



AFSCME LOCAL 88

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AFSCME Local 88 Calendar

E-Board meets 6 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 3.

General Membership meets 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 19.

Constitution Committee meets 6:30 p.m. Monday, Sept. 10.

For contract bargaining updates, visit
www.local88.ws

Thanks to Local 88 members

By Becky Steward
President



Last month at the General Membership meeting we discussed the dues structure for Local 88. It was difficult to talk about – we are talking about money! M-O-N-E-Y My money, your money, how do we change our structure to

be as fair as possible? Money is personal, it is my pocketbook, and it is your pocketbook. It is also our local's, the council's and the international's pocketbook.

We need to move to a progressive percentage structure, that is a requirement from the International. However, there were some options, variables we needed to decide at the local level, things to put on the table and discuss. Should we have a minimum flat rate? Should we have a maximum ceiling or a cap at the top? We needed to determine if we should phase in a percentage over several years or just go with a bang? Other questions not listed here were also on the table.

The debate started. Members spoke passionately and personally. Those who are lower paid workers explained how going to a percentage would help them out. Those who are higher paid explained how implementing without a cap might double their current payments. The options which had been presented and put on the

table were reviewed and the merits of each variable debated. Our solution wasn't fixed or predetermined, it was to be agreed upon through a vote of the members attending the meeting.

Then something happened, a motion was offered from the floor for a new alternative, a different option. It was a compromise that addressed the various aspects of the debate. It was a creative solution that no one had yet considered. Debate ended, the vote as taken, and the motion passed.

For me this experience was magical. It was the experience of our synergy of thinking and debating which created an alternative, a solution we could all live with. It was democracy at the grassroots level. It is what makes Local 88 strong. Thank you to all who involved yourself in the discussion, debate and our democratic process.

My only disappointment is more members were not there to share in the moment. Please join us at our general membership meetings. They are the third Wednesday of the month (except December) starting at 7 p.m. The location is AFSCME Council 75, 6025 East Burnside in Portland. On Sept. 19 we will have a special starting time of 6:30 p.m. We will be finishing up work on our Constitution. Participate in the discussion or the debate and help make Local 88 even stronger. We, you and me, are the Union.

Kudos to Library workers for recognition award

Multnomah County Library leads the nation's libraries in a number of categories, according to a recently released copy of the 2007 Public Library Data Service Statistical Report. The Library has the highest circulation of any U.S. library serving less than one million people, the highest circulation per capita among libraries serving a population of 250,000 and greater, and the highest collection turnover rate among libraries serving a population of 500,000 or greater. What that means is that Local 88 members at the Library are doing exceptional work for the community and deserve the bulk of the credit for ensuring that the Library gets any recognition from national organizations. Sometimes, management forgets that the Library works ONLY because of the commitment and dedication of Library workers. So, kudos to our members.

Nominations accepted at Sept. 19 meeting

Local 88 is growing and changing to meet the needs of our members. Leading that effort are the elected officers, trustees, and executive board members. Nominations for all executive board and officer positions as well as one trustee will be accepted at the Sept. 19 general membership meeting. The election will be held on Oct. 17.

The roles and responsibilities of those elected are defined in Article VI and Article VII in the

Constitution. While we have been revising the Constitution, the election of all in October will be based upon the current Constitution and the articles mentioned. The revised Constitution will need to be reviewed and approved by the International prior to becoming effective.

Members nominated at the September meeting will be asked to submit a brief statement to be included in the Local 88 Northwest Labor Press Page that should reach members around October 5. These statements will also be added to the Local 88 website.

Constitution Review continues in September

Congratulations to Local 88 members for faithfully working through the proposed changes to the Constitution submitted by the Constitution Committee. At the Aug. 15 general membership meeting it was agreed to move the vote on the Constitution to the Oct. 17 meeting. A postcard was mailed in August to all members informing them of this change.

