



WEEK IN ACTION!

Weekly News From Your Union ~ June 15, 2015 – June 19, 2015

2015 VSEA Annual Meeting Registration Forms Coming Next Week

Early next week, VSEA's Special Events Committee will be sending out the forms to register to attend this year's VSEA Annual Meeting on Saturday, September 12, at the Jay Peak Resort. There will be a link to the online registration form in an email that will be sent next week to all members, and the form is also being sent to all members, via the U.S. Mail. The registration form must be returned to VSEA HQ by 4:30 p.m. on Friday, August 7. Members who do not complete the registration form will not be provided meals at the Annual Meeting, as members must indicate their meal selections on the form in advance. This year's Friday night pre-Annual Meeting festivities will have a wild west theme.

District 5 Vacancy On VSEA Board Of Trustees

Vets' Home worker and House Rep. Rachael Fields recently announced her decision to step down from her District 5 seat on the VSEA Board of Trustees, so the body is now actively looking to fill the seat, which represents Bennington and Rutland. With more than a year remaining on Fields' term, the Board must conduct an election to fill the seat. **VSEA members interested in the seat must reside or have an assigned worksite in the District 5 region.**

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. 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 are interested in running for this seat, please download a petition [here](#) and fax it to (802) 223-4035 or mail it to:

Mary Poulos, Chair
VSEA ERN Committee
D. 5 Seat
155 State St.
Montpelier, VT 05602

The deadline to submit your petition is 4:30 p.m., Monday, July 13.

Petitions not sent to VSEA headquarters by the deadline will not be considered.

Sarah Roy Wins *WIA* 500th Edition Contest!

The *WIA* team, along with some staff, reviewed all the entries in a recent "*WIA* 500th Edition" contest and the winner is VSEA member Sarah Roy, who works for the Health Department in Rutland.

The contest asked members to say in 75 words or less why you are VSEA proud. Sarah wrote:

"I am VSEA proud because we are part of Vermont's fabric. VSEA members are the stitching, the binding, and the glue that helps to hold Vermont together. Sometimes we have a break in our stitching or a hole in our fabric, but being a Union, we can use our fellow members to help mend us and keep us strong."

“There were a lot of really great entries, but I think Sarah’s really captured why VSEA exists, which is to keep Vermont working but also to be there for each other in times of crisis or hardship,” says VSEA Communications Director Doug Gibson.

Coming in a close second place was Peter Kipp, who works for the Department of Information and Innovation in Montpelier. Peter wrote:

“I’m VSEA proud because my Union is an independent, not tied to any national affiliation. Now we’re moving beyond merely representing individual members in grievance hearings and investigations into areas like improving education for stewards, growing the membership, increasing work site presence, enhancing member communication and leading unprecedented legislative campaigns. VSEA’s vision for Vermont’s labor movement makes us all proud to be members.”

And coming in third place was Thressa Brace, who works at the Vermont Veterans’ Home in Bennington. Thressa wrote:

“I am VSEA proud to be part of an organization that is always willing to help create a better work environment! Our department didn't have a voice about the treatment our staff receive. So, I decided to become a steward to give my co-workers a voice and in doing so have created an atmosphere of hopefulness, not helplessness. Knowing my co-workers trust me to guide them when they have an issue makes me happy.”

“A huge thanks to every member who entered this contest,” adds Gibson. “Your words and thoughts were really inspiring and they made me wish we could give a prize to every member who entered.”

Here again is what the winners will receive:

First place = 4 day tickets to the Great Escape + VSEA t-shirt

Second Place = 2 day tickets to the Great Escape + VSEA baseball hat

Third Place = 2 day tickets to the Great Escape + VSEA window sticker

VSEA Unit Chairs Reminded To Submit Your Annual Meeting Agendas

VSEA is asking all its Unit Chairs to please submit your Unit’s Annual Meeting agenda to VSEA Communications Director Doug Gibson by Friday, July 17. These are the Unit meeting agendas to be included in the 2015 VSEA Annual Meeting WARN, which mails to all members prior to the actual Annual Meeting, which is Saturday, September 12 at the Jay Peak Resort. Thanks in advance.

