

# The Professionals Guild of Ohio



## PGO UNION NEWS

**August/September 2009**

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Published by  
Professionals Guild  
of Ohio  
P.O. Box 7139  
Columbus, Ohio 43205

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*Produced and printed in-  
house by members of UFCW  
1059*

### **Welcome to Warren County Children Services!**

After months of hard work and dedication, employees of Warren County Children Services voted on August 11, 2009 to join the Professionals Guild of Ohio. The bargaining unit will consist of caseworkers, case aids, and administrative/clerical assistants.

For decades PGO has represented employees of various children services agencies throughout Ohio. We are pleased to continue our long tradition by adding employees of Warren County Children Services as our newest members. While PGO filed several unfair labor practice charges during the election process, PGO is looking forward to working constructively with management at Warren County Children Services in negotiating a collective bargaining agreement and establishing a productive labor-management relationship.

In the coming days and weeks PGO will begin working with local members at Warren County Children Services to develop their union constitution; to elect union officers; to select a bargaining team; and to begin gathering information for negotiating their first collective bargaining agreement. This is an exciting time for all

employees of Warren County Children Services.

Whether an employee voted for the union or not, all employees in the bargaining unit have gained important workplace rights through the election. In the coming months PGO will be working hard to represent the interests of everyone in the bargaining unit.

Again, congratulations and welcome to the PGO!

### *PGO Welcomes New Business Manager*

PGO is pleased to announce that Patricia Holt has agreed to become PGO's new business manager. Patti has an Associates Degree in applied business science from the University of Akron and thirty plus years of work experience in accounting and business management. Patti will work twenty hours per week and she will be responsible for managing the union's financial and office operations.

Patti replaces long-time PGO Treasurer Donna Andrews. Patti began her career with PGO this August and she has gotten off to a great start by organizing PGO financial records, running staff payroll and making sure our bills get paid on time.

## *Lucas County Children Services Settles Negotiations*

PGO has five bargaining units and four collective bargaining agreements with the Lucas County Children Services Board. Following months of difficult negotiations, PGO and the CSB finally have new three-year contracts. The parties began negotiations this past January to replace the old collective bargaining agreements that expired on April 30<sup>th</sup>. Unfortunately, negotiations became protracted when management saw an opportunity to use the current economic recession as a pretext to force unnecessary concessions from the union. Impasse resulted and unresolved bargaining issues were submitted to a SERB fact-finder. After two days of fact-finding hearings and four months of waiting, the union was successful in resisting management's unreasonable demands and achieves fair contracts for its members.

The new contracts will provide two percent general pay increases retroactive to May 1. Negotiations will be reopened in the second and third years of the agreement to set the wages in those years of the contract. Extra work and overtime will be assigned on a seniority basis and employees will not be required to work a split shift without mutual agreement. Tuition reimbursement maximums were increased to \$1,500 per quarter or \$2,000 per semester up to \$6,000 per year. And, employees that do not have paid parking privileges will receive a stipend of \$20 per pay period to defray this cost.

The members of PGO Council 13's bargaining team were council president **Dave Rudebock**, council vice-presidents **Lynne Pinkleman** and **Joe DeStazio**, **Joyce Ransom**, **Becky Davenport**, **Melinda Meehan**, **Nancy Renieke**, AFSCME regional director **Sally Powless** and PGO executive director **Chauncey Mason**. Special thanks go out to these bargaining team representatives for their major sacrifice of time and effort and to all the members of Council 13 for their patient and unwavering support of the union during these lengthy negotiations.

## **Aurora Academy Contract Negotiations**

PGO Council 14 and Aurora Academy have negotiated a new collective bargaining agreement, which PGO membership recently ratified. The agreement will last three years. Wages and insurance will be renegotiated in the second and third years. The union was represented by council president **Beth Nester**, vice-president **Cassy Johnson** and PGO field representative **John Campbell-Orde**.

Aurora continues to experience financial difficulties associated with the current system of funding charter schools. After closely examining Aurora's financial state and spending many hours bargaining, the parties agreed that while there would be no general wage increase in 2009, employees who worked for Aurora during the previous school year would receive a step increase. In addition, employees who worked for Aurora during the previous school year and are employed when spring break arrives will receive a one-time \$150.00 lump sum payment.

PGO also negotiated an additional wage increase for the Cook classification. Importantly, PGO fought back proposals made by Aurora that would have drastically increased what many employees pay for health insurance. PGO also negotiated a provision providing that so long as an employee provides three weeks notice before resigning, Aurora will not take any adverse action against the employee and will give the employee a neutral or positive reference. This provision was motivated by the experience of some teachers during the previous school year and will protect those making the transition to a new job.



**"This is probably not the best time to begin the union negotiations."**

## **Declining Health Care Coverage: The Worst is Yet to Come**

According to the Economic Policy Institute's analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's annual report on health insurance coverage, as of 2007, employer-sponsored health insurance remained the dominant form of health insurance in the United States. Over the 2000s, however, the share of Americans receiving coverage through an employer (whether their own, or that of their spouse or parent) has declined steadily. As of 2007, the share of individuals covered by employer-based policies was almost 5 percentage points smaller than in 2000 (from 64.2 percent to 59.3 percent). This decline, not surprisingly, coincided with a rise in the number of Americans without health insurance coverage.

