



## WEEK IN ACTION!

Weekly News From Your Union ~ July 20, 2015 – July 24, 2015

### **More Than 400 To Attend Tonight's VSEA Chittenden Chapter's "Night With The Lake Monsters" Event**

Weather permitting (fingers crossed), more than 400 VSEA members and their families will be attending tonight's Chittenden Chapter "Night with the Lake Monsters" event in Burlington. This is the best turnout ever for the event.

Chapter President Kara Haynes always opens the event up to VSEA members from across the state, and she says she's thrilled that this year nearly half those coming are from outside the Chittenden region. Haynes adds that she wants the event to allow VSEA members from areas outside Chittenden to meet their colleagues from the region and begin building networks and relationships to foster increased solidarity.

Way to go Chittenden Chapter!

A reminder that VSEA members (going to the game, or not) are invited to stop by a barbeque the Chapter is conducting in the VDH Lab parking lot at 195 Colchester Ave., beginning at 5:00 p.m.

VSEA will post pictures from the night soon on Facebook and the union's website.

### **VSEA Files ULP Against Judiciary**

*VSEA issued the following press release on July 23:*

The Vermont State Employees Association (VSEA) recently filed an unfair labor practice (ULP) against the Judiciary Branch for refusing a request by frontline workers to move the date to begin bargaining a successor agreement to early August 2015. The date change is important because frontline workers say the Judiciary's usual late winter start (anywhere from December to February) hampers them in bargaining because management has already submitted its yearly funding request to lawmakers. All other VSEA Bargaining Teams will begin bargaining in early August.

In its ULP, VSEA General Counsel Tim Belcher writes, "Because prior [Judiciary] negotiations have always commenced after the Court Administrator has already submitted the Judiciary Department's funding requests to the General Assembly, the VSEA has never been able to engage in meaningful collective bargaining over wages and other financial terms and conditions of employment, and has instead been forced to accept whatever terms are negotiated into the collective bargaining agreements covering employees of the executive branch of government."

As justification for the workers' right to request a date switch, the ULP cites language contained in the Judicial Employees Labor Relations Act, which reads:

3 VSA §1036 (c)

The Act further provides as follows:

(e) An agreement shall terminate at the expiration of its specified term. **Upon request of either party, negotiations for a new agreement to take effect upon the expiration of the preceding agreement shall be commenced at any time during the year preceding the expiration date of the agreement.**

Negotiation may be commenced at any time before that time with the consent of both parties.

VSEA's ULP concludes:

“By refusing to commence negotiations during the year preceding expiration of the current agreement at the time requested by the union, and by insisting that negotiations commence after the Court Administrator has already submitted requests for funds to the General Assembly to be included in the budget to take effect July 1, 2016, the Respondent Judiciary Department has violated its duty to bargain upon request “at any time during the year preceding the expiration date of the agreement;” failed to bargain in good faith; and thereby interfered, restrained, and coerced employees in the exercise of rights protected by 3 VSA §1012, all in violation of 3 VSA §§1026(1) and (5), as well as 3 VSEA § 1036(e).

“To be on equal footing, our Judiciary workers deserve to be at the table right from the start in August, which is why VSEA is filing this ULP on their behalf,” said VSEA President Shelley Martin. “We hope our action will cause the Court Administrator to have to come to the table in early August.”

VSEA is now waiting on a hearing date at the Vermont Labor Relations Board.

## **Treasurer Sends Letters To 949 State Employees Who Are Eligible For Retirement Incentive**

*Here's the press release issued by the Treasurer's Office:*

“A retirement incentive program passed in the recently concluded Vermont State legislative session will give 300 executive branch employees the opportunity to retire this year and receive as much as \$15,000 in cash. The State Treasurer’s Office today mailed letters and program applications to eligible employees.

The program was proposed as a way to reduce both the State’s labor costs and the need to lay-off employees to address a multi-million dollar budget deficit. The Vermont State Employees Association, Treasurer’s office and the Administration worked together to craft a plan that would secure general fund savings and protect the financial integrity of the pension plan.