VSEA Officer Candidates Given July 17 Deadline To Submit Photos & Statements

For a few weeks now, *WIA* has been running a story, informing members who want to run for one of VSEA’s top officer positions that you must file a petition by Tuesday, July 14. Another caveat to running for one the officer positions is that each candidate is permitted to submit a photo and candidate statement for inclusion in the Annual Meeting WARN, which publishes and mails a few weeks in advance of the event.

Members who file a petition for office and want to appear in the WARN should send their photo and statement to VSEA Communications Director Doug Gibson by 4:30 p.m., Friday, July 17.

VSEA Members To Circulate Petition At Curtis Awards’ Dinner Tonight

VSEA leaders and members were extremely upset in mid-April, after learning that the chairs of two powerful House committees had penned a letter to the State that included their suggestions for how to lower labor costs through the collective bargaining process. The letter was unprecedented and caused a lot of jaws to drop at VSEA, especially since some of the signers have identified in the past as being “friends” of the VSEA and working Vermonters.

In response to the letter, at tonight's annual Curtis Awards ceremony in Burlington, which honors leaders in the state's Democratic Party, VSEA activists will be asking lawmakers and officials attending the event to sign a petition that reads: "We support VSEA's right to collectively bargain wages, benefits and working conditions. We oppose recent attempts by the House Appropriations and Government Operations Committees to impose terms on VSEA contracts outside the collective bargaining process."

WIA will let readers know how many lawmakers sign the petition tonight.

VSEA Member's "Labor Reading Group" Meets Sunday

VSEA activist John Howe is inviting members to join him at a "Labor Reading Group" he is starting in Burlington. The group is holding its first meeting this Sunday, June 21, at 5:00 p.m. at the offices of the Vermont Workers' Center, located at 294 N Winooski Avenue. The group will be reading passages from "How To Jumpstart Your Union," which is a book about a recent strike by Chicago teachers and how they used their fight to build community and union power.

If you would like more information or have a question, please contact John at johnh@gmavt.net.

Reorganization Email Sparks VSEA Meeting With DEC Members

Last Friday, Department of Environmental Conservation employees received an internal email from Commissioner David Mears that began, "*Dear DEC: As I reported earlier, we were directed to cut \$722,000 from our budget for fiscal year 2016 (July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016). To meet this obligation, I am reorganizing the Regional Office Program of the Drinking Water and Groundwater Protection Division by reassigning the duties of ten of our people in that program. Over the coming months, they will be transferred into a different program or division and, in some cases, to a different location. The people who are affected have all been notified.*"

Knowing many DEC employees will have questions about the abrupt reorganization announcement, VSEA has scheduled a meeting with DEC employees for Tuesday, June 23, from noon to 1:00 p.m. in the large DEC conference room at the McFarland State Office Building in Barre.

"VSEA scheduled this meeting so we can hear directly from the employees who will be impacted by this reorganization," VSEA President Shelley Martin tells *WIA*. "We're sure they know more than what the commissioner related in his email, and we also want to hear their questions and concerns."

Working Vermont Coalition Sends Letter To Burlington City Council, Protesting Uber Employees' Working Conditions

This week, the Working Vermont coalition (which VSEA belongs to) sent a letter to members of the Burlington City Council, asking the body to ensure the local ride-share company Uber is following Vermont labor laws and providing its employees with benefits like workers' comp and unemployment insurance.

"Despite its tremendous resources its continued refusal, in Vermont and across the country, to properly classify its workers as employees is a decision based on financial interest alone," the coalition wrote. "[Requiring Uber to provide workers' comp and unemployment insurance] would help bolster the city's support of the rights of Uber drivers and make it clear that if Uber is going to operate in Burlington, it must do so in full compliance with Vermont laws."

"VSEA is pleased to support this collective effort to ensure Uber is following the law and not taking advantage of its employees," says VSEA President Shelley Martin.

The Burlington Free Press reported on the coalition's letter and you can read the story [here](#).

California Rules Uber Employees Are Not Independent Contractors

Just days after the Working Vermont Coalition sent its letter, across the country in California, that state's labor commissioner ruled that Uber drivers who connect with customers through the company's app must be considered an employee.

