

Hope rises as recovery takes hold in Holyoke

While U.S. nursing homes have been hard hit by the coronavirus, the Holyoke Soldiers' Home disaster remains one of the worst cases in the nation. The situation has stabilized now that there are fewer patients and new staff, along with National Guard members, to handle the high number of infected patients.

"Things are getting better; there's been a lot of progress," said **Kwesi Ablordeppey**, Local 888 chapter president. "But sometimes I feel that, I don't know how we are going to live through this."

At least 84 Soldiers' Home employees, out of more than 300, have tested positive for the coronavirus. "It's like the whole place is infected," said Ablordeppey, who so far has avoided getting the virus.

For more on Soldiers' Home, see page 4.



HELP ARRIVES IN HOLYOKE: Fewer residents and more staff aid Soldiers' Home conditions.



ZOOMING IN ON HIGHER EDUCATION: Local 888 leaders, staff and not-yet-union workers took part in 'Working in Higher Ed in Uncertain Times.' The event was a prelude to the second annual Higher Education Labor Summit set for June 20, 9 to 11 a.m. *Higher ed workers can sign up here:* <http://www.tinyurl.com/higheredlaborsummit>.

Higher ed workers gain voice in 'Uncertain Times'

At Local's 888's April 30 "Working in Higher Ed in Uncertain Times" event, speakers said that gaining a seat at the table with management when dealing with the pandemic was a good example of what unions can do.

"Our members benefit from speaking with one voice, when dealing with Emerson," said **Shaylin Hogan**, vice president of Local 888's Emerson chapter said via Zoom. "We speak with members regularly and have developed a good working relationship with our Human Resource Department. That really helped us get members' coronavirus concerns addressed."

With the rapidly building crisis, "It was clear that management was tuning out our members," said **Aimee Slater**, head steward for Local 888's Brandeis chapter. "We quickly organized a meeting with management. It



SLATER

was amazing to see our members who haven't spoken up much before, feel so empowered. We stuck together for the sake of our peers; and management saw the power of our union."

For more on Higher Education Summit, see page 4.

Cafeteria staff keeps on serving

The Marlborough cafeteria workers, always essential, have been on the job through the COVID-19 shutdowns. They have been preparing thousands of brown bag breakfasts and lunches for the city's children, typically in needy families, with the addition of the senior center.

The food is then delivered by buses using two routes each day, both morning and afternoon.

The COVID-19 environment "has definitely been a learning process for everyone involved," said **Julie Whapham**, chapter president. "People on the whole are doing OK, but some don't feel comfortable coming in to work." Some live with elderly relatives, too.

In the beginning, masks were not mandatory. Everyone has had to adapt to the idea of social distancing.

The staff has had to redesign how the work is done, said Whapham, the food service manager for the high school. For example, now only two people will get assigned to a specific task, so they can stay 6 feet away from each other.

Work flow, too, has been changed so that not everyone is going to use the main refrigerator. And there's more preparation taking place beforehand for the workers who come in later. That, too, helps maintain social distancing.

And now everyone wears masks.

In addition, parents with young children have had the rug pulled out from under them as day-care centers have closed. The rules for who gets paid and who can take sick time have changed over the course of the crisis.

Contracts OK'd with OpaVote

The COVID-19 pandemic has not stopped Local 888's essential work of pursuing collective bargaining agreements and having them voted on. The union has been forging ahead with the help of technology.

Local 888 members in both the Grafton Public Schools and Lawrence Public Library have ratified new agreements using OpaVote, an online voting system.



SOCIAL DISTANCING, TOGETHER: Marlborough cafeteria workers have prepared thousands of lunches since the schools closed. See video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=00n16RvA6CE>.

The overall arrangement now is that workers come in Monday, Wednesday and Friday, but are paid the usual amount. The difficult part of that is, they have to work at a hectic pace the days they go in, because they make about twice as much food each day as they were doing at first during the pandemic.

The Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health has issued guidelines on COVID-19 safety that includes sections on custodial and food service workers. See: <https://tinyurl.com/888essential>.

In addition, Local 888 members at Boston's Department of Neighborhood Development voted for bargaining committee members using OpaVote.

OpaVote's website says the company maintains voter privacy: "Voter emails are using only for your election." The company says it uses encryption to "provide top-notch security and reliability."

For more info, go to <https://www.opavote.com/>.

Health coalition flunks Baker's reopening plan

The Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health, which includes Local 888, has given flunking grades to the governor's plan to reopen the state's economy, saying that it fails to truly protect workers and the public.

The situation, as outlined by MassCOSH, is that "thousands of essential workers in Massachusetts have become ill and even died as a result of their exposure" to the virus that causes COVID-19. This has made for "an unprecedented worker health and safety crisis (For the full MassCOSH report card on Baker's plan, see <https://tinyurl.com/888Baker>).

"Due in particular to the Holyoke Soldiers' Home outbreak, Local 888 members have been hard hit by the coronavirus," said union President **Brenda**



MassCOSH

Rodrigues. "All workers should have access to appropriate personal protective equipment, something that management there failed to provide for caregivers — and, initially, even fought

against," said Rodrigues.

MassCOSH said President Trump's Occupational Safety and Health Administration has been "missing in action." Therefore, the coalition said, "the state must allocate the resources needed to build capacity to conduct worksite investigations, enforcement, data analysis and technical assistance to employers."