‘I am pleased that we could work together to come up with a program that benefits employees and helps address current budget deficit concerns,’ said State Treasurer Beth Pearce. ‘However, while the program does reduce labor costs in the short-term, to realize the full measure of the savings, the State must address long-term workforce issues.’

There are 949 employees eligible to take the incentive. However, only 300 employees will be granted the incentive. If more than 300 employees apply, the Treasurer’s office will utilize a lottery system to select the 300 from among those State employees applying. The deadline for receipt of the application in the Treasurer’s office is August 31, 2015.

Executive branch employees who have worked for the State from 5-15 years would receive \$750 per year of employment. Those with 15 years or more of service would be eligible for \$1,000 per year they worked for the State. The maximum payable under the incentive is \$15,000. The incentive will be paid to recipients in two equal payments in fiscal years 2016 and 2017.

Retirements under the incentive program are effective on October 1, 2015. The law does allow a department to stagger the retirement dates of multiple employees, if necessary, to continue the normal operation of business. However, no retirement date may be later than March 1, 2016.

To be eligible for the retirement incentive program a person must meet the following requirements:

- Be employed by the executive branch of State government on July 1, 2015;
- Participate in the defined benefit or defined contribution retirement plans;
- If hired prior to July 1, 2008, the employee must have at least 30 years of service or be age 62 with at least five years of service as of August 1, 2015; and

- If hired on or after July 1, 2008, the employee must have a combination of years of service and age that equals 87 or more, or be age 65 with at least five years of service as of August 1, 2015.

The State Treasurer's Office has posted an eligibility summary for employees on its web site at [VermontTreasurer.gov](http://VermontTreasurer.gov). Employees that believe they are eligible and do not receive a letter should contact the Treasurer's office. Questions regarding employee eligibility and the incentive program should be sent via email to [laurie.lanphear@state.vt.us](mailto:laurie.lanphear@state.vt.us)."

## **Editorial Highlights Downside Of Retirement Incentive: Fewer Workers To Handle Increased Demand**

The July 19 *Times Argus* included a timely editorial about the State's retirement incentive and its impact to public services. It reads:

### **Early Out**

The [State] is moving ahead with plans to offer incentives for early retirement to 300 state employees as a way of meeting budget-cutting goals set by the Legislature.

Administration officials say 952 employees are eligible for the incentive program, and they will be receiving letters soon with details. If more than 300 employees sign up for the retirement incentive, the state will use a lottery to select those allowed to participate.

The incentive program is a case of spending money to save money. The maximum payment a retiring employee could receive is \$15,000. Payments to qualified employees are based on years of service and will be paid in installments in 2016 and 2017.

The Legislature was faced with a \$113 budget shortfall this year — a gap between expected revenue and expected budget outlays. The retirement incentives are part of \$10 million state officials hope to gain through savings in labor costs.

The agencies and departments with the most eligible employees are the Agency of Transportation, the Department for Children and Families, the Department of Health and the Department of Corrections.

Retirement incentives are a relatively painless way to pare back a workforce. Steve Howard, executive director of the Vermont State Employees Association, said the incentive was far preferable to layoffs axing employees against their will.

Indeed, retirement incentives are a tool commonly used in business. Howard said the state was likely to have little trouble finding 300 workers to take the state up on its offer.

The early retirements do not solve the state's ongoing budget problem, however. During the legislative session lawmakers wrestled with the problem that spending was growing at about 5 percent, but revenue was growing by only 3 percent. They call this a structural problem, and it is not resolved by makeshift yearly remedies.

The retirement of 300 workers will help, but it comes at a time when the demand for services in many crucial areas is increasing. The Department for Children and Families and the Agency of Agriculture are two agencies that are facing new challenges and require additional personnel. The secretary of education has acknowledged that her agency lacks the personnel needed to help local school districts carry out the reforms demanded by the Legislature. The state is seeking to take an aggressive role in stemming the tide of drug addiction and providing alternatives to prison. These initiatives require people.