“The defendants [Uber] hold themselves out as nothing more than a neutral technological platform, designed simply to enable drivers and passengers to transact the business of transportation,” the commissioner said in her decision. “The reality, however, is that defendants are involved in every aspect of the operation.”

Uber said in court papers that it will appeal the decision.

[NYT Magazine Features Excellent Cover Story About Wisconsin Governor's Assault On Working People](#)

Last Sunday's *New York Times Magazine* featured a cover story titled [“Scott Walker and the Fate of the Union,”](#) and it's an excellent chronology of the Wisconsin Governor's attempt to decimate labor unions in his state, both public and private sector. It's also an examination of how poorly the Governor's experiment is working to date, as evidenced by this passage:

“But if Wisconsin is a model for what Walker might achieve nationally, it is worth examining his results so far. Walker credits [right-to-work legislation] in part for the decline in Wisconsin's unemployment rate since he took office in 2011 and has said he considers right-to-work “one more arrow in that quiver” for the creation of jobs. But since 2011, the state has fallen to 40th out of the 50 states in job growth and 42nd in wage growth, according to an analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics data conducted by The Capital Times of Wisconsin. Act 10, officially called the Wisconsin Budget Repair Bill, was supposed to fix persistent budget shortfalls by lowering labor costs and eliminating union rules. But Wisconsin's two-year projected budget deficit has actually increased; in May, the Legislature approved a \$250 million cut to the state's prized university system to help close the gap. Wisconsin is now among the top 10 states people move out of.”

The piece features plenty of interviews with Wisconsin workers, most voicing their displeasure with the Governor's campaign and warning American workers to pay close attention to what's happening in their state. One private-sector union member, an ironworker, sums up Walker's end game simply, saying, “A lot of guys in our local didn't see [right-to-work legislation] as being important for ironworkers because it targeted public employees. I would ask them, how can you say there are good unions and bad unions? It's an *idea* that they're trying to kill — it's not the union itself. This is the strategy they're using to do it. They're splitting everything up. They're going after them first, then it's going to be somebody else. Then they're going to get to us too.”

This excerpt is also pretty telling:

“The night before Walker announced his plans for [right-to-work legislation] to the public, he gathered his cabinet in the governor's mansion for a private dinner and a pep talk. During the dinner, Walker stood up and held aloft a picture of [President Ronald] Reagan. He singled out the firing of the air traffic controllers as ‘one of the most defining moments’ of Reagan's political career — a moment, he said, that ‘was the first crack in the Berlin Wall.’”

“This story is a must read for any worker concerned about attacks on unionized workers like the one Scott Walker and far too many other governors across the nation are conducting,” says VSEA Communications Director Doug Gibson. “Even right here in Vermont, some political leaders are showing signs of having drunk the Koch brothers' and Scott Walker's Kool-Aid, targeting VSEA members and the services they deliver with harsh rhetoric and ill-advised proposals and requests. Thanks to the recent VSEA Fight Back campaign, members are now better prepared to fight back

against these efforts, but we can never let our guard down, even, as we learned, with those who we thought were our ‘friends.’”

State Announces Enhancement To Health Care Flexible Spending Accounts

Benefits and Wellness Manager Clarke Collins asked VSEA to share the following information with VSEA members:

“Effective immediately, there is an enhancement to the Health Care Flexible Spending Account (FSA) benefit for current and future enrollees. With the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, employers have the option to allow employees the ability to carryover up to \$500 of unused contributions to the next plan year. **Starting with the current plan year, the State of Vermont has elected to adopt this new benefit.**

This means that employees with any unused funds in their Health Care FSA at the end of 2015 will be able to rollover up to \$500 of the remaining balance to the 2016 plan year. The carryover is in addition to employer plan limits. For example, if an employee has \$500 remaining at the end of 2015 and elects for the maximum \$2,500 contribution in 2016, they will have a useable balance of \$3,000 for 2016.

This FSA benefit enhancement is intended to give employees peace of mind through reduced risk of losing funds and avoiding any last minute rush to try and spend unused balance at the end of the year.

