“COMING TOGETHER IS A BEGINNING; KEEPING TOGETHER IS PROGRESS; WORKING TOGETHER IS SUCCESS.”

– Henry Ford
I t’s a Union’s responsibility to continually educate its members. Without that education the membership becomes bewildered, confused, and adrift, at least in the universe of labor relations and representation. Two common questions keep coming up no matter how many times they are answered: “Why do I belong to a Union?” “What benefit do I get from the dues I pay?”

The answers to these questions seem to get lost with each generation of workers. So, let’s explore these questions again.

WHY DO I NEED A UNION?

Workers need to be represented and organized. More and more, an employer’s relationship with their employer is evolving into a highly legal relationship, governed by laws, and fraught with liability on both sides. Many of us may never run into trouble in our career. Maybe some of us have a good supervisor and/or manager who feel we have nothing to worry about, but that supervisor or manager may leave or retire, and things can change for the worse. Many of us have experienced poor bosses, ones that seem to have personal issues, vindictive, unreasonable, incompetent, or outright cruel. No one individual employee can stand up to this kind of boss. Human Resources often support the boss, but the union can stand up to a bad boss very easily.

Collective bargaining is another reason to have a union. Again, no one individual can stand a chance bargaining with an employer on their own. However, with a united labor force, the scales are much more balanced. A united labor force can shut down an agency, bring unwanted or embarrassing media attention to an agency, and win a strong Collective Bargaining Agreement (contract).

WHAT BENEFIT DO I GET FROM THE DUES I PAY?

Many of the benefits we get from paying dues can be easily realized by what we have just read. Additionally, our dues support the infrastructure that’s needed to hold elections of officers, vote on contract ratifications, provide the framework to endorse elected officials, and to provide us with necessary communications, such as this professional-grade, union-wide magazine. Our dues also provide the buildings in which to have meetings and to house the Business Agents that defend and advocate for our members. Within these pages, you will find news on Local 1’s battle in the courts to try to protect the promises made to our retirees, as well as a message from the president of our retirees association on how upholding the principles of unionism is a lifelong endeavor. Protecting and expanding what has come before is the best way to honor the legacy of our founder, Henry Clarke, and the others who pioneered this union.

By Peter Q. Nguyen, President

WE MUST BE THE CHANGE WE WANT TO SEE

There is a quote by the Buddha that I like very much. It goes: “Do not believe in anything simply because you have heard it. Do not believe in anything simply because it is spoken and rumored by many... Do not believe in anything merely on the authority of your teachers and elders. Do not believe in traditions because they have been handed down for many generations. But after observation and analysis, when you find that anything agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it.”

Greetings and welcome to the second issue of We Are One! Our focus in this issue is on the ways in which Local 1 is examining its traditions and creating room within them for positive growth and change. My upbringing in the Vietnamese culture has endowed me with a healthy respect for my elders, and transferred to me a reverence for the work that has gone into creating the structure on which we now build. We should instead develop a process that questions status quo does not necessarily mean working for its destruction, but making a sincere and thoughtful inquiry into how it came to be accepted. Sometimes the answer to, “Why is it done this way?” is “Because that is the best, most effective way to do it.” Unfortunately, all too often the answer to “Why is it done this way?” is “Because that’s the way we’ve always done it.”

By Peter Q. Nguyen, General Manager

Change is rarely easy, and never comfortable. But often it is necessary. To achieve success as an organization, we must be unflinching in our examination of which of our traditions “agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all.” Only by doing so can we fulfill our common vision of excellence.
Public Employees Union, Local 1 would like to warmly welcome the Merced County general administrative support employees to the PEU family. Formally known as the Independent Employees of Merced County, they voted to join Local 1 over the larger, national union, the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) by an overwhelming 2 to 1 vote.

Rosie Roberts, Senior Business Agent, who was a key figure in this campaign, said, “As a result of the ceaseless commitment we received from Local 1, we were able to defeat AFSCME, an international union, by a double digit margin. With that kind of continued support I am convinced we will do extremely well at the bargaining table and in all other union-related issues.”

The 299 employees from Merced County who were a part of it! You’ve been intrigued by the mysterious leaflets…

“Things are in motion…”

You now come find out how you can be a part of it!
NOW IS THE TIME TO START PLANNING (AND FIGHTING) FOR YOUR RETIREMENT FUTURE

By Mike Sloan, President, Contra Costa County Retired Employees Association 

The California Retired County Employees Association (CIRCEA) represents 20 counties and over 360,000 members. As of this writing, half of the county associations are involved in lawsuits against their county governments, trying to save either their health benefits or protect their pension funds. This list includes Contra Costa, San Diego, Los Angeles, Orange, Ventura, Sacramento, Sonoma, Alameda, Marin, and San Joaquin counties.

