

WEEK IN ACTION!

Weekly News From Your Union ~ September 7, 2015 – September 11, 2015

VSEA 71st Annual Meeting Is Saturday! Walk-Ins Welcome

More than 150 VSEA members have registered to attend their union's 71st Annual Meeting on Saturday at Jay Peak Resort in Jay, but the door is also open to all full-fledged members who want to attend. If you do choose to walk in on Saturday, but aren't registered, please note that there will be no meals available for you, as food for those registered was ordered earlier. Annual Meeting begins at 9:00 a.m.

In No Time At All, Majority Of Vets' Home Nurses Sign Petition Against Proposed Schedule--And It Pays Dividends

VSEA nursing staff at the Vets' Home recently wasted no time drafting and presenting a petition to management to express their collective rejection of a proposed schedule they contend violates their collective bargaining agreement. The petition reminds VVH that the nurses recently worked hard to create a schedule they believe works for everyone and it asks VVH management to work with them to amend their proposed schedule where needed and then adopt and implement it.

(Pictured here is LPN and VSEA Steward Karen Tendrup reading the workers' petition to management before presenting it formally)

"The importance of the petition's message to frontline nurses was demonstrated by how little time it took to collect 80 percent of their names on it," explains VSEA Union Representative Rachael Fields. "The VVH petition was started last Friday night and 36 hours later 72 of the 89 nursing employees impacted by management's proposed schedule had signed it. It was a very strong rejection."

"We dedicate our lives to caring for our veterans and members and feel that our work should be valued by management enough for them to work with us to create a schedule that respects our contract, our union and our humanity," adds VVH LPN Stacey Crawford, who helped develop the nurses' proposed schedule.

Fields says since receiving the petition, VVH management has shelved its originally proposed schedule and is now taking a hard look at the schedule developed by the nurses.

Nice work VVH nurses and supporters!

AOT Workers Deliver Bargaining Petition To Deputy Commissioner

VSEA AOT leaders in garages across Vermont signed and delivered a petition to AOT Deputy Commissioner Sue Minter on September 10, calling on her to negotiate a fair contract with the workers. The workers' petition calls on management to reward dedicated frontline employees with:

- A fair COLA and step retention;
- No benefit plan rollbacks;
- No expansion of snow season without a meaningful increase in "snow pay";
- Automatic, annual COLA increases for snow and tool pay, as well as boot reimbursement;
- Full pay for workers out on workers' comp due to lyme disease; and
- Binding, third-party arbitration as a means to settle disputes.

Note: The State announced on September 10 that Ms. Minter is leaving her office on Monday to pursue her political ambitions.

Judiciary Workers Demonstrate Solidarity!

Last week, *WIA* informed you about a VSEA Judiciary members' unfair labor practice charge getting a hearing at the Vermont Labor Relations Board. On the day of the hearing, in a show of solidarity for the participating VSEA Judiciary Unit members, other VSEA Judiciary workers across Vermont were asked to wear green and a VSEA button at work, and boy did they respond. Pictured here are just some of the Judiciary workers, sporting the green and buttons.

"VSEA thanks our Judiciary members for sending a strong message that Judiciary workers are united in their support for management to come to the bargaining table now, as opposed to December or January," VSEA President Shelley Martin tells *WIA*. "We are hoping for a ruling soon."

For background on the Judiciary Unit's ULP, click here: <http://bit.ly/1LxLOIt>

VSEA Member At Labor Board To Dispute Improper Overtime Payments

VSEA's Legal team found itself advocating again this week for another impressive member. □

On September 10, VSEA Associate General Counsel Justin St. James and VSEA member Michele Eynon appeared at the Vermont Labor Relations Board to participate in a hearing that concerns the State of Vermont providing only compensatory time to employees for overtime worked, instead of cash as the contract dictates for members in certain overtime categories. VSEA and Eynon contend the arrangement ignores the employee's overtime category that dictates cash as the form of compensation for all overtime hours worked.

"The State appeared to have offered overtime to the grievant at terms less than those required by the Non-Management Unit's collective bargaining agreement," explains St. James. "VSEA appreciates members like Michele having the courage to bring this important issue forward and being willing to endure the lengthy process that comes with bringing cases to the Labor Board. VSEA is anxious to learn the Labor Board's decision, and we will be sure to share it with all members once it's issued."

State Not Realizing Projected Savings From Closing Two 911 Dispatch Centers

[The Associated Press reports on September 9](#) that the State's closure of the Derby and Rutland 911 Emergency Dispatch Centers (PSAPs) is not generating the savings the State predicted, primarily due to the staffing issues that workers and VSEA warned about throughout the 2015 legislative session.

"Our PSAP workers told the State and legislators that their plan to move staff to the remaining, operating PSAPs would end up costing a lot due to increased travel and overtime," VSEA President Shelley Martin tells *WIA*. "Now their warnings are proving true."

