

The Local Line

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Northwest Illinois Area Local

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Update by: Jackie Engelhart

Palatine Maintenance Impact to be Reduced

The impact meeting for Palatine Custodians was held on 10-29 at 10 am. Present for the Union were myself, VP Baskin, MCD Golden and NBA Vance Zimmerman. We were told that the impact would be reduced from 14 to a maximum of 6 Custodians because the MS-47 they based the impact on was no longer valid. This was obvious as they based the impact in part on temporary empty floor space now occupied by the FSS. It made no sense to re-do the MS-47 Custodial staffing based on that. NBA Zimmerman then pointed out the problems he found starting with the square footage being less than the last MS-47 while the building has been expanded. They said they wanted to get this right and wanted Vance's input before they proceed with any impact. The impact is reduced from 14 to a maximum of 6 and the square footage problem should reduce it 3 more.

Clerk Impacts and the Fall Mailing Season...

Mail volume is up at both plants and management says it's because we are having a fall mailing season this year. If we continue to see more mail this should hopefully slow down the excessing. They will not stop until they either can't get their mail out or the overtime is too high. Employees should continue to work safe and not try to make up for understaffing.

No Help from Congress

We have communicated with Senator Durbin's office and Congressman Davis, but face an uphill fight with the newly elected congress. Post-election changes are not favorable to postal and other union employees. Daryl Issa will be the new Chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee and he has called for the creation of a commission to close postal facilities as they did with military bases. He says there are too many postal facilities and too many employees.

National Negotiations

President Burrus leaves office on 11-12-10 and it seems the parties may then begin serious negotiations. Thus far management has proposed reductions in our pay and benefits and/or a two-tier wage scale to pay future hires at a lower rate. This was done a few years ago with the auto-workers and may be coming to us. A two-tier wage scale may be the only way to save current employees from wage and/or benefit cuts. APWU is the first union to negotiate a contract at this worst possible time. APWU must contend with anti-union privatization forces calling for cuts in our salaries and benefits. USPS deficits are due in large part to the billions in required pre-funding for retiree health benefits. 2006-2009 revenues declined by 16 billion due to e-mail and the recession but this revenue loss was offset by 13 billion in aggressive cost cutting, including a reduction of 94 million overtime hours and aligning work hours with volume declines. Postal employees are more productive than ever.

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Special points of interest:

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FSS Mail Handler Bids Posted

98 Mail Handler bids were posted for FSS at Palatine this week and I called A/Senior MDO Ramion to ask when the Clerk bids would be posted. He said that the MH bids were posted because NPMHU President Jefferson Peppers asked that they be posted now with the employees going into the bids at a later date. He said Clerks bids could be posted now if we agreed to the same thing. There is no reason not to post Clerk bids now as management does not have to place successful bidders into bids in December. Clerk FSS positions should be posted in December with the bids effective in January. The FSS will open up some bids on tour 2 with a 10 am start and on tour 3 with a 6 pm start time. We are in contact with the newly elected Clerk Division Director Rob Strunk to inquire about the national level FSS dispute as the Flat Sorter has always been Clerk. I called Mr. Strunk before he took office about getting the Palatine Low Cost Tray Sorter Regional dispute arbitrated and he assured us he will make that a priority. We know the importance of protecting our work as management takes work from the Clerk craft. On a local level, when you allow another craft to perform your work long enough it becomes their work and you can't get it back. It's called sitting on your rights and we have lost work locally due to a lack of vigilance in the past. The USPS has been on a mission to transfer Clerk work to Mail Handlers for the last 10 years, and the National Postal Mail Handler Union is very savvy on RI-399. For the last few years we've made RI-339 a priority but you can't get back what was lost years ago

Busse to Change Bids Again

Chicago Metro Surface Hub soon to be renamed has caught up with the other plants in regards to the constant changes in staffing plans. Just a few months ago we were told the second SPBS would be a back-up and now bids were posted for tour 2 with no advance notice to the union. We believe there are several Clerks with retreat rights to the SPBS on tour 2 and these bids should not have been posted until the retreat right issue was investigated. Since management did not talk to us before these bids were posted we were not able to stop them from being posted but we have informed management the posting should be cancelled. We met with management after the bids were posted and were told management needs to post these bids so they can staff the SPBS from 11 am to 7:30 pm and from 7:30 pm to 4 am with no overlap. This SPBS staffing plan calls for the elimination of the 2 pm start. We don't think there will be closed section bidding for tour 3 SPBS because some of the bids are vacant and can be reverted. A closed section could result in current tour 3 SPBS bid holders losing their current off days. Management has also changed some of the off days in the Racks based in part on needing more Clerks in on Sunday. Some S/S bid are being changed to S/M and the ripple effect will create more F/S bids which had been abolished just a few months ago. We asked Plant Manager Alvarado why they are making changes so soon after a major staffing overhaul in July and he said they are getting more mail than originally planned on. The good news is they are asking for 24 more Clerk positions.

Retirement and NRP Forced Retirement...

I have no crystal ball but believe the USPS may get a two-tier wage scale in the next contract. What we will get for that I do not know. If the two-tier becomes reality, and with Mr. Issa saying we have 200,000 to many employees, the logical conclusion is the USPS may offer another early out after our contract is ratified. Depending on what the new contract says and how cheaply they can start replacing us, they may even offer some money to get rid of us. For those who are looking a retiring soon I would wait to see what happens after the new contract just in case management decides to offer another retirement incentive. For the NRP employees who are wondering what will happen after they hit one year in an LWOP status management is looking to rewrite the ELM provision on separations. It currently states "If an employee on the rolls of OWCP is unable to return to work at the end of the initial 1 year period of LWOP, the LWOP may be extended for successive periods of up to 6 months each. Extensions are granted only if it appears the employee will be able to return to work during the period of the extension." The Postal Service wants to change this language to employees on OWCP LWOP for 1 year can be separated if no necessary work is available for them.

Open Season & Health Fairs

Federal Employee Health Benefit Plan (FEHBP) open season is from 11-8-01 through 12-13-01. The Palatine Health Fair will be on 11-18-10 and the Carol Stream Health Fair will be on 12-1-10. OPM says the average rise in cost to employees will be 7.2 percent.