It is a dilemma that generally runs aground on politics. The instinct of Republicans is to close the budget gap by cutting programs, an approach based on the supposition that there is fat in any budget. Democrats also begin with cuts, but they are usually more willing to consider increases in revenue. Still, Democrats

remain gun shy about tax increases. The Governor has made it a practice always to oppose increases in broad-based taxes, and fellow Democrats understand that in hard times they raise taxes at their peril. On the left, however, some Democrats are convinced that the tax system already favors the rich and more revenue can be found by raising taxes on wealthy taxpayers.

Even raising tax rates remains a temporary fix. If higher income taxes close the budget gap one year, the slower growth of revenue will mean budget demands will have outstripped available revenue a few years later. Meanwhile, the state continues to experience new demands for service in those crucial areas of health care, education and environmental protection. Those 300 retirees will help the bottom line this year, but the state cannot pare its workforce down to nothing, and it should not eviscerate vital programs.

As the state looks for ways to slow spending growth, legislators will inevitably look at the growth in health care expenditures, which have been a major drain on the budget. The future of Vermont Health Connect could well depend, not only on its successful operation, but on its cost. It has cost far more than anyone expected.

**Meanwhile, revenue growth is possible where income is growing. Part of Vermont's problem is that middle-class wages have stagnated in recent decades, while income growth has occurred in the upper tier of earners. Thus, raising rates on wealthy taxpayers makes sense, not to punish them, but as a practical way to tap into a growing revenue source. Scare stories about millionaires moving to Florida are always heard, but millionaires move here, too, despite our tax code. Economic inequality is mitigated only when the people demand it. If programs essential for many Vermonters are to succeed, they need the money to support them.**

### ***St. Albans Messenger* Story Drives Home How Hard It Is For Agencies Like DCF To Rebound From Position Cuts**

In a [July 18 \*St. Albans Messenger\*](#) story titled “Are They Safe? Substance Abuse Poses Threats In Home Visits,” the reporter talks with DCF social workers and VSEA members Skylar Bryan and Melanie Hall about the hazards associated with their work, which is to protect the welfare of Vermont's children, far too many of whom these days they say are living in households where substance abuse is present.

The story focuses on Vermont's struggle to combat substance abuse and the steps being taken to address it, but it also highlights how difficult and scary the day-to-day work sometimes is for Bryan and Hall. “It's really dangerous,” DCF St. Albans Director Alix Gibson tells the paper. **Another important subject the story covers is how DCF social workers' caseloads continue to grow and how the recent addition of new social workers is barely making a dent.**

“Every month, we have a higher percentage of kids in care,” Gibson says. “Between 2010 and 2014, the number of investigations and assessments rose from 453 to 700. Average casework loads – even with five new staff members, making for 17 social workers – increased from 17 families per person to 22 each.”

Bryan, to her credit, tells the paper that she and other DCF social workers just continue to play the hand they were dealt, explaining that, “We have a job to do. The last thing in the world we want is something bad to happen to a child.”

“This is what happens when you blindly hack away at the essential services Vermonters—especially Vermont children in this case—depend on...even more so in tough economic times,” VSEA President Shelley Martin tells *WIA*. “The deep and ill-advised position cuts to the DCF years ago has created a situation where DCF is now forced to play catch up to keep up with the increased need VSEA's DCF members warned was coming when the cuts were being made. Sadly, we now read that some children could be paying the price for those cuts.”

