

Michigan MESSENGER

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P.R.E.S.I.D.E.N.T



by
**Michael
Mize**

Who Are You Going To Save?

Your friend is on their way into the Post Office to work tomorrow morning and they trip over a bad tile in the floor, fall and are severely injured. Your friend now is in the hospital with head trauma from the fall. They were cut and have several staples and stitches on their head and face. Your coworkers' family had to be contacted and race to the hospital to be with their parent and spouse. Doctors say they are lucky because everything is going to be okay and though hurt recovery looks very positive. Do they feel lucky? Do you feel they are lucky?

Unfortunately, now there are many employees that are also living with guilt. Why? The bad tile on the floor was known by many and just never reported. Management may have even known and just didn't think it was a big issue.

So, I have made up this story although it is not an unfamiliar situation. As your Union President and your representatives, we have regular discussions about safety and health concerns in your offices. What we do not see is the problems that you in fact do see every day. We have seen people have months off from work sometimes collecting pay and sometimes fighting to get paid. Even if you are getting paid there is a huge loss to you as the employee, one is in your Thrift Savings Plan. When you are off no money is going there.

There are safety teams that are out in the Districts going to offices and trying to make a difference. The problem is they are only going through. They don't work there every day, they don't see the things that you see. You are there and you see unsafe, unhealthy issues that no one else ever will. You can make a difference. You can be the person to stop your coworkers' injury or your injury.

What I am asking is that every APWU represented employee take the time to help the USPS. Work place injuries hurt everyone. Take the time to report an issue to your super-



Mike Mize, MPWU President and Coleen Maxwell, Editor for the *Auto City Flint Facts*.
— photo by John Greathouse

visor. Take the time to fill out a 1767, Health and Safety form. Management must respond to these forms. If you can't get any response that way, well contact us. We have been told at a District level that Management does want these issues addressed and that they are trying to make a difference.

If you experience any negative action ask for a steward or just contact us. We will help you every way we can and the Local Management may not want to address issues but their bosses do.

Believe me when I say, "The person you save may be yourself". Report all Safety issues immediately!!!

In Unity.

MPWU Members At Postal Press Association Conference



Pictured left to right are John Greathouse, Editor - *The Pacer* in Lansing, MI; Elaine Dunlap, Editor - *The 480-481 Communicator*; Mike Mize, President - MPWU; Coleen Maxwell, Editor - *Auto City Flint Facts*; Roscoe Wood, President - 480-481 Area Local; Michelle Yuhasey, President - 498-499 Area Local; and Tony Carobine, President - National Postal Press Association.

— photo by Lance A. Coles

M A I N T E N A N C E C R A F T D I R E C T O R . . .



by
Sterling
Bouier

Are You Planning On Retiring?

Hello MPWU Brothers and Sisters.

We have had quite a few employees retire so far this year and several scheduled or considering retirement in the near future from the maintenance craft. Due to this fact, I was asked by a maintenance employee who is considering retirement to write an article that would be helpful to someone in such a position.

I will begin by advising employees to visit the postal liteblue website. It contains a retirement section that has topics such as

- Planning
- Request an Annuity Estimate
- Apply for Retirement (eRetire)
- Thrift Savings Plan
- Financial Wellness

It also contains links to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), Social Security Administration, Department of Veteran Affairs, American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), and National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association

(NARFE). It has the Civil Service and Federal Employees Retirement System publications. It has a Frequently Asked Question (FAQs) compilation pertaining to retirement. There are also several retirement videos available to view.

Once you have started the retirement process and received a retirement kit, you are ready for a retirement counseling session. Your annuity estimate, the retirement application and related forms are discussed in detail during counseling so you should have your retirement application kit (blue book) and your

annuity estimate available during the session. You can go to eRetire to schedule a telephone counseling session with a retirement specialist at the Human Resources Shared Service Center (HRSSC). And if you have any questions or concerns, you may contact HRSSC to speak with a retirement specialist.

As always feel free to contact me if there are and questions or if you are in need of my services. I am here to serve. I can be reached at 313 965-1398 or at sbouier@apwudetroit.org.

In Union Solidarity.

H U M A N R E L A T I O N S D I R E C T O R . . .



by
Keith
Combs

Human Relations Training

I was humbled to be a part of the very successful Human Relations/Federal Injury Compensation Specialist Conference hosted by the National Human Relations Director Sue Carney in Atlantic City New Jersey from August 6, 2017 through August 10, 2017.

APWU representatives from across the country received 22 hours of instructions on OWCP claims, grievance handling and classroom exercises. There were presentations made by National President Mark Dimond-

stein on Safe Jobs, Bob McCullough of Magellan (EAP) on Suicide prevention, Debby Szeredy National Vice-President and Sue Carney National Human Relations Director delivered the Be the Change presentation, which addressed social injustice, civil and human rights issues, networking and mobilization.

