By Michael Moore
Union Advocate editor

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Notorious wage broker Ricardo Batres, who pleaded guilty to felony charges of labor trafficking and insurance fraud in November, received a nine-month sentence in Hennepin County district court Jan. 15.

The sentencing brought to a close the first labor trafficking case to emerge from the state’s construction industry. But worker advocates, armed with the findings of an alarming new report, warn that unless the industry makes some fundamental changes, it’s unlikely to be the last.

Judge Lois Conroy did not stray from the terms of a plea agreement Batres reached with prosecutors last year, but the proceeding did give his victims an opportunity to put their stories on record.

“I fear those connected with Mr. Batres,” one of his former workers, identified by the initials “YIB,” said in a statement read by a victim’s advocate.

Ricardo Batres was sentenced to 270 days in the workhouse. Hennepin County photo

(Continued on Page 6)
$10.22
Median hourly wage earned by those 53 million Americans, or about $18,000 a year for someone working full time

278:1
Ratio of CEO pay to the average worker’s pay at S&P 500 companies

Source: Brookings Institute

Labor Voices: Kera Peterson

In times that call for bold action, unions are up to the challenge

Happy New Year, union families! We’ve turned the page to welcome 2020 and the opportunities and challenges it promises to bring.

I was proud to have been sworn in as president of the St. Paul Regional Labor Federation during our January delegate meeting. I am grateful that you’ve entrusted me, as well as the federation’s dynamic board, to carry on the hard work undertaken during the leadership of our previous president, Bobby Kasper, and to build on the progress we’ve made together as a movement.

We all know working people are under pressure, but they are also fighting back in exciting ways. Health care workers are organizing with community allies to prevent the closure of two St. Paul hospitals, so that our neighbors who need medical care will continue to have the access they deserve. Folks working two or even three jobs to provide for their families are declaring together, “One Job Should Be Enough.” And in the construction industry, union and non-union workers are banding together to combat human trafficking in our state.

These are bold actions to take, and it’s a time for bold action. We are experiencing historic inequality in our country. The Trump administration continues to level attacks against workers and their rights to form unions and negotiate fair contracts with their employers. The administration continues to target refugees and immigrants. And it is eroding the rights of our LGBTQ family members, and of our friends and neighbors who worship in mosques and synagogues.

The stakes are high in 2020. Despite everything that appears to be stacked up against us, I am feeling joyful and optimistic because this year we can change things. Minnesota’s trade unionists are powerful changemakers. We get things done by showing up in solidarity, by supporting each other on picket lines and at public meetings, and by inviting union members and community allies to join us in this work. And we can absolutely be changemakers by participating in political processes throughout the coming year.

Precinct caucuses will be held Tuesday, Feb. 25, at 7 p.m. across our state, and anyone who will be eligible to vote in the November general election is able to participate. Union members can start the process of shaping their political party’s platform by bringing resolutions to the precinct caucuses. They can also select, or run to be, delegates at future conventions, where party endorsements will occur.

Additionally, Minnesotans will have an opportunity to vote in presidential nomination primaries on or before Tuesday, March 3. Registered voters will be able to select a ballot for either the Democratic-Farmer Labor Party or the Republican Party, and will be able to vote for one candidate on their ballot. The political parties must use presidential primary results to choose their delegates to the national conventions, where the party’s final candidates are ultimately nominated. We won’t all have the opportunity to attend a presidential nominating convention this year, but every eligible voter in Minnesota has the ability to participate in a meaningful way.

Of course, unions and labor federations at the local, state and national levels will also endorse candidates for public office this year. In the coming months, the St. Paul Regional Labor Federation will screen and endorse candidates for local office and will participate in processes to help endorse candidates for state and federal offices.

Once endorsements are made, we’ll get to work. I hope it’ll see you in the streets, on the doors and at the polls in November.

Solidarity!

Kera Peterson is president of the St. Paul Regional Labor Federation, AFL-CIO, representing more than 100 affiliate unions with over 50,000 members in Chisago, Dakota, Ramsey and Washington counties. Learn more about the federation and its work at www.stpaulunions.org.
On Valentine’s Day, show MSP catering workers some love

Airline catering workers across the country, members of UNITE HERE, have been bargaining new contracts with LSG Sky Chefs since last spring. They want an end to poverty wages and health insurance they can’t afford, but despite record profits in the airline industry, Sky Chefs has refused those demands.

On Valentine’s Day, workers based at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport will join UNITE HERE members nationwide who take their rallying cry – “One job should be enough!” – into the streets. The rally will begin at 3:30 p.m. on Feb. 14, on the East Upper Roadway outside Terminal 1.

For more information on the event or the campaign, go to www.unite-here-local17.org.

Get tips for caucusing like a pro

Maybe you’ve heard the news: 2020 is a presidential election year. Minnesota will hold its first presidential nomination primary March 3, and early voting has already begun. Get all the information you need to cast a ballot on the Secretary of State’s website: www.sos.state.mn.us.

But the new primary doesn’t mean precinct caucuses are going away. Political parties will continue to begin the process of drafting their platforms and electing delegates to their endorsing conventions – including the national conventions this summer – at precinct caucuses, which take place Feb. 25 at 7 p.m. Check with your political party for locations.

Union members or retirees who want to learn more about how caucusing works – and what to expect at their precinct caucuses – are invited to a training at the St. Paul Labor Center, 353 W. 7th St., from 6 to 9 p.m. Feb. 18. RSVP to Kera Peterson at (651) 222-3787 or kpetersen@stpaulunions.org.

Save the date: Union Job Fair

The annual Union Job and Resource Fair is set for April 2 at the Electrical Industry Building in St. Paul. The on-site hiring event, in its fifth year, is an opportunity for union employers, apprenticeship programs and nonprofit agencies to meet people interested in learning more about the advantages of a union job.

Interested in hosting a table at the job fair? Contact Peter Rachleff at 651-230-3294, or find a registration form on the East Side Freedom Library’s website: www.eastsidefreedomlibrary.org.

Support staff push back, win contracts they deserve in North St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale schools

In December, after several bargaining sessions with members of Office and Professional Employees Local 12, negotiators for the North St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale school system put their best and final offer on the table.

