



December 2008

Deb Kerben, Treasurer of our Local

Debbie Kerben died Saturday, September 27th. She had been our Treasurer for eight years, and was active in our Local even before we had a Local union number. She was a 33-year employee of the University Libraries and will be missed by all of us - even if you didn't know her! Debbie played a strong, behind-the-scenes role as Treasurer, activist and conscience of our Local. At the regular membership meeting Wednesday, October 15, the Local approved a donation in Debbie's memory in the form of a memorial paver at the Minnesota AFL-CIO Labor Pavilion at the Minnesota State Fair. Look for that paver when you visit the Fair!

#### New Local Treasurer appointed

Mary Austin, an Info Tech Specialist at Epidemiology, has been appointed our new Treasurer. Prior to her re-class into the Technical Bargaining Unit, Mary was Treasurer of AFSCME Local 3800, the Clerical local here on campus - so Mary comes to us with experience and training. Mary stepped in when Debbie could no longer fulfill her treasurer duties, and we're everlastingly grateful! Mary is a Steward in our Local, and is currently on the University-wide Health and Safety Committee. Without having the formal title, she's been serving as our Local's Health and Safety officer - attending workshops at convention, developing a safety survey (on our web page) and generally keeping us informed of safety issues, concerns and solutions around campus. Welcome to the new position, Mary!!

**Remember to call your Union if you have questions or concerns about your workplace -  
we're stronger each time we solve a problem!**

#### Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA)

We have been getting phone calls and have had many conversations with our co-workers about the attack ads, placed on television and elsewhere, in opposition to the Employee Free Choice Act. A large and substantially-funded business bloc has taken out these ads, and they want you to think that this legislation would harm unions. In fact, it would have the effect of strengthening workers' ability to form unions. We've done a lot of research on this and located a website that is as neutral as we could find - the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor. This committee is made up of both Republicans and Democrats and has a very good explanation of the issues. We urge you to visit this site (it's not a Labor or Labor-endorsed site) to read what they've put out there about the issues:

[http://edlabor.house.gov/micro/efca\\_myth.shtml](http://edlabor.house.gov/micro/efca_myth.shtml)

#### Health and Safety at Work is Everyone's Responsibility by Mary Austin

Given the limited resources available at the University of Minnesota, your first step should be self-education. There are many good websites available including Minnesota OSHA ([www.doli.state.mn.us/mnosh.html](http://www.doli.state.mn.us/mnosh.html)) and Federal OSHA ([www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov)). For employees who are at a desk most of the day, one important tool available to you is the University of Minnesota Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) department. EHS has developed a self-assessment which is helpful for people who work at their desks. The Workstation Self Assessment/Evaluation can be found at [http://www.dehs.umn.edu/ergo\\_office\\_guide.htm](http://www.dehs.umn.edu/ergo_office_guide.htm). It only took me a few minutes to go through the screens (although I had been educated somewhat previously). I learned a couple adjustments to make which have been beneficial. I still have a couple questions that did not get addressed by the evaluation and will need to email them to try for answers. If you find you need to schedule one of the guys to come out and complete an evaluation, be aware that it will take around four (4) weeks to get on their schedule. EHS has only two employees who perform the workstation evaluations and they are responsible for the entire University, including UMC, UMD, UMM, UMR and everywhere in between. Make any changes you can while you wait. Do not assume your situation is unchangeable. Equipment can be purchased to prevent injuries in any setting. They can help you identify which piece of equipment will be most beneficial for your situation. Call EHS at 612-626-6002 or email them at [dehs@umn.edu](mailto:dehs@umn.edu) with any questions you might have but be prepared for a delay in response. Be patient but keep checking back with them. It is your health and your safety that is at stake!

At the September 2008 AFSCME Council 5 Convention, I attended two workshops which both focused on Healthy and Safety at work. I will try to summarize the workshop on Healthy and Abuse Free Work Environments.

This workshop discussed issues related to dignity and respect at work. The negative side of this is workplace violence and stress. In a mild form, it can show itself as "Minnesota nice". Does your department have a high employee turnover rate? Are you or your co-workers absent or tardy often? Is your departmental productivity down? Have you spoken to a steward or union representative about any of these issues?