Unfortunately, we seem to be losing the legal battle because previously negotiated contracts did not contain specific language which protected a lifetime health care benefit. This type of oversight must be corrected in future negotiations so that court battles over an “implied consent” contract will not have to be fought.

Another consideration when planning your retirement budget is the fact that your insurance rates will increase when you retire. Several years ago the retirees were able to negotiate retirement security and pensions have often given up pay increases, pay equity and other rights, as tradeoffs in bargaining. Local 1 has been standing up for our members on these issues, and our strength and will to fight has intensified in the past year. This is especially true in the case of the Public Employees’ Pension Reform Act (PFEPA) and the related bill AB 197. Here’s where Local 1 has tackled this fight with fervor—passed with great fanfare, these laws seek to remove all new employees from their current pension plan, not a retirement plan. The sponsors have decided to withdraw the initiative which, according to CA’s Attorney General, would “eliminate constitutional protections” for public workers, including teachers, nurses, and peace officers” for now. But it will be back in 2016.

While the above threat was temporarily removed for this year, Ventura County is qualifying a ballot measure that would remove all new employees from their current retirement program (a program that is similar to ours). New employees would receive a “defined contribution” plan which leaves a $100 billion-plus hole in the pensions for our workers. But our battle has been a hard one, and the latest news shows a hard fight remains ahead.

On May 12, 2014, Superior Court Judge David Flinn issued the final judgment in a case initially brought by public employees against the Contra Costa County Retirement Association and the Board of Retirement of the Contra Costa County Employee Retirement Association. Local 1 has led the way in this fight—along with several other unions—as an intervenor (a third party to the suit working to protect the interests of our members) and has been aggressively supporting and pushing the local and county retirement plan.

This lawsuit alleged that implementing AB 197 was unconstitutional because it interfered with negotiated employee rights. The County and Union sought to have the employee rights recognized, and the judge agreed. AB 197 unconstitutionality was held as unenforceable. In essence, his judgment is that the contract was not valid where these specific rights are concerned.

The judgment in this case is stayed for a period of 60 days, which means that it does not go into effect until July 12, 2014. Local 1 intends to immediately file an appeal and, exception for certain employees. If you meet the following criteria, your pension may be calculated similarly to how it would have been calculated pre-AB 197:

1. You were a CCRCA or MCERA member prior to January 1, 2011.
2. You retire after the effective date of the judgment (July 12, 2014).
3. Prior to AB 197, your employer allowed you to cash out unused leave time during your period of employment (i.e., while still in service).
4. Your employer allowed you to cash out accrued leave time that exceeds the amount earned in the final compensation period.
5. As of December 31, 2012, you accrued leave that exceeded the amount earnable in your final compensation period.
6. You did not use or cash out that leave prior to your final compensation period.
7. You choose to cash out part or all of your accrued leave time during the final compensation period.
8. This law allows for a lesser amount of (1) your accrued leave as of the end of your employment (if you meet criteria 5 above) or (2) your accrued leave time during your final compensation period.

Many of our employees in Contra Costa and Merced County (the portion of AB 197 that we are litigating does not affect members who participate in PERS) have given dedicated service with the understanding that they could bank their accruals. By doing so, they hoped to increase the security of their plan, not a retirement plan. They counted on exercising this right, and factored it in to their planning.

Local 1 sought a judgment declaring AB 197 unconstitutional, but we also sought an order from the court, called a WRIT of Mandate, to compel the County retirement associations to continue calculating the pensions of Legacy Members (those hired prior to January 1, 2013) in the same way they were calculated prior to the implementation of AB 197.

While Judge Flinn has refused to find AB 197 unconstitutional, he did carve out an exception for certain employees. If you meet the following criteria, your pension may be calculated similarly to how it would have been calculated pre-AB 197:

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In a powerful, unanimous vote, the Merced County Public Employees Union, Local 1 endorses Rich St. Marie for County Treasurer-Tax Collector

MERCED COUNTY PUBLIC EMPLOYEES UNION, LOCAL 1 ENDORSES RICH ST. MARIE FOR COUNTY TREASURER-TAX COLLECTOR

In a powerful, unanimous vote, the Merced County Public Employees Union, Local 1 (MCPEU, Local 1) Executive Board chose to endorse and support Richard St. Marie for Merced County Treasurer-Tax Collector. St. Marie will return integrity, honesty and accountability to a Treasurer’s Office that has been marred with scandal and distrust for over a decade.

