**WEEK IN ACTION!**

Weekly News From Your Union ~ November 17, 2014 – November 21, 2014

 ***WIA* Not Publishing Next Week!**

Due to the short Thanksgiving holiday week, *Week In Action* will not publish next week. Your *WIA* team wishes you and your family a very happy and safe holiday.

For all the latest VSEA news, members can always visit your union’s website ([www.vsea.org](http://www.vsea.org)) or VSEA’s Facebook page (insert link)

**Clarification On Management Memo About Friday Thanksgiving Holiday**

Several VSEA Non-Management Unit members forwarded emails to headquarters that they received this week from management. The emails all reference the State’s decision to close offices on the Friday after Thanksgiving. To the credit of the NMU members who flagged the email, each knew that their Unit’s Bargaining Team had, in fact, negotiated the holiday.

Not a huge deal, but *WIA* was asked to provide clarification.

**VSEA Members In Certain Jobs Asked To Complete “Stressful Jobs” Survey**

In advance of the upcoming legislative session, VSEA members in the following agencies, departments and job classes are being urged to complete a “stressful jobs” survey:

* DOC Workers;
* DCF Social Workers;
* DPS Dispatchers;
* Vermont Veterans’ Home Workers; and
* Vermont Psychiatric Care Center Direct Care Workers.

The survey was prompted by testimony lawmakers heard last year from a group of VSEA DPS dispatchers. The dispatchers were testifying, in part, about the high level of job-related stress they must deal with on an almost daily basis and the adverse impact it can sometimes have on their health and their family. In response, lawmakers asked if other state employees are dealing with equally high stress levels in their daily jobs, so to better determine that fact, they directed Human Resources (with VSEA assistance) to issue a survey and compile a report that includes worker recommendations on how to alleviate stress.

If you’re a VSEA member whose job is included in the list above, you can find the survey by [clicking here](http://bit.ly/1vpoTrm).

To submit your ideas to alleviate stress, [please click here](https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/6GTVXFM) and use the space provided to list your recommendations.

Thanks in advance for participating. Your input is valued and appreciated.

To view survey results to date, please click here

**Want To Help VSEA Put A Face To Job Stress?**

If you’re a VSEA member who is interested in helping educate lawmakers in the upcoming session about the stress level you are experiencing while at work, please contact VSEA Legislative Specialist Anne Accettella at 223-5247 or by email at aaccettella@vsea.org.

“It’s very helpful for VSEA to be able to put a face on this issue to lawmakers,” says Accettella. “Lawmakers really do appreciate hearing directly from frontline workers, and they want your input.”

**Board Of Trustees Seeks To Fill Vacant NMU Seat**

VSEA sent an email this week to all VSEA members belonging to the union’s Non-Management Unit, seeking a member interested in filling the open NMU seat on VSEA’s Board of Trustees.

In case you missed it, the email read:

**Due to a resignation, the VSEA Non-Management Unit seat has become open on the VSEA Board of Trustees.** Because the term of this position expires within a year (September 30, 2015), the VSEA Board will appoint a representative to the seat (VSEA Bylaw 1 Section 6), as opposed to conducting an election.

**If you are a member of the Non-Management Unit, in good standing and are interested in nominating yourself to be considered for appointment by the VSEA Board of Trustees, please send a letter of interest to VSEA ERN Chair Mary Poulos no later than 4:00 p.m., Friday, December 5. Her contact info is at end of this letter.**

Role of the VSEA Trustee:

* The VSEA Board of Trustees manages the internal affairs of the union and ensures that the policies of VSEA are followed. It reviews and approves the union’s budget for submission to the membership, and it reviews committee reports and recommends action by the Council and members. The Board also sets policy for VSEA; and
* The Board meets monthly and Trustees are expected to attend all the meetings as well as all quarterly Council meetings and the VSEA Annual Meeting. Release time from work is authorized under the unit collective bargaining contract. Each Trustee is also assigned to at least one VSEA Chapter to attend meetings and provide any necessary assistance.

