as well as deny the taxpayer their rights, while also failing to secure necessary information at that first contact? If your initial, or follow-up, contact was late, was there a good reason? If not, you've lost that point, but that does not mean you also failed the other aspects; that is, protecting the government's interest, protecting the taxpayer's rights, etc.

Is the manager basing the negative recordation or review on one or two items? If you are working 40 to 60 cases, and your case review was 5 or 6 cases, is that really representative of your work? Were cases reviewed by the manager but

not mentioned in the case review? If not, why? Was the work there acceptable? Were there items you had submitted for recordation that the manager failed to take action on?

--Now, you need to write of your good work.

This is where a self-evaluation comes in. You can write a comprehensive self-evaluation prior to your manager's review, or you can make it part of your rebuttal. If you do a self-evaluation prior to the manager's review, you need to submit it before the manager's review during the final 30 days of an employee's annual appraisal period. You shall be granted a reasonable amount of administrative time, not to exceed 4 hours, to do so. If the manager does not accept the appraisal, they must meet with the employee and explain why.

And what do you write? *First, you're limited to 2 pages. Article 12, Section 4.b.5 requires management to provide a tutorial on self-assessment; you can find this at:

<http://hco.web.irs.gov/1perpolicy/pers/sa/tutorial/menu.htm>

Then, follow the next 6 steps:

- 1) What have you been doing lately? Start a folder and keep notes on your accomplishments, your problem solving skills, even if they are collateral duties. If you did a really good comprehensive case, ask your manager to evaluate that particular case. Make a sanitized copy of the case so that you can recapture the key elements of your work. Don't trivialize your accomplishments. Are you effectively working most of your cases? Are you making timely contact, timely follow-ups, securing necessary information? Are you treating the taxpayer's with respect? Are you treating your co-workers with respect? Do you volunteer to do things for your work group, such as give presentations in group meetings, volunteer for CFC campaigns? Did you organize a blood drive?
- 2) Get your stuff together: Critical Elements, position description, prior year's evaluation, your IDP (if you have one), everything positive in your personnel file, your file from Step 1, documentation from a progress review.
- 3) Notify your manager that you wish to prepare a self-assessment (prior to your

manager's evaluation—it's too late to notify your manager if you are rebutting their evaluation). You get 4 hours, or 240 minutes. You don't have to do it in one hour segments. Sort your documentation by critical element. If one document applies to more than one element, make a copy for each element. To get a top rating, demonstrate that you perform the task "*consistently*". Write a few sentences. If you do not have examples, move on. Use specifics. Keep it simple, keep it clear and keep it brief. Don't worry about the outcome on a particular case; a no change in tax liability or uncollectible status does not mean a negative outcome. Use power words; your steward can provide you with a list.

- 4) Sanity check: Edit your work. List each critical element and component in numerical order. Keep it limited to 2 pages. Type your final product, without typographical errors.
- 5) Submit your appraisal, after making a copy for yourself, noting the time and date of submission.
- 6) Start preparing next year's appraisal. Continually feed this file with self-evaluative notes throughout the year.

You can use many of the same steps in writing a rebuttal. Your steward can be extremely helpful in writing either a self-appraisal or a rebuttal.

It needs to be pointed out that in the event of a grievance over a negative evaluation, if you do not write a rebuttal, NTEU and your steward are greatly hobbled.

*Self-appraisal guidelines courtesy of "Self-Appraisal Guide II, Mike Peacher, National Vice President.



Grinch Awards

-Ron Woytalewicz, Chapter President

In a growingly heated conversation between an employee and their manager, the employee complained that they felt they were being harassed by the manager. The manager's response was to wiggle her hips, and loudly declare, "Harass, harass, harass."

A metro Detroit area manager wrote a recordation item accusing an employee of making an illegal disclosure and violating a taxpayer's rights when the employee talked to a CID agent about a case—CI had requested the meeting because they were working that taxpayer.

A manager announced that an hour of administrative leave would not be granted for the employees to attend a retirement luncheon for an employee in the next group. The manager refused to reconsider until elevation to the Territory Manager was mentioned. The manager then granted the hour.

