



COOKIN' UP A BETTER CONTRACT: The Malden cafeteria workers gather to toast to their hard-won gains. The bargaining committee was made up of Local 888 internal organizer **Joe Montagna**, right rear, chapter president **Nicole Jones**, vice president **Debbie Arbing**, **Bonnie MacEachern** and **Paul Romano**.

Members place pay equity on menu in Malden schools

Local 888 members in the Malden cafeteria workers chapter have a lot to celebrate. They recently ratified a new contract that will boost wages for cafeteria workers between 20 percent and 30 percent by its last year.

The Malden School Committee and school superintendent John Oteri were responsive to the union's position that the gap between the predominantly female cafeteria workers and the predominantly male custodial workers was an equal pay issue that needed to be remedied. Working together, Local 888 leaders and staff arrived at a



series of wage increases that will bring the lowest paid workers up to a \$15/hour rate — several years ahead of the state minimum wage.

In addition, longevity was increased by \$100 at each stage, meaning at 10, 15, and 20 years. The new rates will be \$500, \$575, and \$675 respectively.

Also, utility workers and drivers, will get increases of 2 percent, 2 percent and 3 percent. The contract runs from 2018 to 2021.

For more information on Local 888's campaigns on behalf of cafeteria workers, see: <http://www.seiu888.org/cafe/>.

Big gains from tough talks with transit agency

Local 888 members in the Massachusetts Department of Transportation have overwhelmingly approved a new contract, which runs through June 30.

“Monetary issues were the main thing that held up negotiations,” said Larry Higgins, Local 888 internal organizer. Ultimately, many Local 888 members got substantial increases.



Cost-of-living raises were 2 percent, 2 percent and 2 percent over the three-year contract. Since most of the contract has elapsed, most of the raises will be retroactive.

However, \$700 was added to the highest step (No. 12) as well. Also, about 40 percent of Local 888 members will be getting upgrades, which are retroactive to July 2016. As a result of these moves, many Local 888 members will get big increases amounting to an additional several
For more on the MassDOT contract, see page 2

Holyoke pushes pension upgrades

Local 888 leaders are pushing to ensure that more members at the Holyoke Soldiers' Home get the higher pensions that come with Group 2 retirement classification. This would apply to LPNs and nursing assistants.

Right now, the situation is unfair and open to bias, said **Kwesi Ablordeppey**, the chapter president. "We take care of patients with dementia, Alzheimer's and post-traumatic stress disorder, some of who can even be violent."

To build a case for the better pensions, Ablordeppey found the names of retirees who had been given Group 2 status. These retirees set a precedent, then, for caregivers to get the higher status — a very significant development.

The Group 2 category allows workers to retire at a higher rate of pay earlier than otherwise. Many caregivers are being classified at the Group 1 level, or general state employee, for retirement.

However, the higher category covers positions that "provide direct care, custody, instruction or supervision of persons with



DRESSING UP FOR MARDI GRAS! Local 888 members at the Holyoke Soldiers' Home held their annual party last month. The popular event attracted union President **Brenda Rodrigues**, fourth from left.

mental illness or developmental disabilities."

The unfairness of the current situation is that caregivers move back and forth to the various wards, which also have patients with similar issues. In Ablordeppey's case, he worked for years in a locked ward. Now he mostly works on other kinds of wards at the veterans facility — but works in the locked ward if there is a need, such as due to vacations or illness.

Local 888 members have called on the Legislature to correct this unjust situation. Both Ablordeppey and Local 888

elected officials have testified at the State House in favor of a bill that would do just that.

Now both are asking Soldiers' Home caregivers who are eyeing retirement to contact the union, which will help them fill out the paperwork with an eye toward getting Group 2 pensions.

If Soldiers Home LPNs and nursing assistants are considering retirement, contact internal organizer Cory Bombredi for help in filing retirement papers at cbombredi@seiu888.org or 617-241-3319.

Hard MassDOT talks end in win

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several thousand dollars.

The upgrades are part of a MassDOT classification study as provided under a previous contract. These changes include the creation of new job classifications.

Local 888 has about 50 members at the MassDOT. The Coalition of MassDOT Unions that bargained the contract included the teamsters, steelworkers and AFSCME locals.

Some of what made negotiations complicated is that there were classification issues dating back to 2009 — when the MassDOT was formed. That year, the state Legislature voted to merge what had been MassHighway with the Mass Pike, which had been a separate agency. Those were then combined into the state's highway division.

Other MassDOT divisions include the Registry of Motor Vehicles and the mass transit division.

For more on the new MassDOT contract, see: <http://www.seiu888.org/2020/01/27/dot2020/>.

Younger workers big winners with new contract in Amherst

Members of the town of Amherst chapter voted unanimously for a new contract that significantly boosts base pay for young workers — to the tune of \$5,800 to \$8,700 for all new employees.

Just before the vote, a new employee signed her union card. She'll get a big raise as part of the labor agreement. Now that's a warm welcome!

Jennifer Reynolds, longtime chapter president, praised the contract and her union members for sticking together. "Our members wanted to fight — and wanted to go to mediation if they had to."

She added that there had been "a lot of new hires," who will particularly benefit from the contract.



REYNOLDS

Another "big victory" for the chapter, she said, was that members will, for the first time, be eligible for an educational benefit. That's good for up to \$1,000 per member, and a total of \$1,500 for emergency dispatchers.