It turns out, it was neither District 622’s best nor its final offer.

That’s because members of Local 12, who work as nurses, educational assistants and clerical staff, decided for the first time in Kelly Riemschneider’s 19 years with the district to go get what they deserve.

“You get pretty used to hearing, ‘This is the best we can do for you,’ and sitting back and going, ‘well, OK,’” said Riemschneider, an office nurse and union steward. “This time we didn’t. Sometimes you need to do that. You need to stand up for yourself.”

Members of Local 12’s bargaining team decided to take their frustrations to the school board. They targeted the Dec. 17 meeting and put together a plan to turn out as many supporters as possible.

Stewards like Riemschneider began spreading word to the union’s 130 members, who work in 15 different buildings. Local 12 also reached out to unions that represent other workers in the district, including Education Minnesota, Service Employees Local 284 and Operating Engineers Local 70.

The St. Paul Regional Labor Federation, which unites over 100 local unions in the east metro, put out a call for solidarity among its affiliates, too.

The organizing effort paid off, as a standing-room-only crowd greeted school board members at their meeting. Local 12 members in the room held signs reading, “We deserve a fair contract!”

When board members opened the meeting to public comment, Cathy DeGlusti, an elementary nurse, described the critical work she and other Local 12 members do for the district. Each year, DeGlusti said, the district expects them to absorb more students and more responsibilities into their workload, but balks at giving those same workers an annual raise.

“It saddens me,” DeGlusti said. “We all work very hard at taking care of the students. We care about their well-being in every aspect of their lives.”

The show of solidarity had an impact, Riemschneider said.

“I could see by look on their faces that school board members were very surprised,” she said. “Just seeing us there, it spoke volumes that this is important to us, and you need to remember we are here and we are important.”

Lo and behold, the message trickled down to the district’s bargaining team, too. The next time Local 12 and District 622 met, they were able to reach tentative agreements on new contracts for both of the union’s bargaining units.

“The district moved significantly on wages, health care and language we wanted in the contracts,” Local 12 representative Jim Niland said. “The district also agreed to move everyone in the clerical unit up to $15 an hour, which was one of our demands going into bargaining.”

Was the district’s change of heart a happy coincidence? Riemschneider doubts it.

“The big thing I’ve learned from this experience is something we’re always trying to teach our students,” she said. “We want them to be as independent as they can be, to advocate for themselves. Well, if I’m teaching that, why am I not taking that advice for myself? “So that’s what we did, and it was a really good experience.”

– Michael Moore, UA editor
Coalition takes on proposed hospital cuts in St. Paul

Health care workers, patients and community members alarmed by the news Fairview Health is considering drastic cuts to two St. Paul hospitals have quickly organized a campaign to keep Bethesda and St. Joseph’s open, with unions leading the way.

A town hall meeting Jan. 28, hosted by the Minnesota Nurses Association and SEIU Healthcare Minnesota at a church two blocks from Bethesda, buzzed with energy and outrage, as nurses, doctors, patients and community members took turns at the microphone. Many shared personal stories about how critical the hospitals are to their community.

Dr. Katie Freeman, who practices family medicine at HealthEast, said she referred a patient just that day to St. Joseph’s for OB-GYN services. If the hospital closes, she said, the nearest hospital in the system would be in Maplewood.

“Having a hospital you can get to easily, a hospital in your neighborhood that you can access by public transit, that allows us to access care,” Freeman said. “Before any decisions are made, the people that use these hospitals need to have some input on what they need.”

But the communities Bethesda and St. Joseph’s serve stretch beyond St. Paul’s neighborhoods. Bethesda is an intermediate-term care facility that takes patients from many different hospitals in the Twin Cities – sometimes, MNA President Mary Turner said, from other states. St. Joseph’s, the first hospital in St. Paul, also serves a unique patient population, including those with mental health issues.

If Fairview proceeds with plans to close more than half of Bethesda’s beds by Feb. 10, and possibly close St. Joseph’s altogether, it will have a ripple effect at health care facilities across the region.

“This is patient abandonment,” Turner said. “As a nurse, if I were to abandon my patients, I’d lose my license.”

Unions invited Fairview Health CEO James Hereford to attend the town hall meeting, but he did not turn out hundreds of members alarm ed by the news Fairview Health CEO James Hereford to attend the town hall meeting, but he

On track for arrival at MSP Airport: $15 minimum wage

By Michael Moore

They may work different jobs or carry different union cards, but workers at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport are fighting together to raise MSP’s minimum wage to $15.

And their solidarity is paying off.

The Metropolitan Airports Commission, which oversees operations at MSP Airport, is advancing an ordinance that would raise the minimum wage in three increments, reaching $15 per hour by July 1, 2022. That’s the same date ordinances in St. Paul and Minneapolis tick up to $15 for large employers.

At a final public hearing on the draft ordinance last month, commissioners listened to testimony from airport workers who stand to benefit, including members of the Service Employees International Union, Teamsters Local 120 and UNITE HERE Local 17.

Obang Okelo, a Local 17 member who works for airline caterer LSG Sky Chefs, told commissioners the raise would help him finally afford health insurance. For Michael Schofield, who works in an airport bookstore, the raise would mean more time to spend with his family.

“I work full time for Delaware North, but I have to have a second job because, like many, I have a family to support,” Schofield said, adding that he sees his co-workers at the bookstore clock out after an eight-hour shift, only to clock back in for work at another airport job. “They’re essentially working 16-hour days,” he said.

SEIU Local 26 member Glen Brown, a wheelchair attendant at MSP, said it’s not right that airport workers get poverty wages while corporations making money off the airport earn record profits. For most of the five years he’s worked at MSP, Brown told commissioners, his hourly pay has been under $11.

“I make this amount despite seeing the news stories about airlines making billions in profits,” Brown said. “I make this much despite seeing news stories about MSP Airport being one of the best in the country since 2016. I make this despite seeing airline CEO’s like Ed Bastian at Delta making $6,300 an hour.

“Just doesn’t sound fair to me.”