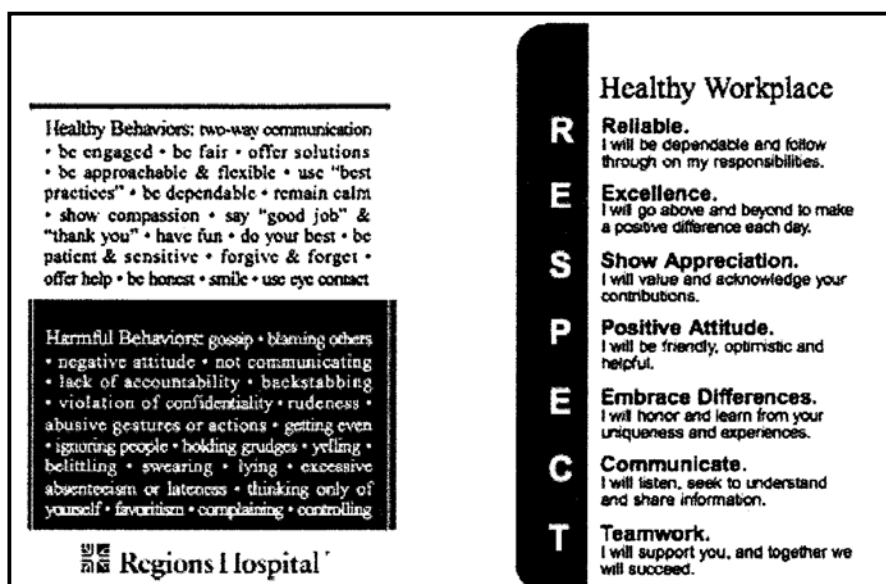
We learned that the College of St Catherine, Region's Hospital and Hennepin County Libraries have all begun to address harmful workplace behaviors. The leaders in this movement appear to be in medical programs (teaching while still students) and hospitals and specialty clinics (and all their corollary workers) but Hennepin County Libraries also recognizes the value of a healthy workplace. What they all say is that making policy to support cultural changes takes a long time but that they already see benefits.

The first step in addressing harmful workplace behaviors is setting up a task force with appropriate membership from across the University. Second step seems to be hiring a consultant to administer a survey to everyone (Administrators, Faculty, Civil Service Staff, P&A Staff, Union Staff and Students). The consultant then assists the task force in defining what behaviors make a workplace harmful (or healthy) and in deciding how to address changing those behaviors. There must be consequences for bad behaviors but our contract must never be violated by any steps agreed upon by the task force.

The panel presented information by way of active task force participants from Region's Hospital and Hennepin County Libraries. Region's Hospital had the most experience. AFSCME Local 722 opened their eyes one day and saw how poorly employees were treated by management and by each other. It wasn't hard to see how toxic their environment was and how it was hurting employees and patients. At this time, Region's Hospital was among "the worst places to work" and had a very high employee turnover rate. Union leadership stepped up and convinced management to work with them on a "Healthy Work Place Committee" (HWPC). After many long hours establishing the new ground rules, the program was implemented. Small successes build. All parties recognize that work must continue every day to retain and build the good work that has been done. In 2005, Region's Hospital received an award for being a "Best Place to Work".

As a result of the work of the HWPC, employees now can wear a badge on their lanyard that spells out RESPECT on one side and defines healthy and harmful behaviors on the other side. A comment like "your behavior is in the red" is now enough to get most employees to adjust their own attitude. The employees (from top down) report improvement in morale, in employee retention and in job satisfaction which reduced absences, tardiness and high turnover rates. The Employer is happy because the cost of constantly training new employees is lowered and their customers (patients) are 'happier'.

Here is a sample of Region's RESPECT Badge. On left side, the bottom half is the 'red' zone.



## Healthy Workplace, October 2008 by Mary Austin (cont'd)

Hennepin County Libraries is newer to the process but reports similar successes. Most of the examples given were related to the medical field.

