

SEIU Local 517M E-Former – August 2015 Edition

Lead, Unite, Fight – Win For the 99%!

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Annual Membership Conference Recap

On Friday, July 24, 2015 local union leaders and members gathered in Lansing for the 2015 Annual Conference which was entitled “Talk Back to Your Union Tour – Leadership is Listening.”

The conference began with a video greeting from Senator **Debbie Stabenow**. The newly sworn in Executive Officers were introduced to the members in attendance during the President’s Report of newly elected President **George Heath**. **Sue Browne** of the BlueGreen Alliance gave a report about clean power initiatives, SEIU 517M AFRAM President **Yolanda Johnson** gave the AFRAM Caucus Report and the SEIU 517M COPE Committee also gave reports to the attendees.



union movement.

Guests also included **Zac Altefogt**, communications director from the Fight for 15 Campaign who gave an update on the campaign and introduced a fast food worker with him to tell her compelling story and her fight for \$15 an hour and the ability to form a union. The Keynote Speaker was **Tom DeBruin** (pictured left), SEIU Public Service Division Director. DeBruin spoke of his union story and what is currently happening in the

There were two winners of the “Member of the Year” award. The School and Local Government winner was **Jan Goodwin** from Wayland Schools for her work as our Local’s Ethics Liaison. She was presented with her award from Region 2 Divisional Vice President **Eric Campbell** (pictured left) and SEIU 517M President **George Heath** (pictured right).





The State Employee winner was **Rod Jackson** from the Technical Unit for his leadership and COPE volunteering. He was presented his award by SEIU 517M President Heath (pictured left) and Technical Unit President **Arnie Beller** (pictured right). Congratulations to both!

There were several team building and communication exercises to assist the leaders in the field for the implementation of the "Talk Back" tour which will be rolled out later this year at worksites.

The afternoon was spent in Caucuses based on division lines to employee bargaining and school government issues which included the "Action Team." Both groups engage and listen to their memberships.



Breakout discuss state and local the creation of discussed how to respective

School and Local Government Action Team

During the School and Local Government break out at our SEIU 517M Annual Conference,



leaders and members agreed that our SLG chapters from the three regions have many common issues. In many cases, one chapter may struggle to find solutions to a problem that a chapter across the state in a different region has already tackled and solved. Whether it's municipal budget matters or school outsourcing challenges, they will work to find best practices within the chapters of our regions.

To achieve a better and more uniform way to tackle our issues, leaders and members from the SLG chapters of all three regions established a committee called the SLG Action Team. Two member leaders from each region, along with SLG staff committed to actively participate with two meetings scheduled on October 6, 2015 and January 5, 2016. The following member leaders have stepped up to work on this committee:

- Region 1 - Betty Smith & Leticia Trevino
- Region 2- Eric Campbell & Jan Goodwin
- Region 3 – Yolanda Johnson & Stephanie Abrams

All of us appreciate their dedication and commitment to all the members of our SLG chapters.

President's Column



By George Heath, SEIU Local 517M President

Fellow 517M members, it will be my privilege to serve as your President for the next 3 years. We have been through some rough times both

internally, and externally. We have seen Right to Work hit and Public Act 53 has caused many public school members to struggle through a new dues deduction process. We have seen the ultra-rich in Michigan contribute millions of dollars to destroy unions. It makes one wonder what they really are afraid of. We union members are people, citizens, tax payers, husbands, wives, brothers and sisters, so what would cause them to be so scared that they want our ranks dismantled? Could it be that they see our true power, even though we sometimes forget?

When I first became involved with 517M I was dead set against the union being involved in politics, just as many of you are to this day. Many say "just take care of our members, and leave the politics out!" I understand your feelings, but the last few elections in our State have shown us what happens when people don't get involved, or vote. We now have one party rule in this State that allows unchecked actions to take place. For example, the Emergency Financial Manager Law was rejected by voters in November of 2012, yet, in less than one month the conservative legislature passed a more stringent law that was contrary to what the voters of this state wanted. That shows that our elected officials only listen when we organize and fight everyday. SEIU 517M wants to make sure that you do count both at the ballot box and in this organization.

We members of 517M seek to be fair, transparent, and inclusive of all of our members. We will continue to further our members' best interest in the work place, but we are not the conscience of our members. There is no way that any group can support all of the ideals of every member. Every member of our Local has a right to vote, think, and believe how they see fit. What we will do is work to preserve good working conditions for our members. We will strive to support those elected leaders who treat the working men and women of 517M with dignity, respect and the professionalism we deserve - regardless of party.