A panel of top leaders from the Division of Federal Employees Compensation, OWCP DOL addressed participants. They took Q & A, listened to concerns expressed by local and state APWU leaders, and

put on a mock hearing for the class. The National Secretary-Treasurer Liz Powell, National Healthcare Director John Marcotte and New Jersey District 1 Honorable Congressman Donald Norcross also addressed us. Bob Romanowski, NBA Clerk Division and ED Duncan, APWU Human Relations Federal Injury Compensation Specialist assisted Mrs. Carney with the instruction.

I'm looking forward to utilizing all that I learned in Atlantic City New Jersey in assisting the Michigan Postal Workers Union membership.

Our members locally and statewide get their OWCP issues addressed by their union representative far better than what they can expect from USPS management. That's because we actually care about our members and their family. All of us who do this Human Relations work, do it for you, the claimant, because our reward is seeing you get what you deserve, an approved claim.

I had a wonderful time with all the attendants. Let's all do it again in two years. I hope to see you all in Atlantic City New Jersey in 2019.



It's your move...

Protect your job. Protect your future. Get involved in your Union!

STICK WITH LABS THAT DELIVER QUALITY CARE AT LITTLE TO NO COST.

High Option

Did you know that if you go to a national lab such as Quest Diagnostics or Laboratory Corporation of America (LabCorp), you are covered by APWU Health Plan at 100% and still get the same quality service? Even though other labs may be part of the Cigna network, you'll get even bigger savings when you go to Quest and LabCorp for your lab work. And with hundreds of locations nationwide, they make it easy to get lab services at no cost to you.

Keep the cost of lab work low with these savings


Description	Quest/LabCorp average cost	APWU Health Plan covers	Your cost	Other in-network outpatient/hospital lab average cost	Your cost
General health panel	\$21.85	100%	\$0	\$43.59-\$191.32	10%
Complete blood count (CBC)	\$5.34	100%	\$0	\$11.67-\$42.26	10%
Prostate screen (PSA)	\$12.62	100%	\$0	\$27.58-\$71.26	10%

Quest: 800.377.7220 • questdiagnostics.com | LabCorp: 888.522.2677 • labcorp.com

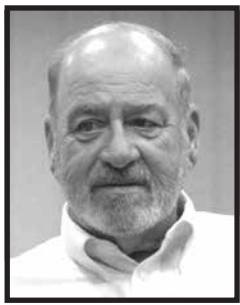
Consumer Driven Option

Members will pay 15% of the plan allowance when covered services are performed at Lab Corp. Other labs maybe considered out-of-network. Access apwuhp.com and click on "See Directory" for provider network information.

(800) 222-2798
www.apwuhp.com



TOGETHER.
BETTER HEALTH.®



by
Al
LaBrecque

Back To The Future

“You’re not to be so blind with patriotism that you can’t face reality. Wrong is wrong, no matter who does it or says it.” — Malcom X

That quote for the reading pleasure of the 37% blue-collar Union members who voted against their and our own self-interests, or anyone offended by my political assessments in this column. I stand by my Big “D” positions without apology. I am entitled to my opinion, and so are you. Having clarified that, it’s time to share my . . .

Reality Check! Some 2-3 weeks after my 80th, like a lightning strike came the stunning realization; Al, you **ARE OLD!** With that self evident truth came a flood of realities. Am I relevant? I recognize there have been both gentle and harsh suggestions that I make an honest examination of conscience. Vibes I didn’t want to hear or see. So, with nothing better to do; I took a trip down memory lane.

Back In Time. As a Young Turk on my first junket to D.C. in 1960 for a National Federation of Post Office Clerks (NFPOC) legislative rally; they featured President Emeritus, J. Cline House. I remember thinking; Man, he’s old. Snow white haired old gentleman. I don’t recall one word he uttered, fairly non-memorable. President E.C. “Roy” Hallbeck was my ‘Reuther’ back then.

Then there were all the national conventions of our predecessor Fed Unions, then in ‘71 the merged APWU. As a dedicated delegate I admit to having been a fervent disciple in favor of opposing retired national officers. More recently was my vocal

and written criticism of the late APWU President Moe Biller who declared he would never belong to the Retirees’ Dept. because he would never retire. I questioned his relevance. Why not let go and retire in dignity? That’s not gonna be me! I’ve got a lot of fishing, hunting, wood cutting, retirement ‘up north’ to do. I **still** have a lot of fishing, hunting, wood cutting, and retirement in God’s Country that remain undone!