VSEA members with questions regarding this benefit enhancement should contact the Employee Benefits Division in the Department of Human Resources at (802) 828-6700, option 1 and then option 3.

Further information, including an FAQ, will be ready shortly.”

Discounted 2015 Great Escape/Splashwater Kingdom Day Tickets Now Available Online! Hard Tickets For Pickup Coming Soon.

Discount tickets are now available to purchase online by [clicking here](#), but in order to access this page, which also includes the required VSEA username and password, **you must be a registered “member-only” VSEA website user ([you can sign up here!](#))**. Please note that there is a service charge for purchasing online.

VSEA will also soon be receiving a batch of hard tickets that members can pick up at headquarters, and there is no service charge attached.

2015 Regular Day Tickets = \$33 each (\$25 savings over price at gate)

Quote Of The Week!

“Working 12 hours a day, you’re done — you’re fried when you come home. It makes it really difficult to have a balance between your work life and your personal life.”

Nurse Practitioner and Vermont Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals’ member Shannon Lyons, [addressing the University of Vermont Medical Center’s Board on June 17](#). The nurses’ union is currently in contract negotiations with the hospital’s Board, and Lyons was there to voice her support for language that would provide 20% paid administrative time to the nurses.

Lamoille Valley Chapter Putting Call Out For Members To March In Morrisville’s July 4 Parade. All Members Statewide Welcome!

VSEA’s Lamoille Valley Chapter has a great opportunity at this year’s annual Morrisville Fourth of July 4 Parade to show House Speaker Stan Smith and other local politicians that state employees are united

and prepared to stand strong in defense of the services we provide. That's because Smith and other elected officials will be marching in the parade, and so will we! The parade also affords us an opportunity to take our message to the public and enlist their support in our fight for the Governor and lawmakers to adopt a responsible budgeting process.

The Lamoille Valley Chapter is inviting all state employees (especially those who live and work in the Lamoille Valley) to march with the Chapter in this year's parade. Here are the details:

- Parade theme is an 'All American Holiday';
- Being held on Saturday, July 4;
- Beginning at 9:30 a.m., floats/marchers will be lining up at the Community College of Vermont Morrisville Campus. The parade begins promptly at 11:00 a.m. and it ends at the Peoples Academy High School; and
- VSEA members are urged to wear green!

Come to have a great time!

Questions? Email the Lamoille Chapter's Aimee Towne at aimee.kelley@hotmail.com, or call her at 802-793-4754

NMU Bargaining Team Wants Your Leave Request Stories

The Non-Management Unit's Bargaining Team was at headquarters on June 3 to continue preparing for upcoming negotiations with the State this fall. One of the topics they discussed is the need to learn more from NMU workers about how long it takes different managers to process employee leave requests. Are workers' requests being approved or denied in a timely manner?

If you belong to the NMU and want to share your story about how long it took for managements to process your leave requests, please send your NMU Team a summary of how long it took and what the ramifications were. Did you miss a booking date due to a delay? Were you denied at the last minute, after waiting for days or weeks? Did you have to cancel a trip or event due to slow processing of your request? Was your family made to suffer because management was stringing you along on your leave request? Your NMU Team wants to know.

To share your story (confidentially, unless otherwise agreed to) with the Team, please send an email to nmumail@vsea.org and write "My Leave Story" in the subject line. The Team thanks you in advance for responding to this request.

Reminder: VSEA Members Enrolled In The Delta Dental Supplemental Plan Are Also Eligible For Vision Discounts

VSEA staff and leaders hear often that members would like to see the current vision benefit negotiated in members' contracts improved. Given this, VSEA wants to make sure that members enrolled in the Delta Dental Supplemental Plan know that you are also eligible to take advantage of a "Vision Discount Program" to help defray additional costs.

To see the vision discounts being offered through the supplemental plan, please [click here](#) and then click on the "Vision Discount Program" entry under the "VSEA Supplemental Dental Plan Info" heading.

File Your Petition Today To Run To Be A VSEA Officer!

Petitions to run for one of VSEA's five top elected official seats are due 60 calendar days prior to the union's Annual Meeting on September 12. This makes the deadline Tuesday, July 14, 2015.

