



## WEEK IN ACTION!

Weekly News From Your Union ~ March 28, 2016 – April 1, 2016

**>> View the full issue of *Week In Action* by visiting [VSEA.ORG](http://VSEA.ORG)**

### **Hard Work Of Vermont Veterans' Home Workers Is Acknowledged**

Not allowing discussions in Montpelier about privatizing the Vermont Veterans' Home (VVH) to get them down, VSEA members working at the VVH continue to provide top-level care to Vermont veterans, and this week their dedication and commitment earned the facility two important and desired distinctions.

- A zero deficiency rate for the second consecutive year; and
- A five-star rating from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, which makes the VVH one of the nation's best.

VVH administration announced the awards in two March 29 press releases, saying: "The outstanding survey results achieved by the Vermont Veterans' Home are just one of the many reasons we are the hallmark in caring for our heroes" and "The staff at the VVH fulfills the promise to our country's veterans, their spouses and Gold Star parents in a vibrant, patient-centered and respectful setting."

"Congratulations to the entire Vets' Home workforce for sticking together and working really hard to provide the best service possible to our veterans," VSEA President Dave Bellini tells *WIA*. "These are important acknowledgements, and you have to wonder why there are still legislators and elected officials openly talking about wanting to turn the care of our veterans over to some private, for-profit company; especially when we're reading about all the trouble Michigan is having after that state privatized some of its Vets' Home services. I really don't think Vermonters want anything similar to what happened there. Our Vets' Home is one of the country's best, and I think we should all be proud of that and fully support the facility and its workers."

### **Delegation Of VSEA Members Headed To Labor Notes Conference In Chicago**

A 15-member VSEA delegation departed Vermont today en route to Chicago to attend the annual and popular *Labor Notes* conference, where more than 2,000 labor activists from across America are gathering this weekend to share ideas, lessons and strategies about how best to organize and advocate for working people. This is the fourth year VSEA has sent a delegation to the conference.

Conference attendees can choose from several workshop "tracks," including Secrets of a Successful Organizer, Health Care, Shop Floor & Steward Skills, Defending Everyone, Organizing Beyond the Workplace, Contract Campaigns & Strikes, Local Officers, Global Justice, Postal Workers and Educators.

VSEA members attending this year's conference include: Bob Arkley (DOC), Suzanne Arrand (AOE), Jennifer Brooks (Judiciary), Nicole Burdick (Judiciary), Katelyn Chase (ESD), Margaret Crowley (Judiciary), Marion Fignar (DOL), Cassandra Edson (DOL), Rubin Jennings (AG's Office), Barbara King (VVH), Jayne King (Judiciary), Sheila Manchester Coniff (AOE), Jill Mongeon (Judiciary), Victoria Thorpe (Judiciary), and William Wells (ESD).

### **State Now Wants To Keep "Temporary" Middlesex Psychiatric Facility Through 2020 & Open New Forensic Unit**

[VPR aired a story on March 26](#) about State officials being asked to “expand the size and scope” of whatever permanent facility is built to replace the “temporary” psychiatric care facility that was constructed in Middlesex after Tropical Storm Irene caused the closure of the old Vermont State Hospital in Waterbury. The temporary facility was scheduled to close at the beginning of 2016, but now officials want it to stay in operation through 2020, when a new permanent structure will be built. In the piece, Mental Health Commissioner Frank Reed explains that he wants the new “permanent” facility to “have the capacity to take in mentally ill inmates who don’t belong in prison but [who] do need secure residential care,” adding that prison is no place for inmates with severe mental illness to receive proper care. This is welcome news to VSEA and its members working in Corrections, who have long advocated for the State and lawmakers to build a forensic unit to care for this population, and they have been joined by VSEA members working at one of the state’s psychiatric facilities, who also believe these individuals can receive much better care outside a prison setting.