The coalition used four categories to size up Baker's plan:

- Worker Health and Safety Standards: Grade: D.
- Enforcement of Health and Safety Standards: Grade: F
- Protection of Workers Rights: Grade: F
- Testing and Tracing Grade: D

For more on Baker's plan, see <http://www.seiu888.org/2020/05/27/health-coalition-flunks-bakers-reopening-plan/>. For a report on Workers' Memorial Day, see <http://www.seiu888.org/2020/05/25/frontline-essential-workers-honored-by-labor/>.



'DEVOTED TO THE KIDS': Wayne MacLeod said his chapter — custodians, maintenance and cafeteria — are essential workers on the job during the crisis.

'Now is our time to step up'

"We are essential workers; this is our moment to shine," said **Wayne MacLeod**, president of the Local 888 chapter that includes Watertown's cafeteria, custodial and maintenance workers. "Now is our time to step up and do what's needed," he said.

"We're pretty much all devoted to the kids. A lot of us grew up in Watertown, myself included," added MacLeod.

MacLeod said that he had worked closely with the schools' superintendent as the pandemic hit. Among other pandemic measures, schools were shut down March 17, St. Patrick's Day.

When he and the schools superintendent first connected to talk about the situation, MacLeod said, he told her that "whatever you need to do, we can do. It's time for us to step up."

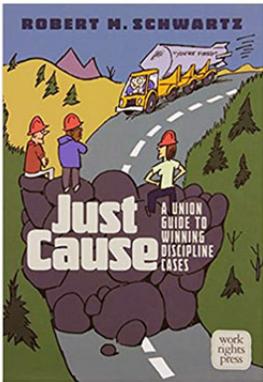
At first, that meant four-hour shifts, five days a week, for the custodial and maintenance staff, later reduced to two days per week. The Local 888 members were paid their full salaries. Now that Local 888 unit is back in 40 hours per week and preparing to return the materials left in the schools — by teachers and students — at the time of the shutdown.

Cafeteria workers continued making meals for delivery to the town's children, particularly the needy. Scheduling varied, but has meant divvying up the needed shifts.

Meanwhile, the chapter is gearing up to negotiate a new contract, along with Local 888 internal organizer Patrick Atwell. In the current environment, negotiations are on hold.

Firing must have 'Just Cause'

Abusive bosses, arbitrary discipline and unjust firings are all-too common in American workplaces. On the other hand, union



agreements typically contain contract language that calls for "just cause" in workplace disciplinary actions. So, how do you get justice in the context of a workplace, which after all is not a democracy?

Well-known labor lawyer Bob Schwartz recently gave a 30-minute "Know Your Rights" talk for Local

888 members that focused on one of his books, **"Just Cause: A Union Guide to Winning Discipline Cases."** He told the Local 888 leaders and staff in attendance (via Zoom) that "there's probably been about 100,000 printed labor arbitrations over the years, and gradually there's been a consensus around certain principles, that unions have fought for, on the issue of 'just cause'."

One of those, he said, is that — when it comes to employee discipline — the "employer has an obligation to point out a rule, along with the possible penalties for disobeying the rule."

For the scoop on future trainings and the full report on 'Just Cause,' see www.seiu888.org. Members can request a summary of Schwartz's, "Seven Basic Principles of Just Cause" by emailing myunion@seiu888.org.

Higher Ed Summit June 20

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With a voice at work becoming so vitally important for higher-education workers, Local 888 is convening its **second annual Higher Education Labor Summit on June 20 (9 to 11 a.m.)** to connect workers fighting to improve their work lives and share skills that it takes to win on campus. The summit will provide workers an opportunity to strategize and coordinate with other university workers on their organizing and contract campaigns.

For the full report, see <https://tinyurl.com/888Edu>. Higher ed workers can sign up here for summit: <http://www.tinyurl.com/higheredlaborsummit>.



DUDLEY

Member aids 'dreamers'

Local 888 activist **Jonathan Dudley** is taking action to help DACA recipients, known as "Dreamers," who President Trump is threatening with deportation. One of them, Jonathan Vargas, is Dudley's brother-in-law — an intensive-care nurse who works with COVID-19 patients in Winston-Salem, N.C.

President Obama set up DACA — the Deferred Action on Childhood Arrivals program — in 2012 as Congress failed to act on immigration reform. These "Dreamers" were brought up in the U.S., and have known no other home. DACA allowed young adults like Vargas to get work papers and attend college, while shielding them from deportation if they had a clean criminal record.

Dudley, a Head Start teacher with Montachusets Opportunity Council, urges people to sign a petition calling on Congress to OK the Dream Act (<https://tinyurl.com/888Dreamer>). For more, see <http://www.seiu888.org/2020/05/27/member-aids-dreamers/>

Hope up at Soldiers' Home

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The Baker administration has removed the facility's superintendent, Bennett Walsh, as multiple investigations look into the Soldiers' Home disaster. Several other members of Walsh's management team have been placed on paid administrative leave.



ABLOR-DEPPEY

Under interim leadership, the overall situation has improved significantly. However, some of that is simply due to having fewer patients. At the start of the pandemic, the facility had over 200 residents.

The state's department of health and human services said that, as of May 26, 92 residents have died since the pandemic hit, with 76 of them testing positive for the coronavirus.

For the full report, see <https://tinyurl.com/888HolyMay>.

