

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

SEIU-West
February/March, 2011

As we head into what feels like the deepest part of winter, there is good news to report across SEIU-West and the union movement.

Bargaining:

- South East Cornerstone School Division has settled their collective agreement. This wasn't an easy task for the members or the bargaining committee as they brought together 3 collective agreements into one and includes a monetary settlement that addresses parity, retro and general wage increases. There are numerous language improvements for these members as well. Congratulations to the membership and bargaining committee for their solidarity and hard work in getting a collective agreement!
- Bentley Moose Jaw settled a collective agreement in the course of one day! With 12% over two years, these members are on the leading edge of the growing retirement home industry in our province and are forging ahead with establishing better working conditions. Congratulations to the membership and bargaining committee!
- Holy Family Roman Catholic School Division continues to work on reaching a collective agreement that will address their workplace and monetary issues. We wish them good luck as they return to the bargaining table.

Staff updates:

- Union Representative Albert Digness began a one-year Leave of Absence effective Jan 22, 2011. We are currently looking for a temporary replacement for Albert.
- We welcome Christine Miller, as our new Communications Co-ordinator. Christine will be working on our website, media relations, public relations, public statements, and media training. Christine will be based out of the Saskatoon office but will travel throughout the province.
- We also welcome Lindsay Martens, who will be covering the Research position on a temporary basis. He brings with him a broad background of experience in research and analysis. This will enable us to provide our membership with greater resources and information for bargaining and campaigns.

- We've brought a number of new staff on with SEIU over the past year or two. As we expand our services and build on the members' strength and abilities to be activists and union leaders, our staff will be assisting and organizing for all of us to build a stronger union.

Education Sector:

Throughout the membership updates over the past year, we've been highlighting different sectors of our membership. This gives all of us the ability to understand the different parts of the union that make up the whole.

Our Education Sector has grown from one or two schools to 3 school divisions across the southern part of the province. Our members work as Educational Assistants, Library Assistants, administrative professionals, building and maintenance engineers, & bus drivers. They work in the public and separate school divisions. And, their hard work has established collective agreements that are the best in the province.

The challenge being faced by this sector is largely due to the funding levels provided by the Gov't of Saskatchewan. Also, the government has threatened the very existence of our Education Assistants. By releasing what they call a "study", the Ministry of Education has put forward the proposal of creating "educational teams" that would provide a different educational experience for our children, that would see far fewer Education Assistants as part of that team. This was done without any consultation or discussion with our members or the union. We have appealed to the Minister of Education, Ken Krawetz, to meet with us so that we can explain the vital importance of the one on one educational support that our members provide – however, the Ministry refused to meet with us.

We see the incredible value, support and importance of our Education Sector as being unparalleled. Whether it is for extra help in learning, encouragement for emotionally, physically, or mentally challenged students, in a time of over-crowded classrooms, and the need to forge partnerships with teachers – our Educational Assistants cannot and should not be discounted in how integral they are to today's learning environment.

Founding Convention:

First notices for our founding convention have gone out to the units. It will be held in Saskatoon from June 13-15, 2011, with early registration in the evening of June 13. The Radisson Hotel will be the venue for this convention. All units were provided with delegate credentials in their notices. The registration deadline is April 1. Make sure you don't miss this exciting event. At the founding convention, we will be focusing on our new constitution and elections. There will be caucus meetings for the sectors to gather to discuss issues of specific importance to each sector, and to help select their representatives to our Executive Board.

Organizing Victories:

We're continuing to build our Organizing Department to help workers gain a voice in their workplace and rights on the job! This past year, members of the Wilcox School voted unanimously to join SEIU-West and their co-workers in the South East Cornerstone School Division.

Recently, workers at Variety Place in Outlook, voted to join SEIU-West. As a result, their employer began a campaign to unilaterally change working conditions and even tried to fire one of our inside organizers. We fought together at the Labour Relations Board and received a decision that shamed the employer for bad behavior. These new members have already begun working on their first collective agreement!

Congratulations to these members for making the decision to join SEIU-West and become a part of a movement for change!

Political Action & Education:

- In January, we provided two Shop Steward Level I training sessions to assist new shop stewards. In March, we will provide several new workshops, *Stewards in Action II – The Next Step*, to provide advanced training for those unit officers and stewards who have already completed the "Stewards in Action - Level I" training. Participants in this advanced course will learn more about the roles and responsibilities of a steward, the grievance process, and how to write a grievance.
- We have taken another step to raise public awareness about the facts behind the delivery of public services in Saskatchewan by launching a blog called "Watch Dog." So far, we have used the Watch Dog blog to share with the public the challenges SEIU-West health care providers face on a daily basis as they try to provide quality care to residents and patients while routinely working short-staffed. You can check out or contribute to the blog by visiting www.seiuwest.ca and clicking on the Watch Dog icon.
- With regard to the delay in retroactive pay from SAHO for retired SEIU-West health care providers, we highlighted the adverse effects of this by establishing a "Scrooged by SAHO" blog and publishing contributions from SEIU-West retirees.
- SEIU-West members and leaders joined together with community groups and area residents in a campaign to keep the Wakaw hospital open. Approximately 300 people turned out at a rally on January 22nd to show solidarity with the residents of Wakaw and area in their efforts to keep the doors of their hospital open.

- SEIU-West members and leaders held a march on Brad Wall's constituency office in Swift Current in early January. The march was intended to share information, increase public awareness, and clarify public comments made by Health Region representatives that are not reflective of what is actually occurring in community health care facilities.
- SEIU-West was invited to participate in the provincial NDP's Policy Dialogue and contributed a range of ideas on how to build a stronger, fairer and more sustainable Saskatchewan, including submissions in the areas of health care, housing and the environment.

Don't forget to watch the SEIU-West website at www.seiuwest.ca for regular updates, breaking news and links to social and labour websites across Canada and North America! On the website, you can also see pictures from rallies, schools and events over the past year.

In Solidarity,

Barbara Cape
President
SEIU-West