

Moving forward in COVID crisis

Union keeps on keeping on — both online and out in the field

Work on the 2020 convention is heating up as the clock ticks down to Oct. 24, 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. The COVID-19 pandemic has required Local 888 to schedule the event on Zoom. Members are urged to register early and be eligible for a special door prize (see <http://www.seiu888.org/convention/>).

“In these pandemic times, our union has persevered and creatively tackled the problems at hand — and kept moving forward,” said Local 888 President **Brenda Rodrigues**. “We’ve adapted to the coronavirus crisis by holding health and safety and union rights workshops online and having our executive board and staff continue to meet all the while.”



WINNING

“I look forward to connecting with our fellow members and talking about how COVID-19 has impacted their lives, professionally and personally,” said **Kevin Nascimento**, the local’s

Nascimento in spotlight

The Local 888 Convention, set for Oct. 24, will shine a spotlight on the local’s new secretary-treasurer, **Kevin Nascimento**. He took office recently after being nominated by President **Brenda Rodrigues** and approved by the executive board, which he was a member of.

“Kevin has truly stepped up in the role of an officer for SEIU 888,” said Rodrigues. “He attended the 2020 SEIU convention as a delegate and is preparing the financial report for our convention.”

Beyond that, she said, “Kevin is a leader who understands adversity in the workplace.”
See page 2 for more on secretary-treasurer



THAT WAS THEN: Local 888 President **Brenda Rodrigues** gives out a prize to a member at the 2019 Leadership Conference. To register for the Oct. 24 Local 888 Convention and be eligible for a special door prize, see <http://www.seiu888.org/convention/>.

new secretary-treasurer. “These are trying times that require displays of solidarity and understanding in order to help each other cope so we can solve issues and get each other through the day.”

Susan Winning said she was “excited to kick off the formation of Local 888’s new retiree chapter.”
See page 4 for more on convention

Convention on for Oct. 24

The Local 888 Convention will run from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on Sat., Oct. 24, via Zoom. The union has identified six key industry sectors that members work in: early childhood education, public schools, higher education, public authorities and state and municipal workers.

There will be breakout sessions for members to meet with workers in their sector to compare their working conditions and union experiences.

To register and be eligible for a door prize, see <http://www.seiu888.org/convention/>.

UMass Lowell chapter slams layoffs

The Local 888 chapter at UMass Lowell has been protesting the state's planned layoffs since the summer and working for fairness for its members.

"What's needed at this point is for the state and federal government to bail us out," said chapter president **Nicholas Piscitello**. "They need to recognize that the universities are in financial distress. UMass Lowell is not alone in this. It's higher education all across the country."

"The federal government bailed out the airline industry" during the pandemic, he added. And during the Great Recession, the feds bailed out the banking industry.

Locally, the chapter is part of a coalition, UMass Unions United-Lowell, that has



ATHLETICS ON ICE: Local 888 members teamed up for an entertaining Hockey Night last year. Now, the school has canceled athletics for the fall.

organized several protests against the layoffs. That included a July demonstration featuring 200 empty chairs, complete with pink slips attached to them, to represent employees losing their jobs.

"We're trying to limit the impact on members, where we can,"

added Piscitello. "We're trying to mitigate what we can." For example, about 10 members took advantage of a retirement incentive program. "Unfortunately, we didn't have enough people take the incentive to prevent layoffs," he said.

Now, he said, about 84 members are on "temporary layoff." Under this designation, the employer portion of their health insurance is covered.

The pandemic shut down the university's in-person teaching and services in March. Local 888 members played a key role in the huge effort it took to bring classes online.

About 580 members are united in the chapter. For full report, <http://www.seiu888.org/2020/10/07/umass-lowell-chapter-slams-layoffs/>

Nascimento takes on budget

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In fact, his LinkedIn page describes himself as an information professional advocating for workers' rights and fair play. He said that the latter applies both to his service as a soccer referee and to unions. "It's important that workers feel they are treated fairly."



NASCIMENTO

Nascimento is treasurer of his Local 888 chapter for the Brockton Public Library. As part of that, he said, people call him up about chapter funds. "At Christmastime, they know who to call," he joked. Social events are part of what chapter funds can be used for.

He started out in 2006, when just a high-schooler, putting books back on the shelves as a

library page. Since then, he said, "I've learned about how important unions are and how important it is to talk with your co-workers about workplace grievances."

He is committed, as a librarian to opposing censorship and advocating for average people's right to information. This includes support for net neutrality, the principle that Internet service providers treat all online data equally, a policy the Trump administration opposes.

Nascimento has worked his way up to the position of reference librarian for fiction. He provides advice for readers using both his own knowledge and the latest software. In the COVID-19 world, he organizes online book clubs.

He has earned a bachelor's degree from Bridgewater State University. Now, Nascimento is working toward getting a master's degree online in library and information science with the University of South Carolina.

Haverhill to hire 10 custodians to take on coronavirus cleaning

The Haverhill Public Schools had been cutting back on custodians for 20 years. But when management came looking to get more out of the remaining workers, chapter leaders and Local 888 staff said it was time for a talk.



RUSSELL

“We said that, in order for us to make it work, you have to hire more custodians,” said chapter president **Eric Russell**. The result is a new agreement on the issue, in which the district is hiring 10 additional custodians to deal with the pandemic.

