



*PROFESSIONAL VIEW*

PEA'S NEWSLETTER FOR APRIL - JUNE, 2010

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**JUNE 2010 PRESIDENT'S UPDATE**

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

“Taking Pride in Public Service” by Dale Klein, Ph. D., Professional Engineer (PE) printed in the April 2010 PE Magazine which is published by the National Society of Professional Engineers (NSPE) called my attention to my career in public service. Dr. Klein spoke to candidates for the Federal Engineer of the Year Awards Ceremony on February 10, 2010 at the National Press Club. During my tenure on the NSPE Board I worked to assure that the Federal Engineer of the Year Award (FEYA) recognition would continue because I believe that recognition of Civil Servants by management, peers and professional organizations is important. Federal employees and engineers are a lot like local employees and engineers. It is important to recognize our success much like PEA recognizes the employee of the year.

Although I am very proud of my years of public service I tend to go about my business with little or no fanfare. I have been listening to a CD on the way to work and home that considers the satisfaction of a job well done. I am also an avid aficionado of the book “Good to Great” by Jim Collins because it encourages an intentional approach to leadership which fits engineers and public servants. I take a lot of pride in planning, implementing and completing assignments. I get a chance to work on a variety of projects and the challenge is always stimulating and rewarding.

The Executive Committee conducted a Strategic Planning Workshop on Saturday morning March 20 to update our strategic plan and identify how we are bringing value to members. The regular monthly business meetings take approximately 3 hours.

We meet with either stewards and or members four times a year so we have 8 Executive Committee Meetings. We don't normally have time to do the work necessary to make sure our strategic plan is up to date. We have a full array of demands to meet each month including responding to members, the Labor Management Committee on Health Insurance and the Labor Management Safety Committee.

You may have heard the phrase, “If you fail to plan then you plan to fail.” I brag about the Executive Committee because they are hard working and they are focused on our mission and vision. It is a big honor to work with such a dedicated Committee. We just hunkered down and went to work and before we knew it it was noon. Everyone on the Committee had an opportunity to make their case on the issues before us.

The workshop was very helpful because we took the time to sit down together and plan for the future. We all understand the issues and why we are doing what we are doing.

The Executive Committee has worked hard for several years to develop a level of service that is appropriate for Professional Employees. One of the issues that we discussed at the March 20 Workshop was how to continue to provide the level of service. We know that we cannot maintain it without a dues increase. We will be presenting our case for discussion at the June General Membership Meeting and asking for a vote at the December General Membership meeting. This is your union and these decisions require member approval to implement.

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We hope that you will agree with the Executive Committee that the level of service that we are providing is appropriate for the

Professional Employees Association and you will support this effort..

### **PEA CALENDAR OF EVENTS 2010**

Wednesday, June 2  
Wednesday, Sept. 8  
Tuesday, Nov. 30

General Membership Meeting at Joseph's Grill, 5:30 pm  
Combined Stewards/Board Mtg. at Joseph's Grill, 5:30 pm  
General Membership Meeting at Mancini's Restaurant,  
531 W. 7<sup>th</sup> St., 5:30 pm

### **School District PEA Negotiation Update** **By David Peterson**

The School district negotiation team consists of School District Negotiation Chair David Peterson, Legal Counsel Mike Wilde, PEA Treasurer Maia Sierra, Steward Marian Heinrichs, and Steward Jennifer Carpenter.

The current PEA and school district bargaining agreement is for the 2008 and 2009 calendar years. Terms continue until a new contract is agreed to by PEA and the School District.

The PEA negotiation team presented a bargaining agreement contract proposal to the School District on March 19<sup>th</sup>, and received the School District's counter offer on April 7<sup>th</sup>.

Currently, the negotiation team is determining what needs to be clarified, and what

the response should be to the School District's counter offers.

School District PEA members will hear more as the negotiation process continues. Ultimately there would be a bargaining agreement contract vote by the District PEA membership, before there would be a final settlement for the 2010 and 2011 calendar years' bargaining agreement contract.

If you have any questions or comments, feel free to contact me, David Peterson, cell phone: 612-414-2768, office phone: 651-696-9626.

