

The Spark

Western Mass. Edition

May 2013



Members Step Up to Rebuild Holyoke Chapter

Elections for new leaders scheduled

After a long period of internal dissent and debate, Holyoke City members are now preparing for elections to choose new officers and select their bargaining committee representatives.

Mark DelloRusso, president of SEIU Local 888, says that he's encouraged by the members' decision to begin strengthening their chapter. "We all share the same goals which are to build a union that is democratic and strong. When members are united in their chapter and working together, they will see better results at the bargaining table," says DelloRusso.

Nominations and elections will take place on May 29 for the positions of chapter chair, secretary-treasurer and recording secretary. Four bargaining committee members will be selected, one from the Police Department, one from City Hall (including custodians and War Memorial staff), one from the Annex and the DPW, and one alternative at-large representative. Every member in good standing is eligible and encouraged to run for office.

DelloRusso says that the events of the past six months are a reminder of the importance of open and transparent communication at every level of the organization. "Trust and honesty are absolutely essential," says DelloRusso. "I think we've all learned that when we stop communicating, none of our interests is served." ■

In this issue:

- **Win a \$75 Gift Card**
- **Meet the Western Mass. Executive Board Members**
- **A Springfield Crossing Guard Leads the Way**
- **Chapter Reports**

Western Mass. Calendar of Events

Western Mass. Caucus Forming

A new committee of Local 888 members in Western Massachusetts is forming. The inaugural meeting will take place in Amherst on June 6th (see details below) and is open to all Local 888 members in the area. Come and meet fellow members from across Western Mass. to forge stronger links and build unity between chapters. Pizza will be served. Local 888 has hundreds of members in Amherst, Athol, Holyoke, Ludlow, Orange, Springfield and West Springfield. Come and make your voice heard!

What: Western Mass. Caucus

When: June 6th, 5:30-7PM

Where: Jones Library, 43 Amity Street, Amherst (There is metered parking across the street. If that lot is full, there is a municipal lot behind CVS.) For more information, contact Lisa Field 617-435-8837 or lfield@seiu888.org.

Help Your Union Grow

If you're interested in building power and helping Local 888 to grow, please attend the first meeting of the Western Mass. Organizing Committee. Discussion will focus on organizing targets, strategies, ways to get involved and eat delicious Red Rose pizza.

What: Western Mass. Organizing Committee

When: June 13th, 4:30PM

Where: Red Rose Pizzeria, 1060 Main St, Springfield. For more information, contact Rudy Renaud at rrenaud@seiu888.org.



Stay in the loop and up-to-date by 'liking' Local 888 on Facebook. Find us at: www.facebook.com/SEIULocal888

Win a \$75 Gift Card

Play our **Crazy 8's** game and you could win one of three gift cards worth \$25, \$50 or \$75. Here's how it works: whenever you see the number 8 in this edition of the Spark, make a note. Add up the sum of the 8s and mail or fax your answer back to Local 888. (For example: every time "Local 888" appears it is equal to 24.) All of the correct answers will be entered into a drawing to be held next month. Mail your entry by **June 14th** to SEIU Local 888, 52 Roland Street, Charlestown, MA, 02129. Fax to 617.241.5150. Be sure to include your name and email address and/or phone number. Only members in good standing are eligible to win. Good luck!

Discount Six Flags Tickets For Western Mass. Members

Thinking about going to Six Flags New England this summer? Local 888 has discount tickets available for members. Tickets can be purchased for \$34—that's \$20 off the regular ticket price. To get your tickets go to www.seiu888.org/888deals/

Meet the Western Mass. Executive Board Members



Two Local 888 members representing Western Massachusetts currently sit on the statewide Executive Board. **Kwesi Ablordeppey**, who works at the **Holyoke Soldiers' Home**, joined the Board last year.



Ablordeppey serves as chapter chair of his unit and is active in several community organizations in Springfield.

Tina Swift, an employee of the **Town of Amherst**, is the union's recording secretary. Swift joined the Board in 2009.

Swift may be familiar to Spark readers. Her article, "Why I Support Investing in Our Communities," appeared in the April 2013 issue of the Spark. ■

Friends and Family

Local 888 received the following request for assistance from member **Beatriz Colon**, City of Holyoke employee. Colon's son Josh dreams of being a Nascar driver and the family is seeking donations to help him realize his dream. Josh's request for help is printed below. If you'd like to make a donation, please mail it to SEIU Local 888, 52 Roland Street, Charlestown, MA, 02129. Thanks to all for your generosity and best of luck to Josh.

My name is Josh X. Colon; I am 14 years old and a Holyoke resident. This will be my second year pursuing my long term dream of becoming a Nascar Race Car Driver.

This year I will be participating in the 11-14 year Youth Division in the Wild Thing Karts. The racing competitions will be taking place every Monday at the Stafford Springs Motor Speedway in Stafford Springs, CT. The season runs every year from May til September.

As you are aware, racing is an expensive sport. Therefore, in order to compete effectively, I will need to properly maintain my kart and pay for other related expenses such as gas, oil, parts and repairs, protective gear, and adequate transportation to the track. Hopefully, you can come to one of my races and cheer me on. Any donation amount will be greatly appreciated.

Thank you for being a part of making my dream come true.

