



The Spark

December 2020

Local 888
SEIU
Stronger Together

Gearing up for 888 election

Rodrigues to retire as president, leaving vacancy in top union post

The union's 2021 election was at the top of everybody's mind at the Local 888 Executive Board meeting this month — as its members made plans and President **Brenda Rodrigues** officially announced that she would not be a candidate for re-election.



RODRIGUES

The union has made “incredible strides in the past few years, providing greater accountability and overcoming major obstacles,” said Rodrigues, 67. “After working hard for some 52 years, it’s time for me to give some time to my family.”

Since the 2018 vote, Local 888 has weathered the setbacks posed by the U.S. Supreme Court’s anti-union Janus case, persevered during the hardships of the COVID-19 pandemic, and moved forward by rallying the membership and organizing the not-yet organized.

This January, Local 888 members voted overwhelmingly to approve revisions of the bylaws — aimed at increasing participation, promoting greater union democracy and strengthening members’ rights to a fair work

See page 4 for more on convention

2021 strategic plan sets high goals

Local 888’s strategic plan for 2021 calls for leaders, staff and members to commit themselves to upping their game from this year’s efforts. In addition, it calls for the union to win standards-setting contracts in Local 888’s six industry sectors, create model contract language for those sectors and help build a broader movement by bargaining for “the common good.”

The plan, approved by the Local 888 Executive



READY TO LEAD: Newly-minted executive board members **Elmer Arriaza**, above, from the Chelsea Soldiers’ Home, and **Justin Lawler**, from UMass Lowell, take the oath of office on Zoom. See page 4.



Board says that, in 2021, the union will “set standards with contract campaigns.” To make that possible, the union will:

- “Invest in research, provide communications support, and strengthen chapter internal organization” wherever necessary to win.
- “Continue to coordinate a campaign with the 12 bargaining teams in the city of Boston

See page 4 for more on strategic plan

Holyoke moves toward restoration

Last spring, the Holyoke Soldiers' Home achieved notoriety for having one of the worst COVID-19 outbreaks in the U.S. New management has been working closely with Local 888 to set things right.

"Local 888 and management, under acting superintendent Val Liptak, have had a cordial relationship," said **Kwesi Ablordeppey**, Holyoke chapter president. "Management has been working well with the union to hire more staff." He said he would have to wait and see how things go under the newly appointed acting superintendent, Michael Lazo.

Management has been hiring needed staff before reopening areas closed due to the outbreak — which killed at least 76 residents. Ablordeppey said that only six units at the



TRYING TIMES: Local 888 leader **Kwesi Ablordeppey** testifies at Holyoke Community College for the Legislature's special committee on the Holyoke Soldiers' Home outbreak.

Holyoke Home are operating, while there used to be 10.

Under the ousted management, the facility had been understaffed for years. Members had launched campaigns demanding the facility increase staffing levels — out of fairness to both the vets and Local 888 members.

At the beginning of the outbreak, managers reprimanded Ablordeppey — in writing — for using personal protective equipment (PPE), such as a gown and the proper mask, an N95. In contrast, the new management has turned that around, he said, so there is sufficient PPE .

"They have done an excellent job," he said. For a full report: <http://www.seiu888.org/2020/12/18/holyoke-soldiers-home-moves-toward-restoration/>.

Zoom event eyes health care

The need to reform the U.S. healthcare system has become even more pressing an issue due to the pandemic and record levels of unemployment. To address that problem, SEIU Local 888 supports setting up a Medicare for All,



or single-payer, system. One way Local 888 leaders can get more involved in the movement for reform is to attend the 2021 Medicare for All

Strategy Conference in January.

As many as 12 million Americans may have lost their health insurance when the COVID-19 economic crisis hit, a study from the [Economic Policy Institute](https://www.economicpolicyinstitute.org/) concludes.

The 2021 Medicare for All Strategy Conference, co-sponsored by the Labor Campaign for Single Payer, will be held online on Sat. and Sun., Jan. 23 and 24. "Single payer" means that the

government will pay the bills, as insurance companies do now.

The aim of the conference is to meet with other labor and healthcare activists to strategize how to win this fight under a new administration and a new Congress.

The organizers' goal is to make this online event as participatory and interactive as possible. Workshops will consist of short presentations, with most of the hour dedicated to breakout sessions for discussion.

Some workshops will be geared to those who are fairly new to the issue while others will target seasoned activists. There will also be opportunities to talk with participants during caucuses, workshop breakouts — even "Happy Hours" hosted on the social networking platform Gather.

To register: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/2021-medicare-for-all-strategy-conference-tickets-127486594837>.

Pact edges by Town Meeting

While vast amounts of wealth have been created at tech companies and in downtown Boston, getting raises can still be an uphill climb for those who work for local governments.

In Winchester, a proposed contract for the Local 888 clerical workers chapter had to face Town Meeting, which allows everyone to get their two cents in. The town's Finance Committee opposed the proposal. The Town Meeting was held via Zoom, due to the pandemic.



Of note: Winchester is one of the wealthiest communities in the state.

