



PROFESSIONAL VIEW

PEA'S NEWSLETTER FOR JANUARY-MARCH 2009

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**SPRING 2009 PRESIDENT'S UPDATE**

**Submitted by John F. Blackstone, P.E., President**

The Federal Government, State of Minnesota, Ramsey County, City of Saint Paul and School District are grappling with the economic downturn. The potential impacts on PEA members are unsettling. I chose a career in civil service because it is challenging, my colleagues are dedicated and the mission is clear. I enjoy the opportunity to plan and budget for the long term. I struggle to adapt long range plans and dreams in response to abrupt changes like those we are experiencing today.

Many of you have expressed your concerns through telephone calls, email messages and conversations with each other. I can tell you unequivocally that every PEA Board member and our Legal Counsel are highly dedicated and concerned about our membership. It is an honor to serve with them. The actions PEA is taking to bring value to members are:

\*PEA is the recognized bargaining unit for its members and, thus, will speak with one voice.

\*PEA has current contracts with the City and District. The PEA Constitution and Bylaws require authorization for any modifications, additions or revisions to either contract by member vote.

\*As mentioned below, PEA has responded to the City's offer for the incentive for retirement. In addition, PEA has been invited to a meeting with the Deputy Mayor on Thursday, February 12, 2009. However, aside from these items, PEA has not received any proposals for changes to current contracts and

has not held any meetings, negotiations or conversations about such matters.

\*PEA has received, considered and approved an incentive for retirement from the City of Saint Paul. Members eligible for the early retirement offer voted to accept the deferred compensation option. A memorandum of agreement was signed on January 26, 2009.

\*PEA actively participates in the City of Saint Paul Labor Management Committee (LMC) which meets every two weeks and the Library and District LMC.

\*PEA Board members attended an all day meeting Saturday January 24, 2009 to consider the challenges we face. The meeting was facilitated by a professional in labor relations who has many years of experience. Priorities were determined. Goals for 2009 were adopted. Timelines for completion were set. Considerable time was taken to flush out goals and actions for the impending impacts of the economic downturn.

\*PEA called a special meeting of Stewards on February 10 at the PEA office to address issues and concerns. Subsequent communications will be conducted as necessary

\*PEA will continue to inform Stewards at the March and September meetings and Stewards and membership at the summer and winter general membership meetings.

\*PEA Board meets monthly and communicates frequently.

## **2009 Calendar of Events**

- March 3** Combined Stewards Board meeting at Josephs Grill on Robert Street 5:30 PM
- June 3** General Membership meeting
- September 9** Combined Stewards Board meeting at Josephs Grill on Robert Street 5:30 PM
- December** General Membership Meeting with elections date and location to be determined.

### **Health Insurance Trends**

#### **Paul Hogrefe, City Negotiations Chair**

Everyone should be aware of the trend toward high deductible health insurance. From the employer's perspective this makes a lot of sense. Getting more people into the high-deductible plans saves the employer money. From the employee's perspective it is not so clear cut. The city \$1,200 per year FSA (flexible spending account) incentive seems like a good deal, and in the short term it is, if you are healthy and enroll in single coverage. What we as a collective bargaining unit need to think about is the long term effect of this trend. Those of us on the PEA executive board are thinking about this, and we encourage everyone in PEA to think about it as well, and give us your input. Karin Anderson is our city representative and Lyla Griffin is our school district representative on the LMCHI (Labor/Management Committees on Health Insurance), which meet regularly.

To that end, I would encourage everyone to read a Star Tribune series on the topic. They do a pretty good job of covering all the bases, and looking at the issue from a number of perspectives. The series can be found here: [www.startribune.com/healthchoice](http://www.startribune.com/healthchoice)

Thanks, and I hope everyone has a happy, healthy new year. Salud!