Several community supporters at the hearing agreed.

“It’s not right that we have a world-class airport ... and depend on poverty wages in order to provide that service,” House Majority Leader Ryan Winkler, a DFLer from Golden Valley, said.

Mary Sansom, a retired member of Machinists Local Lodge 1833, urged commissioners to put themselves in airport workers’ shoes.

“These are not easy jobs, and minimum wage is not sufficient,” said Sansom, who worked at MSP for 47 years. “And if anyone in this room believes that surviving on minimum wage is OK, then I challenge you to do it.”

Fortunately, the MAC appears to be taking workers’ concerns seriously.

Last August, the MAC unveiled an initial draft of the wage ordinance. It included language workers oppose, including a lower wage floor for tipped workers, known as the “tip penalty,” and exemptions for employers with collective bargaining agreements.

A month later, airport unions turned out hundreds of members and supporters to a public hearing on the proposal. Over 50 testified, and all spoke in support of a $15 minimum wage for all MSP workers, with no carve-outs or exemptions.

That’s exactly what they got just two weeks later, when the MAC revised its draft ordinance. Now, union organizers anticipate a vote in February or March.

Airport workers got more good news earlier this month, when the MAC released results from a survey of airport employers. Over 80% of those who responded anticipated the wage hike would not affect their ability to do business at MSP and nearly 90% said the change would not impact the number of workers or total hours on their payrolls.

At the public hearing Tuesday, a handful of airport concessionaires disputed the survey results. They echoed now-familiar warnings about job cuts and business closings heard during debates over the minimum wage in Minneapolis and St. Paul in recent years.

But Wade Luneberg, Local 17’s recording secretary, said airport employers will lose experienced workers to neighboring cities if their wages fail to keep pace. And the airport, which has been showered with awards for its efficiency and service in recent years, has an interest in making sure that doesn’t happen.

“These workers are the first and last impression for the flying public, and literally care for the public,” Luneberg told commissioners. “They work in a secure environment that isn’t easy to get to– or into. They keep challenging schedules, balancing multiple jobs and family commitments. They’ve made a commitment to this facility, and they’ve made a life here at MSP.

“Airport workers deserve $15.”

Solidarity Spotlight

Teamsters Local 120’s Ahmed Abdul Aziz, who works for a rental-car agency, spoke before the MAC in favor of $15.

Misrak Anbese (R), an SEIU Local 26 member and longtime airport employee, appeared before the MAC with Local 26 President Iris Altamirano.

Obang Okelo of UNITE HERE Local 17 told commissioners raising the wage would help him afford health insurance.
Victims’ statements, new report suggest Twin Cities construction industry faces ‘human rights crisis’

(Continued from Page 1)

“I am always fearful. I feel like everyone is my enemy. I did not anticipate this experience in Minnesota.”

“YIB” was one of four former employees who provided the court with statements. They said Batres made them work long hours to keep their housing, which the trafficker arranged, or to pay off debts, which the trafficker held.

Some said they were not paid in full for hours they worked. Others described working through the pain of jobsite injuries, often in unsafe conditions.

“Death was very close to us,” one victim said.

When a spinal injury sustained by victim “JZL” became too serious to work through, Batres instructed the worker to give false information to medical providers, so Batres could avoid liability. In his statement, “JZL” said his family “lived in constant fear” because Batres threatened to kill us if I reported him to authorities.”

“He treats people worse than animals,” another victim said. “He does not have a conscience.”

An industry in crisis

The testimony of Batres’ victims echoed findings of a new report by the Worker-driven Social Responsibility (WSR) Network, which warns of a “human rights crisis” on local non-union construction sites.

Released last month, “Building Dignity and Respect: The Case for Worker-driven Social Responsibility in the Twin Cities Construction Industry” draws from surveys of 76 metro-area residents who have worked a wide range of construction jobs.

CTUL, a Twin Cities worker center and human rights organization, conducted the surveys last winter, gathering information about wages, benefits, training, workplace safety and more.

Nearly half of workers reported being cheated out of wages they were owed. Many said their employers failed to tack overtime premiums onto their wage rates. Others said they were paid less than minimum wage, were forced to work through legally required breaks or had hours shaved off their time cards.

The report also calls into question safety protocols on local non-union sites. Nearly half of those surveyed said they had not received safety training before beginning work, and 44% reported not getting proper safety equipment from an employer.

Three in 10 workers surveyed said they had been hurt on the job at some point, and most workers who reported getting hurt said their employer failed to cover medical expenses or compensate them for lost wages.

Meanwhile, a third of workers surveyed said they wouldn’t voice their concerns about safety, wage theft or other abuses to supervisors for fear of retaliation, whether it be losing their job or being blacklisted, deported or kicked out of employer-provided housing.

Tip of the iceberg

While Batres’ conviction breaks new ground, advocacy groups like CTUL and local construction unions say Batres is not the only bad actor in town. CTUL is currently investigating four other labor trafficking cases, with dozens of Twin Cities workers involved, according to the WSR Network report.

In fact, a week after Batres appeared in court, nearly half of workers reported being cheated out of wages they were owed. Many said their employers failed to tack overtime premiums onto their wage rates. Others said they were paid less than minimum wage, were forced to work through legally required breaks or had hours shaved off their time cards.

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Teamsters, SPFE say district lacks urgency in contract negotiations

(Continued from Page 1)

“Instead of urgency at the bargaining table, we are being met with platitudes about how our proposals sound great, but there’s just no money in the budget,” Stohlmann said. “If you want SPPS to achieve, you need to use your power as a school board to adjust the budget to meet more than just the basic needs of your students and your educators.”

Negotiations between SPFE and the district began last May. After nine public sessions, during which union members offered 31 proposals, the two sides agreed in November to move talks behind closed doors and enlist the help of a state mediator.

But the bargaining teams remained far apart after their mediat ed session Jan. 16, according to educators, who said SPPS had not yet responded to most of their proposals. “They have refused to discuss any proposals that will cost money,” SPFE’s bargaining team said in a statement.

The nature of some union proposals, educators say, has ranked district officials.