*Respectfully,
Josh X. Colon, #48*

Don't Forget to Vote on 6/25

The special Senate election will be held on

Tuesday, June 25th. Polling hours are between 7:00 AM and 8:00 PM. For information about where to vote visit www.wheredoivotema.com



Leading the Way

Joe Perry didn't set out to become a leader. This 61-year-old Springfield crossing guard describes himself as a "quiet type." But when he noticed safety concerns that endangered both students and crossing guards, he spoke up. "The kids shouldn't be in danger and neither should we," says Perry, who became a crossing guard two years ago after retiring from a job with the telephone company.

When Perry began the job escorting student's across Springfield's busy streets, the city's 125 crossing guards had no union. And that meant, as Perry soon discovered, that they had few rights or protections. "If there was a dispute with management, people felt like they were totally on their own. They had no back up at all."

Perry and his fellow guards began the process of forming a union and negotiating a contract that would provide them with essential protections. The crossing guards, who joined Local 888 last year, recently negotiated their first contract. "We feel like we have backup now," says Perry. "We're not so alone."

Safety Group Says Guard Jobs Among Riskiest

A statewide health and safety organization says that Massachusetts school crossing guards face unacceptably high rates of death and injury on the job. According to a report by the Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health or MassCOSH, nine crossing guards were injured on the job in 2012 when they were struck by vehicles. One of the guards sustained injuries that proved to be life threatening. In the past four years, two Massachusetts school crossing guards have been killed on the job.

The report, entitled "**Dying for Work in Massachusetts**" and released on Workers Memorial Day, found that 32 workers in the state were killed on the job last year. Several of the fatalities were related to transportation.

In order to make the crossing guard job less dangerous, MassCOSH urges Massachusetts cities and towns to comply with national standards. A coalition of guards across the state is working to develop additional safety recommendations. ■



Joe Perry is the first chapter chair of the union organized by Springfield crossing guards.

When two crossing guards who also serve as cafeteria lunch mothers were terminated recently for violating a local provision against holding more than one city job, Perry and other union leaders fought for their reinstatement. "Because we have a union contract we were able to tell management, 'you're wrong,' and get these women reinstated," says Perry. The guards, one of whom is 79, are now back on the job. Most importantly, says Perry, members of the new union have had a chance to see their hard work pay off. "Now when there's a problem, we sit down and discuss it. That's a big change from the past."

Members are now engaged in a process that Perry describes as "building a stronger union." As for his role—Perry was recently named chapter chair by his fellow members—he says that he never set out to become a leader, just to "know what was going on."

But while his development as a union leader has changed some things for Perry, his love of his job remains as strong as ever. Helping the students, who range from elementary-aged kids to high schoolers, twice a day, Perry is a regular presence in their lives. "I know them well enough that I can tell when something is bothering them." He also relishes the opportunity to teach them some important lessons. Chief among them: in the battle of child vs. vehicle, the vehicle always wins. "You can't just walk along staring up at the sky. You don't see the driver, the driver doesn't see you, it doesn't end well," says Perry. "The kids listen to me though. I know how to get their attention." ■

Western Mass. Chapter Reports

Orange Maintenance Unit Tries New Bargaining Approach

An experiment is underway at the bargaining table in Orange. Members of the Orange Maintenance Unit are trying an approach called "interest-based bargaining," in which union members and management identify goals, then use the bargaining process to reach them. Chapter chair **Richard Mathews** explains that both sides are working together to make contract language clearer with the goal of easing tensions in the workplace. "We're hoping that by straightening out some of the language there will be fewer grievances," says Mathews. And while the process is still new, Mathews says that early results look promising. "There's more give and take and bargaining feels quite a bit more laid back than usual." If you'd like more information about trying interest-based bargaining at your workplace, contact Lisa Field at lfield@seiu888.org.

Contract Signed at Amherst Housing Authority

Maintenance employees and custodians at the **Amherst Housing Authority** have voted unanimously to approve a new contract. The new agreement runs through next spring and includes a 3.5 % wage increase. Members were also successful in negotiating a new provision that pays members 1.5 times their base hourly salary when the administrative office is closed during traditional office hours for weather-related reasons, but the members stay or come into work. Congratulations to chapter chair **John Summers** and his team.

First Contract for Springfield Crossing Guards

Congratulations to the **Springfield crossing guards** for ratifying their first-ever contract. The agreement came after months of difficult bargaining. The two-year contract includes raises of 1% the first year and 2% the second year, which will bring all of the crossing guards up to the same salary. Chapter chair **Joe Perry** says that members of the 125-person unit are happy to have a contract in place that establishes their rights. "Now if a problem arises, we have to sit down and talk about it. That's why you need a union," says Perry.



Springfield crossing guards formed a union and joined Local 888 last year.

New Stewards Chosen at Holyoke Soldiers' Home

Congratulations to the Local 888 members who were sworn in as stewards at the Holyoke Soldiers' Home on May 20th: **Kwesi Ablordeppey, Paulette Williams, Theresa King, Francine Kapinos, Robin Rodowicz, Jerome Potvin, Gus Garcia, Laura Taylor, Norma Torres** and **Mark Correia**. Congratulations to all and thank you for your service.



New stewards being sworn in at the Holyoke Soldiers' Home. A growing number of members there have expressed interest in helping to build a stronger union.