Now, the shoe’s on the other foot. I **am** that old guy who’s hanging on and around just to collect some sweet smellin’ hugs. Kindly tolerated to write and rant a column consuming considerable space. What some would use for fish wrap? I have to ask myself, who reads my stuff anyway? What impact do my views have? Are working members the least bit interested what this old has-been has to say? It’s abundantly obvious elected national officers couldn’t care less. In that regard; familiarity breeds contempt. But I digress. I’m the appointed retiree advisor to the MPWU State Retiree Chapter by virtue of being the immediate past president. That’s it! Answer when asked. Gently suggest when necessary. I don’t want to be that pathetic, bitter old man who’s no longer relevant, refusing to accept his station, difficult as it is to swallow.

Relevance. Do I, or can I relate to Millennials, or they to me? I seriously doubt under-35 members are moved by issues raised in my column regardless how often we preach that whatever we can achieve today will benefit them tomorrow. It’s been pointed out that by airing our internal struggles, it could turn off prospective retiree members. Another suggests that current working members don’t comprehend retiree internal objectives or the terminology. That I should ‘dumb down’ my articles. I’m not too hip on theirs either, but I will never presume that our mem-

bers can’t get it if they want to. So, to whom am I writing to inform and educate? Am I spinning my wheels, enabled by Sisters and Brothers reluctant to tell me the awful truth?

No Swan Song! In short; no poor me! It’s that next phase in life, and I’m grateful to have gotten here. With all my activities and commitments, I’ve made it a practice that if I can’t do the whole job, it’s time to hang it up. I’ve had a pretty good run. Of my two passions; my sons have said; “Dad, you wouldn’t survive in coaching today”. As I watch the football state finals on TV, view H.S. game rules changes, I tend to agree. Some of my FMAL Brothers and Sisters, and Letter Carrier Son, have said; “Al, you wouldn’t survive in the P. O. any more.” From all I see and read, that’s probably true. Others say that my longevity is a bridge in the evolution of our Union. Experience, hopefully laced with some wisdom, gained by trial and error to be shared.

Blessed! Blessed with the miraculous births of 6 children. By accident of birth to have grown up in the ‘golden years’ of the ‘50’s. Blessed to have had gainful employment and privileged to have been a participant in the postal labor movement, while simultaneously doubly blessed to have been a ‘rent-a-coach’. I’ve got more than enough great memories to ponder with no regrets.

It was extremely emotional when I hung up my coach’s cleats in ‘89. Less emotional, but with some sadness to pass the gavel after 33 years Local Union involvement in ‘93. Almost with a father’s pride, was the transfer of State Retiree Chapter leadership after 20 years. In all cases; I ‘left it all on the field’, and I’m comfortable with that. The difficult part of this will be to resist the itch to write a column when an issue arises. I should take a cue from formerly prolific writers like Leo Persails, or a Don Foley whose occasional articles grab our attention. They have something profound to say. In that vein I’m seriously considering it would serve the best interests of all concerned to contribute in a guest editorial status, chiming in now and then. No more sweating deadlines with submissions hastily written off the top of my head. We have a State Retiree Chapter president to address all matters retiree.

Instilled with Union principles and acceptance by our predecessors, we had to make our own way. So too must this generation of APWU leadership from Local, State, to the national level. Hopefully, my generation fostered those same principles as their basic tenet in the way forward. As for this old war horse; I will remain legislative and politically active

because I can! No way am I going to fade away. My “Al’s Shorts” are testimony to that! So, there it is. Move over old man, exit stage left. (Do I detect sighs of relief?)

Al’s Shorts. Belong Or Be Gone! APWU bargaining unit retirees enrolled in the APWU Health Plan as \$35 per year **Associate Members!** APWU bargaining unit retirees **MUST** belong to the APWU to be eligible to enroll in **our Union FEHBP** health plan! Ever wonder how many APWU bargaining unit retired scabs are enrolled in the APWU Health Plan as “\$35. Associate Members”? Enforce the APWU Constitution requiring every APWU bargaining unit retiree Associate Member to join the APWU either as a full dues-paying member, or the APWU Retirees’ Dept. @ \$36 per year dues and benefits of belonging, which includes eligibility to enroll in the APWU Health Plan, a benefit of belonging! **Belong Or Be Gone!**

Internal Affairs. I have to say it. Disappointed with the direction, or lack thereof, of the Retirees’ Dept. I take personal liberty to express concerns that the Department I had a hands-on contribution in building from the first Director, John R. Smith, then former APWU Sec.-Treas. Doug Holbrook, then with the advent of the right to elect our own Director, that turned out to be Judy Beard. I don’t mind pointing out that I authored the Resolution to elect our Director. That began the era of significant gains and service to the retiree membership. **Yes**, that retiree membership of around 40,000 that’s added to the estimated 160,000 working members, to tout an APWU membership of 200,000 **“strong”!** Yes, it’s **that** membership who’s Dept. has become stagnant, in my view. After nearly a year, still not fully staffed with 2 secretary’s to serve that membership. More, I had better not say . . . for right now.