In the *AP* story, VSEA legislative consultant Vince Illuzzi echoes Martin, telling the reporter, "If you add up all the collateral costs generated as a consequence of this decision, it substantially eats into any projected savings, at least in the short term."

VSEA Executive Director Steve Howard reminds that the union had recommended ways to achieve the savings and avoid the closures, but they were ignored and now the much-touted savings are not being realized.

"I have a feeling this is going to be a huge disaster," Howard says of the cuts. "I would be surprised if this doesn't get reversed at some point."

Don't Be Afraid To Ask The Gubernatorial Candidates Questions

Now that there are several declared candidates to be Vermont's next Governor (read: state employees' boss), it's time to start questioning the candidates about their position on issues important to frontline state employees. Here's some sample questions to get you started, but let us know what your question is for our declared gubernatorial candidates.

What is your reaction to the directive from the State to agencies and departments to “level fund” in the FY2017 budget?

What is your plan to address workplace safety to ensure all state employees enjoy the highest standards of protection?

What is your plan to address staffing and caseload issues within the Department for Children and Families, Economic Services, Corrections, and many other departments and agencies?

Are you aware that the Judiciary Branch is nearly half a year behind in acting on recommended security measures to protect workers inside Vermont's courtrooms? Is this acceptable?

Are you aware that a study was presented to the legislature in 2015, showing a need for 50 to 80 new positions within Corrections, primarily for safety reasons? What will you do to make it happen?

Do you respect the collective bargaining process and have you ever been involved in employee negotiations, on either side of the table?

Did you support closing two Vermont 911 Emergency Dispatch Centers, even though first responders and the public almost universally rejected the idea?

Would you support an additional \$1 to \$2 tax on a hotel's night stay to raise much-needed revenue and prevent cuts to services? If no, then how would you generate new revenue, or would you?

Do you support the State selling off state-owned property, then leasing space instead?

After posting this on Facebook this week, VSEA members submitted these additional questions:

What is your plan to improve employee retention and make the State of Vermont an "employer of choice" that attracts and retains highly qualified candidates and employees?

Do you agree that the collective bargaining process should be conducted solely between the state and the VSEA, with no interference from or participation of the legislature?

Do you support reimbursing meal expenses at the GSA rates or continuing the targeted tax on state workers who have to travel for their job?

If you have a question for the candidates to add to the mix, please email it to vsea@vsea.org, subject line “My Candidate Question.”

New Report Finds Massachusetts' DCF Workers Are “Overwhelmed”

A September 10 *Boston Herald* story highlights some of the eye-opening findings from an interim report about the operation of the state's Department for Children and Families. Vermont DCF workers will probably be able to relate to much of what their Massachusetts counterparts are experiencing.

From the story:

"[The] interim report, which was produced by the Ripples Group and released yesterday, found that poor management and heavy caseloads compromise the care foster kids receive.

'The current situation sets up the workforce to fail as they cannot handle the volume of cases they are assigned without sacrificing quality,' the report said.

The weak management system at DCF leaves caseworkers 'overwhelmed and stressed' and more susceptible to the tragedies that have occurred recently under the agency's watch, the report states.

'This is what front-line child protection workers have been talking about for years,' said Jason A. Stephany, a spokesman for the DCF caseworkers' union. 'You can look at any recent report, and the results and recommendations are always the same.'

VSEA's Retirees' Chapter Looking To Fill District 6 Trustee Vacancy

At the recent Retirees' Chapter Annual Meeting in August, no name was submitted to fill the VSEARC District 6 (Windsor/Windham) Trustee seat, prompting Chapter members present at the meeting to declare the seat "vacant." VSEARC bylaws now allow the BOT to appoint to this seat.

We are once again recruiting for anyone interested in this seat. Please send your name to the VSEARC Board of Trustees, on or before September 20, 2015. **You do not need to reside in Windham/Windsor Counties or Vermont. You *do* need to be a member of the VSEARC.**

Please submit your name to: Vsearc@vsea.org. Names of interested lifetime members must be submitted by Sept. 20, 2015.

Questions...send to email above.

An appointment will be made at the VSEARC BOT's meeting on September 24, 2015.

Vermonters Not Saving For Retirement

[VPR reports this week](#) that Vermont was recently ranked last in the nation in terms of amount of savings banked for people with retirement plans through their employer. It's an issue primarily with Vermonters working in the private sector who receive a 401K, and who are not supplementing their retirement accounts with any additional funds.

"We have a real problem that we need to begin addressing here, because people are not going to have money," explained SEIU's Steve Hill in a presentation to Vermont's Public Retirement Study Committee last week, "It's a crisis."