Instead of focusing exclusively on wages and benefits, SPFE members in recent years have approached bargaining as their window of opportunity to influence how the district serves its students and families.

SPFE calls it “bargaining for the students St. Paul children deserve,” and the strategy – gathering member and community input, identifying areas of need and proposing student-centered solutions – has compelled the district to take action on class sizes, professional staffing, restorative conflict-resolution practices and more.

But this is the first round of contract negotiations since the district installed a five-year strategic plan, “SPPS Achieves.” Nick Faber, SPFE’s president, accused district negotiators of using the plan as a shield to deflect union members’ proposals.

“Classroom teachers were not significantly involved in the strategic planning process, and now the district is acting very surprised that we are demanding these things we’ve brought to the table,” Faber said.

Urgent needs

Educators’ top priority at the bargaining table this year is improving mental-health supports for their students. SPFE wants the district to hire more social workers, provide teachers with relevant training and install a “mental-health team” in every school building.

Union members like Sarah Kaufenberg, who teaches kindergarten at Benjamin E. Mays, say their students’ mental-health needs often go unmet, creating barriers to learning that spread throughout the classroom.

“We have students whose parents are incarcerated or in medical facilities, who have been through a lot of trauma in their lives, and they have nobody to talk to but the teachers in their classrooms,” Kaufenberg said. “They’re in survival mode, and without support, we just are not able to provide them with what they need.”

Lindsay Walker, an art teacher in the same building, said the school’s lone counselor too often is forced to “triage” the needs of students, tending only to those most visibly distressed.

“A student who is hungry or a student experiencing homelessness, their needs should be met just as much as somebody who is having a behavior crisis,” Walker said. “Right now our staff is being pulled in too many directions at once.”

Additionally, educators have proposed “weighted caseloads” for special-ed teachers. Rather than assigning the same number of students to each teacher, they want caseloads to reflect the severity of students’ needs.

“Our special-ed teachers are burning out left and right,” Stohlmann said. “Other districts are taking this approach, and teachers see it working. So we have teachers leaving all the time.”

And education assistants represented by SPFE have spearheaded the union’s proposal to bolster support systems for multilingual students and families.

“How can students be successful if we have a lack of communication?” SPFE member Yasmin Muridi, recently named the state’s Education Support Professional of the Year, asked at the rally. “Frustrations on this issue are building slowly, and one day our parents will burst like a volcano and leave the district. And I don’t want that.”

Teamsters fight for training

Teamsters Local 320, meanwhile, co-sponsored the rally with SPFE. The union represents teaching assistants who are also in contract bargaining with the St. Paul Public Schools.

Teaching assistants’ top priority, Local 320 member Dallas Robertson said, is making the district’s training programs more accessible.

“Even though we work with students all day, every school day, we don’t have any days in our contract set aside for us to further our learning with other educators,” said Robertson, a TA at American Indian Magnet School. “We want to learn how to serve our students better, but the current system of requiring TAs to pursue professional development on their own time ... is not working for our members – not when these opportunities are offered when many of our TAs are working second or third jobs.”

The district, Robertson added, has told TAs any new funds for training will have to come out of union members’ wage increases, even though TAs make just $16,000 per year to start in the district.

‘Open your eyes’

So what does the district want to achieve in bargaining new contracts with educators?

Faber said administrators have proposed making it easier to put teachers on performance-improvement plans, increasing the waiting period before new hires are eligible for benefits and limiting employees’ access to union leave.

“The message is clear,” Faber told members at the rally. “Our district wants to take stuff away. And for educators who are with students every day, they want you to sit down, shut up, take what you’ve been given and do what you’re told. And they also want you to take the blame.”

Still, classroom teachers like Kaufenberg are holding out hope administrators – or their bosses on the school board – can be persuaded to take educators’ demands seriously.

“Maybe they need to join us in our classrooms,” she said. “Spend a couple hours with us, spend a day with us, spend a week with us, and you’ll see it. And if you don’t see it, then you have to open your eyes.”
The St. Paul Regional Labor Federation is pleased to encourage union members and their families to participate in Fare For All Express. Stretch your budget by picking up a package of fresh fruits, vegetables and frozen meats at the sites below each month. Fare For All is open to anyone who eats! There are no questions asked, no forms to fill out. And the more people who take advantage of the program, the better the discounts get – and the more neighborhoods it can serve.

Give it a try!

East Metro Locations – February 2020

- Burnsville: Diamondhead Ctr. Feb. 26, 3 to 5 p.m.
- Cottage Grove: All Saints Feb. 6, 4 to 6 p.m.
- Eagan: Eager Lutheran Church by the Lake Feb. 11, 3:30 to 5:30 p.m.
- Forest Lake: VFW Feb. 26, 4 to 6 p.m.
- Maplewood: Redeeming Love Feb. 10, 3:30 to 5:30 p.m.
- North Branch: Trinity Luth. Feb. 12, 2 to 4 p.m.
- Northfield: St. Dominic Feb. 13, 3:30 to 5:30 p.m.
- Oakdale: Grace of God Luth. Feb. 24, 3:30 to 5:30 p.m.

- Roseville: Real Life Church Feb. 18, 3 to 5 p.m.
- St. Paul: Halflife O. Brown Ctr. Feb. 20, 4 to 6 p.m.
- St. Paul: Hazel Park UCC Feb. 5, 4 to 6 p.m.
- St. Paul: West 7th Community Ctr. Feb. 7, 10 a.m. to noon
- South St. Paul: Central Square Feb. 25, 4 to 6 p.m.
- Stillwater: Community Thread Feb. 18, 4 to 6 p.m.
- White Bear Lake: Community of Grace Lutheran Feb. 14, 1 to 3 p.m.