Mea Culpa: I can’t put a wrap on this without saying to the many friends I’ve acquired due to my Union and Retiree Involvement, acquaintances, adversaries, and some enemies I’ve made; to those I’ve either rubbed the wrong way, offended in word or deed, both intended and unintended; I offer what I believe to be the most powerful words I know, if not difficult to live up to, are found in the Lord’s Prayer: “. . . and **forgive us** our trespasses, as **we forgive** those who trespass against us . . .”. A work in progress at the 80 mile marker.

Slogan Contest: Hey, that’s easy! The most powerful Union slogan I know, taught at my UAW parent’s knee, created in the struggles of the “Cradle of Labor”, sung in the Halls of Labor everywhere, and that is; Solidarity Forever!

DEADLINE

The deadline for
articles for the
September - October
issue of the
Michigan Messenger
is October 13, 2017

NATIONAL BUSINESS AGENT

• • •

Court Leave



by
Michael
O'Hearn

I recently received a summons to report for jury duty. We live in a great country with many benefits and freedoms. However, with these benefits and freedoms come responsibilities and duties. One of these duties is jury duty. I have served on juries in the past and found it very interesting. It can be a very educational experience serving on a jury. In order to make the jury duty experience as painless as possible, your Union has negotiated Court Leave. This leave makes your jury duty time financial acceptable. Court Leave pays you your full salary. However, you get no overtime.

You can find the rules and regulations for Court Leave in section 516 of the Employee and Labor Relations Manual (ELM). Here it states that full-time and part-time regular employees are eligible for Court Leave when serving jury duty. It also states that PTFs are eligible for Court Leave for jury duty. However, their payment is determined by the number of hours they usually work on a given day. If your normal work hours don't coincide with your jury duty hours, you can change your hours to match up with your jury duty hours. Just fill out a PS Form 3189 (Request for Temporary Schedule Change for Personal Convenience).

If you are released early from jury duty on a given day, you must report

back to work if there is an appreciable amount of time remaining on your tour and it is feasible to report to work and complete the tour. A lot depends on the distance from your courthouse and your place of employment. My advice is to call your supervisor about whether or not you should report back to work. This will protect you from being disciplined for not reporting to work. If you are scheduled for your vacation and then are summoned for jury duty, you may cancel your vacation and choose another available vacation period (Article 10.3.F).

Many courts will pay jurors a small salary or fee for serving as a juror. This is usually only about twenty to forty dollars a day. They may also pay

you some mileage fee. If you are getting Court Leave, you will always get much more than this from the Postal Service. You can keep up to \$25 of this court payment (ELM 516.41). You cannot waive this fee. You must turn over to the Postal Service any fee from the court in excess of the \$25. You can keep the mileage.

In a nut shell, these are some of the rules and regulations for jury duty and Court Leave, for more detailed information go to ELM 516. If you are a PTF, look at the MOU in the back of the contract that is on pages 293 and 294. This memo is entitled PTF Court Leave. If you are summoned for jury duty, I hope you enjoy the chance to see the justice system in action up close and personal.

— It's All About Me —

by Dave Steinbach

I want to make a few comments about what I have seen and heard what's going on at the stations and the trash talking at some stations.

Just a couple of examples I would like to use to get my point across. I had a clerk call me from a local. She was upset with the PM in her office. She saw a supervisor working 25 to 30 hours a week doing clerk work, and the limit in this office was 15 hours per week.

She wanted me to file a grievance, that was a violation of the contract. Next day, she wanted me to not go forward with the grievance. She said she wasn't mad any more and if I file on it, the PM would be giving her more hours, and she only wanted 15 to 20 hours a week.

Let's look at this for a minute. The clerk in question only called me because she was mad at the PM. Then made up the next day and wanted to not go forward with the violation. What is wrong with this picture?

Someone only wanting what's good for them, and to heck with the violation.

I see this type of issue gong on all over the state. It's a mess. Some members only want the union to file on things that apply directly to them, and what they will get out of it. If the grievance effects them, then they don't want a grievance filed.

It doesn't work this way. It weakens the contract and causes friction on the workroom floor. With management sitting back, laughing at us.

We have all heard the saying, "divide and conquer." Guess what, it's alive and well at all the stations.