"We want to help our members avoid these kinds of issues, which is why VSEA fights so hard every year to protect our active and retired members' pension benefits, and our defined benefit plan," VSEA President Shelley Martin tells *WIA*. "Supporters of 401K plans will tell you to leave the investing to the individual, but this study shows that many people are struggling so hard to make ends meet that they are unable to supplement their 401Ks the way they should be. It's tough out there."

America's Lowest-Paid Workers See Biggest Drop In Paychecks Since Start Of Recession

[The New York Times reports recently](#) that while some signs are pointing to an improving economy across America, the amount of money many workers are taking home is effectively less in 2015 than it was in 2008, when the recession began.

According to a recent study by the National Employment Law Project, income decline has been greatest for low-wage workers in sectors where hiring has been strong (home health care, food preparation and retailing). Worse, their wages were already below average to begin with in these service industries.

“Stagnant wages are a problem for everyone at this point, but the imbalance in the economy has become more pronounced since the recession,” says Irene Tung, a senior policy researcher at the National Employment Law Project and co-author of [the study](#).

Discount Sugarbush Ski Passes Return For 2015-2016 Season.

For the ninth straight year, VSEA is pleased to inform you that the VSEA Advantage Discount Program is once again offering discounted Sugarbush all-mountain (& other) ski passes for the 2015-2016 season. This year, Sugarbush is once again using an online sign-up feature, which went live on September 1. This year’s rate will be (15+ VSEA sign-ups) \$899 + tax. Offer is available only to full-fledged VSEA members, meaning those who pay full dues. VSEA will be confirming names and status with Sugarbush representative. All-Mountain youth (\$479), child (\$30) and “20s” (\$349) passes can also be purchased from the link.

[Click here](#) to go to VSEA’s website page with the link. If you receive an “access denied” message, it means you are not a registered with VSEA’s website for “member-only” status, which is available to members paying full dues. If you want to register for member-only status, please [click here](#). To sign up to become a full, dues-paying member, please [click here](#).

Please share this notice with any VSEA members you know who might be interested in the Sugarbush deal.

A few notes:

- The program is open to full time employees, their spouse, partner in a same sex marriage. It is not meant for a "roommate" situation.
- Youth and child passes may be purchased only in conjunction with an adult pass.

Deadline to sign up is September 30, 2015!

Discounted Bolton Valley Season Passes Now Available To VSEA Members

For the third year in a row, the VSEA Advantage Discount Program is pleased to offer discounted season passes to the Bolton Valley Ski Resort in Bolton, Vt. VSEA members who order a pass before October 31, 2015, will receive a \$70 discount off the regular \$569 season pass price, making it just \$499. Like last year, this offer is available only to VSEA members who are currently paying full dues to their union.

The sign-up process is pretty straightforward, but, like last year, in order for a member to view the special VSEA discount promo code ([which can be found by clicking here](#)), you must be a registered user of the VSEA website, which also requires you to be a full dues-paying member. If you want to register for member-only status, please [click here](#). To sign up to become a full, dues-paying member, please [click here](#).

After acquiring the special VSEA promo code, VSEA members can [go here](#) to place your season pass order.

Follow these instructions to make your purchase:

- Click on “Buy Online” and select pass products, accepting or declining pass protection and adding each product to your cart.
- In the Cart view, click on “Add/Change Guest” to set the pass holder's name and information to each pass product, then click “Proceed to Checkout.”
- Enter your Promo Code in the box where it asks for your promo code then click “Apply Code.” The cart should be refreshed and show the discounted corporate pricing.

A 2015-16 Bolton Valley All Access Season Pass includes:

- Unlimited alpine skiing and riding;
- 100km of Nordic and backcountry skiing;
- A 20% discount on rentals, retail shop purchases, group ski and ride lessons, and lodging (includes condos, suites, or hotel rooms); and
- Sports Center Membership including access to an indoor heated pool, hot tub, and sauna.

BV pricing allows you to build your own family pass. Adult passes are just \$499 and passes for youth 17 and under are just \$159 when purchased with a parent's pass.

If you have any questions, please contact Brad Battin at 802-434-6813 or bbattin@boltonvalley.com

VSEA Teams Continue Bargaining Overview Meetings

VSEA Judiciary and NMU Bargaining Team members and staff are continuing 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 some newly scheduled meetings—by Bargaining Unit:

Non-Management Unit – Contact: Tim Boyle, tboyle@vsea.org or 802 595-9106

Barre – September 16 – McFarland State Office Building, ESD Conference Room – Noon

Montpelier – September 18 – Tax Dept., 133 State, Room 410 – Noon

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

“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!

"You come to this window to talk to security before you get entrance. Once in the two-story atrium, you still can't get into the work environment. Visitors have to call state workers from phones and, if approved, get escorted through locked doors to their offices."

Waterbury State Office Building Project Manager Mike Stevens in a [September 2 Seven Days story](#) about the new complex and some of the security measures being implemented following the recent tragedy in Barre.

