

The Local Line

"A PPA Award Winning Publication"

The Official Voice of the
Northwest Illinois Area Local

Floor Edition

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Update by: Jackie Engelhart

Greg Johnson to meet with us on March 30th
We have finally been given a date to meet with him for an updated number in regards to the Palatine Clerk excessing. We believe the number excessed will be reduced from the 132 who were sent 60 day notice letters on 2-19-09, but he was unwilling to tell us what that number will be. We have been asking for a meeting since Greg Johnson came to Palatine to replace Ron Woodall as A/ Senior Plant Manager on 2-14-09. Greg asked for a review of the numbers by Tim Anderson, Ralph Ramion, and the Industrial Engineer who ran the original numbers. The Tour 1 managers should also have some input as they're the ones who will be responsible for moving the mail. They say they cannot afford to lose all these people so we think there will be a reduction. It's a positive that Greg requested a review instead of just going with what he was given.

Compliance Hearing for Palatine Award

Arbitrator Ann Kenis sustained an APWU Class Action grievance on 6-23-08 which was filed and arbitrated by Vice President Baskin. Her award stated "The grievance is arbitrable. It is hereby sustained on the merits. The Postal Service violated the National Agreement by permitting and/or inducing senior clerks to volunteer in lieu of junior clerks to be excessed into the mail handler craft at the Palatine P&DC. The corrective action sought by the Union is granted." Human Resource Manager Phyllis Lingenfelter informed us that the class action grievance applied to one Clerk, and wanted to meet with Arbitrator Kenis to clarify her award. We did not agree to meet because we felt management was going to use this meeting as a form of pressure to get the arbitrator to change the award. Dave then filed a second grievance to force compliance with the class action award.

Arbitrator Won't Rule so Case will go to Court

The hearing was held on 3-18-09 in front of the same arbitrator but she said she did not have the authority to rule on non-compliance, and the hearing was over before it got started. Management had packed the room with Labor Relations Staff and the Palatine Mail Handler President. In the room from APWU was Advocate NBA Linda Turney and Technician Vice President Dave Baskin, and one APWU observer. After the Arbitrator stopped the hearing by saying she could not rule, the APWU stated we will appeal the case to Step 4 to decide on whether the arbitrator has the authority to rule on non-compliance. Every indication from our national officers is that she does have the authority, but that will not resolve this issue. This arbitrator does not want to make a ruling in this case. Therefore, we have contacted our Attorneys in Washington and the Attorneys will be going to Federal Court to enforce compliance with this award.

Jackie Engelhart
President
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Special points of interest:

Greg Johnson to meet with us on March 30th
Compliance hearing for Palatine Award
Arbitrator Won't Rule so Case will go to Court.
USPS Organizational Changes
Voluntary Early Retirement
Re-Negotiation Not a Current Option per President Burrus
Meeting with Nancy Frytear
Priority Mail at Plants
RI-399 Regional Issues

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USPS Organizational Changes

On 3-20-09 USPS announced organizational changes that would eliminate six of the 80 district offices, eliminate 521 positions, and offer early retirement to 150,000 employees nationwide (excluding Electronic Technicians, MPE Maintenance Mechanics, and Part-time Postmasters). For the remaining 74 districts there will be a 15% reduction in administrative staffing. More than 1400 mail processing management positions are also being eliminated in nearly 400 postal facilities. The closing districts are Massachusetts, New Hampshire/Vermont, Erie, Central Florida, Spokane, and Central New Jersey. Impacted EAS employees will be given five months to look for placement within the USPS and if they are unable to find a position they will be given a RIF notice on 6-24-09. Once the RIF notice is received the EAS employee has 60 days before their postal employment ends on 8-28. In the past year the Postal Service has taken very aggressive cost-cutting actions, including, cutting 50 million work hours, halting construction of new postal facilities, negotiating an agreement with NALC to adjust letter carrier routes to reflect diminished volumes, freezing salaries of all postal officers and executives, instituting a nationwide hiring freeze, reducing authorized staffing levels at the headquarters, area and district levels by 15 percent, adjusting Post Office hours to reflect customer use, and consolidating mail processing operations. Projections are the Postal Service will lose 6 billion dollars this year and mail volumes are predicted to reach 1960 levels while expenses are skyrocketing.

Voluntary Early Retirement

The nationwide offer is open to 150,000 employees who meet the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) conditions, and who are at least 50 years of age with 20 years of creditable federal service, or any age with 25 years of creditable federal service. An annuity estimate will be mailed to all VER-eligible employees starting on 4-6-09. The VER effective date will be 7-31-09 and employees will be allowed to retire 5-31, 6-30 or 7-31-09. The USPS wants 150,000 employees to go but the cost of retiree benefits will continue to grow as more retire.

Re-Negotiation Not a Current Option per President Burrus

At a recent Union conference President Burrus was asked if he had been contacted by the USPS for any renegotiation of our contract due to the financial problems of the USPS. He said he had not been contacted and if he is, he will decline because the USPS continues to contract out work that should be performed by Postal employees. The May rate increases the discount for pre-sort companies who process mail, which will further reduce revenue at a time when USPS is desperate for revenue. The USPS is subsidizing these private pre-sort companies through higher postage rates for the public. President Burrus said Congress must look at the massive discounts given to pre-sort houses when considering the USPS financial difficulties. The time is long gone when the discounts given for pre-sorting mail justify the discounts being given, and this mail should be returned to the postal system. There is no reason for the USPS to be subcontracting postal work.

Meeting with Nancy Fryrear

VP Baskin, 601 CCD Taylor and I spent an hour recently with the Tampa Postmaster who is currently assigned as A/Plant Manager in Carol Stream. It was refreshing for someone at her level to take the time to actually talk to us. There's a difference in being talked to and being talked at. She told us she's on the floor a lot and expects employees to be working. She also said she was surprised that there are no flats bids (or very few) and would like to see if one or two could be posted for starters. We previously met with her in an RI-399 meeting and she was not afraid to make a decision, which was also refreshing.

Priority Mail at Plants

Carol Stream and Palatine are working Priority mail in an effort to improve service scores. Nancy said the scores are up and the Plants may keep this mail, which is good news for them but bad news for Chicago Metro Surface Hub. If the plants keep Priority we will be seeking bids but we don't want bids posted unless the mail is staying.

RI-399 Regional Issues

We spoke with National RI-399 Coordinator Tom Maier last week, and he said some of our regional disputes (Low Cost Tray Sorters) should be heard this summer. These are regional (Local) as opposed to national disputes such as the APPS and AFSM-AI. Some of our members would like us to retain a lawyer to try to enforce the Local Inventory based on a decision out of Trenton, NJ. The case in Trenton was to enforce a staffing agreement for the AFSM that USPS refused to honor after the AI changes. We do not have a similar agreement to enforce.