

January Newsletter

AFSCME LOCAL 448

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January 2021

President: Kathy Lane, 1-815-677-3699
Vice President: Alice Sutherland, 395-6661
Secretary:

Treasurer: Gail Greenblatt-987-7721

Chapter Chairs

Dave Beccue-DNR, 885-3311
Laurie Scudder-Revenue, 987-7509
Diane Ritter-Lottery, 987-7018
Melissa Dix-DHS-987-7308
Tanya Burns-DCFS-987-7640

Members at Large

Aaron Sockwell-DHS, 232-6121
Kassandra Lumsden-DCFS-987-3266
Tom Soresie-DCFS-625-7594

Trustees

Tina Wren-DCFS-625-7594
Jeff Bergstrom-DHS-987-7308
Robin Aebly-DCFS, 235-7878

People Chair

Laurie Scudder-Revenue, 987-7509

Chris Hooser-Staff Representative, 815-968-0447

Meeting Dates

To be determined

THANK YOU FOR THE MEMORIES AFSCME

On January 26, 1990 I started with the Department of Children and Family Services. I left Lee County Probation where I had been for 2 years and 3 months. I left probation making \$19,500 a year and started DCFS at \$24,663. I was in awe as I couldn't believe I would make more than \$5,000 a year. What I didn't realize at the time is that we made that salary because of AFSCME. Our union fought for the State of Illinois to pass collective bargaining for state workers. With collective bargaining the State of Illinois must bargain over wages, benefits and working conditions. Within our state constitution we are guaranteed a pension, 3% increase each year and guaranteed state insurance after 20 years of service. Wow, where can you get that guarantee? It's not because the state legislature and past Governors just gave us this benefit; it's because members and AFSCME lobbyist met with legislators who passed this legislation. T Governor signed into law and now in our state constitution. AFSCME has continued to fight for each and everyone of us to keep this benefit including taking this to the Illinois Supreme Court when then Governor Rauner tried to take our pensions away. We must continue to fight to keep these benefits.

In 1990 an AFSCME staff representative named Jay Ferraro asked me to come to a union meeting at the Labor Temple. That was the beginning of my union involvement and I never turned back. I ran for Chapter Chair of DCFS and won. But then came the layoff at DCFS in 1991-92. I had to quickly learn the layoff language in the contract and still today it can be confusing. I decided to run for Union President. The Union President at the time decided not to run and of course no one wanted the hassle so here I was 3 years at DCFS and President of the local. Our local was financially broke and we had barely anyone who wanted to be involved as officers let alone stewards. We had a lot to build upon and we went to work. It was my intent to sign up those who weren't members and sign up those who were new employees and we did it. Over 100 people we signed up by meeting one on one with members at the worksite. Sadly, it's not something that can be done during COVID 19.

My first picket was at Beverly Farms in Alton, Illinois for 10 straight weekends to help fight for a fair contract. The employees who were on strike were only making minimum wage and had no insurance. Beverly Farms, a facility that had several different sites cared for those with developmental disabilities. After several months, Beverly Farms administrators went back to the negotiating table and ASFCME negotiated a great contract. I saw first hand how management treated people with not wanting to pay a fair wage or provide health insurance. I felt fortunate having the benefits I had and wanted to help those get the same benefits.

On the picket lines at the correctional facilities due to staff assaults, unsafe environments for the guards and overcrowding seemed to be something we were doing every month. It felt like every day a guard was hurt or an inmate was assaulted. There was always a threat of privatizing the prison system. A bill was finally passed that made it unlawful to privatize prisons. But then then unthinkable occurred when a

All Membership meetings will begin at 6:30 p.m.

female psychologist at Dixon Correctional Center was taken hostage. Our local went into action. I met with the President at Dixon Correctional Center and asked our local to help by paying for food and drinks for those correctional officers, sergeants and lieutenants who were on the tact team coming from facilities throughout the State of Illinois to help the officers at Dixon Correctional Center. I contacted a friend who was instrumental in donating food and drinks. We stayed at AFSCME Local 817, Dixon Correctional Center labor hall providing support until the psychologist was released. Unfortunately, the psychologist was raped by the offender and subsequently unable to return to work. As our motto, when there is a harm to one there is a harm to all stood strong that day and forever after.