St. Paul Plumbers Local 34 organized a toy drive at the St. Paul Labor Center during the holiday season, and union leaders delivered the unwrapped items Dec. 20 to “Toy Shop,” the Twin Cities Salvation Army’s holiday program for local children in need. The truckload of toys didn’t travel far, as Salvation Army’s offices are right across the street from the Labor Center. “The inaugural Salvation Army toy drive went great,” Local 34 Business Manager Tom McCarthy said. “Thanks to the Plumbers Local 34 apprentices for coming up with the idea and all the affiliated unions that donated gifts. There was a need in this community for toys at Christmas for everyone. The unions came together and delivered. Bigger and better next year!” Pictured at left are St. Paul Regional Labor Federation President Kera Peterson, Local 34 Secretary-Treasurer Jeff Huberty and Business Manager Tom McCarthy. Office Manager Heidi Walsh is pictured at top-right, carrying toys and treats out of the Labor Center. At bottom-right, Peterson and McCarthy filled the bed of a pickup truck with gifts, many of which, at the Salvation Army’s request, were intended for middle-school and teenage youth. In addition to the truckload of toys, the Labor Center donated over $2,000 worth of gift cards.

Questions? Please go to www.fareforall.org or call 763-458-3888.

The St. Paul Regional Labor Federation takes up two collections each year as part of the Jean Jones Initiative. Named after a former St. Paul teacher and union leader, the collections are used to purchase school supplies and winter gear for students in need, especially those whose families are struggling with homelessness.

This year’s winter coat drive raised over $1,625. The money was used to purchase coats, mittens, gloves, socks and hats, which were dropped off at the St. Paul Public Schools’ district offices last month.

But the coat drive’s impact stretched even further this year, thanks to one of the St. Paul RLF’s affiliates. Pipefitters-Steamfitters Local 455 set up a collection site at the union’s training center and meeting hall, and encouraged members to donate new and slightly used coats for the Jean Jones Initiative.

“The members of Local 455 took our coat drive and ran with it this year, and it was great to see,” said Lynne Larkin-Wright, an AFL-CIO Community Services liaison who works for the St. Paul RLF’s nonprofit arm, the St. Paul Labor Studies and Resource Center. “From all of us at the St. Paul Regional Labor Federation, thank you to everyone who contributed.”

The St. Paul LSRC’s annual Labor of Love – Sponsor a Family holiday initiative raised over $8,300 last year. Proceeds were used to purchase gift cards from union grocers, and distributed to local nonprofit agencies that support families in need.

We’re looking for new friends.

Get labor news, action alerts and volunteer opportunities when you like the Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation on Facebook.

Tweeting? So are we.

Follow The Union Advocate’s Twitter feed for breaking labor news. Connect with us at: twitter.com/unionadvocate

Labor federation’s coat drive gets boost from St. Paul Pipefitters

St. Paul Public Schools Title I staff accepted coats and winter gear donated through the St. Paul RLF’s Jean Jones Initiative.

submitted photo
LIUNA LOCAL TURNS 100

They plow city streets, fill potholes, take care of parks, maintain public housing and more. They’re the members of Local 363 of the Laborers International Union of North America, and Jan. 22 the local celebrated its 100th anniversary.

Local 363 is comprised of public-sector employees who work for the cities of St. Paul, Minneapolis, St. Francis and Becker, as well as the St. Paul Public Schools, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, Minneapolis Public Housing Authority, St. Paul Public Housing Agency, Kanabec County and Metropolitan Mosquito Control District.

“It’s fair to say most folks aren’t aware of the vital services our members provide,” said Tony Kelly, Local 363 business manager. “The proud members of Local 363 are there day in and day out.”

Local 363’s anniversary celebration filled the main meeting room at the United Labor Center in Minneapolis, where St. Paul Mayor Melvin Carter was on hand to read a proclamation which declared Jan. 26 as “LIUNA Local 363 Centennial Day.” Local 363’s original charter was on display, dated Jan. 26, 1920.

Local 363 today includes just over 900 full-share members from its various public-sector bargaining units, including 154 who work for the City of St. Paul and 74 who work for the St. Paul Public Housing Agency.

About 140 members were on-hand at the anniversary celebration. “Give yourselves a round of applause,” Business Manager Tony Kelly told the crowd. “You are the union.”

- Minneapolis Labor Review

REMEMBERING ‘THE WEATHERMAN’

Local TV icon and longtime union activist Barry ZeVan died Jan. 1. The local chapter of his union, SAG-AFTRA, remembered ZeVan as “a true raconteur and a lifelong performer.”

ZeVan trained as a meteorologist during his service in the U.S. Air Force, and he combined that training with a gift for performance in on-air TV roles in Montana, Idaho, Minnesota, Detroit and Washington, D.C. He was inducted into the Minnesota Broadcast Hall of Fame in 2013.

Even after retiring in 1987, ZeVan remained active in his union, as well as the Minnesota State Retirees Council and in the Minnesota AFL-CIO Veterans Council.

“Barry was particularly proud that he had been elected as a delegate to almost every SAG and SAG-AFTRA convention since the late 1980s,” his union remembered on its website. “Those who knew him will never forget him and we have all benefited from his decades of service as an actor, singer broadcaster and Local Board member.”

LABORERS’ MACKEY RETIRES

Longtime labor leader Tim Mackey, who served as business manager of LIUNA Local 563 and most recently as president and business manager of the union’s district council, retired Jan. 24 after 33 years in the local union movement. Gov. Tim Walz declared his retirement date “Tim Mackey Day” statewide.

Mackey started his career as a general construction laborer with Mortenson Construction and went on to serve in every position in the union, from executive board member to business agent, from dispatcher to financial secretary-treasurer.

During his tenure, Mackey contributed to a full spectrum of LIUNA’s member-service entities, including the union’s health and welfare fund, vacation fund and “LECET,” the Laborers-Employers Cooperation & Education Trust. He served on the union’s apprenticeship and training boards, on the Union Bank and Trust board and as a Great Lakes Region Organizing Committee director.

Mackey will be succeeded as business manager and president of the Laborers District Council by Joel Smith, a 29-year LIUNA member who has served on the District Council’s staff for the past year.

“LIUNA couldn’t have a better role model, and I couldn’t have a better mentor,” Smith said. “Tim Mackey’s legacy is unmatched, and we can’t thank him enough for all he has done to lift up the dignity and voices of working people.”