[{PUT IN SIDEBAR}](#)

[DCF FSD Workers Urged To Complete Revised Safety Survey](#)

In light of the recent tragedy in Barre, labor team members of the DCF Family Services Division's Labor/Management Committee are requesting that all DCF FSD employees please revisit and complete a revised safety survey concerning your job duties. While many employees did fill out a similar survey earlier in the summer, your team members are requesting that everyone take a few moments to fill out the revised survey, providing as much detail as possible. Please respond no later than September 11, 2015. The survey can be accessed by [clicking here](#).

[VSEA Member's Firefighter Son Seeks Kidney Donation](#)

VSEA member Gerald Garrow is the Fire Safety Division's Chief Plumbing and Heating Inspector, and some of his coworkers recently contacted VSEA to let the union know about Gerald's son, Brent, a union firefighter who is in need of a kidney donation. Brent, a Local 2323 firefighter, is O-blood type. In an appeal on Facebook, Garrow's mother Jennifer writes, "If you are a potential donor or know someone who could help him. I'd be forever grateful!" She adds that he needs a new kidney by October to avoid dialysis.

If you are able to help, please contact the UVM medical center @ 877-467-5102.

[New VSEA Video Uses Recent Retiree Voices To Talk With Young State Employees Just Joining The Workforce](#)

VSEA's Communications Department has produced an 11-minute video that features recent VSEA retirees talking about their experience in the union, why they got involved, the good the union does, the importance of being a steward and other things. VSEA will begin including a flyer in all new-member packets, steering the new member to the video link and asking them to take a few minutes and view.

"This is an additional tool for VSEA to use to recruit new members to get active in their union and help ensure it's still around when he or she is getting ready to retire and pass the baton to a whole new generation of Vermont state employees," says VSEA Communications Director Doug Gibson.

VSEA members can view the video by [clicking here](#).

[VSEA Labor Educator Announces Fall 2015 Training Schedule](#)

VSEA Labor Educator Tim Lenoach asked WIA to announce a new round of trainings he has scheduled throughout the fall 2015. If you are interested in registering to attend one or more trainings, you can do so by [clicking here](#). Please direct your training questions to Tim at tlenoch@vsea.org.

Steward 1: Introduction and the Basics

VTrans Training Center, 1716 US Rte. 302, Berlin

Wednesday September 16

VSEA Council Members and Chapter Officers

VTrans Training Center, 1716 US Rte. 302, Berlin
Wednesday, September 23

Steward 2: Protecting the Contract and Building the Union

VTrans Training Center, 1716 US Rte. 302, Berlin
Wednesday September 30

Steward 3: The Contract and Challenges in the Workplace

VTrans Training Center, 1716 US Rte. 302, Berlin
Wednesday, October 14

The Labor Activist (open to all members and union officers)

VTrans Training Center, 1716 US Rte. 302, Berlin
Friday, October 16

Health and Safety Issues

VTrans Training Center, 1716 US Rte. 302, Berlin
Wednesday, October 28

The Grievance

VTrans Training Center, 1716 US Rte. 302, Berlin
Friday, November 6

Steward 1: Introduction and the Basics

VTrans Training Center, 1716 US Rte. 302, Berlin
Friday, November 13

VSEA Council Members and Chapter Officers

VTrans Training Center, 1716 US Rte. 302, Berlin
Wednesday, November 18

The Labor Activist (open to all members and union officers)

VTrans Training Center, 1716 US Rte. 302, Berlin
Wednesday, November 25

Labor Management Committees for Stewards and Labor Team Members

VTrans Training Center, 1716 US Rte. 302, Berlin
Wednesday, December 2

Steward 2: Protecting the Contract and Building the Union

VTrans Training Center, 1716 US Rte. 302, Berlin
Friday, December 4

Representing Co-Workers in Investigations and Disciplinary Meetings

VTrans Training Center, 1716 US Rte. 302, Berlin
Wednesday, December 9

Steward 3: The Contract and Challenges in the Workplace

VTrans Training Center, 1716 US Rte. 302, Berlin
Friday, December 18

[Click here](#) to register for a training(s)!

Upcoming Meetings/Events/Holidays:

September 16

Vermont State Colleges Staff Federation Executive Board Meeting
VSEA HQ
Montpelier
9:00 a.m.

September 16

Building Committee Meeting
VSEA HQ
Montpelier
9:00 a.m.

September 16

Steward Training 1: Introduction & Basics
VTrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Route 302
Berlin
9:00 a.m.

September 16

NMU Contract Overview Meeting
McFarland House
ESD Conference Room
Noon

September 17

Judiciary Unit Labor/Management Committee Meeting VS
VSEA HQ
Montpelier
Noon

September 18

NMU Contract Overview Meeting
Tax Dept. & DII
133 State St.
Room 410
Montpelier
Noon