I met my friend Gloria Arseneau in 1990 after I became Chapter Chair of DCFS. Gloria was then the treasurer of AFSCME Local 2794, the Northeastern part of Illinois. Gloria also worked at DCFS in Kankakee. Gloria took me under her wing and introduced me to those who would help develop our local to what it is today. Gloria and I co-facilitated labor management meetings at DCFS. We may have disagreed on things, but it never got in the way of our friendship. She continued to be my mentor until she passed on June 20, 2018. That was one of the hardest days of my life within the union. No longer seeing Gloria who was there at every labor management meeting, standing committee meeting, state and international conventions and negotiations would no longer be by my side. I decided it was time for me to look at my retirement plans and decided December 31, 2020 would be the day I would retire from DCFS and as Union President. I didn't take this decision lightly as the union has been my life day and night for the past 30 years with 27 years as Union President.

Attending negotiations meant that you had to be away from your home at least 3 days a week every two weeks traveling to Springfield, Bloomington, Chicago, Champaign and Peoria for at least 4-5 months. We had many meetings before negotiations to discuss our proposals and in between times as well to discuss our strategies. With the economy struggling the negotiation process became longer and the fight was harder. Encouraging members to become involved was a daunting task but it was needed. Our local always stood strong and was ready for the fight. The pickets in front of the Rockford State Building on Wyman, the several pickets throughout our local at different worksites and those throughout the state made AFSCME stand strong and negotiate great contracts. But then came Rauner. We knew before he was elected that it was going to be a long four years, but I never envisioned having to take a strike vote. When Rauner stated we were at impasse during a negotiation meeting, we were taken back as we were still negotiating in good faith. It was apparent Rauner wanted us to fold but that's not what we are about, so we went into action. After several meetings with the state negotiating team, we decided to take a strike vote. Our local negotiating team was Enus Higgins, then Vice President, Glen Sago, then Chapter Chair of ISP-Forensics, Donna Wellman, then Chapter Chair of DHS and I. The state negotiating team voted unanimously to take the vote to our membership. After several days of voting at several worksites within our local manned by members, stewards and executive board members, 94% of our members voted to strike. I can't thank those enough who took days off of work manning those voting sites, counting the votes and sending down the tallies each night to Council 31 in Springfield. The camaraderie shown during that time was exciting, amazing, emotional and one of the proudest moments in my lifetime as a Union President. We knew then we had an upper hand when we met in Springfield with the media to state over 90% of union members voted to strike. The tables turned on Rauner. Our next fight was to get him out of office so we could get a contract. We did just that in electing Pritzker and went back to the negotiating table. What a great contract we were able to negotiate after so many years without a pay raise, step raises and Upward Mobility on hold. Workers got their step-raises and back pay which resulted in some receiving \$40,000 in pay. No rate increases for insurance in 6 years; who can say such with any other employer. The pay raises we negotiated resulting in a 11.5% increase; wow who would have thought that would happen. When Rob Craddock of CMS and Roberta Lynch, our Executive Director stated we had a contract, tears flowed down my cheeks. A long, hard fought negotiations was done and those who started in this process was no longer there to celebrate with me. Enus Higgins retired, Glen Sago received a promotion and moved to a different agency in another local and Donna Wellman was unable to continue in her role as the DHS Chapter Chair. My mentor, my friend and my cohort Gloria Arseneau who sat next to me at each negotiation meeting had passed away. This contract settlement was for her. Alice Sutherland and Tamara Shorter took the place of Enus Higgins and Glen Sago and attended throughout the negotiations with Governor Pritzker. Our local ratified the contract with 98% voting yes. It was finally done-5 long years. We lasted one day longer.

Our local has been not without tragedy. Lidia Juarez was killed by her estranged husband on June 9, 2017 while sitting in her car at the DHS office in Sycamore. Lidia was only 37 years of age. Lidia had two children Santana and Zoey. When I was notified of the tragedy, I immediately contacted our local who approved food for the office and for the family. PSP was contacted and was at the office on Monday morning. Enus Higgins, Tamara Shorter and I met with the workers on that Monday morning and were again there on Tuesday offering our help and to just talk with Lidia's co-workers. Lidia's parents were presented with a check from our local to help in providing for the children.