### **2010 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

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## THE CORNER

By Mike Wilde, Legal Counsel

For about a year in the early 1990's, while I was saving money to continue my education, I worked for a home finance company. My title was an account representative, which I soon learned was a fancy title for bill collector. After several months I was promoted to the bankruptcy coordinator position. This essentially meant that the worst of the worst accounts were now my responsibility. I accepted the work and did my best to secure funds and attempt to return accounts to a healthy status by working with the debtors. But the negative consequence of my job affected me. I became jaded.

Since I was only exposed to the delinquent accounts, my thinking became predisposed to believe that anyone who was not paying their bills on time was grossly irresponsible. My list of bad debtors usually had the same repeat customers who would go on vacation, go to the casino or buy a new car – before paying their mortgage payment. This caused me to view everyone with some disdain, even though many of the customers on my list were there due to real hardship and for only a brief period of time. I quickly learned that one's line of work exposes certain aspects and characteristics that should not apply to the larger population.

Today I represent labor organizations. But I try to keep the lessons that I learned as a bill collector fresh in my mind. In fact, that is the stark reminder that popped to mind when I decided to share what I have seen from working with public employees over the last two years. First, the observation is MORALE IS VERY LOW.

In the last three months alone I have met with or counseled at least four PEA members who are extremely stressed out and agitated. In each case the root of the problem is either that the workload and demands have far overstretched the employee's time and resources or that their supervisor is unable (perhaps unwilling) to correct the workflow, thereby ensuring someone's failure. To a few people who are usually out of touch with today's work environment, such problems just sound like an equation where inflow exceeds outflow. But it's not that simple. The compounding effect of this "equation" causes a lot of serious

difficulties. Work now carries with it a sense of urgency, especially at the professional level where discretion and problem solving cannot just be accelerated. You have many more problems with not enough time, so every assignment is clouded with the perception that you must quickly finish what is in front of you to get the next thing done and to pull ahead before more work is assigned to you. Bulletin: It Never Happens! You get buried.

It's also somewhat natural to look around in an attempt to gauge other people's workload. Inevitably, a stressed out worker will find someone nearby who does not appear that busy. Or they will have a co-worker who begins to ask for special favors or even pushes responsibility towards them. In both cases the resentments grow like weeds. And if there is one thing that gets resentments to grow stronger it is a common bond with a fellow resentment holder. This relationship is galvanized through gossip.

So at this point, an overworked employee often has general stress, anxiety related to a growing sense of urgency, resentment towards other works (usually based on erroneous perceptions) and a need to enforce such feelings through complaints and gossip. This might sound like psycho-babble, but we could go on and on. Yet many of you can already relate.

Try mixing in the additional variables. High performing workers usually take pride in their work. But urgency sometimes creates errors and the workload itself cannot be met, meaning someone is unsatisfied with your efforts. Errors and missed deadlines start to make the high performer feel as though they are in jeopardy of discipline. It's natural to jump to the conclusion that you will lose your job over the inability to perform ALL of your work to the usual high standards. If that hasn't crossed your mind, then you've at least wondered whether the upcoming layoffs will affect you.

On top of this you might have a new and incompetent supervisor. Maybe your frustrations are bottled up until you get home and you take it out on the spouse or family. Many workers seek escape through unhealthy living habits like overeating, alcohol abuse or gambling.

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Depression in the workplace is always a real threat and recent stresses from the economy have only created more unease on the job. Who knows, maybe even a local news crew will expose some shoddy work habits of public employees and you will be painted with a very broad brush by neighbors, relative and the community at large.

In representing PEA this is what I have observed in a number of members and in employees from other public sector agencies.

Now, my self-reminder is that SOME SPECIFIC EXAMPLES DO NOT MAKE THIS TRUE FOR EVERYONE. Although it is probably true that morale in general is suffering, I reminded myself that I work with people's problems. Members don't check in just to say "things are going great in our department." They call when a problem becomes unbearable or when they need to prepare for a lopsided improvement plan, a discipline hearing or certain problems that are only just beginning. Sometimes we can help through preventative communications that alert management of a problem before someone lays blame with the member. Sometimes it is

helpful to utilize labor management committees. Your labor organization is not often able to prevent workplace stresses, but it can often be a resource and voice to address it early or defend against the consequences that were not of the employee's making.