Revisions to proposed language for Articles IV, VI and VII in the Constitution will be reviewed and voted on at the September meeting after nominations are taken for the positions up for election in October.

The Constitution Committee meets on Sept. 10 at 6:30 p.m. to review language to be voted on Sept. 19. The meeting will be held in the Library at Council 75 Building. Anyone who wants to contribute to the process is invited to attend.

Eulogy for the Employee Benefits Board

By Shelley Lee Immel
Vice-President

By the time you read this we will have passed the 60-day anniversary of the death of the Multnomah County Employee Benefits Board (EBB), which died a swift death when the Board of County Commissioners voted unanimously to dissolve it. In the end, the EBB was steered by risk managers, technicians in search of an imagination, whose main purpose seemed to be to find a way to squirrel away the \$12 million in reserves to some cubicle in the Multnomah Building rather than purposefully use it to help ensure the good health of county employees. Increasing the load of health care costs into the paychecks of employees seemed to be the goal.

It was a wise decision for Local 88 members to stay with the EBB until the end even if the outcome was not changed.

Hindsight is always 20/20. The demise of the EBB was probably ordained when the County and other bargaining units insisted that the EBB

votes were determined by bargaining units rather than proportional to how many members each unit represented. It was never fair that Local 88, which represented 75% of all the employees, received only two votes – one for the main bargaining unit and one for Local 86, the non-strike able unit. Thus the members representing the smallest number of County employees had all the votes to block initiatives which could have benefited our more diverse membership and the continued existence of the EBB.

Credit for the death of the EBB goes to many. First, the County gets credit for a bumbling, inarticulate and confusing offer regarding the EBB governance structure and then lack of leadership, or direction, on how to think about health care for employees.

Second, the County's Consultant was off the mark so many times one had to wonder why they were paid a fee. Third, members of the EBB, including sadly many of our brothers and sisters in other unions, never did understand the role of the EBB, or

that together we were all, represented and non-represented, better with the EBB than separately without it.

Without the EBB there is no employee oversight, or discussion, about changes proposed by the health plans or pharmacy services. Insurance companies and pharmacy services are known for trying to reduce the bottom line and not looking out for our best interests. No one, either County or employee, has been serviced by the demise of the EBB.

So, where do we go from here? Our bargaining team has proposed to the County the option to create an Employee Benefits Team, which is a shadow of the potential of the EBB, but which will allow for a conversation to begin about health care, healthy employees, and the purpose of health benefits. It could be an interesting vehicle to incubate policy direction and changes on health care issues that affect all of us.

The questions we should ask are:

1) How can County policies and health care benefits help employees

and their families be healthier?

2) What can the County do to help employees make better health care choices that fit the season of their lives?

3) What can employees do to become healthier?

4) How can we learn to be better advocates for our selves with the health plans we choose?

5) How do we require health plans to be accountable to meeting the goal of good health rather than just pushing insurance, or just reducing the bottom line?

We need to be served well by the health plan choices we make. We need to learn how to be the best advocate for our own health and our dependents. We need to ask questions and have the skills to question the answers we receive when obtaining health care.

Personally, I have been fortunate to work in a Division that honors a culture of advocacy and has provided opportunities to learn skills for self advocacy. When I began working for the Aging and Disabilities Services, our

County and our Department (at the time) were seen as a leader and a strong advocate for those we serve, including the employees. As the area agency on aging, ADS has a federal mandate to advocate for all we serve – the elderly, disabled and veterans – and those who may become one. Advocacy is an awesome responsibility. It is one that our union has as a core value. That is why we need to speak up when others may be silent, why we need to look out for those who are not strong, powerful or rich, and why we believe that working together our community is always better.

There are lessons to be learned from the demise of the EBB in the week that we celebrate Labor Day. I am hopeful that we can go forward with a conversation between Local 88 and the County that focuses on something we missed in the EBB: how to help our members maintain or improve their health. If we can do that then a phoenix could rise from the ashes of the EBB.