What I am trying to get at is some of the mem-

bership are weakening the union by doing this. I see this all the

time, where two clerks have been friends for years, and one gets mad at the other for some off-the-wall issue. Then the fight is on. Bad mouthing and degrading each other, while management loves each and every minute of it.

Come on. There are big issues with management trying to take away our jobs, and we are fighting with one another? Come on, stop it's not good for the union or the membership throughout the country.

What chaps my bide is some of the fighting going on where clerks blame the union for not stepping in. One clerk wants the union to file a grievance on the other clerk.

The union doesn't file on the membership and as a matter of fact, I refuse to get in the middle of a cat fight.

The union gets blamed for all the things that go wrong: it's the union's fault.

All I am asking is look around and see who

is in the middle of the fighting. It's management taking sides with one, just to piss off the other. It's management letting one clerk get away with everything and the other clerk getting harassed for everything.

Is this asking too much for the members to look out for each other and realize management is playing the game and laughing at all of us.

Management is starting the fires. Instead of throwing water on them, they are adding fuel to the fire.

Management is shaking the trees to see how many leaves fall, and it is working. Changing start times and NS days off just to get to everyone. They know most of us hate change, and the best way

to get to the workers is through change.

If management is changing your NS days off and start times, let us know. Give the union a chance to check it out. Before you blame the union, ask us fist so we can defend ourselves.

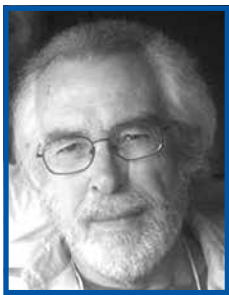
— Voice of Colorado



Get active with your fellow retirees

R·E·T·I·R·E·E·P·R·E·S·I·D·E·N·T

. . .



by
Paul
Browning

They're Coming To Get You

FTR, NTFT, PTR, PTF, PSE, CSRS and FERS retirees-we are all in this together trying to maintain a decent standard of living which is dependent on a viable U.S. Postal Service and the United States Congress keeping the promises made to us through previously passed legislation. Opposed to this goal are the current Executive and Legislative Branches of the Federal Government as well as the Postal Service itself.

Just look at the White House budget and congressional legislation proposed in the last several months:

- White House –
- Reduction in methods of delivery (read 5 day delivery)
 - Increase in employee contribution to FERS
 - Change retirement benefit calculation from average of high 3 years' salary to high 5 years' salary
 - Eliminate COLA for FERS retirees
 - Reduce COLA for CSRS retirees

U.S. House of Representatives –

- Eliminate the supplemental pay that FERS retirees receive until to age 62 when they are eligible for Social Security

- Eliminate guaranteed pensions for new hires and replace them with a 401k dependent solely upon the vagaries of the stock market

- Eliminate official time on the clock for Union representatives. (Good luck filing a grievance)

- And perhaps most chilling of all make federal employees “at will” employees. That means you can be fired from your job any time with no reason.

These are not just ideas, they are actually written down on official government documents which can come up for a vote and be passed as operable and applicable legislation. And let's face it, an awful lot of the people voting on this stuff believe we're overpaid, underworked, and have way too generous retirement benefits.

Then you have USPS which seems bound and determined to run the place into the ground. What kind of outfit whose only product to sell is “service”, reduces that service? Cutbacks in Window and Mail Processing staffing along with plant

consolidations requiring hundred or even thousands of miles in unnecessary mail transportation only result in delivery delays and angry and frustrated customers. As for the Collective Bargaining Agreement, many managers and supervisors seem to believe it's not worth the paper it's written on.

So what's to be done? First, we all-workers and retiree's alike-must keep up the pressure on the elected Federal representatives. Letters, emails, and especially phone calls to representative's offices in Washington D.C. as well as their local offices absolutely must be made. Your family, friends, neighbors and local community must be educated also to join in. Let them know decent middle class jobs that the community depends on are at stake plus an essential service that millions still depend upon. Many of us still do business through the U.S. Mail and the ever increasing parcel delivery business brings packages right to your door cheaper than FEDEX or UPS. Pressure must be kept up on both the USPS and through legislation to return to the 2012 delivery standards. Don't let anyone tell you USPS is losing money. Without the onerous pre-funding health care mandate, USPS is at least breaking even and that's what a government service is about – not turning a profit for stockholders! We must

not let up. At least make a couple of phone calls a week to your Congressional representative. It's only a few minutes of your time. As for those still on the workroom floor, ask for a steward if you even suspect a Contract violation is happening. The only way to hold Postal management accountable is through the grievance procedure. It's our present and our future, GET INVOLVED!