As proof of how long VSEA members have been requesting the State to build a forensic unit, here are some excerpts from past *WIA* stories:

November 2011

*The legislature’s Mental Health Oversight Committee held a meeting on November 9 to hear testimony from nearly every party tied to the Vermont State Hospital and learn more about the status of interim plans to replace the services provided at the facility prior to it being inundated by Tropical Storm Irene.*

*The VSH workforce was represented by Psychiatric Techs Kris Martin and Peter Bartlett, who testified about how unique and specialized the current VSH staff is and how a lot of employees have real concerns about the level of care their patients are receiving in some of the State’s interim facilities, which includes a prison. Martin and Bartlett also voiced their support for the State to construct a State-run, stand-alone hospital somewhere in central Vermont; one that is **also equipped to accept Vermont’s forensic (a.k.a. inmate) population suffering with acute and severe mental illness**. “I think the only logical solution would be a centrally located new hospital with 30 beds at least,” said Bartlett. Martin concurred, adding “A centrally located, new facility is the answer.” Martin also expressed his hope that no VSH employee would lose his/her job as a result of Irene, and he voiced the frustration of many VSH employees about how long this workforce has waited for a real solution to replacing the VSH, saying, “People are fed up. They want a decision.”*

March 2010

*“Our DOC members have been warning VSEA for years that the number of severely mentally ill inmates is rising, and that, as a result, they fear more and more for their own personal safety,” VSEA’s Legislative Coordinator told WIA. “VSEA has also been trying hard to get the appropriate legislative committees to address the issue of mentally ill inmates by **adding forensic beds** to any plan adopted to replace the Vermont State Hospital. These beds would be a place where Vermont’s severely mentally ill inmates could receive proper treatment for their illness, instead of DOC employees having to just deal with it at their own peril.”*

February 2008

*While VSEA supports the idea of siting the facility in Waterbury, we have serious concerns that using the Dale facility may limit the space that will ultimately be needed for patients transferring from the Vermont State Hospital. If the Dale facility closes as a women’s prison, the State should consider **creating a ‘center for forensic psychiatry’** for DOC which can house offenders with serious mental illness.”*

November 2007

*While VSEA disagrees with the **lack of forensic beds** suggested in the new system—and still supports a*

*this report is a positive step away from the Administration's favored plan to privatize the mental health system by building a \$100 million facility on the Fletcher Allen campus. The future of the Vermont State Hospital will remain a top priority for VSEA in the coming legislative session.*

Commissioner Reed also told lawmakers that he has been instructed to "evaluate the prospect of partnering on the project with a private company." VSEA will be keeping an eye out for whatever parameters are established to govern a public/private partnership, should one be formed.

## **Two VSEA Members Declare As Candidates In Vermont House Races**

Two more VSEA members and frontline state employees will be working this year to follow in the footsteps of VVH member (now Union Representative) Rachael Fields, who was victorious in her first-ever run for the House in 2012.

VSEA is pleased to announce that VSEA First Vice President Aimee Towne is running to succeed House Speaker Shap Smith as the new representative for the towns of Elmore, Morristown, Woodbury and Worcester. Aimee is a Benefits Program Specialist with the Economic Services Division in Morrisville.

[Read Aimee's Campaign Announcement Here](#)

VSEA is also pleased to announce that VSEA Judiciary employee Evan Hill is running for one of two seats to represent Vermonters living in the Grand Isle and West Milton district. Evan is a Family Case Manager who works in the Grand Isle County Courthouse.

[Read Evan's Campaign Announcement Here](#)

Rachael Fields is also running for re-election for a House seat in Bennington.

VSEA is asking members who live in Aimee, Evan and Rachael's districts to consider casting your vote for a fellow state employee. The more rank-and-file worker voices in the State House, the better!

## **NPR Story Features Great Work Being Done By Educator At Woodside**

National Public Radio aired an excellent story on March 29, titled "[Two Days Inside A Classroom For Young Offenders](#)," which features Woodside Teacher and VSEA member Lisa Elder. The reporter spends the day with Elder in her classroom, reporting on the important work she is doing every day to get troubled Vermont youth back on track, educating them about basic life skills and trying to provide some guidance and direction.