Martin and the DCF workers aren't alone in pointing out the dangers associated with position and service cuts, especially to human services. In April 2015, in an [interview with VPR](#), former AHS Secretary Doug Racine warned that the State is failing in its efforts to ensure that DCF resources are meeting the public demand. Here's an excerpt from that interview:

*“Racine says that although DCF hired several new positions in the fall of 2014, the caseloads are actually higher than they were at this time last year, when two deaths occurred. ‘The fact is, we’ve seen a major increase in the number of children coming into custody; we’ve seen a major increase in the number of reports to DCF of suspected abuse and neglect, all of which require investigation.’ Along with this, Racine says that there is an increase in drug abuse problems, which he says played a part in at least one of the deaths last year.*

*‘Where is the importance of children on the agenda there?’*

*‘I think the money is there. If it’s a priority it should be there.’ He points out that the Legislature is finding money to clean up Lake Champlain, help with the Medicaid cost shift and create jobs, all of which Racine notes are important. ‘But where is the importance of children on the agenda there? This is a year old now, and perhaps its fading from memory, but I hope they will focus on what did happen and why it did happen ... if they aren’t addressing the number one issue, [staffing], I think they are failing Vermont’s kids.’*

“We have got to change the thinking in Montpelier about how lawmakers address future budget deficits,” Martin adds. “Cuts, cuts and more cuts takes a toll, sometimes a very bad toll, and nowhere is that clearer than at DCF right now.”

## **Upcoming Retirement Board Election**

If you would like to run for the State Employees Retirement Board—and have your name on the ballot—you must submit a letter of intent to the Chair of the Election, Rules and Nominating Committee (ERNC) no later than Friday, September 4, 2015. This year there will be an election for one (1) VSEA seat and one (1) VSEA alternate seat on the Board.

The Retirement Board is an eight-member Board that is responsible for the proper operation of the retirement system. VSEA has three members and an alternate who serve to represent the interests of state employees and their beneficiaries. The board invests the funds of the system to ensure an adequate return and funding of the system. The Board also appoints an actuary, hires money managers and makes yearly recommendations to the Governor on the amount of money the State should appropriate in the next fiscal year to achieve and preserve the financial integrity of the funds.

Questions?? Contact ERN Chair Mary Poulos by phone at 479-7544, or by email at [mpoulos@vsea.org](mailto:mpoulos@vsea.org).

## **VSEA Teams Continue Bargaining Overview Meetings**

VSEA Judiciary and Corrections Unit Bargaining Team members and staff have scheduled a series of meetings across the state to give frontline workers an overview of upcoming bargaining with the State, talk with you about where to go for information and let you know how you can assist your Team throughout negotiations.

Here are the scheduled meetings to date by Bargaining Unit:

**Judiciary Unit**– Contact: CC Reuge, [creuge@vsea.org](mailto:creuge@vsea.org))

Burlington - August 5 - Costello Courthouse - Champlain Room - Noon  
Barre - August 6 - 255 North Main Street, Suite 3 – Break Room - Noon  
Bennington - August 7 - 207 South Street, Jury Room - 11:30 a.m.  
St. Albans - August 11 - 36 Lake Street, Lunchroom - Noon



St. Johnsbury - August 12 - 1229 Portland Street, Jury Room, Main Floor - 4:30 p.m.  
Morrisville - August 19 - 65 Northgate Plaza, Jury Room - Noon  
Middlebury - August 21 - 7 Mahady Court, Probate Hearing Room, Noon  
Rutland - August 26 - 9 Merchants Row Lunchroom -Noon

**Corrections Unit** – Contact: Tim Lenoach, [tlenoch@vsea.org](mailto:tlenoch@vsea.org) or 802-777-2813

Barre P&P Office - July 27 - Noon  
Hartford State Office (NMU and DOC P&P) - July 29 - Noon

**Non-Management Unit** – Contact: Tim Boyle, [tboyle@vsea.org](mailto:tboyle@vsea.org) or 802 595-9106

Barre --August 4 -- ESD Conference Room -- Noon  
Bennington – August 27 -- State Office Building --11:30 a.m.  
Burlington – August 24 -- ESD Office, Conference Room -- Noon  
Burlington – August 20 -- Health Department, 108 Cherry Street --11:30 a.m.  
Brattleboro – August 26 --State Office Building --11:30 a.m.  
Newport – August 28-- State Office Building, 100 Main Street, Room 250 -- 11:30 a.m.  
Rutland -- August 13 -- Rutland Bowlerama – 5:00 p.m.  
Waterbury – August 25 -- DDS Office, 93 Pilgrim Park -- Noon