Steward in the Spotlight



This issue's Spotlit Steward in **Marianne Gordon**, Steward in Farmington Hills and Detroit, Chapter Secretary, and Director of Training:

I started with Internal Revenue as a Revenue Agent on May 27, 1975, when I was 2 weeks out of college. When I started, there were 24 people in my group, but only 3 were women. Being an Agent is the only job I have had as an adult. As such, I have also coached all phases for Revenue Agents, as well as instructed several computer and Report Generation System classes. I have worked in the Detroit, Southfield, Dearborn, Livonia, and Farmington Hills posts of duty.

I joined NTEU Chapter 24 in 1975 or 1976. I became a steward in 1988. Aside from being steward, Chapter Secretary, and Director of Training, I am also an elected Member of the Board, and was previously Chief Steward of Co-Operative Efforts.

While representing members of Chapter 24, I have received the Steward of the Year Award, and, this year, the "Best Left Hand Hand" Award.

I am a good aunt to my nieces and nephews, and great nieces and nephews, spoiling them terribly.

I plan on retiring in 2007, and yes, there will be a party. After retiring, I plan on traveling with my (older) friends, the other Golden Girls—**Phyllis Vidler, Diane Greiner, and Judy Beard**. I also plan on doing some volunteer work.

Probationary Employees* What Can NTEU Do For You?

Probationary employees are part of the NTEU bargaining unit and have all the rights and protections afforded by the contract. Since they are part of the bargaining unit and are covered by the contract they can and should become members of NTEU.



The “coverage” article of your NTEU agreement lists the employees covered and excluded from coverage by the contract. Probationary employees are not listed among the excluded employees. What this means is that a probationary employee can file a grievance over any matter concerning conditions of employment that are covered by the contract. Examples include:

- Lost overtime opportunities
 - Disciplinary actions
 - Denial of leave
 - Eligibility for career ladder promotions
 - Health and safety concerns
 - Alternative work schedule issues
 - Representation in meetings with agency representatives (investigatory interviews or meetings over changes in working conditions)
- NTEU also can represent probationary employees proposed for some adverse actions (suspensions of 15 days or more or reductions in grade) including taking the case to arbitration. However, NTEU will not represent non-members in their oral reply over these proposals.
- NTEU is constantly working to improve the lives of NTEU members. We fight for fair pay and benefits. Every day we represent all of the em-

ployees in our bargaining units by litigating court cases, lobbying Congress, negotiating contracts or protecting employee rights and contract language in arbitrations. Probationary employees enjoy those protections and benefits as well. Although the law does not provide us with the right to arbitrate the removal of a probationary employee for conduct or performance and severely limits appeal rights to the MSPB that does not mean we are powerless to assist a member for removal. NTEU stewards can determine:

- 1) Is the employee being removed during the probationary period?
- 2) Is the removal motivated by some impermissible reason which would trigger the right to higher review?
- 3) Even if the employee has no special protections, NTEU can still provide some representation. NTEU contracts provide for advance notice as well as ongoing communication with the employee regarding conduct and performance.

*Excerpts from NTEU Steward Update,
“Can We Help Probationary Employees?”,
Written by Dennis Schneider, NTEU
National Counsel

Employee Benefits

Weichert National Real Estate Service

Weichert Relocation Company will provide NTEU members and their families with a “Cash Back” bonus when buying or selling a house, townhouse, or condominium through National Real Estate Services. Members will be eligible to receive up to a \$1000 bonus--\$2000 if buying and selling.

Under the program, whether you are moving across town or the country in United States or Canada:

- Buyers will be provided with a leading real estate broker and agent in their designation area. Services may include a relocation package with local information, area tours and sample listings of homes that may be of interest to you.
- Sellers will be provided with a leading broker and agent in their area who will complete a market analysis of their property to determine how to assist them with pricing and suggestions to market their home to get the best price. All applicable multiple listing systems will be provided.
- Members will receive a 40% discount on interstate household goods shipments.

All services are offered fee-free to NTEU mem-

bers anywhere in the United States, Canada, and Puerto Rico.

To receive a discount, you must call Weichert before you talk to any realtors. Call 1-800-234-2445. See the NTEU Benefits Guide, or ask your steward for more details.

To SURVEY 2006 We Say

The character of Howard Beale in the movie “Network” perhaps gave the best answer to the whole Survey process when he said: “We all know things are bad—worse then bad—they’re crazy.