On September 29, 2017, Pam Knight, an investigator with DCFS was brutally attacked after getting out of her car to meet with grandparents to take protective custody of a child. Pam, a former police officer and child welfare caseworker for LSSI had been with DCFS for 12 years as an investigator when the attack occurred. Again, our leadership at AFSCME rose to the occasion when Gail Greenblatt, treasurer and steward for DCFS and I stayed with Angie Lopez, Pam's supervisor and Pam's family at St. Anthony's Hospital in Rockford. It was important that we provided support to the family and to her supervisor who received the phone call that Pam was hurt. In conjunction with DCFS leadership, we met with workers at the Dixon Police Department the afternoon of September 30th as workers and clerical were visibly shaken. Pam was a quiet person but had a witty sense of humor. Pam was a hard worker, professional in every aspect and was always concerned about the welfare of children. Our local along with retirees from DCFS continued to support Pam's husband and her daughter with taking turns in sitting with Pam while at St. Anthony's and Illinois Rehabilitation Institute and providing gas cards, food and support. Pam would have done the same for any of us. Pam succumbed to her injuries on February 8, 2018 at Northwestern Hospital in Chicago. Many of us attended the court hearings that resulted in her assailant receiving 19 years in prison; not enough for taking the life of another person.

As a Union President, you must be there for everyone in your local; it's your responsibility as a leader. My last state convention was bittersweet. I knew it would be my last convention to attend as the Council 31 62/63 conference board delegate on the executive board. It was my last time hearing International President Saunders at the podium telling us at Council 31 how we were the labor leaders within the United States and how we beat down Rauner. I knew that my mentor Gloria Arseneau would not be there at the credential meeting telling us what we needed to do or reading the credential report during the convention. I knew it would be bittersweet, but I didn't know how that convention would affect me for the rest of my life. You see my local, our local nominated me for the Jane Fitzgerald award. Jane Fitzgerald was a DCFS investigator who worked tirelessly for her local and was well respected by her fellow union members. Of course, I didn't know I was nominated but I did know that Roberta Lynch, Executive Director asked the Council 31 executive board to rename the award to Jane Fitzgerald/Gloria Arseneau award. When Rose Daley, retired AFSCME Council 31 associate director started reading the letter nominating me, I didn't know who she was referring to until I heard "and we have even called her when she's on vacation, even while in Ireland or Mexico" I thought to myself, this isn't really happening and I started to cry. When accepting the award, I mentioned my friend and mentor Gloria Arseneau, my mom and sister who has always supported me during my tenure, but I was very clear in saying that without my former and current executive board members our local wouldn't be where we are today. Working hard together as one and being inclusive is what makes our local the best in the State of Illinois.

So, in closing, thank you for those who supported me as your union president for the last 27 years. Your union membership card is your lifeline to better wages, benefits and working conditions. Be a part of your union as strength is in numbers. Attend a union meeting (of course when COVID is no longer an issue), become a steward or when the time comes, walk a picket line; it does make a difference. My wish for this local is that you continue to grow, be supportive of each other and fight like hell as that is the AFSCME way. Thank you to my former and current executive board members, stewards and MAT team members for their time in serving our local. Thank you to Gail Greenblatt and Tamara Shorter for the advice I so needed, Enus Higgins for always keeping me on an even keel as I know it was hard to do, Alice Sutherland for always picking up the pieces and Melissa Garman for being there after my mom passed away. It's now time for me to pass the baton and become a member of the retiree local.

In solidarity,

Kathy Lane, President

BALLOTS WILL BE SENT OUT FOR ELECTION OF PRESIDENT AND THREE TRUSTEE

Nominations were held on December 3, 2020 for the Executive board and 3 trustees. There will be an election for President between Alice Sutherland and Richard "Ricky" Echevarria. There will also be an election for 3 trustees. Those running for trustees include Gladys Boyt-Lopez, Jeff Bergstrom, Tina Wren and Greg Duffy.

Ballots will be sent to your listed address on the roster from AFSCME Council 31. Please read the instructions as to how to fill out the ballot and return in the self addressed stamped envelope.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS TO ALL FROM YOUR EXECUTIVE BOARD

The holidays are near and for many, you will be unable to spend time with your families due to COVID 19. We all know that can be hard for adults but especially for children who don't understand what is occurring around them. I always reflect at the end of the year what has occurred in my life and how it can be better in the year to come. So here's to a better 2021 and for all to have a Happy Holiday and a Joyous New Year!