- **VSEA President**

- VSEA First Vice President
- VSEA Second Vice President
- VSEA Clerk
- VSEA Treasurer

VSEA members interested in running for one of the "Elected Officer" positions above can find a filing petition [here](#).

Note: If running to be an elected officer, please make sure you clearly indicate the office you seek in the space provided. Primarily, this means distinguishing between First and Second VP.

June 30 Deadline To Self-Nominate For VSEA Departmental Council Seat

VSEA Elections, Rules and Nominating Committee Chair Mary Poulos is reminding VSEA members that now is the time to self-nominate for a VSEA departmental Council seat.

All departmental Council seats are open, and current terms will expire on September 30, 2015. The deadline to submit a self-nomination form is Tuesday, June 30, 2015.

You can find a self-nominating form by [clicking here](#).
(Opens/ downloads as a PDF)

With more than 120 VSEA members, the VSEA Council is one of your union's primary governing bodies and its largest and most diverse, with departmental representatives from across state government. The Council meets quarterly and retains a right to override decisions made by the VSEA Board of Trustees.

Questions? Please contact VSEA Administrative Assistant Ayla Hudson at 802-223-5247, or by email at ahudson@vsea.org.

To determine the best fit for you, here is a complete list of the number of Council seats available, by departmental heading:

Aging and Independent Living = 4 Seats
 Agriculture = 1 Seat
 Attorney General = 1 Seat
 Auditor of Accounts = 1 Seat
 Buildings and General Services = 5 Seats
 Children and Families = 10 Seats
 ACCD/Housing = 1 Seat
 ACCD/Economic Development = 1 Seat
 ACCD/Marketing and Tourism = 1 Seat
 Commission on Women = 1 Seat
 Corrections = 10 Seats
 Criminal Justice Training Council = 1 Seat
 Defender General = 1 Seat
 DVHA = 2 Seat
 Education = 2 Seats
 Environmental Conservation = 3 Seats
 Finance and Management = 1 Seat
 Financial Regulation = 1 Seat
 Fish and Wildlife = 1 Seat
 Forests and Parks = 1 Seat
 Health = 6 Seats
 AHS/Rate Setting and Auditing = 1 Seat

AHS/IT Unit = 1 Seat
Information and Innovation = 1 Seat
Judiciary = 3 Seats
Labor = 3 Seat
Library = 1 Seat
Liquor Control = 1 Seat
Lottery = 1 Seat
Mental Health = 4 Seats
Military = 2 Seats
ANR = 1 Seat
Natural Resources Board = 1 Seat
Public Safety - Civilian = 4 Seats
Public Service Board = 1 Seat
Public Service Department = 1 Seat
Secretary of State = 1 Seat
Tax Department = 1 Seat
Transportation Agency = 10 Seats
Transportation Agency/DMV = 2 Seats
Treasurer's Office = 1 Seat
Vermont Veterans' Home = 3 Seats
Vermont State Colleges = 4 Seats
Vermont Housing Authority = 1 Seat

Upcoming Meetings/Events/Holidays:

June 23

Fight Back Debrief/Leg Update Meeting
ESD
District Office
Burlington
8:00 a.m.

June 23

Training: Diversity & Solidarity For Public Sector Union Members
VTrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Route 302
Berlin
9:00 a.m.

June 23

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

June 23

VSEA Meeting w/DEC Workers
McFarland State Office Building
DEC Conference Room
Barre
12:00 p.m.

June 24

NMU Bargaining Team Meeting
VSEA HQ
Montpelier
9:00 a.m.

June 25

Training: The Contract & Challenges In The Workplace
VTrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Route 302
Berlin
9:00 a.m.

June 25

Rutland Chapter Meeting
Asa Bloomer State Office Building
Rutland
12:00 p.m.

June 25

Benefits Advisory Committee Meeting
VSEA HQ
Montpelier
1:00 p.m.

June 25

HAEU Workers' Meeting
On Tap
Essex Junction
4:45 p.m.

June 26

Retirees' Chapter Meeting/Mailing
VSEA HQ
Montpelier
9:30 a.m.