During the next 3 years we will be dealing with contract negotiations, contract violations, and no doubt continued attacks from outside forces. What I can promise is that I will do my best to represent you in an honest, upright, and ethical way. Your union will continue to be transparent and I welcome comments from all members. As President I will expect nothing less from our other leaders, and staff. Our goal is to make contact with each of you in one form or another because we serve you, and we want you to see the value of being a union member. I want this to be a local that each of us can be proud to be a part of, and feel included in.

What we need is help: Help to search you out if you have a question, or concern that we can help with. We want to know you. We want to hear your voice. In the coming months we will be having Chapter meetings in areas across the state. Please attend a meeting, introduce yourself and make your voice heard.

We are listening! Best wishes to you and your loved ones.

- George

Privatization Thwarted In Memphis Schools



By Danny Ritter, Region 3 Labor Relations Specialist

Our food service workers and administrative assistants at Memphis Community Schools mounted a successful anti-outsourcing campaign and prevented the school district from contracting with the food service corporation, Chartwells. Our members were largely kept in the dark, by the district, of the outsourcing plan and only discovered the news of Chartwells' uncontested bid a month before the board was due to make a decision. The superintendent of Memphis Schools believed the contract with Chartwells to be a done deal, needing only the rubber stamp of the school board.

Worst of all, Chartwells' own projections would still have the food service program running at a deficit that was only marginally smaller than the current deficit. It became very clear that the administration's plan to outsource had nothing to do with money. This was union busting, pure and simple.

Out of necessity, our counter-campaign was developed rather quickly and utilized a diverse array of strategies including the distribution of fliers among the community, face to face conversations with neighbors and friends, a social media campaign that actually went viral, and contacting a reporter from the Port Huron Times Herald.

Much of the content of the campaign materials was authored with the help of 517M members from Taylor School District, who had successfully fought off Chartwells a few years earlier. Their thorough and precise knowledge of the many pitfalls and drawbacks of privatization were instrumental in our efforts to galvanize the local community to action. Through these efforts, we were able to organize the largest attendance at a school board meeting the district had ever seen, packing the room with our members, parents, reporters, students, teachers, and even local business owners concerned about the loss of local jobs. After an hour and a half of passionate and heart wrenching testimony, the Memphis School Board relented and voted unanimously against the Chartwells bid. The room erupted in applause at the decision and filled our members with a new found sense of optimism and solidarity. A sense that even at the midnight hour, when it seems all is lost, we can still fight and we can still win. For the union makes us strong...



AFRAM UPDATES



By Yolanda Johnson, SEIU 517M AFRAM President

During our annual meeting held on Friday, July 24, 2015, I gave the membership a presentation on the History of AFRAM and updates on the members of AFRAM participation with community affairs and mentoring programs throughout their region.

Betty Smith and **Kayla West** of the Saginaw AFRAM Chapter have been mentoring young ladies ages ranging from 6 to 16 years old. They are a dancing group called the Dancing Diamonds, who just recently won a local competition. WAY TO GO! Since their start in January, they have also had the opportunity to find out about many careers in their community.

The AFRAM Caucus would like to congratulate **John Eck**, Secretary/Treasurer of Local 517M for renewing his membership with AFRAM. John has always been a strong supporter and advocate of the AFRAM Caucus since the Local's chapter began in 2007.

Michigan AFRAM State Caucus (M.A.S.C) which is comprised of the four Michigan SEIU Locals will have its 3rd Annual Leadership Conference in Saginaw, MI August 7-9, 2015 at the Holiday Inn Express Hotel & Suites Saginaw. Speakers will be State Representative of the 95th District, **Vanessa Guerra**, **Amos O'Neal**, Mayor Pro-Temp of Saginaw and a former SEIU Member, **Curvin Merrill** from National Action Network (NAN), **Azola Williams** of the A. Phillip Randolph Institute (APRI), **Richard Mack** a labor attorney with Miller Cohen, PLC, and our very own SEIU 517M Director, **Liza Estlund Olson**.

This will be a powerful and exciting conference. Registration cost for Members is \$50 and \$25 for guests. Registration cost for members will include meals, conference materials, t-shirt, and MASC 2016 dues, and guests will receive meals and t-shirt. Please contact **Stephanie Teamer** at 313-456-2911 for more information as we have extended the registration deadline to August 3, 2015. Come and join us as we are *"Rising to the Challenge of Leadership"*.