If you have questions regarding the VSEA NMU Trustee appointment, please contact Mary Poulos at MPoulos@VSEA.ORG.

The deadline date to submit your name for appointment to be VSEA Non-Management Unit Trustee is 4:00 p.m., Friday December 5, 2014. Send your letter of interest to:

**VSEA Board of Trustees**
c/o Mary Poulos
155 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05602

**Veterans’ Home Workers Ready To Defend Their Service—Again**

New year, new fight for workers at the Vermont Veterans’ Home (VVH) in Bennington.

Last week, State officials testified to lawmakers in Montpelier about the Home’s long-term financing challenges, painting a rather bleak picture and using claims of “overstaffing” as one of the main reasons for VVH’s ongoing budget deficits. A report was also distributed, and it spelled out the financial pressures and also suggested several possible ways to bring down costs; some of which are causing VVH frontline workers to once again have to prepare to defend the vital service they provide to Vermont veterans.

“The simple truth here is that VSEA members do not run the Vets’ Home, and they don’t make the staffing decisions, but here they are, once again, finding themselves unfortunately being used as the primary reason for the VVH having to search again for money,” VSEA President Shelley Martin told *WIA*. “Talking with frontline workers at the Home, it’s clear they believe that staffing levels are in line with what constitutes good patient and resident care. They believe our Vermont veterans deserve safe staffing levels and the proper number of licensed beds to adequately serve this very deserving population. They would actually like a thorough review of some of the Board and management decisions they believe helped contribute to the Home’s budget woes, but, not surprisingly, that’s not a recommendation. As I said, VVH frontline workers believe strongly in the service they provide and they will fight tooth and nail not to see it denigrated any further. Vermont vets deserve the best care we can give them and a proper number of dedicated care providers.”

Some of the talking points VVH workers will be championing in the coming weeks and months include:

* Frontline VVH workers strongly support making permanent General Fund commitment to the long-term care of Vermont veterans;
* Frontline VVH workers support the state investing resources in a marketing plan for VVH;
* Frontline VVH workers oppose a reduction in the number of licensed beds;
* Frontline VVH workers oppose a reduction in the number of frontline, direct-care providers; and
* Frontline VVH workers oppose further harming southern Vermont’s economy by cutting services and jobs.

Workers are also prepared to remind that VVH staff was just recognized by patients, residents and their families for providing a level of care that is near the top in the nation. They will also share the findings

of the State’s own hired consultant, Health Care Management Associates, which reported that demand to come to the Home is high and that VVH’s market is “expandable.”

“VSEA will be standing with our frontline Vets’ Home workers to ensure their voices are heard, not only at the State House, but all across Vermont,” adds Martin.

**Brattleboro Chapter Participating In Annual “Toys For Kids” Drive. Toy Donations Urged!**

This holiday season, VSEA’s Brattleboro Chapter is volunteering to help collect “Toys for Kids.”

VSEA members and other state employees are invited to stop by the Brattleboro State Office Building at 232 Main Street any time to drop off your new, unwrapped toy donations. Once everything is collected, VSEA members will deliver the donated toys to “Toys for Kids” at noon on Saturday, December 13. If you’re unable to drop off at the State Office Building, your toys can also be donated at the Brattleboro Price Chopper’s parking lot on December 13, between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.

“We’re pleased to be helping this very worthwhile organization fulfill its mission, which is simply to give Brattleboro families in need a little something to put under the tree for their kids at Christmas,” says Brattleboro Chapter President Robin Rieske.

Brattleboro’s annual “Toys for Kids” drive is sponsered by the Windham County Sheriff’s Department, the Brattleboro Detachment and Auxiliary Unit 798 of the Marine Corps League.

For more information, or to volunteer fto help with this event, please contact Chapter President Robin Rieske at (802) 275-7232.

**VSEA Board Of Trustees Holds Two-Day Meeting/Training**

The VSEA Board of Trustees met on November 13 and 14 in Montpelier to conduct the union’s business and also spend time doing some training on effective communication and strategic plan development.