St. Marie decided to run because he believes there should be openness and answerability in the office of the Treasurer. MCPEU Local 1 endorses wholeheartedly.

The incumbent has been involved in a slew of bad news. She was censured when employees’ sexual harassment charges against her were substantiated by an independent investigation. Most recently, she was featured in a very unflattering front-page article in the Merced Sun-Star. It focused on her biased tax decisions favoring specific groups and businesses over others that exemplify cronyism and pay-for-play politics. As well, she has consistently abused her authority and has engendered a hostile work environment where our Local 1 members are treated with the utmost respect as well as managed wisely.

As a candidate for the Office of Treasurer-Tax Collector, I understand the importance of integrity and accountability with handling the precious resources of the County taxpayer. I am committed to managing taxpayer money with transparency, accountability, and honesty.”

MCPEU, Local 1 President, Shavonneti Machado, describing St. Marie, said, “As the Director of Administrative Services, Mr. St. Marie supervises our members, who hold him in the highest regard.”

St. Marie is a life-long resident of Merced County, having lived in Los Banos, Dos Palos, Atwater, and the City of Merced. While he served as a Reserve Police Officer in Dos Palos, he was appointed to and served as a member of the Dos Palos City Council. He is currently the Director of Administrative Services with the Merced County Sheriff’s Office where he manages the largest Department budgets in the County, while maintaining public safety services at the highest possible level in these economically challenging times.

With St. Marie as the Treasurer-Tax Collector, Local 1 believes the financial assets of Merced County will be treated with the utmost respect as well as managed wisely.
Beloved Local 1 Leader Major Dixon Passes Away

By Matt Mason, Supervising Business Agent, Richmond Office

Major Dixon, Sr., one of the most admired and respected Local 1 leaders in our history, died on March 24, 2014 at the age of 76.

Dixon worked for the West Contra Costa County School District for more than 30 years, and was an active Local 1 member and leader for most of his career. He was revered by our members who worked for the District as well as respected and admired by the District’s Board of Education and its administrators.

“Major was instrumental in showing me how to be a union member,” recalls WCUSD member James Lewis. “When I was hired into the School District, he brought me the Local 1 contract and said that this is our bible. We all owe him a lot for all the gains we have made.”

Dixon started with the District in 1960 as a custodian. He later became a lead groundskeeper, a position he held until he retired in 1992. He served in many leadership roles for Local 1. He was a negotiator, shop steward, political activist and President of his unit.

“Major Dixon was a strong leader in the district. He was a champion for the workers in the district and a leader in the community,” Reid Forcier, a Grounds Leadman for the District says. “I encourage all workers in the district to read his story. He is a true testament to resiliency and courage for all working people.”

Dixon was elected and re-elected several times by Local 1 members to be Local 1’s Second Vice President. He was the first African-American to hold that post. He and long-time Local 1 General Manager, the late Henry Clarke, admired, respected and loved each other.

Dixon was fond of telling a story about joining Local 1. This was in the days before collective bargaining was legal for public employees. Dixon would say, “They told me not to join Local 1 because that crazy Henry Clarke would have us on strike. I joined Local 1, and a week later Henry had us on strike.”

The strike to which Dixon referred happened in 1963. It was the first and only strike in what was then known as the Richmond Unified School District. Not until 13 years later would the California Supreme Court declare that public employers had a right to strike.

Major Dixon’s courageous contribution to Local 1 continues to live through those he inspired. He will always be part of our history, and he leaves a great legacy to all Local 1 members.

Meet Sacramento’s Newest Business Agent Brian Lopez

Brian Lopez graduated from the University of California, Davis with a major in Psychology and the University of the Pacific-McGeorge School of Law with concentrations in Advocacy and International Legal Studies. Prior to joining the staff of UPE/PEU, Lopez was a member of the UPE 008 Bargaining Unit as both an Eligibility Specialist and Human Services Specialist with the Sacramento County Department of Human Assistance.

Lopez also has experience in assisting marginalized and underrepresented populations through his past volunteer and work experiences, including representing individuals in federal administrative proceedings, serving as a community mediator for civil conflicts, offering “Know Your Rights” presentations about current legal issues, among others endeavors.

Lopez has a strong commitment to serving the public interest and is enthusiastic about the opportunity to assist our members in protecting their rights and achieving successes in the workplace.

NEW LOCAL 1 WEBSITE FOR THE NEW LOCAL 1

Many who have visited the old PEU 1 website over the years have probably noticed that it looked outdated, did not stretch the length of the screen, included a somewhat confusing infrastructure, and had, well…just call it an “uncommon” color scheme.

