



## WEEK IN ACTION!

Weekly News From Your Union ~ September 14, 2015 – September 18, 2015

### **VSEA Members Meet At Jay Peak For 71<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting. Dave Bellini Is Elected VSEA President.**

More than 150 VSEA members were at the Jay Peak Resort on September 12 to attend their union's 71<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting. At the meeting, members debated and passed a budget for the next fiscal year, and they approved several Non-Management Unit master bylaw proposals. Members also voted in large numbers to approve the union's first dues increase in four years, raising member dues 54 cents per paycheck to \$17.52, or \$14.04 per year. Finally, members learned the results of recent elections for union officers, and the winners were:

Dave Bellini - DOC - President  
Aimee Towne - ESD - First Vice President  
Rubin Jennings - DG's Office - Second Vice President  
Sheila Manchester Coniff - AOE – Treasurer  
Katelyn Chase - ESD – Clerk

Members at Annual Meeting also elected the following to the State Retirement Board:

Judy Rosenstreich – DMH – Full-Time Seat  
Jean-Paul Isabelle – Sec'y of State's Office – Alternate

The VSEA Council held its meeting at Jay the Friday prior to Annual Meeting. In addition to hearing from a veteran of the Wisconsin labor wars and learning some valuable lessons from him, Council members also reviewed much of the same material that would be presented to members at Annual Meeting. At both the Council and Annual Meetings, a moment of silence was observed for DCF worker Lara Sobel, and Chittenden Chapter President and DCF worker Kara Haynes took time during the Council meeting to deliver an impassioned remembrance of her colleague and ask members to support the call for more frontline DCF workers and safer workplaces for all. After the Council meeting adjourned on Friday, VSEA hosted a banquet and many gubernatorial candidates and other politicians attended. Members were able to interact with the invited guests at a cocktail hour prior to the banquet. When the banquet ended, VSEA's Special Events Committee got its wild west-themed party started, and members got to network a little and have some fun. A table was present both days for members to contribute something to a fund VSEA is helping the family of Lara Sobel establish to honor her memory and help her children. Soon, VSEA will announce how all members can contribute to this special fund.

This week, President Bellini gave interviews in his new role to several news outlets, keeping his message consistent that his primary issues for VSEA are staffing, caseloads and workplace safety. Bellini also used the opportunity to denounce the State's recent directive to Agency and Department heads to "level-fund" in the new fiscal year, reminding about the many demonstrated safety and staffing needs that currently exist throughout state government.

Outgoing VSEA President Shelley Martin asked *WIA* to thank all the members who attended Annual Meeting and to wish Dave Bellini all her best in his new position leading VSEA. The Special Events Committee wants to thank all the vendors who helped sponsor the event and set up tables outside the event to promote their services to VSEA members.

## **Annual Meeting Awards**

During lunch at Annual Meeting, VSEA's Special Events Committee member Janis Henderson took to the microphone to announce the winners of the union's annual awards, recognizing excellence within the VSEA membership. The winners were:

Frank Mazza Award (internal VSEA promotion efforts) – Patricia Bennett, DPS  
Terence Macaig Award (external VSEA promotion efforts)– Shelley Martin, ANR  
Chapter of the Year – Retired Members' Chapter  
Linda Coan Award (HQ staff person acknowledgement) – Amy Haskins, Financial Coordinator

## **Presidential Awards**

Outgoing VSEA President Shelley Martin issued her final set of "Presidential Awards" to members and retirees who she says went "beyond the call of duty" in the past year. They include:

Art Aulis – AOT  
Patricia Bennett – DPS  
Jerry Comstock – AOT  
Janis Henderson – VSC  
Tom Lague – DPS  
Monte Mason – Retiree  
Dr. Leslie Matthews – ANR  
Mary Poulos – DOC  
John Roman – ANR  
Tony Smith - Retiree

## **Annual Meeting Video Recaps Year To Date**

VSEA members attending this year's Annual Meeting were treated to a video recap of what VSEA has been up to since the 2014 Annual Meeting. If you haven't had a chance to view the video, you can do so by [clicking here](#). It was prepared by VSEA's Communications Department.