Retiree Accolades

In a recent National APWU Legislative conference call, President Dimondstein and Legislative Director Beard were effusive in their praise of retirees. Dimondstein stated “We appreciate all the retirees fighting for justice”. Beard followed with “We especially thank all the retirees for their activism”. Nice words, yet APWU retirees continue to get treated like second class Union members. It's a travesty that at National APWU Conventions, the 40,000 dues paying members of the APWU Retiree Department are entitled to only five (5) votes on the Convention floor compared to the 2,000 votes of those members still working and paying full dues.

Yes, we pay less than a tenth of what full dues paying members pay to the APWU in Washington. However, we only have seven (7) National officers out of almost 80 National Officers that we can vote for-those seven that can directly affect our lives. The other 72 National Officers have to do with Contract administration and the grievance/arbitration procedure – something retirees don't benefit from. Nonetheless, we contribute a portion of our dues to the big pot of money for the good of all and are glad to do it. And one more thing – I paid full dues for 32 years. How many of those 2,000 delegates on the Convention floor can say the same?

This issue came up at the 2016 APWU National Convention and my deepest appreciation to the almost half of the delegates who voted in favor of increased retiree representation on the Convention floor. As one of the 5 Retiree National Convention Delegates, I will be back at the 2018 National Convention championing increased retiree representation and I hope that more delegates will agree with the sentiment expressed by President Dimondstein and Legislative Director Beard and give retirees their due. When our National President refers many times in public and private to the 200,000 APWU members, he makes no distinction between the 160,000 full dues paying members and 40,000 retiree dues paying members. It's because we're all in this together, so let's have equal rights for all!



This cartoon can be used and reproduced by any Union publication with our permission. Color version is available upon request of the editor.

VETERANS' DIRECTOR

Veterans' News



by John P. Smeekens

PX And Base Exchanges On Line Soon

Beginning November 11, 2017, Military Exchanges will once again be able to serve Honorably Discharged Veterans online through a lifelong exchange benefit. Honorably Discharged Veterans can now verify their eligibility at VetVerify.org

- All it takes is three easy steps:
- #1-Submit a verification form at VetVerify.org ;
 - #2-Follow the Exchange on Facebook, or The Michigan Messenger, for ongoing updates;
 - #3-Start shopping on November 11, 2017!!!

Possible Help For OTH Veterans'

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has released finalized plans that lay the framework for providing emergency mental health coverage to former service members with other-than-honorable (OTH) administrative discharges. This is the first for a VA Secretary to implement an initiative specifically focused on this group of former service members who are in mental health distress. So, effective July 5, former service members with other-than-honorable (OTH) administrative discharges may receive care for their mental health emergency for an initial period of up to 90 days, which can include inpatient, residential or outpatient care. The VA Secretary wants these former service members to know that there is someplace they can turn to if they are facing a mental health emergency — whether it's urgent care at the VA, a Vet Center or through the Veterans Crisis Line, any Veteran in crisis should call the Veterans Crisis Line at 800-273-8255 (press 1), or text 838255.

Legislative Roundup

The U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Veterans' Affairs met on July 19 to pass 11 pieces of legislation out of the committee, including the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017, otherwise known as the "Forever G.I. Bill." Also approved during the session was H.R. 95, the Veterans' Access to Child Care Act, making the VA's pilot program for child care a permanent program at VA for veterans who are receiving regular mental health services and other intensive health care services from VA; H.R. 918, the Veteran Urgent Access to Mental Health Care Act, which requires the VA to provide an initial mental health assessment, as well as follow on care, to former service members who received an OTH discharge, but only if they are combat veterans or victims of military sexual trauma and have applied for a character of service determination; and H.R.1690, the Department of Veterans

Affairs Bonus Transparency Act, which would require the VA to submit an annual report to the pertinent congressional committees regarding performance awards provided to regional office directors, medical center directors, service network directors, and senior executive staff. The VA would also be required to provide the amount of each bonus awarded, the job title of each recipient, and the location of employment. These bills are expected to be considered for a full vote by the U.S. House soon!!!

P.T.S.D. Quarterly

The PTSD Research Quarterly (RQ) is an electronic newsletter produced by the National Center for PTSD, Department of Veterans Affairs. Interested in keeping abreast of PTSD information and research? Go to the following web site to subscribe to this quarterly publication;

<https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/publications/ptsd-rq.asp>.

10 Things To Know About Choice Care Program

1. Am I eligible for the Veterans Choice Program?

To be eligible for the program, you must be enrolled in VA health care and must also meet at least one of the following criteria:

You are told by your local VA medical facility that you will need to wait more than 30 days for an appointment.

Your residence is more than a 40 mile driving distance from the closest VA medical facility with a full time primary care physician.