OUT FRONT, INTO A UNION

Staff members at OutFront Minnesota joined the Minneapolis Newspaper and Communications Guild in December, after OutFront’s executive director voluntarily recognized workers’ petition to form a union. OutFront is an advocacy organization dedicated to equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people. Its offices are in Minneapolis.

The Guild, an affiliate of the Communications Workers of America, has become a leading representative of local nonprofit and advocacy workers, with bargaining units at Clean Water Action, TakeAction Minnesota and the Minnesota AFL-CIO.

UNION VOLUNTEERS GET KIDS ICE FISHING

Elevator Constructors Local 9 and the Union Sportsmen’s Alliance co-hosted Take Kids Ice Fishing Day last Saturday on frozen Chisago Lake, where dozens of union volunteers introduced more than 75 young anglers to the sport.

“We had a great turnout, and the event went really well,” project leader and Local 9 member Dave Morin said. “It’s awesome to see all these kids getting out to experience ice fishing, some for the first time.”

The event was free for all registered kids, who came from across the Twin Cities metro area to enjoy hands-on ice fishing instruction and access to state-of-the-art fishing gear.

“This is a really cool idea,” said David Brandner of Inver Grove Heights, who brought his son Mason to the event. “You’re getting kids involved in the outdoors, which is wonderful. Plus how many people can say they took their kid fishing and got a free fishing pole?”

At the conclusion of the event, participants received an ice-fishing starter kit, which included an ice-fishing rod and reel, game calls and other goodies. Unions and other sponsors donated over $3,000-worth of door prizes for participants.

“We’re grateful for everyone who put this event together,” said Tony Wilking, a retired U.S. Army veteran who attended with his 6-year-old son, Jack. “Activities like ice fishing are so much better for kids than sitting inside playing video games.”

In addition to Local 9, event sponsors included the Bass Pro Shops and Cabela’s Outdoor Fund, IBEW Local 110, Operating Engineers Local 49, Cement Masons Local 633, Pipefitters Local 539, Plumbers Local 15, Roofers Local 96 and the Minneapolis and St. Paul Building and Construction Trades councils.

“Thank you, Bobby Kasper, for your years of leadership and service as RLF President. We welcome Kera Peterson and wish you all the best in your new role as president!”

December 11, 2019
The Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation met in regular session on the above date and was called to order by President Kasper at 6 p.m. Board members in attendance were Beedle B, Beissel, Dreyer, Edwards, Engeldorf, Faber, Froemke, Gibbons, Guertin, Hoppe, Kasper, Luneburg, Maki-Green, Markham-Kocurek, McNamara, Meyer, Rogers, Ryan, Sansom, Schmidt, Seath, St. Aoro, Terry, and VanDassor. Excused were Madden, Mullin, Varco. Absent were Beedle G, Gorman, Haugen, McCarthy, and Weed.

CREDENTIALS
CREDENTIALS were received from AFSCME Local 4001 and USW Local 11-75. President Kasper administered the Oath of Obligation to those new delegates and alternates present.

COMMITTEE ON POLITICAL EDUCATION (COPE) MINUTES DECEMBER 11, 2019
COPE met in regular session on the above date and was called to order by President Kasper at 6 p.m. Board members in attendance were Angrimson, Beedle B, Beissel, Dreyer, Dreyer, Edwards, Engeldorf, Faber, Froemke, Gibbons, Guertin, Hoerth, Hoppe, Kasper, Luneburg, Maki-Green, Markham-Kocurek, Mayer, McNamara, Meyer, Rogers, Ryan, Sansom, Schmidt, Seath, St. Aoro, Terry, VanDassor and Weed. Excused were Beedle G, Gorman, Mullin, Varco. Absent were Beedle B, Gorman, Haugen, Krey, Loehman, McCarthy, Naseth, Qualy and Weed.

Items to come before this committee included:
- Kera Peterson, political director, and Colleen Nocerini, political organizer, reported on the Blue Green Alliance and the SEIU Local 26 march in the skyways.
- President’s Report: Kasper thanked the unions that made financial contributions to our COPE program. The White Bear Lake Schools bond referendum is the largest referenced to be passed.
- Thank-you notes received from Matt Klein for the RLF’s $200 contribution to Senate District 52, and from the White Bear Lake Teachers Association expressing their sincere appreciation for the financial and logistical support offered by our union friends in the St. Paul Regional Labor Federation.
- There being no further business to come before this committee, the meeting adjourned.

EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES DECEMBER 11, 2019
The Executive Board met upon conclusion of COPE with those same members present who are duly elected to this board.

Items to come before this board included:
- Organizing/Updates/Campaigns:
  - Support the St. Paul Federation of Teachers on Thursday, Dec. 12, 2019, at 4 p.m. at 360 Colburn in St. Paul.
  - Join OPEIU Local 12 clerical workers, education assistants and nurses at the North St. Paul Maplewood-Oakdale school board meeting next Tuesday, Dec. 17, at 5:45 p.m., where they will speak out for a fair contract.
  - Members of Teamsters Local 320 who work in the St. Paul Public Schools are in contract negotiations. They are demanding that the district treat them like professionals. They are requesting at least two days for professional development. Training currently is optional.
  - There will be a Mental Health Summit on Jan. 18, 2020, from noon to 5 p.m.
  - Thank-you note received from Jewish Community Center for the St. Paul Labor Studies and Resource Center’s Labor of Love – Sponsor a Family cub food gift cards.

- M/S/C TO APPROVE THE EXECUTIVE VICE-PRESIDENT’S STIPEND TO $350 AND THE SECRETARY’S STIPEND TO $500.