## **Discounted 2015 Great Escape/Splashwater Kingdom Day Tickets Now Available Online!**

“Two parks of fun for the price of one!”  
Lake George, New York

Park Opens May 16, 2015, & Splashwater Opens May 23, 2015

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!**

*“He said. ‘You are the most unprotected department in all the state of Vermont.’”*

VSEA DCF social worker Skylar Bryan telling a *St. Albans Messenger* reporter what a DOC Parole Officer said to her recently about her and other DCF workers having to sometimes enter dangerous situations, but without any protection. [See WIA story here.](#)

**{PUT IN SIDEBAR}**

## **Up-To-Date Schedule Of Chapter Annual Meetings**

It’s that time of the year again. Time for all VSEA Chapters to conduct their Chapter Annual Meetings in advance of VSEA’s all-inclusive Annual Meeting on September 12 at Jay Peak.

Here are the scheduled Chapter Annual Meetings to date:

- **Addison County** – Thursday, July 30 – 156 Court St., Middlebury – Noon

- **Barre** – Thursday, August 6 – The Quarry Restaurant, Barre – 5:00 p.m.
- **Bennington** – Wednesday, August 29 – Rescue Squad Bldg., Bennington – 5:30 p.m.
- **Brattleboro** – Wednesday, August 5 – Brattleboro Savings & Loan, Putney Rd. – 4:45 p.m.
- **Central Vermont** – Monday, August 10 – VSEA HQ, Montpelier, 5:00 p.m.
- **Chittenden** – Thursday, August 20 – TBD – 5:00 p.m.
- **Franklin/Grand Isle** – Thursday, August 13 – St. Albans Bay Park, St. Albans – 5:00 p.m.
- **Lamoille** -- Saturday, August 1 – Elmore State Park, Elmore – 11:00 a.m.
- **Newport/St. Johnsbury** – Wednesday, August 12 – ANR Office, 1229 Portland, St. Johnsbury – 2:00 p.m.
- **Rutland** – Thursday, August 13 – Rutland Bowlerama, Rutland – 5:00 p.m.
- **Springfield** – Tuesday, July 28, State Office Building, First Floor Conf. Room, Springfield – 4:30 p.m.
- **Vermont State Hospital** – Friday, August 14 – VPCH, Berlin – 2:00 p.m. & 3:30 p.m.
- **Waterbury** – Wednesday, August 12 – Cold Hollow Cider Mill, Waterbury Center – 5:30 p.m.
- **White River Junction** – Wednesday, August 29 -- Room 120, 118 Prospect St, White River Jct. – 4:30 p.m.

## **Register Today To Attend VSEA 71<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting**

VSEA's Special Events Committee is reminding members to complete and send in your 2015 Annual Meeting registration form today. The union's 2015 Annual Meeting is on September 12 at the Jay Peak Resort in Jay, and the forms went out in the mail recently. You can also download a registration form by clicking [here](#). This year, the Committee is sponsoring a special wild west-themed event on Friday night, September 11.

Your registration form must be mailed 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.

## **Who Will Win VSEA's 2015 Outstanding Performance Awards? Make Your Nomination Today!**

- 1) VSEA Chapter of the Year;
- 2) VSEA Steward of the Year;
- 3) The Mazza Award — For Outstanding Service to VSEA;
- 4) The Macaig Award — For Outstanding Public Service; and
- 5) The Linda Coan Memorial Award — Outstanding VSEA Staff Member

To get nomination forms, either call Communications Specialist Kris Lizzari at VSEA HQ (802-223-5247) or print the forms out [here](#). All nominations must be received before 4:30 p.m. on Friday, August 7, 2015. Winners announced at Annual Meeting banquet on September 12.

## **Vermont Has A New Labor Candidate School & Interested VSEA Members Are Encouraged To Apply!**

Do you think Vermont needs more union-friendly people in the State House? Have you ever thought about running for office but didn't know where to start?