The Daily Times Chronicle reported that the contract drew support from the Personnel Board and the town

manager. The added cost to the town of Winchester, the Personnel Board said, would be \$22,774 for the first year of the contract and then \$70,864 and an additional \$70,314 for the other two.

Town Meeting passed the chapter's contract by one vote. Still opponents called for yet another vote, but failed to overturn the original vote.

The three-year contract included cost-of-living raises of 2 percent (retroactive) in the past fiscal year and again in the second year, partially retroactive. The contract, which runs through June 30, 2020, has a 2.5 percent COLA in the third year.

The contract drew fire over:

- An increase in the technology stipend from 1 percent to 2 percent, retroactive to July 1.
- The potential for higher raises, given the customary step scale.
- The impact on the town budget

The contract also includes a longevity clause that gives workers an extra \$100 after the first five years, \$150 after 10 years, \$200 after 15 years, \$400 after 20 years, and \$400 after 25 years. In addition: a boost to hourly pay if a worker fills in for someone in a higher pay grade.

Social Security:
With You Through Life's Journey...

 Securing today and tomorrow

Members eye retirement with COVID-style event

In a pandemic triumph, about 200 members attended the Social Security 101 workshops this month on Zoom.

"I was really excited about how many people attended," said **Teresa Riordan**, an organizer of the event. "This showed that a lot of people are looking to retire, but don't know how to go about doing it — especially given the complicated details surrounding Social Security."

She said that most attendees stayed on past the presentation for the question-and-answer session, which pushed the online events out to a remarkable two hours. Local 888's hosting of the event fits in with its new strategic plan, which calls for providing more programs and services to members beyond their labor contracts.

The union's new chapter — SEIU Local 888 Union Forever — sponsored the event. If you are retired or about to retire, the Union Forever chapter invites you to become a member.

At this time, the cost to join the Local 888 retiree chapter is \$40 annually. For an application form, [click this link](#). For more info, contact Lidia Calvo at lcalvo@seiu888.org. In addition, Local 888 has begun offering a BCBS Dental Insurance Plan retirees chapter members. See <http://www.seiu888.org/2020/12/18/members-eye-retirement-with-covid-style-event/> for the full report on the Social Security workshop.

For the slides from the workshop, see <http://www.seiu888.org/2020/12/02/social-security-101-turns-out-250/>.

Board approves new officers

The Local 888 Executive Board has ratified the nominations of new officials, electing one new member to the board and one trustee. They are:

- **Elmer Arriaza**, chapter vice president at the Chelsea Soldiers' Home, to the board.
- **Justin Lawler**, who has served as vice president of the chapter at the University of Massachusetts Lowell, as a trustee.

Also in recent months, the Local 888 board approved the nominations of:



NASCIMENTO

- **Kevin Nascimento**, who has served as treasurer of the Brockton Public Library chapter, as the local's secretary-treasurer.
- **Susan Winning**, a former UMass Lowell leader and Local 888 trustee, to the board as the representative of the new retirees chapter.

Respect Us, Protect Us, Pay Us

The international union is taking the next step in its Respect Us. Protect Us. Pay Us campaign.

In the November election, SEIU members voted for health care and long-term care that everyone can afford — along with:

- Changing policies and systems that can make it harder for people of color and working families to thrive.
 - Providing frontline workers with protective gear, hazard pay, and paid sick leave.
 - Raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour.
 - Tackling the COVID-19 crisis in a clear, science-based way.
- Supporting essential workers and their right to collective bargaining.

SEIU members voted for leaders who will support them. Now, the International Union said, it's time for officials at all levels of governance to "do what we elected them to do."

To sign the pledge. Go to:

https://secure.everyaction.com/dfab1X7d_UWSTvWcPRR8oQ2.

SEIU wants you for quick survey

These are unprecedented times. Now, members can give valuable feedback to SEIU on how the pandemic has affected their workplaces. To take the survey, go to: <https://tinyurl.com/SEIU2020survey>.

Local looks to election

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environment. One change included the creation of a chapter for Local 888 retirees. **Susan Winning** is now the new chapter's executive board member.

At its December meeting, the board approved four impartial Local 888 members to serve on the Election Committee overseeing the 2021 Officer and Executive Board election. They are:

- **James Harrington**, Lottery Commission
- **Kathleen Porrazzo**, Quincy Housing Authority Professionals
- **William Bonnetti**, Town of Yarmouth, Unit A
- **Marcelina Johnson**, Boston Centers for Youth & Families

For the full report on the election:

<http://www.seiu888.org/2020/12/18/gearing-up-for-local-888-election/> .

2021 strategic plan sets high bar

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- where contracts expired in 2020."
- Bring leaders together and support the union's negotiators for the state's Unit 2 — which includes both Holyoke and Chelsea Soldiers' Homes, the Massachusetts State Lottery and the University of Massachusetts Lowell, which will be negotiating their contracts in 2021.

The 2021 strategic plan calls for convening chapter leaders in each industry sector to compare contracts and arrive at model contract language. This would cover such issues as union orientation for new hires, and strengthening health and safety committees.

In addition, the strategic plan urges chapters to "Bargain for the Common Good." For the full report: <http://www.seiu888.org/2020/12/18/2021-strategic-plan-sets-high-goals/> .