## **Bellini's Election Opens Corrections Board Seat To Interested DOC Members!**

For years, VSEA's Corrections Unit has been represented admirably on the VSEA Board of Trustees by Dave Bellini, who was elected VSEA President this past weekend. Bellini's new post creates an opening on the Board, and VSEA is accepting [petitions](#) from interested workers who belong to the Corrections Unit.

If you're a VSEA DOC member who is interested in running to fill the Corrections Board seat, you must obtain 25 signatures or more on a [petition](#) and submit it to headquarters by 4:00 p.m., Friday, October 9, 2015.

## **AOT Workers Snubbed This Week By State Negotiators**

VSEA AOT leaders came to Montpelier on Tuesday, September 15, fully expecting to meet with State negotiators to talk about their specific contract needs in this current round of negotiations. But less than 24 hours before the meeting was to take place, the State's lead negotiator canceled, citing the need to review a report. VSEA's lead negotiator responded back almost immediately, writing, "VSEA is not agreeable to canceling our NMU bargaining meeting scheduled for tomorrow. As I informed you last week, we will have VSEA members that work for AOT attending to discuss proposals directly related to AOT and I also requested that AOT management attend."

VSEA's AOT members all took time off work to come to Montpelier, and they were not pleased to be stood up, so they decided to walk their list of issues down the street to the Pavilion Building, which

houses the Governor's office. They were met downstairs by a representative of the Governor's Office, where AOT leader Leavitt Sayers presented the workers' issues and a petition to the representative and told him they viewed the State's no-show at bargaining as "disrespectful" to them and the time they took to come to Montpelier. The representative took their information, thanked them for coming and then hurried away.

The AOT workers then assembled outside the Pavilion Building's entrance, where they conducted a short press conference with *VTDigger*. Sayers again explaining that the meeting had been planned for more than a week, and the workers were not happy it did not occur. He also reiterated that the workers viewed the State negotiator's action as disrespectful. When asked if the workers were willing to return for another bite at the apple, most indicated they would be, but they added it is not easy given the nature of their work. You can read the *VTDigger* story [here](#).

Following their trip to the Pavilion Building, the AOT contingent crossed the street to deliver the same list of issues and petition to the Commissioner of the Human Resources. She was unable to meet with the workers and sent a representative out to greet them instead.

Just a reminder that the AOT workers are looking for the following in this year's contract negotiations:

- 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.

### **Stunt? No, Just An Attempt To Talk**

Just hours after the AOT workers had left Montpelier to return home, the Secretary of the Administration was conducting an interview with the *Times Argus*, where he labeled the workers attempt to talk with someone a "stunt" that he alleged was "orchestrated by the union." Johnson also slams VSEA for not informing the AOT contingent of the State's cancellation, never acknowledging that most workers do not have the luxury to cancel a scheduled day off with less than 24 hours notice, which is what State negotiators afforded these workers when informing them early Monday morning that they would rather review documents then go to a scheduled bargaining session. Johnson's attack was not received well by the AOT workers who came to Montpelier, or their VSEA brothers and sisters or a lot of AOT supporters across Vermont in general. One AOT worker who went to the Pavilion posted on VSEA's Facebook page that the State was well aware they would be there that day, not buying Johnson's account at all.

A VSEA voice did not appear in the *Times Argus*, primarily because the reporter only reached out to Executive Director Steve Howard, who was in meetings on Tuesday afternoon and missed his calls. Howard, however, did not waste any time contacting the reporter to clarify that the AOT workers' action was not a stunt, and that the State's snub of the workers was disrespectful. "The [State] had a week's notice," Howard tells the reporter. "The deputy secretary of administration knew (the AOT workers) had taken time off. It's not my job to brief the [State] on this." He adds, "These are not people who come to meetings every day. These people took the day off from working on our roads and our bridges to be there, and to not meet with them was disrespectful." [You can read the whole story here](#).

## **Sen. Sears Concerned Retirement Incentive Could Hit DCF Hard**

[Seven Days reports on September 15](#) that the four State agencies and departments that stand to suffer the greatest loss of employees due to the State's retirement incentive are AOT (50 possible), DCF (27), DOC (20) and DEC (15). The DCF number has Senator Dick Sears (D-Bennington) very concerned. "You take another 20 to 30 workers out of DCF, and you are going to create a huge problem for those who are left," Sears tells *Seven Days*. He's right, and, as Sen. Jane Kitchel (D-Caledonai) correctly notes in response to Sears' concerns, just a quarter of those slots will be allowed to be refilled.