Here's an excerpt:

*"I'm looking at kids who are 14 years old and have been getting kicked out of school since day care," Elder says. "People give up on these kids."*

*For many, Woodside is the first stable place they've had. Most have experienced trauma. They come from troubled homes, foster care, even from the streets.*

*"We've had kids that have never used forks and spoons," she says.*

And like other VSEA members campaigning for improved safety protections, Elder tells *NPR* she's also not immune to violence at work, but, like many state employees, her dedication to the service she provides keeps her going.

*"I have been assaulted only once in any serious manner," she says, "and I had to go back in the next*

## **Labor Breathes Sigh Of Relief After U.S. Supreme Court Deadlocks On Fair Share Ruling**

Public-sector union members across America are breathing a huge sigh of relief after the U.S. Supreme Court divided this week in a case (*Friedrich's v. California Teachers Association*) that would have decided whether or not public employees who are represented by a union can be required to pay "fair share" fees. By all counts, the Court was poised to narrowly rule against unions, but then Justice Scalia passed away unexpectedly, and new rumors of a deadlocked Court began circulating. Sure enough, the Court did vote 4 to 4 on March 29 to leave in place an Appeals Court ruling that upheld a union's right to collect fair share fees.

The Friedrich's case had implications for more than 5 million workers in Vermont, as well as in 22 other states and Washington, D.C.; all of whom are represented at the bargaining table by public sector unions.

After the Court's vote, national AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka issued a statement, saying, "Today, working people have persevered in the face of another attack on our rights. All over the country working people are showing that we won't allow wealthy special interests or their politicians to stand in our way to join collectively and make workplaces better all across America. In the face of these attacks we are more committed than ever to ensuring that everyone has the right to speak up together for a better life."

## **April 30 Is Deadline To Enroll For New Easy-Issue, Permanent Life Insurance Option**

*In early February, VSEA announced a new offer to members to purchase voluntary permanent life insurance through the convenience of payroll deduction and easy online enrollment. Here's a reminder about the offer, which is being rolled out in a series of WIA announcements.*

### **Announcement #1 – February 9 – Features Of Affordable Purelife-Plus Life Insurance**

- Permanent life insurance to age 121;
- Easy qualification for Express Issue with only three work & health-related questions; and
- All with coverage that you own and may take with you when you change jobs or retire - it's yours to keep!

Employee, spouse, children and grandchildren may apply.\*

Remember...the State offers 2x your salary in life insurance. This coverage reduces to \$10,000 at retirement with 20 years of service.

Don't miss your chance to protect your family with permanent, portable life insurance from Texas Life Insurance Company.

*\*Texas Life complies with all state laws regarding marriages, domestic and civil union partnerships, and legally recognized familial relationships. Coverage and spouse/domestic partner eligibility may vary by state. PureLife-plus (PRFNG-NI-10) is an individual, flexible premium universal life insurance product. For details of coverage see the PureLife-plus brochure. PureLife-plus is underwritten by Texas Life Insurance Company, P.O. Box 830, Waco, TX, 76703; 1-800-283-9233 16M016-C (1) 1013 (exp0218)*

### **Announcement #2 – March 18 - Do You Have Enough Life Insurance?**

According to a recent LIMRA International survey, sixty-five percent of employees with group life believe they need more life insurance beyond what their employer provides.\*

Enrolling now, PureLife-plus is affordable life insurance from Texas Life

Enrollment Dates: 3/1/16 to 4/30/16

[Click here to enroll](#)

Login using your employee number in both the ID and password fields.

If you have any questions or need assistance with enrolling in coverage, please contact VSEA's insurance administrator, R.K. Tongue Co., at (800) 638-6353 or email [info@rktongue.com](mailto:info@rktongue.com).

\*Facts from LIMRA International, September 2015

*PureLife-plus (PRFNG-NI-10) is an individual, flexible premium universal life insurance product. For details of coverage see the PureLife-plus brochure. PureLife-plus is underwritten by Texas Life Insurance Company, P.O. Box 830, Waco, TX, 76703; 1-800-283-9233 16M016-C (2) 1013 (exp0218)*

**Announcement #2 – April 1 – Enrollment Dates Are 3/1/16 to 4/30/16!**

Have you taken advantage of this opportunity to apply for voluntary permanent life insurance? Log in now for your personalized offer!