It’s like everything everywhere is crazy...and all we say is, ‘Please, at least leave us alone...and I won’t say anything. Just leave us alone.’

Well, I’m not going to leave you alone.

I want you to get mad!

I don’t want you to protest. I don’t want you to riot. I don’t want you to write to your Congressman, because I wouldn’t know what to tell you to write...



All I know is that first, you’ve got to get mad. You’ve gotta say, ‘I’m a human being, goddammit! My life has value!’

So, I want you to get up now. I want all of you to get up out of your chairs. I want you to get up right now ... and yell,

‘I’m as mad as hell,
and I’m not going to
take this anymore!’”

The numbers available at the time of this newsletter indicate that less than one third of all IRS employees took the survey this year, sending a resounding message of dissatisfaction to management, and support for NTEU’s effort. Additionally, of the people who did take the survey, a substantial number of them were from Criminal Investigation, a unit that is not represented by NTEU.

Overheard



Territory Manager SB/SE Exam announced their retirement date of August 3rd. A Territory Manager LMSB queried, “What year?”

A revenue officer of 28 years experience changed his advice to Newbie’s from “Get Out Now!” to “Get Out Already!” [i.e., Go find a job somewhere else]

A metro-Detroit Exam manager drove across the city from their POD to another POD to interview someone for a secretarial job. While there, the manager locked their keys in the car. They were able to catch a ride home that day from another employee, then rode their bike to work the following morning, and then hitch-hiked from there to the other POD with an extra set of keys to claim the car.

Think that’s bad? A few days later, this same manager, driving home from a different POD, ran out of gasoline on the freeway. The manager walked the three miles home, got a can of gas, and then walked back to rescue their car. After this incident, a fellow manager suggested that they install a bike rack on their car, and carry a bicycle at all times.

A manager attended a recent Chapter membership meeting—the manager is not a member; someone suggested that if management is going to spy on us, they should at least wear sunglasses and a trench coat.

A Revenue Agent trainee, returning to work after delivering twins, made a field call to a taxpayer, with her two children. While at the taxpayer’s

residence, she asked if the taxpayer's spouse could watch her infants as she conducted the audit. She also asked if it would be all right for her to take the taxpayer's records home to show her husband, an accountant, but not an IRS employee. This Agent is no longer with the service. *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, or Ron at Ronald.E.Woytalewicz@irs.gov.*

Eating



Crow

In the previous newsletter, we stated that we would not hesitate to poke fun at management, rank and file, Chapter 24, or this newsletter. Fair's fair. In Volume 5 of this newsletter, front page and in bold print was the date, "May 2005", instead of 2006. We hope no one recalculated their retirement plans accordingly. Also, in the last volume's Grinch Awards, Ron identified **Charlotte Wiley** as a Group Manager of Collection in the Lansing office; in fact, she was the Exam Group Manager...It tastes like chicken!

We Get Letters

In response to the Volume 5 of [Firebird 24](#) we received:

"I just wanted you to know I LOVE THAT NEWSLETTER."

"Nice Newsletter."

"Good job, keep up the good work."

"Another great job!! Do you think the manager in...will read this and figure out who it is?"

Could This Be the IRS? A Japanese company and an American company decided to have a canoe race on the Missouri River. Both teams

practiced long and hard to reach their peak performance before the race.

On the big day, the Japanese won by a mile. The Americans, very discouraged and depressed, decided to investigate the reason for the crushing defeat. A team made up of senior management was formed to investigate and recommend appropriate action. Their conclusion was the Japanese had eight people rowing and one person steering, while the American team had eight people steering and one person rowing.

So American management hired a consulting company and paid them a large amount of money for a second opinion. They advised that too many people were steering the boat, while not enough people were rowing.

To prevent another loss to the Japanese, the rowing team's management structure was totally reorganized to four steering supervisors, three area steering superintendents and one assistant superintendent manager. They also implemented a new performance system that would give the one person rowing the boat greater incentive to work harder. It was called the "Rowing Team Quality First Program", with meetings, dinners, and free pens for the rower. There was discussion of getting new paddles, canoes and other equipment, extra vacation days for practices and bonuses. The following year the Japanese won by two miles. Humiliated, the American management laid off the rower for poor performance, halted development of a new canoe, sold the paddles and canceled all investments for new equipment. The money saved was distributed to the senior executives as bonuses, and the next year's racing team was outsourced to India.