## **Page DeLong—An Introduction**

I would like to introduce myself as the newest member of your executive board. As Personnel Chair, I will work with the stewards to welcome new employees to PEA as regular or fair sharemembers and complete the necessary paperwork. I am a Medical Technologist in the Public Health Laboratory at 555 Cedar St. We do medical and environmental testing for programs within the city and county. My husband is a veterinarian with a specialty in lab animal medicine. I have a daughter who teaches first grade in Rochester and a son who is a sophomore in college. In my free time I enjoy running, swimming at the Y, biking and skiing.

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St. Paul, MN 55101  
651-266-1321

### **School District Health Care Labor Management Committee Update** **David Peterson, School District Negotiations Chair**

The School District Health Care Labor Management Committee has established a timetable in order to select a Health Care vendor for the 2010 calendar year by May, 2008.

Currently, the Health Care Labor Management Committee is working on developing terms and conditions for the necessary Request for Proposal.

PEA steward Lyla Griffin is the current PEA representative to the School District Health Care Labor Management Committee.

Concerns can be addressed to Lyla at 767-8288.

## THE CORNER

By Mike Wilde, Legal Counsel

When I was assigned to write my quarterly newsletter article, it was suggested that I write about the primary reason for the City's current economic problems. As you probably know, it is the drastic cut to Local Government Aid or LGA. It sounded like a reasonable request at the time. It was an assignment to look at the root cause of our current financial ailment. The medical community, by comparison, would address an ailing patient by examining the original cause of the problem. But over the last week there has been so much attention, talk and speculation about the symptoms, i.e. layoffs and service cuts, that it seems pointless spending a lot of time wondering how we got here.

The point is that the City is in about as dire of financial shape as any current employees can recall. I make that drastic statement based on the preliminary cut estimates of 20%. Now, I know that such a forecast is speculative and maybe a little grimmer than what will really happen. But as I write this article, various department heads have commented openly about deep cuts, mandatory unpaid vacations and unheard of service elimination. Some of these ideas are being floated past Mayor Coleman and I expect we might hear more about cuts in the upcoming week.

In the meantime, there are some things that all PEA members should remember. These reminders apply as much to District employees as City employees. First, you work under a contract. Like most other contracts, a labor contract establishes mutual promises and obligations for both parties. This creates some certainty where otherwise there would be none. For example, if you worked in an employment-at-will setting, your employer would make 100% of the decision on any employment issue regardless of fairness, equity or procedure. Under a collective bargaining scenario such as ours, many of the foreseeable issues have been negotiated and settled through express terms of the contract.

Second, if you work for the City your contract does not expire until December 31, 2010. In the District, PEA's contract expires December 31, 2009. In both scenarios the contracts are binding until renegotiated. This means that if arbitrary changes were initiated by the employer they could be challenged under the contract and PEA would have a strong case to enforce the express terms of the negotiated agreement.

Third, the full force and effect of our contract through December of 2010 does not prohibit or ban creative thinking. As can easily be understood, some newer PEA members have inquired about what the Union is doing to prevent their possible layoff. A few questions or comments that have come in have encouraged the PEA Executive Committee to open up our contract or initiate discussions with the Mayor. While communication always proves helpful, PEA has no interest or authority in initiating cuts to our negotiated benefits. Instead, we need to hear from the Mayor or Labor Relations, as well as our members, before any options can be intelligently discussed. Until then we have a negotiated agreement approved and ratified by a majority of our members that we strive to enforce according to its terms. This again applies to the City as well as the District members.

Fourth, according to both of our PEA contracts a reduction in the workforce is to be administered according to the principle of class title seniority. Essentially, this means that the employer determines which classifications will be cut and then the employee's continuous time with the employer in that title is measured against his or her colleague's to determine who is least senior and, therefore, subject to layoff. This is a general description of the seniority application and since we don't have exclusive private access to this newsletter, I'll reserve PEA's more detailed seniority analysis to private discussions with only our members.