“Management definitely understood the situation, even though they didn’t like it. They had to give us more staff,” said Russell. The school district currently employs 51 custodians, with about 10 of them part-timers.



“They want us to go through and clean the bathrooms every hour,” he said, describing the heightened cleaning. That’s compared to having the bathrooms cleaned once a day, usually after hours. The

work includes emptying the bathroom trash, cleaning up anything that’s been disposed of improperly and disinfecting key areas such as the sinks and toilets.

The goal is to prevent the spread of the coronavirus and make students and staff feel safe. The new work also includes disinfecting heavily used surfaces in the buildings, such as door knobs and light switches and the water coolers. Students bring in their own cups.

Haverhill has 17 buildings and about 8,063 students. Therefore, not all the buildings, including Russell’s, will have another custodian.

The school district has many students who are learning remotely. Most are going to school on a hybrid model, meaning they are only in the school two days a week, with students broken up into two cohorts.



STEPPING FORWARD: Via Zoom, Local 888 President **Brenda Rodrigues** swears in stewards **Lorraine Cavanaugh** and **Maryanne Carty** as the new chapter leaders for the Westwood clerical and administrative workers.

Orienting new members

SEIU Local 888 has taken on the challenges of the COVID-19 crisis by innovating — such as by using Zoom to host union orientation programs for members, new ones in particular.

One recent evening session featured new members in the North Shore Regional 911 Center, Boston Public Schools and the Boston Water and Sewer Commission.

“I take great pride in being a union member — and in speaking up and making sure our voices are heard,” said **Brenda Rodrigues**, Local 888’s elected president, kicking off the Zoom event. She noted that, early in her working life at the Brockton Public Library, she became an active member of her union. Rodrigues emphasized that “the union is the chapter’s members in the workplace. It’s about how we work together to have a safe and healthy workplace.”

The main service Local 888 provides members is internal organizers, who assist with collective bargaining and contract enforcement. Rodrigues compared belonging to a union to being a member of a gym. If you don’t show up at the gym to exercise, you won’t build up muscles.

Building up your union’s strength means: knowing your contract, showing up at union meetings and supporting your co-workers on the negotiating team. It also means representing your union in the community or with elected officials.

Contact Johannes Raatz at jraatz@seiu888.org to find out more on member orientations. See www.seiu888.org for more info.

Ranked Choice Voting at polls

The SEIU Massachusetts State Council has followed Local 888 in endorsing Question 2, or Ranked Choice Voting. The “Yes on 2” Campaign says that approving the measure on the November ballot would strengthen our democracy, because more elected leaders will better represent the will of the people.



MERMELL

If the state already had such a measure, it likely would have been the deciding factor in the Massachusetts Fourth Congressional District.

Pro-labor candidate Jesse Mermell, former communications director for Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick, was supported by Local 888 and many other unions in the recent Democratic primary.

But the pro-labor vote was split between several candidates, and ex-Republican Jake Auchincloss won with only 22.4 percent of the vote, or 34,971 votes. Mermell got 21.1 percent, or 32,938 votes.

With Ranked Choice Voting (RCV), voters — if they chose — could rank their choices of candidates. In this scenario, those who cast No. 1 votes for the least-popular candidate would see their No. 2 votes doled out to the remaining candidates. This process would continue to narrow the field until one candidate received an actual majority of the vote.

RCV helps to keep third-party candidates or those with similar views in a primary from becoming spoilers, who pull votes from a potential winner, such as Mermell. The former Brookline Select Board member said she is now the poster child for why RCV should become law.

For more on RCV and the election:

See <http://www.seiu888.org/2020/01/07/voter-choice-set-for-ballot/> in *The Spark*.

Voter Choice Massachusetts is leading the charge for Ranked Choice Voting, see <https://www.yeson2rcv.com/about/>.

Local 888 is organizing a forum with candidate for U.S. Congress Jake Auchincloss on Wed., Oct. 21 from 5:30 to 7 p.m. on Zoom. See www.seiu888.org for updates.



GADDIS

On Local 888 menu: ‘The Labor of Lunch’

There is a growing movement in the U.S. to improve the freshness and quality of school cafeteria food — while improving the quality of the jobs and ensuring better wages and benefits. “Cafeteria workers are

typically left out of the public conversation” on school lunch programs, said Jennifer Gaddis, a University of Wisconsin-Madison professor. She spoke with Local 888 members on a special Zoom call to celebrate National Food Service Worker’s Day.

Gaddis said the coronavirus pandemic has only increased the importance of engaging cafeteria workers, who are now widely praised as “essential.” There needs to be a move toward “improving labor conditions, providing hazard pay and guaranteeing sick days, she added.

Gaddis spoke about her book, “The Labor of Lunch: Why We Need Real Food and Real Jobs in American Public Schools.” She provides an analysis of how large food companies and chains “have largely replaced the nation’s school cooks by supplying cafeterias with cheap, precooked hamburger patties and chicken nuggets.”

In 2019, Local 888 along with union and community allies successfully fought to save cafeteria jobs in the Groton-Dunstable Regional School District (For the full report on “Lunch,” see: <http://www.seiu888.org/2020/10/07/on-local-888s-event-menu-the-labor-of-lunch/>). For a video of her talk: <https://youtu.be/oQM7CxFT9cE>

Convention readying for takeoff

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It will be great to have the opportunity to work with other retirees to begin planning how to build the chapter,” added Winning, the new executive board member for retirees.

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