



WEEK IN ACTION!

Weekly News From Your Union ~ January 19, 2014 – January 23, 2015

State Trooper Lieutenant Is First Vermont Woman Promoted To Captain

VSEA is sending big congratulations to 16-year state employee and VSEA member Ingrid Jonas on being the first Vermont woman *ever* promoted to the rank of captain with the Vermont State Police (VSP).

According to a *Times Argus* story, Jonas will now command the Staff Operations Section, overseeing operations that include recruiting and training, internal affairs and professional standards. Prior to her promotion, Jonas had served as the commander of the Internal Affairs Unit.

VSP Col. Tom L'Esperance called Jonas's promotion is a significant milestone in the history of the state police.

VSEA Launches New Vets' Home Ads On *VTDigger*

This week, VSEA began running new ads about the Vermont Vets' Home on the online media site *VTDigger*. The ads feature the Home's front lawn sign with a "No Vacancy" sign superimposed on it, which is a jab at a recent decision by the Home's Board of Trustees to cut the number of beds at the Home from 171 to 130. The ad connects to an information page that explains how the State's own report shows there will be an increased need for beds at the Home in the future, not a decreased need. It also urges Vermonters (especially Vermont veterans and their families) visiting to the page to contact their legislators and ask them to stop the cutting of beds at the Vets' Home. VSEA members are urged to help as well.

To view VSEA's new Digger Vets' Home ad page, [click here](#).

NMU Bargaining Team Sending Survey Soon

Members of VSEA's Non-Management Unit (NMU) Bargaining Team are asking members belonging to the Unit to please begin thinking about the kinds of things you want your team to bring to the bargaining table in the next round of negotiations with the State, which begin this fall. To assist the Team in determining priorities, NMU Chair Bob Stone tells *WIA* that a bargaining survey has been created, and it will be sent out soon to all NMU members. Stone is stressing the importance of the survey and is urging as many NMU members as possible to fill it out and send it in.

WIA will let NMU members know when to look for the survey.

January 30 Deadline Approaching For VSEA Members Wanting To Serve On VSEA 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.

DHR Agrees To VSEA Request To End "Direct Dealing" By Management

VSEA General Counsel Tim Belcher reports that the Department of Human Resources (DHR) recently agreed to VSEA's request to discourage and end the practice of "direct dealing" by managers throughout state government. Direct dealing is when a manager independently brokers a wage or benefit deal with an employee; the terms of conditions of which exceed what's in VSEA's negotiated agreement covering all state employees.

"The result of these kinds of direct dealings is that they serve to solve problems for only certain favored employees, while leaving many others behind," explained Belcher. "We told DHR representatives that the direct-dealing practice undermines employees' rights and that it is unacceptable and even illegal. If the State can solve problems piecemeal for a select few, then it has no incentive to agree to solve problems for every state worker. DHR agreed and they understand that VSEA is now fully committed to enforce the law and insist that the State solve problems for everyone through the collective bargaining process."

Belcher reminds that VSEA remains eager to help solve members' problems and will negotiate to solve inequities that arise under the contract in a way that helps everyone.

If you are familiar with an incident of direct dealing occurring where you work, please contact VSEA's Legal Department by phone at 223-5247, or by email to vsea@vsea.org, subject line

“Direct Dealing.”

VSEA Legal Team Says It’s Okay For Labor Team Members To Use State Email To Collect Agenda Items & Warn Meetings

VSEA was recently alerted to a situation in a workplace where management was disputing a member’s right to send a message on State email to colleagues, asking for ideas to bring to an upcoming Labor/Management meeting. The member is a frontline worker who sits on the Labor side of the table at meetings.

According to VSEA’s Legal team, the member has every right to use the State email system on his/her break time to send out notice of a meeting or request agenda items. To clarify, because the substance of the emails concern workplace issues, the emails are absolutely fine to send on State email during break time.