You need to travel by air, boat, or ferry to the VA medical facility closest to your house.

You face an unusual or excessive burden in traveling to the closest VA medical facility based on a geographic challenge, environmental factor, medical condition, or other specific clinical decisions. Staff at your local VA medical facility will work with you to determine if you are eligible for any of these reasons.

You reside in a State or a United States Territory without a full-service VA medical facility that provides hospital care, emergency services and surgical care, and reside more than 20 miles from such a VA medical facility. Note: This criterion applies to Veterans residing in Alaska, Hawaii, New Hampshire, Guam, American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Also note that some Veterans in New Hampshire reside within 20 miles of White River Junction VAMC and are therefore not eligible for the Veterans Choice Program.

2. What if I think I am eligible?

Call the VCP Call Center at 866-606-8198 or visit the Veterans Choice Program website to verify eligibility and set up an appointment here.

3. Can I call my non-VA doctor to make an appointment?

No, please call the VCP call center at 866-606-8198 to verify eligibility and set up an appointment.

4. How is the 40 mile calculation determined?

This calculation is based on the driving distance from your permanent residence (or active temporary address) to the closest VA facility, including Community-Based Outpatient Clinics and VA Medical Centers. You are eligible if you live more than 40 miles driving distance from the closest medical facility that has a full-time primary care physician.

5. If I am eligible for the Veterans Choice Program, can I receive Beneficiary Travel for travel to appointments with a VCP provider?

Yes, the Choice Act does provide funding to pay for travel to VCP providers for Veterans who are eligible for Beneficiary Travel. However, it did not provide any new Beneficiary Travel eligibility.

6. If I didn't get my Choice Card or I lost my Choice Card, what do I do?

You do not need your Choice Card to access the VCP. If you didn't receive a Choice Card or lost your Choice Card, simply call 866-606-8198 to find out if you are eligible and to make an appointment.

7. How do I get my prescription filled if I use the Veterans Choice Program?

The community provider you see through the VCP can issue a prescription for up to a 14 day supply of a national formulary drug. You may have the 14 day supply filled at any non-VA pharmacy of your choosing.

Prescriptions can be reimbursed through the Business Office/Non-VA Care Coordination Office at VA facilities. This reimbursement may take 30-45

days to process, and requires a copy of the prescription and the original receipt. Veterans cannot be reimbursed at the VA Pharmacy.

For prescriptions needed past 14 days, please follow standard procedures to fill a prescription at the VA pharmacy.

8. If I use the Veterans Choice Program, does that affect my VA health care?

No, not at all. You do not have to choose between the two. The VCP is here to make it easier to access the care you need. VA is building a high-performing integrated health care network to deliver the best of VA and the community. This integrated network will give Veterans more choices to access care and ensure care is delivered where and when you need it.

9. What is my responsibility for co-payments to my other insurance?

Nothing. VA is now the primary coordinator of benefits for VCP, so you are only responsible for your VA co-payment.

Your VA co-payment will be determined by VA after the care is provided. VA co-payments will be billed by VA after the appointment.

10. How does the new VCP extension law affect me?

Public Law 115-26, enacted April 19, 2017, made three key changes to help improve the VCP. The law removed the expiration date for the program, made VA primary coordinator of benefits for services provided to you, and it removed barriers with sharing necessary health information with community providers.

And if your still not sure, don't forget, you can contact your County Veterans Service Officer.

Nationwide Plan To Cut Jobs Must Be Fought Locally

by David Yao

From Washington, D.C., comes word that management is now on a campaign to cut clerk jobs – again. For the last couple of years we had witnessed some level of stability, and, in Seattle at least, we even had jobs added to the clerk craft in both Mail Processing and Customer Service. Accompanying this was a fluctuating level of PSE conversions to career jobs, anywhere from two to ten per month.

But that was yesterday, so to speak. In recent months, as soon as a clerk job in Seattle is vacated, management decides to eliminate it, with few exceptions. Our contract defines “reversion” as: A management decision to reduce the number of duty assignments in an installation when such duty assignment(s) is/are vacant. Our local’s clerk craft directors have been filing grievanc- es contesting the reversion of num- erous jobs.

Management’s argument is that mail volume has fallen, and there- fore whatever jobs become vacant, they can declare they are not need- ed. As to the first part, there is prob- ably some truth that flats and letter volume are off from last year. But

looking deeper at it, we had enor- mous amounts of mail due solely to the presidential and other elections last year. In 2017 there are fewer election races, but in 2018 we are back into another major election year for the U.S. House, Senate, and state legislatures. Does it make sense to understaff based on the lowest expected mail volume?