[Click here to enroll](#)

Login using your employee number in both the ID and password fields.

If you have any questions or need assistance with enrolling in coverage, please contact VSEA's insurance administrator, R.K. Tongue Co., at (800) 638-6353 or email [info@rktongue.com](mailto:info@rktongue.com). For additional information, [click here](#).

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## **Bolton Valley Already Offering VSEA Members Deeply Discounted 2016-2017 Season Pass Rates**

Bolton Valley Ski Resort has been a participating member of the VSEA Advantage Discount Program for years, offering full-fledged VSEA members and their families discounted day and season passes.

Even though the 2015-2016 ski season isn't over quite yet, Bolton is already offering VSEA members an early-bird special deal on a 2016-2017 season pass. This is special pricing that Bolton Valley is offering on a trial basis to gauge Vermonters' interest in purchasing a pass way ahead of time if the price is deeply discounted.

Bolton is offering an adult "All-Access" season pass for \$269 to VSEA members. This is a \$230 savings per pass from last year. This price is good until October 31, 2016. Youth passes (\$159) include an added discount that Bolton will stop offering on April 4, 2016, so, if interested, book these sooner, not later.

[Click here](#) to order your pass(es) today! On the page, you'll find a list of prices and instructions to order. Members will need a promo code at the time of checkout, which will apply discounts to the full price passes. VSEA's promo code is 51VSEA.

## **VSEA & State's Child & Elder Care Committee Announce Benefits To State Employees**

*The VSEA/State Child and Elder Care Committee met this week at headquarters and asked WIA to announce the following programs available to state employees in the Executive Branch.*

1) **The Child Care Reimbursement Program** provides reimbursement for care supplied by a state-approved provider (separate from FSA).

- Reimbursement will be available for employees who spent at least \$300 dollars for regular, ongoing, work-related child care for children who were under 14 years of age (as of 12/31/15);
- Employee's (plus spouse's or partner's) federal taxable income (after deductions) must not exceed \$60,000;
- The application deadline for 2015 reimbursement is 4/16/16; and
- Applications and additional information are available by calling (800) 287-8322 or [click here](#).

2) **The Child Care Referral Service** provides parents of infants and children (through age 12) with assistance in locating suitable child care.

- A network of referral agencies are located throughout the state to serve your geographic area;
- Assistance with year-long and summer child care;
- Available free of cost; and
- FOR MORE INFORMATION: Contact the Child Care Resource and Referral Service at 1-800-339-3367

Additional information about these programs and their guidelines can be obtained by calling (800) 287-8322.

3) **The Elder Care Reimbursement Program** offers mini grants to help Vermont state employees with their elder care expenses.

- Reimbursement will be available for employees who spent at least \$50 for elder care for immediate family members who were aged 62 or older. The maximum reimbursement per household per year is \$500;
- Elder care items eligible for reimbursement include but are not limited to: respite care, Lifeline or similar service, home modification, ramp installation, safety bars, door widening, rental or purchase of medical equipment, transportation to medical appointment or needed medical services, housekeeping provided by a service, mileage over 50 miles (round-trip) for an appt., etc. Items not on this list will be considered by the committee. Items not eligible for reimbursement are: nursing home care, medical & dental bills, eyeglasses, hearing aids, medications and hospital bills; and
- Applications are available by calling (800) 287-8322 or [click here](#).

## **VSEA First Vice President Looking To Fill Vacant Council Seats**

VSEA First Vice President Aimee Towne asked *WIA* to remind members about several open seats on the VSEA Council. These Council seats (by departmental heading) still remain open:

Aging and Independent Living

Agriculture

Auditor of Accounts

Buildings and General Services

Children and Families

ACCD/Housing

ACCD/Economic Development

ACCD/Marketing and Tourism

Commission on Women  
Criminal Justice Training Council  
Education  
Finance and Management  
Financial Regulation  
Forests and Parks  
AHS/Rate Setting & Auditing  
AHS/IT Unit  
Labor  
Library  
Liquor Control  
Lottery  
Mental Health  
ANR  
Public Safety - Civilian  
Public Service Board  
Public Service Department  
Secretary of State  
Tax Department  
Transportation  
Transportation Agency/DMV  
Treasurer's Office

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](mailto:ahudson@vsea.org).

