



Firebird 24

Reborn From Our Ashes

NTEU Chapter 24 Newsletter

Volume 19

**** Member Edition ****

January 2010

President's Corner

-Jeri Burger, Chapter President

Membership Meetings

Chapter 24 recently had two very successful (and fun!) membership meetings. The annual Detroit meeting was held on October 21 at The Rooster-tail. We had the outstate meeting in Grand Rapids at the Grand Rapids Brewing Company on October 27. Both meetings had record attendance. It was wonderful to see and talk with so many members. I was particularly excited to see some of our very newest members. Thank you to all who came to the meetings. Our next membership meeting is scheduled for Spring 2010. The date and place have not been yet determined so stay tuned for further details. I hope to see you there!

Membership

Now, I must ask for your help. While I was so glad to see some of our new employees at the membership meetings there are still some that have yet to join us as members of NTEU. It is so vitally important that we all, as members of NTEU, convince the new employees that it is to all of our benefit that they join us as members. The strength of our numbers enables NTEU to benefit us all. Increased pay raises and contract provisions such as Flexiplace, Alternate Work Schedules including Maxiflex are just some examples of NTEU's accomplishments. In essence, nonmembers often benefit from your membership. They are content to accept the benefits that you support by your membership and the dues that you pay. So how can you help? Simply ask the new employees if they have joined. When you are helping them with their work ask them to help you, and help themselves, by joining NTEU. Your steward can help you identify who has already joined. Your steward can also help you with flyers and other information that you can use to convince the nonmembers to join us. **As an added**

incentive, NTEU Chapter 24 will give the new employee \$35.00 as a recruitment bonus and also pay \$35.00 to you for your recruiting efforts. The bonuses are for recruiting any nonmember, not just new employees. Please remember that you should not have these discussions during work hours. Of course, breaks and lunch times are permissible. Thank you for your commitment through your membership to NTEU. And thank you in advance for your efforts in keeping NTEU and our Chapter one of the leaders in membership.

Thanksgiving?

I am sure many of you saw or heard about the Thanksgiving message from John Berry, Director of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM.) Mr. Berry forwarded his message to the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies on November 24. He wrote, "As a mark of gratitude for the service provided by Federal employees, executive branch department and agency heads can use their existing authority to provide an early dismissal (excused absence, with out charge to leave or loss of pay) on the day before Thanksgiving." For IRS this means 59 minutes charged to administrative time at the end of the day. So why didn't many IRS employees working on November 25 have an early dismissal? Unfortunately, the IRS Human Capital Officer, Jim Falcone, told IRS executives, "Questions have arisen regarding the attached Memorandum from John Berry, Director Office of Personnel Management. For the sake of clarification, today is a normal work day and employees should adhere to their normal tours of duty unless they are on approved leave or otherwise on excused absence from work." In all fairness, Mr. Falcone did reverse himself and advised Management that they could grant the 59 minutes – but not until 2:30 in the afternoon. I suspect this reversal was prompted by the contact NTEU National President

Colleen Kelley made to IRS. The question remains, why was his knee jerk reaction to deny the time? Is it any wonder that many IRS employees think that morale is the lowest that it has been in many years? Please know that NTEU Chapter 24 joins Mr. Berry in appreciation for your hard work and your membership in NTEU.

Partnership?

On December 9, 2009, President Obama issued an Executive Order establishing labor-management forums. Those of us that were around in the 1990s remember the days of partnership. The question then, and now, is why would NTEU (as in you, the bargaining unit employees) want to partner with Management?

I see the new labor-management forums as an opportunity to reduce the current adversarial relationship with many areas of IRS Management. In fact, the Executive Order reads: "The purpose of this order is to establish a cooperative and productive form of labor-management relations throughout the executive branch." This is important because the current climate of distrust and combativeness carries a high price. Over the last several years Chapter 24 has been working all time high numbers of grievances and arbitration cases. While we successfully resolve most of these issues, the grievance and arbitration processes involve additional time, money, and emotional burdens.

While working "in partnership" with Management may not always be successful or productive, it will be an opportunity to open the lines of communication. It is to our benefit to resolve workplace problems as quickly as possible. We will still have all the benefits of the National Agreement II; we can still file grievances and arbitrate disputes.

I am hopeful that a new climate of working collaboratively with Management will reduce the number of issues and encourage more expeditious resolutions.

From the Chief

-Karen Johnson, Chief Steward

Here's a brief glimpse of the year in re-view.