- President Kasper reported on the following:
  - The RLF and LSRC office contracts have been settled.
  - He thanked Jamie McNamara, IBEW Local 110, for hosting the holiday party this evening.
  - Discussed the 2019 financials. We have been in the plus for the past nine years. This year we will be in the negative. This reflects benefit payments to some employees.
  - There will be a retirement party for Kasper’s years of service on Wednesday, Dec. 18, 2019, from 5 to 8:30 p.m. at the IBEW Local 110 union hall.
  - Tonight we will be conducting elections for: President, Vice President, Secretary-Treasurer, Sargent At Arms, two trustees, 11 board members at large and nine COPE members.
  - President Kasper notified the Executive Board that the four Assemblies to the RLF had their elections for Chairpersons and the following union members were selected:
    - Washington County Labor Assembly Chairperson Brian Beedle.
    - Carpenters Local 322.
    - Dakota County Labor Assembly Chairperson Connie Beissel, NALC Branch.
    - Chisago County Labor Assembly Chairperson Michael Madden, IWW Lodge 112.
    - Ramsey County Labor Assembly Chairperson Theresa St. Aoro, AFSCME Council 5 Local 2829.
    - Minnesota AFL-CIO Retirees had their election, and their representation will be Jerry Beedle, Sign, Screen and Display Local 880.

- M/S/C TO APPROVE THE ABOVE TO BE APPOINTED TO THE BOARD.

- There being no further business to come before the board, the meeting adjourned.

- M/S/C TO DEFER THE REMAINING MEETING BUSINESS UNTIL NEXT MONTH TO ALLOW FOR THE BOARD NOMINATIONS TO PROCEED.

NEW BUSINESS
- President Kasper opened the floor for nominations of the following Executive Board and COPE Positions:
  - Open for nominations for: Executive Vice President
    - Perry Schmidt, NALC Branch 28 Secretary-Treasurer.
  - Bernadine Engeldorf, Minnesota Nurses Association Sergeant-at-Arms.
  - Jennifer Guertin, AFSCME Council 5 Local 2508 Trustees
    - John Mullin, St. Paul Building and Construction Trades Council
    - Paul Slattery, Teamster Local 120
  - Executive Board At Large
    - Mike Dreyer, UFCW Local 1189
    - Tom Edwards, APWU St. Paul
    - August “Gus” Froemke, Teamster Local 3200
    - Kelly Gibbons, SEIU Local 284
    - Wade Luneburg, UNITE HERE Local 17
    - Dorothy Maki-Green, ATU 1005
    - Mona Meyer, CWA State Council
    - Carrie Robles, LIUNA Local 563
    - Mary Sansom, IAM Local Lodge

- M/S/C TO APPROVE THE RLF’s $200 contribution to Senate District 52, and from the White Bear Lake Teachers Association expressing their sincere appreciation for the financial and logistical support offered by our union friends in the St. Paul Regional Labor Federation.

- There being no further business to come before this committee, the meeting adjourned.

Submitted by:
BERNADINE ENGELDORF
Secretary-Treasurer

January 8, 2020
The Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation met in regular session on the above date and was called to order with the Pledge of Allegiance by Executive Vice President Schmidt at 6 p.m. Board members in attendance were Beedle B, Beedle J, Beissel, Dreyer, Edwards, Engeldorf, Faber, Froemke, Gibbons, Guertin, Madden, Maki-Green, McCarthy, McNamara, Mullin, Peterson, Sansom, Schmidt, Statter, St. Aoro, and Varco. Absent were Haugen, Luneburg, Markham-Kocurek, Rogers, and Varco. Absent were Beedle G, Gorman, Hoppe, Meyer, Seath, Terry, Vandassor and Weed.

NEW OFFICER ELECTION
William McCarthy, President, Minnesota AFL-CIO, swore in the newly elected St. Paul Regional Labor Federation Executive Board and COPE Board Members. They were elected to a four-year term.

CREDENTIALS
CREDENTIALS were received from Education Minnesota White Bear Lake, Heat & Frost Local 34 and the Minnesota Newspaper Guild-CWA

(Continued on Page 11)
MINUTES

M/S/C TO APPROVE MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 13, 2019, AS PUBLISHED IN THE UNION ADVOCATE NEWSPAPER AFTER THE SECRETARY NOTES THERE ARE NO ADDITIONS OR CHANGES CALLED FOR.

COMMITTEE ON POLITICAL EDUCATION (COPE) MINUTES JANUARY 8, 2020

COPE met in regular session on the above date and was called to order by Vice-President Schmidt at 5 p.m. Board members in attendance were Kasper, Beedle B., Beedle J., Beisel, Dreyer, Edwards, Faber, Faber J., Foerster, Gibbons, Goodin, Haugen, Hoerth, Kasper, Madden, Muelken, Mayer, McCarthy, McNamara, Mullin, Naseth, Peterson, Sanson, Schmidt, Slatery, St. Aoro, Varco and Wise. Absent were DeRoy, Haugen, Mayer, R. McCarthy, and Ryan. Secretary-Treasurer Engeldorf reported on the financial status of the RLF’s $200 contribution. Chairperson, thanked everyone who came to the January meeting. D elegates voted unanimously to elect the slate of candidates, led by new President Kera Peterson, a month earlier.

EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES JANUARY 8, 2020

The Executive Board met upon conclusion of COPE with those same members present who are duly elected to this board. Items to come before this board included:

- President Elect Kera Peterson is working on scheduling endorsement screenings for Rep. Betty McCollum, Congressional District (CD) 4; and Rep. Angie Craig, CD 2.
- Jen Guertin, AFSCME, presented information about CD 4 DFL Caucus. Caucus Training. They will be Saturday, Jan. 25 from 2-5 p.m. at Woodbury Library; Sunday, Jan. 26 from 2-5 p.m. at Rondo Library; Monday, Jan. 27 from 5-8 p.m. at Sun Ray Library; and Saturday, Feb. 1, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Stillwater Library. After some discussion there was an agreement to have the same training presented by the St Paul Regional Labor Federation at the Labor Center for labor union members.
- Thank-you notes received from Connie Bernardy, House District (HD) 41A, for the RLF’s $200 contribution.
- There being no further business to come before this committee, the meeting adjourned.

REPORT OF THE TREASURER

Secretary-Treasurer Engeldorf reported on the financial status of the Federation as of December 2019. The report was accepted as read.

CREDIT UNION VISA CARD, SAINT PAUL FEDERAL CREDIT UNION, UNION BANK AND TRUST AND AFL-CIO HOUSING INVESTMENT TRUST AND TO ADD KERA PETERSON TO THOSE ACCOUNTS.

M/S/C TO GIVE ROBERT KASPER HIS CURRENT IPAD WITH HIM ASSUMING ALL EXPENSES.