### **Special Alert To Stewards From VSEA Labor Educator**

*Note: Be sure to read #3 and then click to sign up.*

1) **UPDATE!** Save the Date! Friday, May 20: **VSEA Steward Summit Training.**

All Stewards are urged to attend this special, all-day training. VSEA officers and staff will join us to collectively explore ways to improve public services, strengthen our contracts, and build our Union. The day will include breakout sessions and workshops by bargaining unit, department and Field territory. Breakfast and lunch will also be provided on May 20.

**New!** Folks are invited to stay overnight at the hotel on May 19, especially if you are traveling from far away. You will need to make your own room reservation by April 11. Call Best Western directly and ask for the VSEA rate for May 19. VSEA will reimburse you for the hotel stay. There will also be a group dinner on May 19.

Best Western Waterbury: 802-244-7822

Questions about the training, contact Tim Lenoach: [tlenoch@vsea.org](mailto:tlenoch@vsea.org)

Questions about hotel reservation, contact Amy Haskins: [ahaskins@vsea.org](mailto:ahaskins@vsea.org)

## 2) Spring Trainings

[Click Here To Sign Up](#)

See *WIA* entry “Labor Educator’s Winter/Spring 2016 Training Schedule” for more information.

## 3) Individual trainings/meetings at your worksite.

I would like to hold **one- to two-hour individualized trainings** with you, depending on your availability. Stewards can sign up for a training by clicking below on whichever link is nearest your worksite, and then select a time and suggest a location to meet. I will follow up with an email to confirm and discuss logistics.

Topics range from your experiences and worksite challenges to statewide issues and current VSEA campaigns.

[Burlington & St. Albans](#)

[Newport & St. Johnsbury](#)

[Morrisville & Waterbury](#)

[Montpelier & Barre](#)

[Rutland & Middlebury](#)

[White River Junction & Springfield](#)

[Bennington & Brattleboro](#)

## **VSEA Labor Educator’s Winter/Spring 2016 Training Schedule**

*VSEA Labor Educator Tim Lenoach asked WIA to remind about the latest round of trainings he is conducting in the winter/spring 2016. 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).*

**Trainings in blue are for all members.**

**Steward Training: Corrections Unit**

Wednesday, April 6

VTrans Training Center



1716 U.S. Route 302  
Berlin

### **Steward Training: The Grievance**

Wednesday, April 13  
VTrans Training Center  
1716 U.S. Route 302  
Berlin

### **Steward Training: The Labor/Management Committee**

Friday, April 15  
VTrans Training Center  
1716 U.S. Route 302  
Berlin

### **Diversity & Solidarity For Public Sector Union Members**

Friday, April 22  
VTrans Training Center  
1716 U.S. Route 302  
Berlin

### **Quote Of The Week!**

*“We asked the State to sit down and try to reach agreement, working with the fact finder’s report, but they decided to play politics for reasons no one was able to explain to VSEA negotiators and Teams. It felt mean-spirited.”*

VSEA President Dave Bellini in a press statement earlier this week about the State’s decision to fight with bargaining units, rather than negotiate.

### **VSEA Legislative Team Updates Now Online**

VSEA’s Legislative Team has been sending bi-weekly updates on State House happenings to about 500 members, but now the updates are available for VSEA members to read online. To read one of the three updates the Team has issued to date, please [click here](#).

Please note that in order to view the updates on [www.vsea.org](http://www.vsea.org), you must first be a registered user of the site, which will grant you “member-only” status. If you are not a registered user of VSEA’s website, you can [click here](#) to sign up today. If you are not a registered user, you will receive an “Access Denied” message when trying to view the updates.