## **Have You Signed The VSEA 2015 Contract: Respect & Dignity Petition Yet?**

As official contract bargaining on successor agreements begins, VSEA is reminding members to sign your union's "2015 Contract: Respect & Dignity" petition, which calls for good-faith bargaining, an end to cuts, cuts and more cuts and for lawmakers to stay out of the collective bargaining process (language prompted by a letter from the Chairs of two powerful House committees with their suggestions for what and how to bargain with state employees). To date, VSEA has collected nearly 900 signatures on the petition, but we need more!

You can sign the online petition by [clicking here](#).

## **"Right-Size Government" Is Code For Service/Job Cuts!**

VSEA is advising members to keep an ear open for the phrase "right-size government" in the coming months. It's code for service and job cuts.

If you hear this phrase, remember what "right-sizing" government means to frontline state workers, which is:

- Adding 52-84 new positions in Corrections, which a study said was needed, primarily for safety reasons;
- Adding 40-60 (or more...) new DCF social worker positions, to try to prevent another tragedy;
- Adding much-needed positions at the Green Mountain Psychiatric Care Facility, where one or two wings are currently closed due to a lack of staff and Vermont is in a mental health crisis;
- Adding Dispatcher positions to help alleviate the workload issues caused by the ill-advised recent closure of two Vermont PSAPs; and
- You tell VSEA. Send an email to [dgibson@vsea.org](mailto:dgibson@vsea.org) and write "Positions Needed!" in the subject line. Tell us what you do, where you work and why more employees are needed.

Please help VSEA ensure Vermonters understand the message. Thanks!

## **After Five-Year Fight, VSEA's Class-Action OT Lawsuit Is Dismissed**

Back in 2010, more than 700 current and former VSEA members entered into a lawsuit against the State, claiming unpaid overtime because the State was not paying time-and-one-half for overtime to employees in pay grades 23 and above. Unfortunately, the lawsuit was dismissed in 2013 by the federal court in Burlington, so the VSEA members appealed the decision to the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit in New York City, and on September 14, this Court affirmed the dismissal of the lawsuit, effectively ending a five-year battle in the courts.

According to Tom Somers, the Class' attorney, the United States District Court dismissed the case in 2013 on the grounds that Vermont enjoys sovereign immunity against FLSA lawsuits and has not waived it. Somers explains that sovereign immunity is an ancient doctrine carried over from the law in Great Britain where the King may not be sued. Recently, the United States Supreme Court expanded sovereign immunity for states against claims for overtime under the FLSA.

“The Court did not rule that the State complied with the federal overtime law,” says Somers. “In fact, the Court stated that Vermont was subject to the federal overtime law. Its ruling was grounded solely on the basis of sovereign immunity.” He added, “We are very disappointed that the case has been dismissed. Obviously we believed in our arguments and fought as long and as hard as we could.”

Somers says he’ll be conferring with the Representative Plaintiffs before deciding whether to seek review from the United States Supreme Court. The United States Supreme Court only accepts approximately 80 appeals a year.

## **VSEA Member Pens Letter To Editor**

Inspired by what she heard from a Wisconsin labor activist who spoke to the VSEA Council on Friday, September 11, VSEA Brattleboro Chapter President Robin Rieske decided to pen a letter to the editor of her local paper, championing labor unions and working people. Here’s an excerpt:

"Unions are under attack nationally, and here in Vermont the landscape is not much different. So what can you do? Support the unions. Get involved in the ones you are a member of. Support the unions your loved ones or neighbors are in and the ones that fight for fairness and justice for all workers including those not in unions. It has been proven time and time again, that the response to economic inequality is labor unions."

Read Robin's Full Letter Here: <http://bit.ly/1OZfVXg>

Read The Editorial Robin References Here: <http://bit.ly/1LyAjeo>

## **Nice Story About VT Game Wardens Making Sure Roadkill Doesn’t Go To Waste**

[Nice little story in Seven Days this week](#) about how Vermont Game Wardens do everything they can to ensure roadkill is not going to waste and that it is salvaged and provided to families in need.