While these reminders don't begin to relieve the anxiety caused by looming cuts, I share them with you to remind you that a process has been contemplated, negotiated and approved several years ago. The recent stress that many are feeling comes from the unknown and the misguided notion that all new rules are going to apply. It will be "an all new" scenario, because layoffs have been rare, but the rules will most likely be followed according to the contract and Civil Service Rules, in that order.

If a member faces layoff, under either of our contracts, the laid off employee will most likely have unemployment benefits and COBRA rights for continued health insurance access. We also have a two year reinstatement right, which gives the laid off employee recall rights into that

same classification above any other applicant or candidate for two years. This may seem of little comfort, but in the event that City improves financially or colleagues retire in the next two years, the laid off employee will have first access back into the City.

Again, this newsletter is intended to provide our members a brief overview. By the time you read this, we will have completed our first emergency meeting with PEA's City stewards. We will probably also have reviewed the Mayor's proposals. For right now the best advice is to keep your lines of communication open and talk to your PEA steward. He or she is the route of communication for information and updates.

### **Concerned About Layoffs?**

If you are concerned about the possibility of being laid off, please be aware that Human Resources has a special section on this on their website. These resources are available at the following link: <http://spnet.ci.stpaul.mn.us/depts/humres/layoff.html> We would like to particularly call your attention to the Employee Layoff Information Booklet at: <http://www.stpaul.gov/DocumentView.asp?DID=7440> As always, if you have any questions or concerns about these materials, please bring them to your steward.

**2009 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

PRESIDENT	JOHN BLACKSTONE	WATER - 1900 Rice St., 55113	266-6324
VICE PRES.	KARIN ANDERSON	CAO - 750 City Hall, 15 W. Kellogg, 55102	266-8765
TREASURER	MAIA SIERRA	SCHOOLS - 360 Colborne St., 55102	767-8269
SECRETARY	BRIAN KRAWIECKI	DSI – 8 E. 4 <sup>th</sup> St., #200, 55101	266-9134
NEGOTIATIONS			
CITY	PAUL HOGREFE	OT/IS-210 City Hall, 15 W Kellogg, 55102	266-6783
SCHOOL	DAVID PETERSON	SCHOOLS - 360 Colborne, 55102	696-9629
PERSONNEL	PAGE DELONG	RAMSEY PUBLIC HEALTH	266-1321

**STEWARDS**

CAO & OFS	REGINA ETOLL	500 City Hall, 15 W. Kellogg, 55102	266-8726
FIRE	PAULA PETERSON	100 E. 11 <sup>th</sup> St., 55101	228-6203

**LIBRARIES**

CENTRAL/MMC BRANCHES	SUSAN HENRY	MMC, 2109 Wilson Ave., 55119	501-6310
FULL TIME	KATHLEEN CONGER	Rice Street, 1011 Rice St., 55117	558-2223
S&I/HR	FRANK BERG	8 E. 4 <sup>th</sup> St., #200, 55101	266-9072
OTC/IS	LUCIE PASSUS	110 City Hall, 15 W Kellogg, 55102	266-6770
PARKS & REC	BRIAN TOURTELOTTE	300 CH Annex, 25 W. 4 <sup>th</sup> St., 55102	266-6414
P.E.D.	CRAIG O'BRIEN	1100 CH Annex, 25 W. 4 <sup>th</sup> St., 55102	266-6695
POLICE	MARSHA PANOS	367 Grove St., 55101	292-3781
PUB. HEALTH	SUSAN MYRAN	555 Cedar St., 55101	266-1210
PUB. WORKS	BILL VOS	700 CH Annex, 25 W. 4 <sup>th</sup> St., 55102	266-6113
SCHOOL DIST.	LYLA GRIFFIN	360 Colborne, 55102	767-8288
SCHOOL DIST.	LISA JONES	1001 Johnson Parkway, 55102	793-5561
WATER	SALAM HAMID	WATER - 1900 Rice St., 55113	266-1632

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