If so, the newly created [Vermont Labor Candidate School](#) (VLCS) is for you!

VSEA, along with other unions, is helping conduct the Vermont Labor Candidate School for union members who are committed to helping create positive political change. VLCS is not affiliated with, nor supported by, any Vermont political party.

Elected leaders, from the state legislature to local boards, make important decisions that impact labor

union members every day. VLCS teaches union activists the important skills necessary to successfully run for office in Vermont at the local and state level. VLCS will continue to support participants after they graduate by offering mentoring programs and trainings.

VLCS trainings will be held on Saturdays in the Fall and Winter 2015/2016.

Applications are due Monday, August 17!

Go to <http://www.vtlaborschool.org/> to learn more!

## **Joe Hill 100 Roadshow Coming To Old Labor Hall**

On July 31, the Joe Hill 100 Roadshow will make its only stop in Vermont, performing at the Old Labor Hall in Barre. The show is a musical tribute to the legendary labor activist and songwriter with the Industrial Workers of the World. There's little doubt today that Hill was framed for two murders that he was executed for in Utah. Many say Hill was targeted because he was a foreigner and a well-known advocate for workers. The Roadshow commemorates the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hill's execution by firing squad in 1915.

The "Joe Hill 100 Roadshow" is sponsored by the Barre Historical Society, with support from the Vermont Labor History Society, the Vermont Workers' Center, Pie-in-the-Sky Farm B&B, the Three Penny Taproom, and the Vermont State Labor Council-AFL-CIO.

The concert begins at 7:30 p.m.. Tickets are \$15 and \$12 for students and seniors. For more information and reservations go to <http://oldlaborhall.org>, email [info@oldlaborhall.org](mailto:info@oldlaborhall.org) or call [\(802\) 479-5600](tel:(802)479-5600).

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

### **July 27**

Corrections Bargaining Overview Meeting  
Barre P&P Office  
Barre  
Noon

### **July 28**

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

### **July 28**

Springfield Chapter Annual Meeting  
State Office Building  
First Floor Conference Room  
100 Mineral St.  
Springfield  
4:30 p.m.



## **July 29**

Deadline To Register To Attend Retiree Chapter Annual Meeting

## **July 29**

Corrections Bargaining Overview Meeting  
Hartford State Office Building  
Hartford  
Noon

## **July 29**

White River Junction Annual Meeting  
Room 120  
118 Prospect St.  
White River Jct.  
4:30 p.m.

## **July 29**

Bennington Chapter Annual Meeting  
Rescue Squad Building  
Bennington  
5:30 p.m.

## **July 30**

Addison Chapter Annual Meeting  
156 Court St.  
Large Conference Room  
Middlebury  
5:30 p.m.

## **July 31**

Joe Hill 100 Roadshow  
Old Labor Hall  
Barre  
7:30 p.m.  
*See WIA Post*

## **August 1**

Lamoille Valley Chapter Annual Meeting  
Elmore State Park  
Beach House Room  
Elmore  
11:00 a.m.

## **August 5**

Judiciary Bargaining Overview Meeting  
Costello Courthouse  
Champlain Room  
Burlington  
Noon

## **August 5**

Brattleboro Chapter Employee Appreciation Day  
232 Main St.  
Room 148  
Brattleboro  
Noon

**August 5**

Brattleboro Chapter Annual Meeting  
Brattleboro Savings & Loan  
Putney Road  
4:45 p.m.

**August 6**

Judiciary Bargaining Overview Meeting  
255 N. Main St. |  
Suite 3  
Barre  
Noon

**August 6**

Barre Chapter Annual Meeting  
The Quarry Restaurant  
Barre  
5:00 p.m.

**August 7**

Bennington Chapter Employee Appreciation Day  
South St.  
The Jury Room  
Bennington  
11:30 a.m.

**August 7**

Deadline To Register For 2015 VSEA Annual Meeting

**August 7**

Deadline To Nominate Members/Chapters/Staff Person For VSEA Awards