It’s okay, we can admit it. We can look back and honestly acknowledge what worked and what didn’t work. And we can do it while having some fun at our own expense.

The old website was not very cool. It defined the heart and soul of any bargaining process. The new website had become imperative to Local 1. So a new website was built; but not just any website. The new site must represent our union as the premiere public employees union in California. To reflect that mission, our new website must not only be informative, it must be sleek, and represent the innovation of a strong, modern and independent union.

Local 1’s new website—launched in May—was built by professional web designers from Noble Image in conjunction with the Strategic Operations Team of Local 1. The website will integrate social media and ensure that our communications, content and messaging get out in a variety of forums to the broadest swath of audience possible.

Eventually, the website will include an online Member Resource Center so that members can have the most up-to-date information on contracts, bylaws, labor law, current issues relevant to public service workers and unions, as well as other useful information for rank-and-file activists.

It will also include an internal staff forum for our professional staff members to share resources, experiences, trainings, and other pertinent, professional development. This section will facilitate collaboration and communication for Local 1 staff throughout California.

It is also our hope that our website will be useful to our strategic community allies as well as the public our members serve.

We will have information about social justice issues within our community and the labor movement at large. Community members, and prospective members, will come to the Local 1 website and find it useful and informative. The aim is to have our website serve as an information hub and an activist hotspot for both members and the community.

The website was designed to motivate members, potential members, organizers and activists to consider, join, advocate, and work with our action-oriented, forward-looking union. However, we can only achieve our goal with the help of our members and our community partners. It is your constant visits to our site, and your constant involvement with our union, that will make our vision come to life.

Members, please utilize the new website heavily. We want a website that reflects our union: member-oriented, top-notch, and civically engaged.

AN ORGANIZED CONTRACT CAMPAIGN IS THE WAY TO GO

By Walter Davies, EDCEA, Local 1 President

Collective bargaining is a democratic right and a formal, legal process but the contract campaign is truly the heart and soul of any bargaining process. It is workplace democracy and shared governance at its finest.

Our contract campaign was a plan of action, as all contract campaigns need to be. It was designed to “encourage” the County to agree to improve working conditions and compensation as proposed by our bargaining team. Members’ actions made that a reality.

We began our campaigns with educational outreach such as brown bag meetings, site visits, newsletters and bargaining updates. Then we moved on to expressions of solidarity such as wearing buttons or t-shirts. We reinforced the campaigns with letters, e-mails, faxes, op-ed pieces, and social media networks, culminating with public demonstrations of support and unity. Nothing else compares to the active engagement of members.

By engaging in acts of democracy, our members became active agents of our union. The agency and activity of our members secured a victorious contract for us. Our contract campaign could not have come at a better and more ideal time. Prior to this contract win, some members were feeling the effects of concessional contracts during the tough economic times. Morale waned. A variety of anti-Labor organizations and politicians thought to further alienate Labor in this county.

However, after our big win, we are in fit condition to counter these attacks. As well, we are in a better bargaining position for negotiations next time since members have seen what standing together can do, and will want to expand on their momentum to regain the losses incurred. By leveraging the power of our members’ unity, we placed severe pressure on El Dorado County. The ability of Local 1 to exercise power in this context was critical to mobilizing pressure against hostile concessionary proposals from the County.

By understanding the relationship between organizing strategies, bargain- ing to win, and member participation in terms of levers of power, our organizing efforts brought about this victory in our contract fight.

We firmly stand behind the power and effectiveness of a good contract campaign.
United Public Employees, Local 1, our Sacramento affiliate, staged two job actions in protest of the County’s position on numerous contractual items.

Members protested the lack of PEPRA contributions, the lack of contract reopener for medical and receiving a COLA in line with the CPI, and for maintaining the differential for Social Workers and workload/caseload relief.

The actions were highly successful, with approximately 500 members showing up at the County Administration Building where the Board of Supervisors meet on February 25th, and nearly 400 members showing up at the Sacramento Executive Airport (site of bargaining) on March 6th, garnering media attention (both print and television) at both locations.
After long and grueling negotiations, UPE, Local 1’s Office Technical and Welfare Non-Supervisory bargaining units have finally reached agreement on a contract that was filed by Local 1 on behalf of all Eligibility Specialists hired to work in the Medi-Call Fresh Service Center.

All members who train on both the CalFresh and Medi-Cal programs are due a 5% differential from the first day of training. The department claimed that since members who only had to learn one component of the program did not receive the differential, no-one else entering the program should receive it either.