Say It Ain’t So! Longtime VSEA Member, Workers’ Rights & “Buy American” Advocate Monte Mason Leaving State Service

Monte Mason was a fixture at VSEA rallies during his 16-year career as a state employee.

Bittersweet is the word that probably best describes how VSEA members, retirees and staff are feeling after recently learning that 18-year activist Monte Mason is leaving state service. Mason will officially leave his position as a State Electrical Inspector on February 13. He is based in Williston.

“Monte has been a leader in our union since joining the workforce in 1996, and I honestly can’t imagine VSEA without him in it,” said VSEA President Shelley Martin. “We wish Monte nothing but the best in the future, and we thank him for always being there to demonstrate, picket, leaflet, testify, educate and organize for our union. Most important, Monte was an excellent worksite steward, always taking time to help employees with their questions, a grievance or any other issue.”

Martin added that Monte came into VSEA with an extensive knowledge of workers’ and contract rights because he had belonged to other unions in the jobs he held prior to coming to work for the State. She said he also brought with him a cause he believed in very strongly.

“One thing Monte always wanted to talk with people about is how important it is for them to buy American-made products,” said Martin. “I know he made me much more conscious of the origin of my purchases, and I thank him for it. He’ll be greatly missed.

Continued...

Monte's Going-Away Party!

Monte's good friend and colleague Bob Stone is inviting VSEA members to a going-away party for his friend on Friday, February 13. Here are the details:

We'll Miss You Monte! Party

Spare Time

Colchester

5:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Meal Provided

\$20/Meal, Rental Space & Gift Contribution

Cash Bar

Please RSVP by Thursday, February 5, with your \$20 payment* to:

Bob Stone

c/o VSEA

155 State Street

Montpelier, Vt., 05602

* If paying by check, please make payable to Robert Stone. Thanks!

VSEA Members Rightly Question Blue Cross/Blue Shield Decisions On Certain Medical Devices

One issue that has come up since the State switched employees out of Cigna into Blue Cross/Blue Shield (BC/BS) in 2014 are disputes around certain medical devices BC/BS will or won't cover and the cost associated with some of the devices.

VSEA's Benefits Advisory Committee (BAC) recently learned about one such incident, where BC/BS refused to allow a member to purchase a \$200 foam wedge, prescribed for the member by UVM sleep specialist. BC/BS reported it did not have a code for the wedge, but, instead, they told the member to purchase a \$2000 CPAP machine, and BC/BS would cover ongoing maintenance, mask, hose and filter costs.

To their credit, the member called VSEA to ask why BC/BS would not cover the low-cost solution to his problem, especially a solution prescribed by the member's doctor.

"It took some time and repeated phone calls to BC/BS, but they finally agreed to let this state employee get the foam wedge, saving Vermont taxpayers a bundle of money," VSEA Benefits Advisory Committee Chair Dave Bellini tells *WIA*.

Bellini adds that these are the kinds of cases your BAC needs to hear about, so if you're a member who has also been subjected to similar Blue Cross price inflating, please let the BAC know the specifics and the resolution, if any. Your name and other specific details will be kept confidential.

To share your BC/BS story with your union's Benefits Advisory Committee, please send a brief overview of what happened to you to vsea@vsea.org, subject line heading "BC/BS Issue." VSEA will confidentially forward your stories to Committee members.

VSEA Files Appeal Brief With Supreme Court, Concerning VLRB's Ambiguous Ruling On State's Attorney's Employees Right To Collective Bargaining

This week, VSEA filed an appeal brief with the Vermont Supreme Court, disputing a Vermont Labor Relations Board (VLRB) ruling in early 2014 that denied employees in State's Attorney's offices a vote for union representation and collective bargaining rights.

VSEA's Legal team informed employees this week about the appeal brief and added that they will also be striving to resolve the confusion surrounding exactly who the workers' employer is. Unfortunately, the VLRB punted and did not rule on whether or not the employees were state or municipal workers.