Supreme Court Remands School Pension Case to Court of Appeals

The Michigan Supreme Court has remanded the 2010 3% school employees pension lawsuit back to the Court of Appeals for further consideration. The Court of Appeals had originally ruled that the 2010 law was unconstitutional thus sending the case to the Supreme Court on appeal. The Supreme Court has ruled that the replacement law from 2012 dealing with the same issue was constitutional. The Supreme Court remand of the 2010 case to the Court of Appeals is for reconsideration based on the reasoning for the Supreme Court's ruling upholding the 2012 law.

SEIU Local 517M Golf Outing Slated for August 14th



The annual SEIU Local 517M golf outing will be held on Friday, August 14, 2015 at the Wheatfield Valley Golf Course in Williamston. The 4-person scramble will start with registration at 8:00 a.m. and shotgun start at 9:00 a.m. Registration information is available at: <http://www.seiu517m.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/40/files/2015/05/Golf-outing-flyer.pdf>

New Region 3 Staff Hired



My name is **Danny Ritter** and I'm happy to be part of the team at SEIU local 517M. I come from a union family and have been a proud member of three unions including the Coalition of Graduate Employees (CGE) AFT Local 6069, the Graduate Employees Union (GEU) AFT local 6069, and the United Staff Association. Over the years as a member and officer of these unions I have done a little bit of everything. I was a steward, chief grievance officer, lead negotiator, vice president of organizing, staff representative, and even head cook for our big social events. It was the comradery and solidarity I felt with my brothers and sisters in these unions that convinced me to make the career change that brought me to the labor movement. Before moving to Michigan, I lived in Corvallis, Oregon but have lived most of my life in South Carolina. In my spare time, I like to garden, fish in the beautiful rivers and lakes of Michigan, cook, and play guitar. I especially love playing old labor songs and was part of the local Lansing labor choir, Labor Notes, so I invite anyone interested in singing songs of the labor movement to contact me.

Danny has been assigned Dearborn Heights Schools, East China Schools, Hope Network/New Passages, Memphis Schools, Mott Community College, North Huron Schools, City of Royal Oak, St. Clair County Friend of the Court, and St. Clair County RESA.

State Employees Lose RTW and Pension Cases

On July 29, 2015 the Michigan Supreme Court ruled on two cases that involved our state employee members. In both cases, the Court ruled 4-3 against state employees.

"We're obviously very disappointed, not surprised, but very disappointed," said **Liza Estlund Olson**, SEIU 517M Staff Director. "I think state employees will now have no protection from the political vagaries of the state Legislature."

In the Right to Work decision, the Court ruled that since the Civil Service Commission is funded by the Legislature to conduct operations, the imposition of mandatory agency shop fees was beyond the Civil Service Commission's constitutional authority.

In the 4% pension decision, the Court ruled that the framers of the 1963 Michigan Constitution understood that "conditions of employment" only dealt with salaries and wages since it pre-dates the establishment of pensions and therefore the Civil Service Commission didn't have the exclusive authority over pensions.

Read the Right to Work Decision here: <http://www.seiu517m.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/40/files/2015/07/rtwscruling.pdf>

Read the 4 percent Pension Decision here: <http://www.seiu517m.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/40/files/2015/07/4percentscruling.pdf>

With our members help and determination we will continue to fight every day to have a say in our working conditions.

July Text Contest Winners

Congratulations to the winners of the July E-Former text contest. The five winners chosen at random were:

Joel Colosky
Amanda Pennell
Stacie Percell
Arlene Wargo
Marjorie Zabel

August Text Contest

Our monthly text contest allows five winners to receive \$20 gift cards. **To enter, text "517M" to 30644 to take a quiz about the E-Former.**

This month's question: When is the 1st meeting of the SLG Action Team?

- A) January 5, 2016
- B) October 6, 2015
- C) October 1, 2015
- D) July 23, 2015

Text the correct answer to enter the contest. The contest is an opt-in contest, meaning that we will only text you if you like to participate.

Calendar of Upcoming Union Events for August, 2015

August 7-9: AFRAM Conference in Saginaw

August 10: Scientific and Engineering Unit Board Meeting

August 14: SEIU Local 517M Golf Outing

August 19: HSS Unit Board Meeting

August 26: Scientific and Engineering Unit Member Education Program *Work-Family Balance*

August 24-26: HSS Union Member Meeting at the Veteran Employment Specialist In-service

August 27: Taylor Schools "Back To School" Membership Picnic

For more information on the above events, consult our on-line calendar at:

<http://www.seiu517m.org/events/month/>

The monthly subscription for the E-Former is included in your membership dues payment and is intended for members in good standing of SEIU Local 517M.



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