As of this writing, we have 80 open grievances and other issues, such as TIGTA interviews, employee tax compliance, etc. In 2009 Chapter 24 stewards resolved 103 open grievances and other issues in contrast to 89 in 2008.

There is no doubt the workload for stewards continues to increase. We attribute this to a number of factors, including stewards who are well trained to recognize contract violations, as well as members who are willing to step forward to protect their rights under our collective bargaining agreement.

Stewards make compelling arguments during the grievance process that result in a high percentage of full or partial remedies on behalf of our members.

Still, sometimes we find it necessary to pursue an issue through to the arbitration process. At present, we have 14 cases invoked for arbitration. The arbitration process is very time consuming and a financial burden. Settlement options are continuously explored throughout the arbitration process right up to the actual date of the hearing. Settlement opportunities enable the parties to reach agreement without having to incur the costs of arbitrating the case or the additional time spent awaiting the arbitrator's decision.

Settlements contain confidentiality statements and are non-precedential; meaning they cannot be used as examples in similar case actions. We can publish only a brief synopsis of the issue.

For example, Chapter 24 successfully settled a grievance over the removal of an employee from an Alternative Work Schedule to the mutual satisfaction of all the parties prior to having the arbitration hearing.

We settled an Article 38 Disciplinary Action involving misuse of a Government computer from a three day suspension to a letter of reprimand.

In an arbitration case invoked over a violation of Article 34, Sick Leave, we settled prior to the hearing to the mutual satisfaction of all parties involved.

An Article 12 Performance Appraisal grievance over a 2008 annual evaluation was settled prior to the arbitration hearing to the mutual contentment of all the sides.

Chapter 24 stewards volunteer their time and effort for more than just grievance representation. They distribute information, educate, coordinate lunch and learns for labor recognition week and to present other issues of importance to the membership, and they represent the Union's position at formal meetings and discussions.

Special recognition goes out to the following stewards for their exceptional representational work on behalf of their members: **Scott Marshall, Dave King, Leonard Hanline, David Hauenstein, Dan Itchue, Greg Wert, Kim Longstreet, Sheree Jones, Reese Scripture.** Special thanks to **Scott Whitehead** for being the go to guy for 7114 survey meetings. Also, to my faithful assistant **Mary Cook** in East Lansing. And lastly, the always extraordinary efforts the stewards in ACS must go through just to get bank time to represent member issues in ACS: **Rhonda Davis, Patricia Buchanan, Meta Hyde** and my newly appointed Assistant Chief Steward for ACS, **Brenda Lowery.** Thank you all so much for your commitment to the Union on behalf of all our members.

Membership Meeting

-Phyllis Vidler

NTEU held its general membership meeting at the Roostertail restaurant on October 21. Over 170 members, retirees, officers and stewards attended the meeting. Our Members came from Lansing, Detroit, Farmington Hills, Pontiac and Ann Arbor.

The guest speaker was **Ken Moffet**, Deputy Director of Negotiations for NTEU. He was the chief spokesperson and advocate at the term bargaining table for our new contract. **Jeri Burger**, our own President was a rotating member of the negotiations team.

Ken spoke about some of the articles that were negotiated where our members might be impacted. He also spoke about the FSIP, which is the Federal Services Impasses Panel. The members of this panel are appointed by the President to hear disputes between the Federal agencies and labor unions.

In addition to our guest speaker, NTEU Chapter 24 held its installation of our officers and board members for the upcoming term. The officers were sworn in by **Thomas Coates**, NTEU Assistant Counsel from the Chicago field office.

As we watched the sun slowly sink into the west, we enjoyed the view and the fellowship with each other.



Newly elected/appointed Chapter 24 Officers (from left to right) Cynthia Harris, Greg Wert, Mary Cook, Barry Begeny, Carol Engelsman, Karen Johnson, Marianne Gordon, Dan Itchue, Jeri Burger, and Henry Morrison. NTEU Assistant Counsel Thomas Coates administered the swearing in of the newly elected & appointed officers and board members.

Ken Moffat,
National
Deputy
Director of
Negotiations



A Successful Trip West for Chapter 24 Board

-Mary Cook, Assistant Chief Steward

On October 29, 2009, nearly 50 of Chapter 24 members attended a membership meeting in Grand Rapids. Members came from Benton Harbor, Portage, Grand Rapids, East Lansing, Jackson, Mt Pleasant, and Traverse City to meet the Board of Directors and hear the latest information. Chapter President **Jeri Burger** addressed concerns regarding credit hours and answered questions about the new Maxiflex provisions of the contract. Chief Steward **Karen Johnson** reported on the chapter's grievance inventory levels; and Vice President Dan Itchue discussed Chapter 24's Legislative Committee and TEPAC.