In closing, here are some general tips on dealing with stress. They are all helpful, but nothing compares to #10 ... Maintain a Positive Attitude.

- Put it in perspective.
- Modify your job situation
- Get time away.
- Fight through the clutter.
- Talk it out.
- Cultivate allies at work.
- Find humor in the situation.
- Have realistic expectations.
- Nobody is perfect.
- Maintain a positive attitude (and avoid those without one).

**Professional Employees Association (PEA)**  
**General Membership Meeting Agenda**

Time & Place: Wednesday, June 2, 2010, at Josephs Grill on Wabasha in Saint Paul.

5:30 Social time

6:00 Dinner

6:30 Meeting

Agenda:

1. Introduction of stewards and executive committee members in attendance
2. Adoption of [minutes from the December 2, 2010, General Membership meeting](#)
3. Legal Counsel Update - Mike Wilde
4. Committee Reports
  - a. President John Blackstone
  - b. Vice President – Karin Anderson
  - c. Treasurer – Maia Sierra
  - d. Personnel – Page Delong
  - e. Negotiations (City) Paul Hogrefe
  - f. Negotiations (School District) – David Peterson
5. Discussion regarding dues
6. Old Business
7. New Business
8. Adjourn

Reservations Requested

RSVP to Karin Anderson (651-266-8765 or [Karin.Anderson@ci.stpaul.mn.us](mailto:Karin.Anderson@ci.stpaul.mn.us)) by close of business May 29, 2009.

Please give your name, menu selection and Department.

Grilled New York Strip Steak  
Broiled Walleye  
Roast Lemon-Thyme Chicken

All dinners include a house salad and a non-alcoholic beverage of your choice.

If you have special dietary needs please let Karin know when making your reservation.

***Note: Only regular members may vote and participate in Association business decisions. If you are a “fair share” member, please consider becoming a regular member today so you can become an active participant in your union.***

**PRELIMINARY DRAFT**  
**Minutes from the DECEMBER 2, 2009 General Membership Meeting**  
*The draft below needs approval from the General Membership at the June Meeting.*

**PEA GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING**  
**Mancini's**  
**December 2, 2009**

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:** John Blackstone, President; Karin Anderson, Vice President; Maia Sierra, Treasurer; Page DeLong, Personnel Chair; David Peterson, School District Negotiations Chair; Paul Hogrefe, City Negotiations Chair; Brian Krawiecki, Secretary and Mike Wilde, Legal Counsel.

**STEWARDS:** Frank Berg, Jennifer Carpenter, Kathleen Conger, Regina Etoll, Gale Hawkinson, Marian Heinrichs, Susan Henry, Craig O'Brien, Marsha Panos, Paula Peterson, Brian Tourtelotte and Bill Vos.

**OTHER PEA MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:** Issac Afwerke, Mary Ann Berglund, Joe Blomquist, Jim Brewer, Mary Calvo, Jennifer Carpenter, Joan Chinn, Jeff Cummings, Roberta DeCrans, Peg Doheny, Susan Feuerherm, Jim Giebel, Elena Grinberg, Cece Hauge, Shelly Hawkins, Doug Hempel, Kelly Herwin, Jennifer Jannetto, Jim Jeffery, Brian Karschnia, Greg Kelley, Mark Kile, spJon Klinkenberg, Kathy Korf, John Larson, Fong Lor, Kari McDermott, Barbara McMonigal-St.Dennis, Pam Mendez, Mark Moody, Barb Morin, Patty Norwig, Jordan Nguyen, Kieuoanh Nguyen, Sara Nurmela, Diane Olson, Bill Pesek, Ruth Richardson, Katy Schulz, George Simon, Greg Simpson, Barbara Sippel, Julia Sobania, Elizabeth Stiffler, Michael Tharp, Kha Vang, Jodi Wallin, Casey Walters, Angie Wiese and Maly Yang.

