



## **WEEK IN ACTION!**

Weekly News From Your Union ~ December 15, 2014 – December 19, 2014

### **VSEA Members Wanted For Judicial Board!**

VSEA President Shelley Martin asked *WIA* to include a solicitation to members who might be interested in serving on the union's Judicial Board. Martin notes that, historically, members who serve on this Board are not activists, stewards, officials or Council or Board of Trustees' members.

"In this rare case, the less involvement you have with VSEA, the better suited you are to serve in this role," explains Martin. "We need members who can be objective."

VSEA's Judicial Board is charged with ensuring elected and appointed union officials' compliance with Unit and Master Articles, Bylaws and adopted policies. The Judicial Board is also charged with ensuring that all Unit, Chapter, and VSEA elected and appointed officials and members shall act in a manner consistent with the purposes and policies of the VSEA, and with the goals and objectives of the union and its Units and Chapters, and not act in a way that is detrimental to the purposes of the VSEA as specified in Article 2 of these Articles of Association.

The Judicial Board consists of VSEA members, who are appointed by the VSEA President. If you would interested in submitting your name for consideration, please send your letter of interest to VSEA President Shelley Martin no later than Friday, January 30, 2015. The mailing address is 155 State Street, Montpelier, Vermont 05602.

### **Message From President About UVM Organizing Drive**

This week, United Staff members working at UVM went to the polls and cast their vote for or against joining our union. After all the ballots were counted by representatives of the Vermont Labor Relations Board, workers unfortunately rejected joining VSEA, but they only did so by a slim 33-vote margin. That's right...303 UVM clerical, technical and specialized workers wanted VSEA representation, but 336 did not.

Because the vote was so close, and because the 303 workers who want union representation deserve VSEA's due diligence, we'll be using the 10-day period VSEA is afforded by law to explore whether or not there are any objections to the vote to be made. If we find we have options, we will exercise them.

I want to express my thanks to the hundreds of United Staff members who went to the polls this week to cast a vote to empower yourselves and improve your livelihoods. Even if this election vote does end up certified as is, you have demonstrated great courage and I'm confident the bonds built during this campaign will last and only grow stronger.

Thank you also to VSEA's talented team of organizers at UVM. Organizing workers requires a lot of personal sacrifice, dedication, long hours and the ability to adapt fast in what can

sometimes be a quickly changing environment. Your efforts are appreciated, and I know there are 303 workers at UVM who appreciate them even more.

## **VSEA Council Learns About VSEA “Fight Back” Campaign**

It was a full house at the VSEA Council meeting on December 16 at the Capital Plaza Hotel in Montpelier. VSEA First Vice President and Council Meeting Chair Michelle Salvador opened the meeting by swearing in 21 new Council members; a number not seen in a while and a good sign that VSEA member involvement is on the rise.

A highlight of the day’s meeting was an initial discussion with Council members about their willingness to engage in a “Fight Back” campaign to solicit community support for public services and the Vermonters who provide them and to call for an end to cuts. Council members were also asked to participate in a statewide effort to promote several revenue-generating ideas that VSEA Policy Analyst Adam Norton explained to the Council. A copy of Adam’s PowerPoint on the FY16 budget and the challenges facing Vermont’s working families can be found by **clicking here**.

Throughout the meeting, some Council members were already busy participating in the Fight Back campaign, phoning and writing lawmakers, posting anti-cuts messages on their local Front Porch Forum page and recording short video snippets about the ramifications of cuts to state services.

Just before lunch, Council members listened to a budget update from Treasurer Sheila Coniff and then asked questions about certain line items. The Council then broke for lunch.

After lunch, Council members took time to review, amend and approve the VSEA Legislative Committee’s 2015 legislative agenda, which includes issues like proper staffing levels, seeking alternatives to service and job cuts, protecting the Vets’ Home and its workers, curtailing privatization, funding our State Colleges, grievance arbitration, stopping the abuse of temps and several other items. Prior to the new year, VSEA will be sending all members an electronic *VOICE* that will include the union’s full legislative agenda and other stories of interest to VSEA members wanting to know more about how to get involved with your union politically and legislatively.

Council members then paused to welcome CWA Local 1400 members Ned O'Brien and Mike O'Day; two representatives of striking FairPoint workers, who updated the crowd about their dispute and urged VSEA members to continue dropping by the picket lines and to please donate if possible to help some of the striking workers’ families who are struggling to make ends meet. The two got a lot of love from the Council and they received a healthy donation from a raffle held throughout the meeting. The raffle winner selflessly donated his winnings back to the strikers.