A collection for the local food bank netted 6 boxes/81 pounds of food and \$60.00 in cash. A 50/50 raffle for TEPAC was conducted and Revenue Agent John Thull was the winner. Other prize winners included **Julie Smith, Kelly Kester, Rebecca Clark, Dawn Falicki, and Kevin Patterson**. A delicious meal was served and chocolate cake was enjoyed by all afterwards.

The attendees received pertinent information and enjoyed themselves. One member asked when we could do it again. Fran, we will be back next year. We hope to see you then.

Employees Reach Out to Soldiers

-Wendy Molloy, Steward

On October 3, 2009, Forward Operating Base Keating in Afghanistan was attacked for over twelve hours. Eight U.S. soldiers lost their lives and there were numerous wounded soldiers as well. The remaining soldiers lost all of their personal belongings. They had no clothing, toiletries, snack items, playing cards, etc.

Rebecca Mayer and Therese Babcock organized an effort in the Farmington Hills POD to send care packages to these stalwart survivors. IRS employees generously donated such items as socks, cookies, candy, snacks, toiletries, OTC medications, magazines, coffee, hot chocolate, as well as other needed items, including monetary donations to help with the cost of shipping. Employees also included notes to the soldiers.

By November 5, 2009, eighteen boxes were sent to Afghanistan. A sincere thank you goes out to the organizers Becky and Therese and to those who donated and assisted.

Reporting Building Problems -Jeri Burger, Chapter President

The absolute best way to have building problems recognized and fixed is to file ERC tickets. I know it sounds like a pain, but the process is very easy. From the upper right hand corner of the Intranet home page click on **OS Get Ser-vices**. Then click on **My Workplace**. Most reports will then be filed under the first choice, **Building Maintenance and Service**. Safety concerns should be reported under **Safety and Accident Reporting**.

All employees can access and report any build-ing problem such as temperature problems, cleaning issues, restroom malfunctions, or leak-ing windows through ERC. You may think that the CR or a manager will have taken care of a problem – but many times it has not been repor-ted. The ERC system creates a ticket that be-comes a written record of a problem. It is some-one’s job to follow up with every ERC ticket, so it makes it harder to slip through the cracks. It is also noted if more than one person files a ticket or if one person files multiple tickets. I encou-rage you to speak up about your workplace pro-blems by using ERC. I have tried it and it works!

GRINCH



AWARDS

Ring the Bell and Run

-Karen Johnson, Chief Steward

Chapter 24 members in Insolvency had their Christmas stolen by the Grinch.

On December 14, 2009, members of Detroit insolvency were presented with proposed disciplinary suspension letters ranging from 1 to 3 days by Territory Manager **Peter Ducat**, who promptly retired on December 31, 2009. How's that for a parting Christmas present?

Turkey Draw

As we do every year, Chapter 24 Stewards held their annual holiday Turkey Draw to award “tur-keys” (gift cards) to some of our members. Win-ners this year included: **Debra A Johnson, Helaine Morris-White, Donna Ricks, and Audrey Waugh** in ACS, **Alan Borucki and Lela Tennille-Ingersoll** in Ann Arbor, **Nancy Hollandsworth, Donna Peczynski, and Jeffery Wiese** in the Farmington Hills POD, **Tonya Etheridge**

and **Carol Kausch** in Pontiac, **Alex Adkins, Alana Bailey, Toni Cooley, Angelo Fracassa, Darlene Jackson, Jennifer Junior, Rose Knight, Elizabeth Pawlicki, John Stamey, Deaira Tooks, and Lance C. Williams** in Detroit, **Elizabeth (Liz) Munger** at LMSB-ECC, **Carol Briney** in Benton Harbor, **Bethany Rusch and Mary Rule** in Flint, **Patrice Sharick** in Kalamazoo, **La Terra Scott Comer and Deanna Wiltz** in Grand Rapids, **Kendra Mathis** in East Lansing, **Cary Dumas** in Counsel, **Debora Maniko** in Marquette, **Jeffrey Long and Laurel Tomlinson** in Saginaw, **Deborah Morgan** in Traverse City, **Deborah Cleveland** in EPEO, **Cassandra McDonald** in EUES, **Sarbia Murray** in SEP, **Robert Patterson** in TAC, **Mary Fielding and Armando Abreu** in TAS, **Kendra Mathis** in East Lansing, **Laura Buus, Fred Gavin, Charmaine Labadie, Kathie Henderson, Linda Kramer, and Dinetta Johnson** in Appeals, and **Kathy Stutzner** in Clinton Twp. Congratulations to all winners.