The Supreme Court's ruling will determine what steps can be taken to achieve collective bargaining rights for the workers. State's Attorney's employees with questions are asked to direct them to VSEA Organizer Tim Boyle at TBoyle@VSEA.org or call 802-595-9106.

Barre AOE Workers Schedule Series Of Meetings To Air Issues

VSEA launched a series of lunchtime meetings today with Agency of Education (AOE) workers in Barre. The meetings are a forum for the AOE workers to talk with their Union Representative about building-related issues and also share their worksite concerns or issues.

"The employees will be working to craft an agenda of worksite issues that they hope to formally present to AOE decision makers, building contractors and, if necessary, local legislators," explains VSEA Union Representative Josh Massey.

Here are the dates for the upcoming AOE meetings at noon in Barre:

January 30, Room 423
February 6, Room 424
February 20, Room 423
February 27, Room 423

NMU Looking To Fill Vacancies

VSEA Non-Management Unit Chairperson Bob Stone is actively looking to fill several open positions, including:

- NMU Bargaining Team Clerk; and

- NMU Bargaining Team - Law Enforcement Seat

VSEA NMU members interested in any of the above positions are asked to send a letter of interest by close of business Friday, February 6, 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

NEK/St. Johnsbury & Rutland Chapter Members: Mark The Date!

VSEA's NEK St. Johnsbury Chapter will hold its next Chapter meeting on Wednesday, February 11, beginning at 5:00 p.m. at the ANR office at 1229 Portland Street in St. Johnsbury. At the meeting, attendees will vote to fill a Council seat and hear from VSEA President Shelley Martin.

VSEA's Rutland Chapter had to unfortunately cancel its meeting this week on January 21. The meeting has been rescheduled for Wednesday, February 11, beginning at noon in the Asa Bloomer Building's fourth floor conference room. The Chapter apologizes for any member inconvenience due to this week's cancellation.

Register Today To Attend VSEA's 2015 State House Day

An online form has been created for VSEA members to use to register to attend the union's 2015 State House Day, which is Tuesday, February 17.

At State House Day (formerly "Lobby Day"), VSEA members are afforded an opportunity to talk with legislators about the services you provide and the issues and challenges you and your colleagues face.

Register today and help make this VSEA's most successful State House Day ever. With Vermont facing a huge budget deficit, it's more important than ever to demonstrate VSEA members' collective power at the State House and remind lawmakers that we're not only state employees who provide services, we're also Vermont voters, and we care about the adverse impact service and personnel cuts have had—and will have—on the communities where we live.

New VSEA Member Representatives Needed For Non-Management Unit Sick Leave Bank Committee!

VSEA's Non-Management Unit (NMU) is actively recruiting members interested in serving on the Unit's Sick Leave Bank Committee.

The Sick Leave Bank, which awards additional sick leave to members who have serious and

often life-threatening health issues, is dependent on state employees donating annual leave, personal leave or compensatory time to it.

This NMU committee operates in a labor/management setting, meaning VSEA and DHR representatives meet jointly. It convenes monthly to review and act on applications from members. It is crucial that VSEA have adequate representation on this committee.

If you are interested in serving on this committee, please send a letter of interest to Bob Stone, NMU Chair, VSEA, 155 State Street, Montpelier, Vt. 05602, or send an email to Bob at rstone@vsea.org.

Please include information about yourself (i.e. where you work, how long you've worked for the State, how long you've been a VSEA member) and your reasons for wanting to be on the committee. Members of the NMU Executive Committee will review letters of interest and appoint members to the committee.

Upcoming Meetings/Events/Holidays:

January 30

DCF Family Services Division L/M Meeting
VSEA HQ
Montpelier
9:00 a.m.

January 30

Benefits Advisory Committee Meeting
VSEA HQ
Montpelier
9:00 a.m.

January 30

VSEA Meeting w/AOE Employees
219 North Main Street
Suite 423
Barre
Pizza & Beverages!
Noon