Update

In the last issue of this newsletter, we reported that Jeri and Linda were going to have a recount of who had the more black shoes this July. Since then, we are reliably informed that Linda has been busily shopping for more. Furthermore, she has thrown down the gauntlet for anyone else, who might have more than Jeri or her. Judy Gleason has stated she would buy the winner lunch.

Also, as inquiring minds wanted to know, Chapter President **Ronald Woytalewicz** did some further investigating of the **Charlotte Wiley** story and reports the following: She was a manager in SPEC (Stakeholder Partnerships, Education, and Communication). She had so many problems in SPEC that they took her out of management and made her an advisor. She still had problems, such as not wanting to talk to any of her

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employees and doing all communication by email. She supposedly messed up some big project in SPEC as an advisor (something about messing up computers for VITA) and that caused her to be fired. She last worked in the Newark, N. J. office and was fired from there. She has been gone almost a year and supposedly has filed an EEO complaint, but no one knows where that stands now.

POD Happenings

--The Alpena office is now vacant of employees. Only the furniture remains.

--From the Clinton Township POD, Steward **Karen Johnson** reports, **Robert Ambrose** retired. Bob was a Revenue Officer since 1982, having military time before that. The luncheon was held at J. Baldwin's.

--The DCC, now known as the ECC (Enterprise Computing Center) is now home to almost all the



occupants of the 24th Floor of the McNamara Building.

Additionally, ACS is planning on hiring 20 new people this year.

--In Farmington Hills, Revenue Officer **Melvin Collins** retired. Melvin had 25 years of service. According to Stewards **Ella Porter** and **Timmierae Sharp-Boyd**, his luncheon was May 25th, and his last day with IRS May 31, 2006.

--The Grand Rapids office might also be moving in the distant future. Steward **Daniel Spears** reports that **Susan Clifton**, Revenue Agent (and member) took Disability Retirement as of May 26, 2006. **Andrea Smith**, MITS, gave birth to Ethan James, 5 pounds 8 ounces, May 18, 2006. Steward **Larry Miller**, Revenue Officer, is out of the office on a teaching detail, beginning May 30, and will not return until July 24th.

--The Mt. Pleasant office currently has 2 employees.

--From Steward **Scott Marshall**: "After many years of service to the public, the IRS office in Muskegon, Michigan is closing May 31, 2006. Six employees are either moving to the Grand

Rapids POD or are going on full-time flexiplace. On May 30th, NTEU provided a lunch of pizza and pop to the employees. I was in attendance as well."

--Pontiac: Revenue Agent **Erwin Cohen** retired after 44 years of service. Collection Group Manager **Judy Gleason** also retired, heading for Florida the next day. Both retirements were in March. Revenue Officer **Lisa Perry** and her husband are expecting their third child in September.

Saginaw Steward **Marsha Pratt** reports the arrival of two new Revenue Officer trainees.

Becky Mietz and **Kenneth Suhr**, "have completed nearly three weeks of orientation and are heading for Phase I June 19, to Cincinnati. They are both enthusiastic about what they have seen and heard about the job so far."

--The Traverse City Post of Duty is planning to move, as are the Ann Arbor, Flint, and Kalamazoo offices.

In Memoriam

Betty Robinson, a Revenue Agent with Employment Tax Group in Detroit, and President of the Association for Improvement of Minorities within the Internal Revenue Service (AIM-IRS), passed away June 2, 2006.

Frank Franchi, recently retired after approximately 35 years of service with IRS, passed away May 29, 2006. Frank had been a Revenue Officer, Group Manager, and Advisor in Special Procedures and Insolvency.

Editor's Note: I was extremely honored to receive the Steward of the Year Award, given to me mostly because of this newsletter. It is almost sinful to be awarded for something I enjoy so much. However, this newsletter is surely not the product of one person. It would not be possible without the encouragement, contributions, ideas, and proofing of many people. To them, I am extremely grateful; the award is theirs, too. I must also thank the tolerance of my group manager. And despite the successes, I can only hope that the newsletter achieves more in the future; that it is of further usefulness and enjoyment to Chapter 24's members, and non-members.



Firebird 24

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