Annual Stan Lotzoff Memorial Golf Outing -Greg T. Wert, Steward & Board Member



The Stan Lotzoff Memorial Golf outing was held at Pontiac Country Club on September 18, 2009. 39 golfers raised \$335.00 for cancer research which was donated to U of M Hospital in Stan’s name (including both halves of the 50/50 raffle proceeds which were donated).

Lauren Lotzoff represented the Lotzoff family while several other friends and guests assembled together in the clubhouse. Chapter 24 thanks everyone for participating and reminds you to mark your calendar for next year’s event, tenta-tively for the second Friday in September 2010. The weather was perfect and everyone was glad for the return after a one year hiatus.

Winners included: Flight A-**Doug Williams**, Flight B-**Bob Dawbenko**, Flight C-Martha Mol-nar, Flight D-Warren Ingersoll. Long Drives-**Aaron Inman & Greg T. Wert**, Closest to the Pin-**Diane Greiner, Vera Williams, Joe Ville-neuve, & Brian Tucker** (guest).

In My Opinion

What Ails Collection?



I recently had dinner with an IRS friend of 20 years. She is now a program manager in MITS. She previously held many positions in Collection, including revenue officer. Inevitably talk drifted to retirement. I intend to retire the moment I am eligible, as most of my fellow revenue officers feel and do. She, conversely, while envying the relative nearness of my pending retirement, truly likes her job and does not, at this time, intend to retire the moment she can. It seems that so many other employees outside of Collection feel the same way. They find purpose and satisfaction in what they are doing, and while bowing to the inevitability of moving on in their lives, don't feel the need to trample over anyone to get out the door; the Agency thereby reaps the continued benefits of their knowledge and experience.

So what is so different about Collection? I can't speak to retirements in ACS—does anyone survive there long enough to retire?—but the revenue officer who stays beyond their retirement eligibility date is as rare as an honest politician. From my own perspective, it isn't so much dealing with taxpayers or their representatives; although I do think that the POAs need to revise their playbook as I've been hearing the same sorry, tired excuses for 30 years. What makes me so yearn for retirement is the Agency itself. Impossible inventories, unreasonable unachievable expectations and deadlines, truckling self-serving self-aggrandizing managers, and modifying my actions to serve the computer are the things that keep me awake at night. The revenue officer is treated as the problem; not the taxpayer, their representative, or an unworkable system. While we have heard over the years many assurances and reassurances from upper management and the National Office of how they are going to reform this or that to improve working conditions, little is ever done to truly make the job of the revenue officer easier; ROs are simply made to modify their behavior, their work efforts, and their lives to adjust to these so-called improvements. (And example of this is Ferris Fink in a "town hall meeting" in Pontiac last spring assuring attendees that the Agency would negotiate with NTEU over revenue officer inventory levels; also within 90 days address problems regarding Embedded Quality; the 90 days have come and gone twice over without a word, nor any word on inventory levels.)

Is there a solution? Yes. From the top down, management needs to recognize that the job of revenue

officer is truly that proverbial dirty, thankless job; yet ultimately the buck stops with the revenue officer. The RO is the soldier in the trenches taking fire and returning it. And to quote Napoleon: "There are no bad soldiers, only bad officers." There are the few enlightened individuals to the contrary, but those in management who think ROs indolent or incompetent or unworthy of their respect should be eliminated; either put back in the field as revenue officers (oh no! anything but that!) or removed from the Service entirely. Management should seek real solutions from honest, forthright, dedicated revenue officers, not sycophants seeking promotion who will always spew forth the company line. The Agency should set aside the stick and embrace the carrot. ROs should be treated as cherished professionals. Programs should be made to work around the needs of the revenue officer, not revenue officers around the limitations of the latest program. *But most importantly, Collection should stress people first, mission second, technology third.* **That's the difference between Leadership and simply being a manager or automaton.**

Could it happen? Probably not. Bureaucracies by their nature are impervious to change except in the greatest of crises. Yet to borrow from the late Senator Edward Kennedy's eulogy of his assassinated brother, Robert: "Some men see things as they are and ask 'why'. I dream of things that might have been and ask 'why not'."

Sound Off?

We have decided to cancel the "Sound Off" telephone line. Unfortunately, there has been almost no response over the past few years. Nevertheless, if you have an opinion you wish to express, Chapter 24 and the Firebird invite you to contact your steward, or call the main chapter number at (313) 628-3652.



Firebird 24

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