**INTRODUCTIONS:** John welcomed attendees and asked PEA members to introduce themselves to one another.

**MINUTES FROM THE JUNE 3, 2009 GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING:** The minutes from the June 3, 2009 General Membership Meeting were presented. MOTION by Pam Mendez to adopt the June 3, 2009 General Membership Meeting minutes as presented. SECOND by Mark Kile, MOTION CARRIED.

**LEGAL COUNSEL UPDATE:** Mike gave an overview of how the City LMCHI developed the City's Voluntary Employees Beneficiary Association Plan (VEBA) for Health Reimbursement Arrangement (HRA). PEA's role in the process was instrumental to the final development of the Agreement. The Unions successfully negotiated to have the City pay for the administrative costs to set up the VEBA. Mike has agreed to be the Chairperson of the VEBA Trust Account Committee. This is a very important position because the Unions have all fiduciary responsibilities for the trust account and will ensure PEA's role as a leader in the future of the VEBA.

Mike gave a review of PEA's success with the grievances that have occurred throughout the past year. He also reminded members in attendance of the importance of PEA's Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the City and County to protect members seniority rights when they transferred to County employment and how an MOA within the Libraries saved a member from layoff.

Mike recognized the PEA Stewards gave special commendations and thanks to the Stewards for their efforts and all the work they do on behalf of PEA members.

## **COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

**President:** John recognized Issac Afwerke for his recent military deployment overseas and welcomed him back to his position with the Saint Paul Regional Water Department.

**Vice President:** Karin reviewed the activities of the City LMCHI and the development of the City VEBA HRA Plan. The LCMHI will be reviewing proposals for a Health Insurance provider and will be making a recommendation to the City for the next Health Insurance provider. The City is in the process of rewriting job descriptions to have better integration into job matrices. The language in the job matrices is focused on how an employee does their job at the same time the language has to describe the job. The PEA Strategic Plan will be reviewed in March by the PEA Executive Board. The PEA Strategic Plan was implemented last year to keep PEA moving in a positive direction.

**Treasurer:** Maia reported PEA's fund balance to be in excess of \$133,000.00.

**Personnel:** Page reported there to be 297 PEA members, 229 in the City and 68 in the School District, with only 34 fair share members in the City and 3 fair share members in the School District. Page welcomed two new Stewards in the School District, Jennifer Carpenter and Marian Heinrichs.

**City Negotiations:** The current City contract continues through 2010. Paul asked members to let him know what they would like to see in the next contract. He also asked members to identify the benefits that they provide to the City so he can bolster arguments for increases in the next contract.

**School District Negotiations:** The School District has a new Superintendent, Valeria Silva. David was part of the Labor Committee to interview the new Superintendent. David identified for Ms. Silva that an important issue for PEA is equity in layoffs with the teachers. The Negotiations Committee is developing a proposal for the 2010-2011 PEA Contract and they are closely monitoring the Teacher's Contract as the PEA Contract has paralleled the Teachers Contract in previous negotiations.

**ELECTIONS:** Mike Wilde facilitated the PEA Executive Committee election process. The current Executive Committee has agreed to run for their current positions. Mike asked for nominations for Executive Committee positions from the floor. There were no nominations presented from the floor. The current Executive Committee was reinstated in their current positions for 2010 by majority approval. John Blackstone, President; Karin Anderson, Vice President; Maia Sierra, Treasurer; Page DeLong, Personnel Chair; David Peterson, School District Negotiations Chair; Paul Hogrefe, City Negotiations Chair & Brian Krawiecki, Secretary.

### **PEA MEMBER OF THE YEAR AWARD:**

Regina Etol was honored as 2009 PEA Member of The Year.

**AMENDMENTS TO THE PEA BY LAWS:** John presented the proposed PEA By Law Amendments. John opened the floor for comment and discussion on the proposed By Law Amendments. No comment or discussion was offered. The proposed By Law Amendments were approved by majority vote.

Door prizes were awarded to; George Simon, Angie Wiese, Paula Peterson, Jim Brewer, Barb Sippel, Diane Olson, Bill Pesek, Kelly Hervin, Kathy Korf, Barb Morin, Gale Hawkinson, Jennifer Jannetto, Mary Calvo, Jodi Wallin, Shelly Hawkins and Julia Sobania.

**ADJOURNMENT:** The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

## 2010 STEWARDS

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