Finally, we convinced management to pay the members who had to be trained in both programs the proper 5% differential for their training time. The department hopes to have the pay added to all affected members’ checks within the next two pay periods. Individual amounts will range from $240 to $649, depending on the members’ pay step at the time of training and the length of the training.

ORGANIZING FOR POWER AT WORK AND IN THE COMMUNITY

By Matt Mason, Supervising Business Agent, Richmond Office

The last few years have been difficult ones for our members at the West County Wastewater District. The West County Wastewater District, as the district has disrespectfully imposed two contracts in a row.

The noble efforts of the members during last year’s bargaining helped highlight the disrespectful way the WCWD Board treats its labor-management relationship and has signaled the importance of change at the top.

The racist and clueless remarks of WCWD Board President Leonard Battaglia have spurred members of the community the District serves to become active in seeking the three open seats up for election on the board this November. For the past few months, Local 1 members have been meeting with Leonard McNeil, a former City of San Pablo City Council member, and Antonio Medrano, a community leader and activist with the teachers’ union, about challenging the board and members for their seats. Our members’ diligence has paid off as both McNeil and Medrano have thrown their hats into the ring and will be running on a strong, pro-labor campaign platform.

Local 1 members are excited to help elect board members who care about productive labor relations and about our community they will serve. This is especially important as our members start their campaign, heading into bargaining this summer.

In late March, with the knowledge and support of McNeil and Medrano, Local 1 members presented the WCWD Board of Directors with a declaration of priorities, signed by the majority of WCWD unit members and focusing on transparency, safety and respect.

More such actions of solidarity will follow as we prepare for bargaining this summer.
After over a year at the table, we got Contra Costa County to agree to a fair contract for our workers. Our 4% pay raise and the lump-sum payment were in your May 10th paycheck. Another raise and lump-sum will come in May of 2015. The Board’s adoption of the contract followed an overwhelming vote by union members in favor of the negotiated agreement. You asked your Local 1 leadership to make voting easier, and we did. We came to you, at fifteen sites all over the County. You rewarded us with the highest voter turnout we’ve ever had.

As Lead Chair for the County, I went to meet a lot of you at the polling sites, and I saw people from all different jobs coming together to exercise their right to vote for a better contract and a better paycheck. Members recognized we got a good agreement this time, and that’s why the ratification passed with a 90% YES vote.

But the fight doesn’t end here. We’re going back to the table for health care in April 2015, and what we do as a union between now and then is going to determine how much leverage we bring to the table with us. There are a few things we must focus on for April 2015. We can’t allow the County to divide and conquer us. Too often, we get our bargaining unit blinders on and argue amongst ourselves over narrow issues. That’s a trap, because to the person facing them, all issues become the most important. What we can do instead is look for common ground and build from there. We need to move past each group guarding its pet issues to the detriment of the whole.

The second big lesson from this year’s negotiations is how important it is for all of us to take our commitment to serve as negotiators seriously. We’ve been entrusted by our members to represent them in getting the best contract we can each time. And we need to live up to that trust. Some members of the team have put that responsibility on the back burner. That’s not right. We owe it to the members who put their confidence in us to show up, to be part of the constructive discussion, and to stay focused. Some of my mental health colleagues call it “mindfulness,” but to me, it’s plain “showing respect.”

Let’s face it: the County doesn’t let their jobs get in the way of hard bargaining. The County will run over us—as they have done in the past—if we give them the opening by not being serious and prepared. This is the first contract where our momentum at the table, and our various actions, stopped their steamroller.

Now we need to build on that. Once we do, once we have better participation from everyone, we can run this County. The County is afraid of that because they know it’s true. It’s not about the few, it’s about the many. The union has to work for the many, first and foremost. Through solidarity, we will find our strength.
A Profile in Giving:
Laura Ghione and the (HE)ART of Charity

For the past 12 years, Laura Ghione, Senior Administrative Assistant in the Martinez office has dedicated herself to some worthy charitable causes on behalf of Local 1. Every year, she runs the Local 1 Toy Drive as well as the Local 1 Food Drive. For the past five years, she has also participated in the MS Walk as part of Team Local 2 El Dorado.

Ghione’s devotion to these good causes has deep-rooted origins.

Born and raised in San Francisco, Ghione grew up in the Outer Mission with her three sisters. Her parents went to Mission High School, and Ghione attended Longfellow Elementary and Balboa High School. In fact, her father still lives in the house where Ghione grew up. “My childhood was great. I had a loving and supportive family. My mom was my best friend,” Ghione recalled with ease, a slight uptick smile on her lips.

Then tragedy struck. Ghione’s mother developed a brain tumor. After two surgeries attempted to save her mother’s life, she died at the age of 42. Ghione was only 16 when she lost her best friend. “It wrecked me,” Ghione said, “I dealt with it by closing down my heart.”