M/S/C FOR THE SECOND COLLECTION TO GO TOWARDS THE VETERANS PROJECT MACVETS.

- ORGANIZING/UPDATES/CAMPAIGNS: The Saint Paul Federation of Educators, SEIU Local 284, SEIU Health Care Minnesota, UNITEHERE 17, IAMAW, Teamsters and the Minnesota Nurses updated everyone on their organizing activities.
- Thank-you notes received from Sponsor A Family MN for the St Paul Labor Studies and Resource Center’s Labor of Love – Sponsor a Family donation of Cub Food gift cards, and from the Soward Family for contributions to Hawgs for Dogs.
- There being no further business to come before this board, the meeting adjourned.

TRIP REPORTS TO THE TREASURER

Secretary-Treasurer Engeldorf reported on the financial status of the Federation as of December 2019. The report was accepted as read.

President’s Report

President Peterson wished everyone a Happy New Year. We will talk joy and hope as we move through the year and our work. I encourage and invite you to come in as we screen candidates for potential labor endorsement. We always learn something new from new or returning candidates. Please consider attending caucus trainings, vote early and encourage your union members to vote in the primary.

Staff/Labor Liaison Reports

- Perry Schm idt, Labor Community Action Committee Chairperson, thanked everyone who donated blood at the annual Labor-Red Cross Blood Drive. Thank you to everyone who made financial donations to the Labor of Love – Sponsor A Family. Come march with us at our Annual Winter Carnival Parade and Warm Up Party, held on Saturday, Jan. 25 at the Labor Center. The committee will be purchasing hats, scarfs, socks and bed sheets for their MAC Vets project. Thank you to Jamie McNamara and IBEW Local 110 for hosting the St. Paul Regional Labor Federation’s Holiday Party and Robert Kasper’s retirement party.
- The Minnesota State Retiree Council sent information to AFL-CIO affiliates requesting financial contributions. The Council is open to all union members, retired or not.
- Josiah Hill, delegate and labor brother, will be a candidate for Senate District 39.

There being no further business to come before this delegation the meeting adjourned.

The Regional Labor Federation sponsored a marching unit in the St. Paul Winter Carnival’s Grande Day Parade last month. Dozens of union members, retirees and their families participated in the annual tradition, which celebrates and promotes the longstanding partnership between local unions and Greater Twin Cities United Way in service to their communities. Find more photos online at www.facebook.com/SaintPaulRLF.
Unions on U.S.-Mexico-Canada trade deal: Working people made it better

By Michael Moore
Union Advocate editor

President Trump was expected to sign the U.S.-Mexico-Canada trade agreement (USMCA) into law at a White House ceremony Jan. 29.

Undoubtedly, Trump used the signing ceremony as a victory lap, but AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka, the nation’s top labor leader, says much of the credit for getting the deal done goes to working people.

“Make no mistake, we demanded a trade deal that benefits workers and fought every single day to negotiate that deal; and now we have secured an agreement that working people can proudly support,” Trumka said.

Senators voted Jan. 16 to approve the USMCA, but the agreement faced its toughest test earlier in the House, where labor-friendly Democrats won a majority in 2018 midterm elections.

After trade ambassadors for the U.S., Mexico and Canada signed the new pact in November 2018, the AFL-CIO and its allies in the fair-trade movement went to work, pushing lawmakers to demand significant improvements before signing off on the agreement.

The lobbying push, backed by phone calls and emails from thousands of union members across the country, resulted in the first U.S. trade agreement the AFL-CIO has endorsed since a 2001 deal with Jordan.

To improve Trump’s initial deal, congressional Democrats added language making the USMCA’s labor standards more enforceable, including a rapid-response authority capable of investigating allegations of union-busting or other abuses firsthand.

Trumka called the final version of the USMCA “a vast improvement over both the original NAFTA and the flawed proposal brought forward in 2017.” The agreement also “eliminates special carve outs for corporations like the giveaway to Big Pharma in the administration’s initial proposal and loopholes designed to make it harder to prosecute labor violations,” he said.

While House Democrats managed to improve the USMCA, not all unions share Trumka’s enthusiasm.

In a letter to members of Congress, Machinists Union President Robert Martinez Jr. said the USMCA did not do enough to replace “the current trade template” that has bled the nation’s industrial sector of hundreds of thousands of jobs.

“As we have repeatedly said, to win the support of the IAM, the USMCA must make fundamental changes to NAFTA in order to curtail the massive outsourcing of work in aerospace and other manufacturing sectors to Mexico,” Martinez wrote.

Doug Williams, director of the Minnesota Fair Trade Coalition, called the USMCA “the best of bad choices” from a labor perspective.

The agreement already has prompted Mexico to begin raising its labor standards, and the USMCA provides stronger mechanisms for monitoring and enforcement of standards in all three countries. But those mechanisms won’t mean much, Williams said, unless officials have the will to use them.

“On paper it looks great,” the long-time trade activist and Communications Worker said. “But it’s complicated, it’s time-consuming, and the entire process relies on the good faith of whatever U.S. administration is in charge of enforcement at any given time. So that makes our presidential elections even more important.”

Labor standards fared better than environmental standards in the USMCA’s final version. Notoriously undemocratic trade tribunals – known as “investor state dispute settlement” systems – are mostly phased out of the agreement, except for those protecting energy companies from pollution laws. And opponents point out that in the USMCA’s 2,000-plus pages, not once does it mention climate change.

“There’s a well-documented record of corporations using NAFTA to dodge environmental standards in the U.S. by shipping out to Mexico,” Williams said.

“That’s still going to be a problem.”

While the effectiveness the USMCA and its new labor standards can only be judged over time, the Trump administration’s push to rewrite U.S. trade policy marches on.

Agreements with the United Kingdom, the European Union, Japan, India, Brazil, South Africa and the Philippines are in various stages of negotiations. The USMCA creates “a new standard” for any future agreement, Trumka said, thanks to the efforts of working people and their unions.

“President Trump may have opened this deal, but working people closed it,” Trumka added. “And for that, we should be very proud.”