The meeting wrapped with a report from the VSEA Building Committee and a solicitation for names to be considered for a seat on the union’s Judicial Board (see separate *WIA* entry).

The next Council meeting is scheduled for February 17, 2015.

## **Council Members Record Short Anti-Cuts Video**

At this week's Council meeting, a handful of members agreed to videotape messages about the impact of service and job cuts, what employees have been doing to help and the need for the State and lawmakers to explore other options, such as generating new revenue. To view the video, **please click here**. Once viewed, please share the link with your family, friends and other supporters of state employees and the quality services we provide.

## **Despite Strong Protests By VSEA & Vets' Groups, Vermont Veterans' Home Board Votes To Cut Beds**

VSEA members working at the Vermont Veterans' Home (VVH) were very discouraged to learn that the facility's governing Board voted on December 17 to cut the number of certified beds at the Home from 171 to 130. The Board's vote was nearly unanimous, except for a lone "no" vote cast by VVH employee representative and VSEA member Harry "Jaime" Percey.

Percey rose prior to the vote and said the following: "As an initial matter, the workers at the Vermont Veterans' Home strongly support a permanent general fund commitment to the care of Vermont's veterans and believe that our state has an obligation to fulfill the promise that was made to the men and women who fight for our country."

VVH employee, VSEA Board member and newly elected House Representative Rachael Fields echoed Percey in remarks she provided to the press following the decision to scrap beds.

"We think the state should be prioritizing our state's heroes," Fields told the *Rutland Herald*, adding that a study released last year "clearly states that there's a growing need for veterans' home beds."

At the meeting, Fields and Percey were joined in opposition to reducing the number of beds by the representatives of several veterans groups.

John Miner, who runs a veterans outreach program on the grounds of the Home, told the *Rutland Herald* that he planned to reach out to his own organization, the Vermont chapter of the Vietnam Veterans of America, and other veterans organization to bring a protest to Montpelier. "We're tired. We're tired. We're old, and we're tired, and we're sick of having to fight every (expletive) day for our rights to be taken care of, for our rights that we were promised," he said.

And from the *Bennington Banner*: "Don Keelan, of Arlington, a veteran and supporter of the Veterans' Home, objected strongly to cutting back the number of licensed beds. He reminded the trustees that, although they were appointed by the governor, their loyalty must be to the Home. The vote should be postponed, he said, because the trustees have received two state-mandated reports in the past two years 'that are diametrically opposed.' The first report, known as the Pulling Report, said there could be a need for hundreds of more beds to accommodate Vermont veterans and their spouses and Gold Star parents. Yet the present report urges decreasing the number of available beds, indicating that the demand is not there for more. The trustees should hire an expert in the field to answer such questions as how many beds would be needed in the future to serve Vermont veterans. 'Having gotten that number from an expert, then determine how does the Vermont Veterans' Home promote and market its services to meet such demand.' As a veteran of the Marine Corps, I can speak I think on behalf of my fellow Vermont veterans.

Don't rely on the Legislature to treat the Vermont Veterans' Home as an orphan facility of the state. And don't allow yourselves to succumb to the whims of certain legislators who are hell-bent on balancing the state budget on the backs of our veterans and their caregivers."

One small positive for VSEA members coming out of yesterday's VVH Board meeting was a statement by the Home's Administrator Melissa Jackson that she did not foresee having to cut direct-care workers as a result of reducing the number of beds. She said the bed cuts would mean 13 currently open positions won't be filled, but she added, "I do not want to cut any direct-care positions; there may be some ancillary staff that we can look at."

### **VSEA Goes To Supreme Court To Prevent Raid**

On Thursday, December 18, Acting VSEA General Counsel Alfred Gordon O'Connell represented the union at the Vermont Supreme Court. The case was an appeal from a Vermont Labor Relation's Board decision that denied an attempt by the New England Police Benevolent Association (NEPBA) to hold a representation election for roughly 75 VSEA law enforcement members. The Labor Board ruled that the NEPBA had failed to file a representation petition during the statutorily set open period in 2013, so therefore their petition should be dismissed. General Counsel Gordon O'Connell articulately informed the Justices of the existing Vermont law, as well as provided an important history lesson on foundational labor law issues, while requesting that the Supreme Court affirm the Labor Board's earlier ruling. While normally squaring off against one another, this case presented an opportunity for the State of Vermont, through Assistant Attorney General Naomi Sheffield, to sit at the same table as General Counsel Gordon O'Connell. This is because the State wanted to uphold the contract it signed with VSEA.