Not knowing how to cope, Ghione struggled, and eventually found ways to help make the sadness go away if only for a moment. “My mom’s death took me down a very dark path, one I would never have normally chosen,” Ghione acknowledged, stopping just short of vivid details.

What followed for Ghione was years and years of hiding, of feigning, of posturing. Ghione mastered the veneer of stability with friends and simulated a facade of functionality at work. She endured a lot of “job hopping” as she called it. Ghione bounced from job to job, and not always by choice. When she felt like her blufféd exterior was cracking, she’d quit a job and find another. Soon, she found herself jumping from temp job to temp job. And then, she found herself out of a job. Shortly thereafter, she was on the verge of food stamps and welfare.

“I was borderline homeless at that point,” Ghione said somberly. It took Ghione into her early 30’s before she saw just how bad the path she was on actually was. She came to the realization that her mother would not approve of what she’d become. “I remember thinking to myself, ‘Mom didn’t raise you to be this,’” she said.

After experiencing the self-appointed “lost decade and a half,” Ghione decided it was time to turn her life around, time to get right. She left the dark path behind, she also left her family behind. She retreated from her family, extricated herself for nearly a decade whilst only keeping in sparse and rare contact with one sister. “I wanted to handle my problems on my own, not put it in their lap,” Ghione affirmed.

She got a job as a legal secretary in a firm that practiced primarily family law. It was this job that set Ghione on the path of charity work and supporting noble causes. She found that she was quickly burned out watching families tear themselves apart for no better reasons than pettiness and spite. As part of her duties working these cases with the attorneys, she had to sit and watch parents turn into infants, witness children get used as tools and weapons. “There are simply no winners in family law. You just see the worst of human behavior,” Ghione said.

“I recall this one five year old boy. He was the sweetest, little angel when he first came into the office due to his parents’ pending divorce. I watched him become a terror and a hateful kid because of the instability and the parents shuffling him back and forth,” Ghione recalled.

Ghione expounded, “I’ll never forget how vindictive people can be. There was this woman, the wife of a man, a good man, who was a good person, moral and hard-working, loved his son. He lived for his son. And she purposely moved out of the state just to take the son with her so she could say ‘I took your son away from you.’”

And that was the impetus. Ghione had worked too hard to lift herself out of dark mindsets and terrible environments to sit idly by and be a pedestrian witness—or worse, a dutiful collaborator—to such wicked shackles. “I just didn’t want to see so many people voluntarily ensnare others in vile situations,” she added.

From her own dark travels to being the occupational beholder of others lost in vengeful, mental crepuscule, Ghione said she saw that “these are the pillars of stable life,” Ghione said. “And I wanted out of the nasty, selfish world of self-preservation and self-interested. I wanted to do something more, to work for an employer that wouldn’t feed off of other people’s misery, but rather help uplift people in need.”

And that’s when Ghione turned her attention to unions. “I couldn’t leave that job as a legal secretary fast enough. I applied for a temp position with Public Employees Union, Local 1 and happily accepted it when they offered it to me,” she said.

“I was thrilled when the need arose a few months later for a full-time position and PEU offered it to me,” Ghione added.

To show her gratitude for her newfound stability, Ghione worked to pay it forward. She started her now-renowned charity work. She reached back to the Food Bank to purchase $6 of nutritious food. Effectively, Local 1’s $19,543.71 delivered $117,262.26 worth of food.

Besides the “Buy A Bag” program, Ghione’s food drives have also focused on canned and other non-perishable foods. In the nine years since they actually started keeping a tally, Ghione’s efforts have generated nearly 1500 pounds of donated food goods.

Never mind her background, Ghione herself is quick to push part that. She looks forward and she highlights facts. “23% of people who use the Food Bank are skipping meals so they can feed their children; 43% of people receiving emergency food in Contra Costa County are children,” Ghione is able to rattle off without checking a crib sheet.

According to the Food Bank, the federal poverty level for a family of four is $16,050 a year. 63% of the clients of the Food Bank have an income of less than $10,000 a year. More sobering is the fact that 78% of those relying on the Food Bank have incomes under $15,500.

“I’ve heard a heart when you read the numbers,” Ghione lamented. “The Food Bank serves over 45,000 Contra Costa County residents each month! That’s grievous.”

When Ghione fell on hard times, there was one friend who never left her. Even when Ghione withdrew from the world, this one friend reached out to her, helped Ghione whenever she could. She was Ghione’s one best friend in adulthood, Des.