The health of the labor market, of course, has a direct impact on access to employer-sponsored health insurance, and rising unemployment correlates highly with declining insurance coverage. While unemployment worsened from 2007 to 2008 – from an average of 4.6% in 2007 to 5.8% in 2008 – the magnitude of that change was much smaller than in 2009, when unemployment has averaged 8.9% so far, hitting a high of 9.7% in August. Thus, the changes in health care coverage during 2008 are likely to be relatively modest, with the full impact of the worst of the recession still to come. The 2008 annual report is due to be released this September and its data will provide valuable insight into the state of insurance coverage in 2008.

## **Employee Awarded Promotion**



**"It's from the insurance company -- in lieu of coverage."**

## **Through Arbitration**

A PGO member at Montgomery County Children Services (PGO Council 12), recently bid on a position within Children Services. Children Services, however, awarded the position to another employee. The member grieved his being denied the position.

PGO conducted an extensive investigation of the selection process in order to determine whether Children Services had violated the union contract when choosing between the candidates competing for the position. Based on its investigation, PGO concluded that Children Services had in fact violated the union contract when choosing between the member and other candidates competing for the position. Consequently PGO appealed the grievance to arbitration.

After reviewing documentary evidence and listening to testimony, the arbitrator concluded that in selecting between the competing candidates Children Services had failed to consider certain factors that the union contract required to be considered. On this and other grounds, the arbitrator sustained the Union's grievance and awarded the position to the grievant.

While regrettably the employee who originally received the position had to return to her former position, the arbitration was important to ensure that in the future Children Services considers all factors required by the union contract when filling positions. Since employers typically choose to fill positions behind closed doors, all employees have an important interest in knowing that when they bid on a position their employer will consider all the factors required by their union contract.

## **PGO Executive Board Meeting**

The next meeting of the PGO Executive Board will begin at 10:30 a.m. on October 17, 2009 at the Montgomery County Children Services offices located at 3304 N. Main Street in Dayton, Ohio.

## **Great America**

### **Mother Jones: The Workers' Champion**

Mary Harris - better known as Mother Jones and often called the "most dangerous woman in America" - was born in Cork, Ireland, August 1, 1830. Her fiery rhetoric and magnetic speaking style belied her modest traditional garb - usually a lace-fringed long black dress and matching bonnet - and her tiny figure, all of 100 pounds. Nevertheless, Mother Jones struck fear in the hearts of many a mine owner and factory manager from the 1890s until her death in 1930 at age 100.

A familiar presence on picket lines and at union rallies, Mother Jones would pepper her speeches with mild profanity and skewer the rich and comfortable with such lines as: "Pray for the dead but fight like hell for the living!"

Another favorite phrase: "Get it right, I'm no humanitarian. I am a hell raiser!"

The shocking abuses of child labor she saw as she investigated working conditions in southern cotton mills prompted Mother Jones to write: "The children (working in the mills) are half-fed, half-clothed and half-housed, but as they toil on, the poodle dogs of their masters are petted and coddled and sleep on pillows of down."

During her long career as a union organizer, Mother Jones traveled throughout the U.S. to help workers in trouble - on the railroads, in mines and mills. She organized a caravan of children to march on the home of President Theodore Roosevelt and marshaled an army of wives and mothers armed with mops, brooms and pots to guard mine entrances against scabs.

Drawing from her struggle, Mary Harris Jones managed to keep a cheerful, determined demeanor even though her own life was filled with tragedy from early childhood. Her father fled to the U.S. to escape British authorities. She left Ireland at age 8 with her mother and two siblings to reunite the family in America. Earlier, Mary's grandfather had been hanged by the British.

As a young woman, Mary Harris worked as a seamstress in Chicago where she experienced first



hand the wide disparities between the wealthy families that employed her and the city's dispossessed that lived on the edge.

At age 31, while teaching in Memphis, Mary married an ironworker, George Jones. George and the couple's four children died in a yellow fever epidemic in Memphis in 1867. Not long after, while living in Chicago, the Widow Jones was one of many victims of the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 - losing her home and all her belongings.

While her organizing exploits gained her notoriety throughout the nation and earned her the undying affection of miners and factory workers, Mother Jones was reviled by the establishment and often jailed by authorities. In 1913 she was sentenced to 20 years in prison in West Virginia, but public outrage forced the governor to release her within the year.

Mother Jones died at age 100 in Silver Spring, Maryland. She is buried in the Union Miners' Cemetery in Mt. Olive, Illinois, the only union cemetery in the nation.

For a more complete account of the life and times of Mary Harris "Mother" Jones, go to <http://www.aflcio.org/aboutus/history/jones.cfm>.

*Editor's note: this article has been reprinted with permission from the July-August 2009, Label Letter, Union Label & Service Trades Department, AFL-CIO.*