Reynolds said a new town human resources manual noted

the educational benefit was going to nonunion employees. "I marched right up to the town manager and told him how wrong that was. I told him I thought it was classism at its worst."

Another improvement in the contract is an increase in bereavement leave to five days for a spouse, children or domestic partners.

Local 888 members will be getting retroactive pay, since the contract ran out last year. The cost-of-living raises for the three-year contract will be 2.5 percent, 2 percent and 2 percent.

A 12-year town employee, Reynolds started out as a parking supervisor and is now the administrative assistant for the senior center. She has served on Local 888's executive board.

The new Amherst contract covers 60 members, who work in such posts as clerk/receptionists, library assistants, parking enforcement officers, building maintenance, animal welfare, emergency dispatchers and building inspectors.



A TEAM EFFORT: Local 888 President Brenda Rodrigues, right, officially swore in the officers of the Haverhill custodians chapter. From left: **Leo Fortin, Eric Russell, Ed Simpson** and **Paul Migliori**. Local 888 Executive Board member **Fred Simmons** set up the event.

State GIC health costs steady

When it comes to health insurance, out-of-pocket expenses can be a real curve ball. Local 888, other unions and retirees have been working to rein in out-of-pocket expenses for members covered under the state's Group Insurance Commission.

For fiscal year 2018-2019, out-of-pocket expenses for GIC enrollees held roughly steady. Here's the roundup:

- For the top-paying 5 percent of enrollees, those hit with the most out-of-pocket expenses, these costs rose somewhat — from about \$3,429 to \$3,502.



Commonwealth of Massachusetts Group Insurance Commission

- For those in the top 10 percent of enrollees, out-of-pocket charges actually went down over 2018-2019 — from \$2,968 to \$2,752.
- The median out-of-pocket charges for GIC enrollees that year went down by a dollar, from \$914 to \$913.

Local 888 chapters in these communities are covered under the state's GIC: Arlington, Framingham, Gloucester, Groveland, Haverhill, Lawrence, Lexington, Lowell, Medford, Millis, Norwood, Randolph, Somerville, Springfield, Watertown, Westwood, Weymouth.

Climate change bill aimed at pension funds wins round

A state bill targeting the fossil fuel industry, and backed by Local 888's executive board, has cleared a major hurdle in the Massachusetts Legislature. The divestment legislation is part of the growing worldwide support for battling the oil industry to curb the damage caused by climate change.



STATE HOUSE: A panel has OK'd a bill to advance fossil fuel divestment.

"The struggle for environmental justice is tied to the fights for economic and racial justice," said Local 888 President Brenda Rodrigues. "Climate change affects impoverished and marginalized

communities far more than the wealthy."

At the national level, the Service Employees International Union has voted climate change a key part of its political agenda. The international's executive board has also passed a resolution in support of a U.S. Green New Deal, a proposal that aims to address climate change and the need for high-quality union jobs at the same time.

In Massachusetts, the Legislature's Joint Committee on Public Service has approved a bill that would allow local communities to divest their pension funds from the fossil fuel industry. The local-option bill, put forward by the MassDivest coalition, was recently endorsed unanimously by the Boston City Council. State SEIU Locals 888, 509 and 1199 all belong to MassDivest.

Right now, communities' retirement systems are barred from divesting their fossil fuel assets, due to a ruling by the state's Public Employee Retirement Administration Commission. The bill would allow those communities that want to divest — including Boston, Cambridge and Somerville — to sell off such stocks and bonds.

For the full report on climate change, see <https://tinyurl.com/888LClimate>.

Coming Attractions

LABOR, CLIMATE CHANGE AND POLITICAL POWER: Conference set for Sat., March 28, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Massachusetts Archives in Boston. Sponsor: UMass Boston Labor Center. For more info: <https://tinyurl.com/888Climate>.

SAVE THE DATE

COMING UP

LOCAL 888 LEADERS MEET:

The SEIU Local 888 Executive Board meets Wed, April 8, 10 a.m. at the union's conference room at 25 Braintree Hill Office Park, in Braintree. The

executive board is the governing body of SEIU Local 888.

Time to 'Know Your Rights'

Local 888 will offer a series of trainings for members and leaders this spring. The essential one, "Know Your Rights Training," shows how members can exercise their workplace rights and support each other on the shop floor.

The "Leadership Training" workshop will cover, in depth, a leader's role and the grievance procedure. A combined class puts them together.

- A combined "Leadership & Know Your Rights Training" will be: Sat., March 21, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., SEIU Local 888 office, 25 Braintree Hill Park, No. 306, Braintree.
- A "Leadership Training" workshop will be: Wed., March 25, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., SEIU Local 509, 293 Boston Post Road West, Marlborough.
- The first "Know Your Rights Training" will take place: Wed., April 15, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Scituate Library, 85 Branch St., Scituate.

To sign up for a training, go to <https://forms.gle/UCqC1EdiSzzZ5eno7>.

Moments of Silence

The officers and staff of Local 888 extend our deepest sympathies to the families of:



- **Mary Cirone**, president of the Woburn cafeteria workers chapter, whose mother died.
- **Kathleen Webber-Lewis**, also a Woburn cafeteria worker, whose brother died.