On top of that, in Customer Ser- vice we already have stations that are understaffed, either in the back end doing early morning distribu- tion, or on the retail side serving customers during the business day. It makes no sense to understaff ei- ther side.

Furthermore, I see no end in sight to the increase in parcel volume at the stations. Admittedly, a huge por- tion of that is from drop shipments from UPS, Fedex, and Amazon. Those create more work for the back-end clerks, some of whom start as early as midnight. But we are also seeing more prepaid parcels, such as returns or Etsy orders, dropped off, and those support jobs through- out the postal system. As America abandons the shopping mail for the convenience of ordering from home, and the Postal Service delivers a

huge portion of those goods, there MUST be enough clerks at the sta- tions to handle the massive volumes we experience, especially at peak times.

There have already been plenty of grievances filed for management doing bargaining work at stations, such as throwing parcels. And that was BEFORE they decided to try and get rid of the vacated jobs. Un- derstand that this cost-cutting job- cutting (and speed-up-the-remain- ing workforce) mentality is coming from postal headquarters far away. Their obedient flunkies at the Area and District levels are just follow- ing orders, in a heavy-handed way. In many cases, local management is very unhappy with the loss of a clerk job, as they have fewer people to cover the many clerk duties that must be done daily, and on a timely basis.

How to Fight Back

There must be local resistance to these job cuts from union mem- bers themselves, meaning use of the grievance procedure, but much more than that alone. First, we as clerks must do our jobs in a way that accurately accounts for all the work that we do, so that work gets credit in management’s computerized measurements of our work. Sec- ond, we must make sure that clerk bargaining unit work gets done by clerks. And third, we must find ways to enlist the public to sup- port us, whenever understaffing hurts the level of customer ser- vice.

The most accessible way to help would be for clerks to make sure to account for all of their work. Window clerk demand is measured by the number (and type) or transactions recorded by POS. So if you get an unnum- bered package for a customer, or their vacation mail, or hand out n form, or accept a vacation hold, PLEASE hit the non-revenue but- ton and then find the right entry to record your activity. Did you know there is one for providing rate or service information to a custom- er? I used to answer questions all the time and not hit that button – now I know to do so. Also, many people stand in line just to hand us a prepaid item. You can scan that in for them and give them a receipt for that – thus producing a recorded transaction.

Of course the one flaw in this advice is that it produces a tiny bit more work for the clerk in- volved, and many times we or our co-workers are too tired or over- worked to want to follow through.

Another important step, which also involves a tiny bit more ef- fort, is clocking in to the proper operation so that work you do

gets credited. For example, I have heard a top boss say that some sta- tions had no clock rings showing time spent doing Parcel Return Ser- vice (Operation 637) yet somehow that work was getting done. But the station would not get credit for it for staffing purposes. The same prob- lem could be true for pulling collec- tion mail (640), a.m. AND p.m. cage hours (544) and the new work for- warding and returning parcels (RFS = Operation 664).

And I confess I am myself not perfect in my clock rings, as my job has me moving back and forth, and I sometimes forget. But we should all at least be trying.

And of course, window clerks not on the window should clock over to a different operation, such as 558, and also be putting their POS on Standby when not helping a cus- tomer. And yes, punching in your 15-digit password a hundred times a day is a pain in the butt, I totally agree.

Is Management Helping You When They “Help” You?

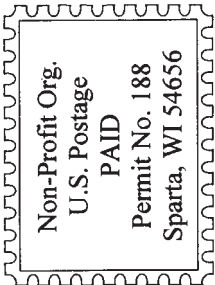
At certain stations we have re- liable witnesses who will report management doing bargaining unit work. From some we get mixed re- ports. And sometimes it happens regularly, but the clerks either don’t want to ruffle feathers, or else they are so tired that would rather see anyone but themselves do the ad- ditional work. But it is important to report this so there is a record of it. In the long or short run, it can make a difference in terms of getting more workers assigned to the station.

And finally, if we have a window that is chronically understaffed, we may want to get the community in- volved by doing an information leaf- leting, or petition, or post card cam- paign. This has actually worked in the past in Seattle.

Check out the APWU website (apwu.org) which has an article about this (Web News Article#: 61- 20 17) that mentions the Baltimore APWU doing an informational leaf- let at the Main Post Office there on June 10, and describing prepara- tions by other locals to do the same.

We must remember that job cuts, which hurt us in various ways (such as delaying conversion of PSEs to career) are also service cuts to our communities. Alerting the public to what is going on, and enlisting their support, can be very useful in com- bating cuts to jobs and service.

If enough of us decide to help the cause in any of the ways described above, I truly believe we can make a difference. In unity there is strength! *(And thank you if you have read all the way to the bottom of this long article.)*
– Greater Seattle APWU News



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