### **Important Reminder About Messages to the Legislature or the Public!**

VSEA members are under attack, both at the bargaining table and in the Legislature, and members’ voices are the most powerful force we have. Members are already speaking out, particularly to legislators, so we need to remember some basic ground rules. [Click here](#) to view a memo that outlines some basic points about how to make sure your speech is protected. One of the key rules is this:

**When you communicate with legislators, the media, or the public, make sure you are not on work time and don’t use the employer’s computer!**

Nothing will undermine your message more effectively than the suspicion that you are using work time or the employer’s property for personal purposes. Electronic messages to lawmakers should originate from your personal email account and not from your state email account. The same goes for posting on websites or blogs. Send your messages from your personal email on break time, or pre- or post-work.

VSEA thanks all members for your attention to this request.

## **Joint Safety & Health Committee Posts “Complaint Form” To Gather Data From State Employees**

For years, VSEA members and staff have served with management on a specially created Joint Safety and Health Committee, which meets periodically to discuss current safety and health issues impacting state employees, your worksites and/or the public. Committee members also strategize together about the best course of action to address a safety or health issue or concern, and they make recommendations to the State.

The Committee asked *WIA* to share that it has recently created [a new downloadable “complaint” form](#) for VSEA members to fill out and submit to the Committee if they are dealing with a safety or health issue and want to file an official complaint. The Committee will review all submitted forms at upcoming meetings to determine if action is warranted, and, if so, what kind of action is appropriate.

If you have any questions about the form, please contact VSEA’s staff liaison to the Committee, Field Services Director Gretchen Naylor. You can email her at [gnaylor@vsea.org](mailto:gnaylor@vsea.org) or call her at 223-5247.

## **Post Your Sign Photos To VSEA Facebook Page!**

Please remember too, in the coming weeks and months, if you spot a VSEA yard sign, snap a photo and [post it to VSEA’s Facebook page](#) or send it VSEA Communications Director Doug Gibson at [dgibson@vsea.org](mailto:dgibson@vsea.org), and he’ll post it for you.

The signs featured with this WIA entry were submitted by VSEA First VP Aimee Towne and Retirees’ Chapter President Joanie Maclay. Thanks! Keep them coming!

## **Threatened While On The Job? VSEA Wants To Know.**

VSEA President Dave Bellini is asking all state employees who are threatened while performing your job duties to provide an account of the threat not only to your supervisor or the State, but also to VSEA.

“VSEA wants to begin to compile its own record of threats against frontline state employees, no matter your occupation,” explains Bellini. “I’m asking all employees who are threatened, especially those working in AHS, to take a few minutes to fill out an online form VSEA made to collect your report. The information will help us provide a firsthand account of the number of threats being made and where they are being made, in addition to some other things.”

Here are the questions:

Name:

Occupation:

Work Base:

Preferred Phone:

Preferred Email:

Date Of Incident:

Where Did Incident Occur:

Name & Relation Of Person Making Threat To Employee (i.e. client, client’s husband, unrelated stranger):

Was Threat Made In Person?      If No, How Was Threat Made?

Description Of What Happened:

Incident Reported To:      On (date):

Have You Received A Response To Your Report?      If Yes, What Was The Response?

Have You Received Any Counseling? Other Help? To Deal With The Threat?      Did This Help?

Are The Police Involved At All In This Incident?

If you are a state employee who is threatened on the job, please click [here](#) to find the online report form, **which will remain confidential**, unless otherwise approved by you.

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

#### **April 6**

Steward Training: Corrections Unit  
VTrans Training Center  
1716 U.S. Rte. 302  
Berlin  
9:00 a.m

#### **April 7**

Marble Valley Regional Correctional Facility Meeting  
Marble Valley Regional Correctional Facility  
Rutland  
5:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

#### **April 8**

Chapter Presidents Committee Meeting  
VSEA HQ  
Montpelier  
9:00 a.m.

#### **April 8**

Corrections Labor/Management Committee Meeting  
VSEA HQ  
Montpelier  
9:00 a.m.

#### **April 8**

NMU Executive Committee Meeting  
VSEA HQ  
Montpelier  
9:00 a.m.