When Des developed MS (multiple continued on pg. 21
The last full contract negotiations between Local 1 and Yuba County employees have been pushed to mitigate staff reductions through layoffs due to the downturn in the economy, the parties have relied on the economic provisions of the contract. The current contract addendum is scheduled to expire on June 30, 2014. The County and YCEA are now addressing a broad range of issues.

The committee selected by the members to take on this challenge are: Roman Ontiveros, Ryan Mahon and John Houghton representing the Supervisory Unit; Tamara Brown and Sandra Williams of the Technical Unit; and Executive Director Gary Stucky who is representing the Supervisory Unit; and Executive Director, Sutter/Yuba Office.

The committee selected by the members or appointing bodies to negotiate the contract between Local 1 and Yuba County employees voted two years ago to negotiate for its employees by Local 1. Local 1 assumed the current contract, addendums and side letters when the Miscellaneous Unit employees and the other proposals that seek to adjust compensation, increased life insurance and several other proposals to take on this challenge are: Roman Chávez Day as an additional holiday, César Ontiveros, Ryan Mahon and John Houghton.

The City has brought in Patrick Clark, a labor relations agent immediately. He said it all seemed like an innocent meeting. As a result, he was assaulted based upon what he knew to be false.
NEW LEADER, NEW ATTITUDE
Bring Hope to Contra Costa County Library Workers
By Suzanne Vito, Business Agent, Martinez Office

Libraries are meant to be outposts of entertainment, enlightenment, and intellectual freedom. The slogan of the Contra Costa County Libraries, “Bringing People and Ideas Together,” perfectly encapsulates that notion. But for the past few years, whether the Library’s mission extended to its own employees often seemed doubtful. Workers within the department felt divided into haves and have-nots by inconsistent and poorly explained practices regarding reassignments, training, selection for committee work, and other avenues for advancement. Local 1 has done its best to keep the Library a fair and transparent workplace, but poor communication from the Department made that a Sisyphean task at times.

“It’s been a long and arduous fight,” says Robin Milne, a shop steward for the Library Unit. “Sadly, [Administrativa’s approach] seems so adversarial to the employee.”

Changes in the workplace would be introduced as pilot projects—then fully implemented—without a proper chance given to Local 1 to negotiate the effects of such changes on its members. Without the opportunity to properly bargain, Local 1 had no way of knowing the extent of grievances as well as several Unfair Labor Practice charges with the state Public Employee Relations Board.

In the past three years, Local 1 has won grievances against the County for the Library’s conduct in making lateral reassignments; a discriminatory denial of extra-hours work assignments; unilateral implementation of a change in performance evaluation procedures; and arbitrary and capricious changes in substitute assignments.

All of the strife had a dreadful effect on day-to-day life in the CCC Libraries. At one point, the Library itself commissioned, and then quickly discarded, a survey on employee morale, never disclosing the results to the rank and file. Finally, the Librarians, Library Assistants, and Library Specialists (the classifications represented by Local 1) were so disheartened that they conducted and passed a Vote of No Confidence in two of the three Deputy County Librarians.

All of these actions by Local 1 and its members have had an effect. Positive changes are beginning to grow out of the strife. Library’s mission extended to its own libraries are meant to be outposts of intellectual freedom. The slogan of “Organizing for Power at Work and in the Community” on page 15 of this issue.)

Local 1 members submitted their top 3 questions to County Administrator David Tun, to be posed to candidates in the final round of interviews. As this issue goes to press, Jessica Hudson, formerly of Nevada County Libraries, has taken the helm at CCC Libraries. In less than a month of employment, Hudson has already made herself aware of the myriad of issues facing her and her workers. She has worked with Local 1 and County Counsel through shuttle diplomacy sessions to reach potential resolutions to three pending Unfair Labor Practice charges.

And on May 12, Hudson will come to Contra Costa County to meet with Local 1 leaders to meet with Local 1 leaders to meet with Library Unit leadership and staff at the Local 1 Martinez Hall. With these initial positive signs, Local 1 hopes to have the Contra Costa County Libraries will soon be a place where bringing People and Ideas Together is the mission of administrators to staff, as well as of staff to the public.