### **Middlebury VSEA Members Make Holiday Brighter For Families In Need**

Congratulations and thanks to VSEA members working at the Middlebury Courthouse. For the third year running, workers at the courthouse conducted a holiday fundraising drive, collecting money to donate to area families in need. Today, VSEA member Bill Capasso delivered the workers' \$335 donation to the United Way, which is targeting the money to help families at the Winter Shelter at Charter House in Middlebury.

"I really appreciate all the donations from VSEA members and others working here," said Capasso. "This was our best year yet, and we hope to do even better next year. It feels really great to be helping families who need it, especially at this time of the year."

Pictured here (center, red shirt) is Capasso and some of the courthouse workers who are helping make the holiday brighter for area residents in need.

### **Special "Holidarity" Dinner To Support Striking FairPoint Workers**

VSEA is urging members in Chittenden County to attend a special "Holidarity" dinner on Sunday, December 21, to support striking FairPoint workers and their families. Proceeds from the benefit will go to the workers' strike fund and to purchase gifts for the children of striking workers. Food will be provided by the People's Kitchen, with local food being donated by area farmers and businesses. Great music and holiday cookie decorating and other fun activities for kids. The benefit is from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. in the cafeteria of the Sustainability Academy at Lawrence Barnes Elementary School, 123 North Street, Burlington.

Following the Holidarity event, people are welcome to come to Higher Ground ballroom from 6:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. for another FairPoint benefit. The Contois School of Music Band from Essex will be playing their Holiday Party/Concert, where they will be rocking with pop, jazz, and classic rock tunes along with some Christmas arrangements. A portion of the night's ticket proceeds will go to the workers' strike fund. Tickets are \$10 on the Higher Ground website or \$12 at the door.

As always, you can donate online to help striking workers at: <http://fairnessatfairpoint.com/ibew-cwa-strike-relief-fund/>

## **VSEA & AOT Team Up To Promote Jobs**

A few months back, the VSEA side of the AOT Labor/Management Committee agreed to jointly work with AOT to help promote Vermont highway jobs to a greater audience. To help, VSEA agreed to lend its name to an AOT advertising campaign to promote the highlights of AOT work, including "enjoying the great benefits and opportunities [afforded you] under a solid union contract." To date, the ad has been published in the 2015 Vermont Fish & Wildlife Regulations, in the Auto Hunter publication and in Green Mountain Trading Post.

## **NMU Looking To Fill Vacancy**

VSEA Non-Management Unit Chairperson Bob Stone is still actively looking to find a new NMU Bargaining Team Clerk.

VSEA NMU members interested in the Clerk position are asked to send a letter of interest to:

### **Bob Stone**

NMU Chairperson

c/o VSEA

155 State St.

Montpelier, VT 05602

You can also send an email of interest to [rstone@vsea.org](mailto:rstone@vsea.org)

## **VSEA App Now Has Updated Contracts**

Just a note that the VSEA's App has now been updated to include all the new contracts ratified this year by VSEA's Bargaining Teams. VSEA App users can also find: steward, officer and staff contact information; a calendar of events; and labor news from Vermont and around the globe.

Download the VSEAUnite App for Your Smartphone!

Union Contact Info  
Steward Trainings  
VSEA Contracts  
Calendar and Events  
News Feed  
and More!

## **VSEA Advantage Program Participant Offering Deal To New Members**

The Fusion Yoga Studio in Montpelier is offering a \$30 for 30 days discount to new members who sign up for yoga sessions. For more information, contact:

Fusion Yoga Studio  
75 Main Street  
Montpelier  
Ground floor, rear entrance (behind Boutique No. 9)  
Phone: 802-272-8923  
General Questions Email: [Yoga@FusionStudio.org](mailto:Yoga@FusionStudio.org)  
Membership Sign Up Email: [Yogainfo@FusionStudio.org](mailto:Yogainfo@FusionStudio.org)

## **Upcoming Meetings/Events/Holidays:**

### **December 25**

Christmas Day Holiday  
Most State Offices & VSEA Closed

### **December 26**

Day After Christmas Day Holiday  
*Negotiated By VSEA's NMU*  
Most State Offices & VSEA Closed