“This was a really great opportunity for the Board to come together for two solid days of strategic planning and brainstorming around how to make VSEA stronger and more effective and visible in 2015,” says VSEA President Shelley Martin. “This included discussions about member representation, member recruitment, the role of stewards and elected officials, politics and legislation and many other things. I think we all emerged energized and ready to work together to advance VSEA even further.”

**NEK/St. Johnsbury Chapter Again Conducting “Santa Fund” Toy Drive!**

VSEA’s NEK/St. Johnsbury Chapter is once again conducting a “Santa Fund” toy drive this holiday season, and Chapter officers are asking workers in state offices throughout the region to please place a toy collection box at your worksite. Chapter members are then urged to donate a toy(s) at your worksite.

The deadline to collect toys is December 12, 2104. To arrange for someone to pick up your office’s donations, please contact NEK/St. Johnsbury Chapter President Dianne Rivers at 626-6223.

Chapter officers thank you in advance for your help.

**Renewed FairPoint Talks End Abruptly**
In an effort to restart stalled negotiations, FairPoint workers’ union representatives returned to the bargaining table with management on November 18, but it was soon clear that management was unprepared to budge from its rigid stance and the talks ended just as quickly as they started, immediately returning striking FairPoint workers to the picket lines.

Attempting to turn up the heat on management, FairPoint workers this week sent an email to all supporters, asking for help to combat management’s efforts to convince the public and decision makers that the workers’ strike is having little to no impact on service. Striking FairPoint workers explain that they know full well there has been adverse impact, and they are urging VSEA members who use FairPoint—and who are dissatisfied with their service—to let your elected officials and state regulators know. If you have family or friends experiencing service delay or some other service issue, ask them to make their voice heard too.

Please call or email the appropriate agencies in your state (see below) AND complete this form on the IBEW/CWA workers’ website, [http://fairnessatfairpoint.com/customerreportform/](http://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=http%3A%2F%2Ffairnessatfairpoint.com%2Fcustomerreportform%2F&h=FAQFoNm41&s=1)

VERMONT

Public Service Department: 800-622-4496

Public Advocacy Division: 802-828-4010 or consumer@state.vt.us

Governor's Office: 802-828-3333

MAINE

Public Utilities Commission: 800-452-4699 or maine.puc@maine.gov

Public Advocate: 207-287-2445 or opa@maine.gov

Governor's Office: 207-287-3531

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Office of Consumer Advocate: 603-271-1172 or oca@oca.nh.gov

Public Utilities Commission: 603-271-2431 or [www.puc.nh.gov/ConsumerAffairsForms/complaintfrm.aspx](http://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.puc.nh.gov%2FConsumerAffairsForms%2Fcomplaintfrm.aspx&h=BAQF-nJx4&s=1)

Governor's Office: 603-271-2121 or [www.egov.nh.gov/consumercomplaint/](http://www.egov.nh.gov/consumercomplaint/)

If you have questions or need additional information, please respond to this email, FairnessAtFairPoint@[gmail.com.](http://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=http%3A%2F%2Fgmail.com%2F&h=aAQEQRsic&s=1)

**Donate Today To Striking Workers’ Fund**

VSEA members who would like to donate individually to striking FairPoint workers can send your check, made payable to the:

*IBEW-CWA Solidarity Fund*
21 Gabriel Drive
Augusta, ME 04330

To make a credit card donation, please [click here.](http://www.gofundme.com/IBEW-CWA-Strike-Relief)

**Reminder: Retirees’ Chapter Holding Special Meeting On Dec. 11 To Select Trustee For Windham & Windsor Counties**The VSEA Retirees’ Committee is actively searching for a trustee to represent Windham and Windsor Counties. If you’re a current dues-paying retiree who resides in Windham or Windsor Counties, and you’re interested in running for this trustee seat, please send a letter of interest by 4:30 p.m., Wednesday, December 10, to VSEA RC President Maclay at jmaclay@vsea.org. Chapter officials will then hold a special meeting on December 11 to name a new Windham and Windsor trustee. The meeting begins at 9:30 a.m.