NEW ANTI-BULLYING POLICY RAISES STAKES
By Jere Copeland, Executive Director, El Dorado Office

More than a year ago, the County of El Dorado was asked by a citizen’s group to declare their support for an anti-bullying day. In response to that, we proposed in open session to the Board of Supervisors that the County should consider such a policy for its own employees. On April 9, 2013, the Board instructed the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to develop such a policy and return to the Board. In January of this year, eight months later, the CAO did bring a proposal back to the Board. That proposal called for a cultural assessment, obtained through interactive interviews with employees and an online survey of employees. On March 4 of this year, the Board funded the cultural assessment and approved the following policy:

Personal Rule 111. RESPECTFUL WORKPLACE. The County promotes and values a respectful work environment and expects that the business of the County will be carried out in the most efficient and courteous manner. Repeated and/or egregious disrespectful treatment of fellow employees which is both subjectively and objectively unwelcome and/or sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter working conditions of the employee, working environment so as to create or perpetuate an abusive working environment shall be reported to the Department or to the Human Resources Department as set forth below...

What follows in the policy is several paragraphs on how to report a violation.

Local 1 has been pressing for some sort of anti-bullying policy within the County for several years. We have seen too many examples of members treated unfairly or poorly by their managers and the County failing to do anything about it. We have tried to deal with the problem ourselves, but have always had to deal with the real fear of retaliation by members of their retaliation by their bosses. What may be making this effort different is that in conjunction with the new policy, the CAO commissioned an outside firm to do a confidential survey that will, according to a memo from the CAO’s office, “develop a baseline assessment of the El Dorado County organization.” Coupled with the survey was a hotline. By calling, an employee becomes interviewed by an attorney working for the outside firm, so that the employee could give more specific information without fear. The information from this assessment is to be brought back to the Board in late April or May.

The County has now created a situation for itself. Our members believe the response exceeded county expectations. Furthermore, the information corroborated what Local 1 has been telling the County; that there is a significant bullying problem here. In fact, in some departments, the bullying has become part of the culture.

We applaud the CAO for making this issue for discussion and for putting some effort into actually investigating what people are saying. We see this effort has produced a level of expectation that something is now going to be done about the bullying in the County. We at Local 1 will be watching.

RAISES STAKES
By John Bonilla, Executive Director, Butte Office

The Butte County Social Services Workers bargaining unit recently ratified a two-year contract giving them a 3.5% COLA over the life of the agreement. Along with the COLA, they will see an increase of $27.50 per month to offset future medical costs. The contract also includes some minor language changes. For months, the team fought for improvements to pay for on-call workers, and did achieve one victory in that arena. We were successful in getting a small increase in the vehicle allowance for those on-call workers who use their cars for the work that they perform. During future bargaining sessions, we are hoping to improve further in this and many other areas.

But to make those improvements happen, both the members and the staff of BCEA, Local 1 have plenty of work to do in advance of the next bargaining cycle. Most of all, we need to educate the employer in order to open their eyes to the issues that exist, such as the ‘cookie cutter’ agreements being offered to the surrounding counties. There must be something the County can do to retain its current workforce. It might need to look at its current wage and benefit package. Once the County comes to terms with the fact that it is losing talent, it will have to start spending money to keep its workers.

Bringing financial relief to the pockets of members in order to compete and keep them in Butte County requires a consistent effort. Along the same lines is the problem working in Butte County is not just a Butte County problem. It’s a problem for every working person in the country. Local 1 and other unions can try to change that trend going forward. But to make those improvements happen, both the members and the staff of BCEA, Local 1 have plenty of work to do in advance of the next bargaining cycle. Most of all, we need to educate the employer in order to open their eyes to the issues that exist, such as the ‘cookie cutter’ agreements being offered to the surrounding counties. There must be something the County can do to retain its current workforce. It might need to look at its current wage and benefit package. Once the County comes to terms with the fact that it is losing talent, it will have to start spending money to keep its workers. More than ever, it’s a necessity for workers to get more involved in their union to make a positive effect on future bargaining. Numbers are the key—when the employer starts to see a group get organized, the employer starts to listen.

It is my hope and the hope of Local 1 that our power can make these "cookie cutter" agreements go away. One of these "cookie cutter" agreements will have to stop rewarding those that can’t or don’t do the work for their members; giving everyone the same economic package regardless of this effort. The employer must stop hard work and bring a membership that is willing to fight and able to put their foot down and say that it’s...
Local 1 Participates In Labor Notes Conference

Local 1 attended the Labor Notes Conference in Chicago in early April as a way to exchange ideas with and learn successful practices of labor organizations from across the country, and to bring those tools and strategies back to use for the benefit of our units and members. Of the 52 workshops offered, our business agents who went to the conference attended 45 of them. We were also granted a private, educational tour of historical labor sites by the Chicago Labor History Society.

The Labor Notes biennial conference is an excellent fit for independent unions like Local 1, because Labor Notes is a well-known, respected labor umbrella organization that is not affiliated with any one single, international union. In the near future, Local 1 will begin working with our units to sponsor interested members to the next conference, to be held in 2016.