"We don't always want to be the person out there writing tickets," explains VSEA member and Game Warden Greg Eckhardt, a 17-year veteran whose district includes the towns of Londonderry and Windham. "If you can help someone out, it's pretty cool."

## **VSEA Labor Educator Reminds That Some Fall Trainings Are Open To All**

*VSEA Labor Educator Tim Lenocho asked WIA to remind members that many of the trainings scheduled throughout the fall 2015 are open to all members (indicated below in blue).*

*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](mailto:tlenoch@vsea.org).*

### **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)!

**New Report Finds Working Americans Achieving Positive Results At Bargaining Table In 2015**

A story published this week about working Americans achieving success at the bargaining table in 2015. Here's an excerpt:

"According to the report, working people who bargained for new contracts in the first half of 2015 saw their wages increase by an average of 4.3%, an increase of \$1,147 a year for an average wage earner in the United States. These increases are up from 2.9% in the first half of 2014, with substantial wage wins occurring in sectors from nursing and oil to airline pilots and teachers."

Link To Story & Report Here: <http://bit.ly/1KjhFAZ>

## **VtSHARES Welcomes New Program to its Roster of Charitable Organizations: Girls/Boyz FIRST Mentoring Program**

*This piece was submitted to WIA by Doug Kievit-Kylar (VSEA & Sustainability Committee Member/Mentor with the Girls/Boyz FIRST Mentoring Program)*

The season of giving will soon be upon us once again as VtSHARES rolls out again this autumn. This is the time of year when we all invest in our fellow Vermonters by donating to charitable organizations designed to help those in need. Every year Vermont state employees demonstrate remarkable generosity of spirit through their donations to VtSHARES – and VSEA members have, and can continue to play an important role in supporting charitable organizations of their choice.

VtSHARES was established in 1977 as the State Employees' Combined Charitable Appeal (SECCA) to allow an annual, coordinated campaign to permit payroll deduction, thereby encouraging financial support from Vermont State employees for local charitable organizations providing services to Vermonters. The campaign allows employees to spread contributions over an entire year or to make a one-time gift through payroll deductions.

This is the first year that the Girls/Boyz FIRST Mentoring Program is included in the roster of charitable organizations that State employees may elect to support with a donation. As a mentor for nearly two decades in this program myself I urge you to learn what you can about mentoring, about this important program, and consider making a donation to support young Vermonters.

To learn more about mentoring, the program, or to volunteer as a mentor yourself please visit the Girls/Boyz FIRST Mentoring Website at:

<http://www.communityconnections.us/ProgramInfo/girlsboyz/GirlsBoyz.html>

The economy and environment have continued to be hard on many Vermonters, and supporting those in need has always been a trademark of state employees and VSEA members. I urge you to take part in VtSHARES and choose to make a difference.

### **Discount Sugarbush Ski Passes Return For 2015-2016 Season.**

**Deadline to sign up is September 30, 2015!** 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.

## 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](mailto:bbattin@boltonvalley.com)

## 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!**

*"The [State has] had this information [about AOT workers coming to the 9/15 scheduled bargaining session] for seven days and they initially made it seem like they were going to meet with us. Then, all of a sudden, out of nowhere, they kind of fell back on what they had said."*

VSEA AOT member Leavitt Sayers, in an informal press conference outside the Pavilion Building after delivering AOT workers' contract issues there. The workers decided to personally deliver the issues after State negotiators cancelled their scheduled meeting with the workers at the last minute.

### **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'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](mailto: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.

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

#### **September 21**

Central Vermont Chapter Meeting

VSEA HQ

Montpelier

5:00 p.m.

#### **September 23**

Council/Chapter Officers Training

VTrans Training Center

1716 U.S. Route 302

Berlin

9:00 a.m.

**September 24**

Retirees' Chapter Meeting

VSEA HQ

Montpelier

9:30 a.m.

**September 25**

DCF FSD Labor/Management Committee Meeting

VSEA HQ

Montpelier

9:30 a.m.