As always, if you are a lifetime member of VSEA and are interested in joining the VSEA Retirees’ Chapter, please send your $10 dues check to VSEA HQ or bring this payment to the special Chapter meeting on December 11.

**{PUT IN SIDEBAR}**

**Benefits Advisory Committee Chair Promotes Pre-Tax Health Care Premium Payments & Flex Spending Accounts!**

VSEA Benefits Advisory Chair Dave Bellini asked *WIA* to remind members that roughly 1,000 state employees are currently paying their health insurance premiums with after-tax dollars. He says that these members could save money by switching to a “premium reduction plan,” or a pre-tax plan.

“We all just found out we’ll be paying an additional 18 percent on our premiums, and there are a couple of ways for VSEA members to bring the payment down a little,” explains Bellini. “First, if you’re paying your premium with after-tax dollars right now, you can reduce the impact of the rate hike a little by switching to a pre-tax plan.”

To pay your insurance premiums on a pre-tax basis, state employees can fill out and submit this form:

<http://humanresources.vermont.gov/sites/dhr/files/Documents/Benefits/DHR-Health_Benefits_Pretax_Form_2013.pdf>

Bellini is also suggesting that more members join the 20% of state employees who are currently taking advantage of Flex-Spending Accounts. These accounts allow an employee to pay healthcare, vision and dental deductibles and copays with pre-tax income. Bellini recommends that state employees who anticipate regular copays or other medical expenses should utilize flex spending accounts to pay these out-of-pocket costs on a pre-tax basis. You can start a Flex Spending Account using this form:

<http://humanresources.vermont.gov/sites/dhr/files/Documents/Benefits/DHR-FSA_Enrollmet_Form_2014.pdf>

**VSEA Union Representatives’ New Territories, As Of Nov. 17!**

VSEA Director of Field Services Gretchen Naylor recently announced a reshuffling of territories and agency/department assignments for VSEA Union Representatives. The new assignments officially begin on Monday, November 17, so please consult the list below to learn who your Union Representative is.

New Territories/Agencies/Departments

**John Brabant**: St. Albans, Grand Isle, St. Johnsbury, White River Junction, Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital (VPCH), Middlesex Residential Facility, Lyndon State College, Vermont Technical College
**Kelly Burns** : Chittenden, Lamoille, Johnson State College
**Dave Van Deusen**: Statewide Agency of Transportation (AOT), Addison, Rutland, Castleton State College
**Bob South**: Brattleboro, Springfield, Newport, Island Pond
**Brian Morse**: Bennington, all supervisors, all of Judiciary
**Josh Massey**: Barre, Waterbury, Central Vermont (except AOT)

**No Longer Recognizing Mail Sent To VSEA HQ Using Defunct P.O. Box Number

Stewards Urged To Review Cards**

VSEA is issuing an alert to members NOT to use P.O. Box 518 when sending mail or other correspondence to VSEA headquarters in Montpelier. The Post Office is no longer forwarding mail sent to VSEA with the P.O. Box number. VSEA Stewards and other leaders are being asked to review any cards or literature you may be passing out in worksites to ensure the address printed on the material does not include the now defunct P.O. Box number.

As a reminder, VSEA’s new and correct mailing address is:

VSEA HQ
155 State St.
Montpelier, VT 05602

**Upcoming Meetings/Events/Holidays:**

**November 27 & 28**

Thanksgiving Day Holiday

Most State Offices & VSEA Closed

**December 1**Benefits Advisory Committee Meeting
VSEA HQ
Montpelier

2:30 p.m.

**December 2**

Child & Elder Care Committee Meeting

VSEA HQ

Montpelier
9:30 p.m.

**December 3**

Legislative Committee Meeting

Fletcher Free Library

Burlington

9:30 a.m.

**December 3**

**United Staff/VSEA Solidarity Rally**

***See Post In* WIA**

**Royall Tyler Theater**

**9:30 a.m.**