In the academic world, the College of St Catherine implemented the program in the Department of Nursing and the Department of Physical Therapy, Occupational Science/Occupational Therapy, Social Work, and Family and Nutritional Sciences; both departments are in the medical field. St Kate's made it a part of the curriculum and plans to follow students for a number of years after they graduate to monitor how things are going.

Some other results of the task forces include a "dignity and respect" section in performance reviews, a stronger local union and a sense of trust between parties. Many of the groups already working this program include their vendors in the program.

My recommendation for the University of Minnesota community is to initiate a similar program which could result in a Memo of Understanding (MOU) which could then become a part of our contract(s). The process only works if everyone takes ownership of the process and of the results. Management must also be willing to invest in the program. The University is such a large place that we should pick a single department (the worst one? the not quite worst one?) and start there. I put this idea forward because we spend about one third of our life at work. Don't we deserve dignity and respect here? "This is your life; get the best because you can't get yesterday back" (M Diaz, President AFSCME Local 722).

### UMPD Police Dispatchers

Did you know that the Police Dispatchers in the University of Minnesota Police Department (UMPD) are members of our Local? Did you know that it was a UMPD Dispatcher who caught the first 911 calls about the August, 2007 bridge collapse? Or that the cell phone towers on the freeways around campus route calls to them, whether or not it's actually a *University* problem?

We had a meeting last month with the Dispatchers to talk about workplace issues they face, in large part as a result of the increased use of technology and the expanded geographic area for which they're responsible. We also learned a lot about how the job has changed just since we organized our Union in 1993.

Harriet Miller, the most senior Dispatcher, has been here long enough to watch these radical changes - from telephones and radios to cell phones and dozens of computer screens they have to monitor each shift. We got a list of the job duties they perform and though it's too long to reprint here, we thought we'd share some of the highlights of the work they do.

Besides answering all 911 calls and dispatching the appropriate emergency services, the Dispatchers have to check the National Crime Information Computer and the Criminal Justice Information System files for checks on persons, articles, vehicles, warrants and driver information as well as entering data on stolen articles, vehicles, KOPS, criminal history checks, etc.

They monitor the Phoenix alarm system (for not only Twin Cities campus, but also including, Crookston, Duluth, Morris) which includes silent alarms, hold-up alarms, fire alarms, etc., and they monitor cameras throughout campus including Eastcliff, the University President's residence. In disasters such as the bridge collapse, and other drastic local events, the Dispatchers contact emergency service organizations, public works crews, utility companies DEHS, DEM, etc.

To do all of this, they have to have a solid knowledge of the geography of the University, City of Minneapolis and surrounding cities, along with a knowledge of the various services provided by the University, City, County, State and Federal Agencies.

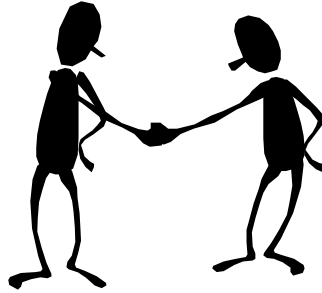
And as you might imagine, they have to have strong listening and verbal communication skills, and an ability to gain control of conversations with irrational, confused or hysterical callers and access situations rapidly and accurately. In other words - they have to have the ability to perform under pressure and high levels of stress. We'll be working with the Dispatchers this year to try to get their jobs pulled into line with the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, but we also wanted to get the word out about what they do here at the U!

Local 3937 sends a heartfelt and somewhat wistful

**THANK YOU!!!!**

To Mariann Nelson - our *Tech Talk* editor who's retiring this December.  
This is Mariann's last newsletter, and we thank her for all the great work  
she's done for Local 3937

**HAVE A GREAT RETIREMENT!!!**



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**ADDRESS CORRECTIONS NEEDED**

We need your help to maintain an accurate list of member names and addresses. If you know of a U of M Technical Worker who is not receiving *Tech Talk* please tell us. Call 612-379-3933 or send an e-mail to: [union@afscme3937.org](mailto:union@afscme3937.org) with any corrections (send both old and new addresses.)

**Thank you!**

***HAVE YOU SIGNED YOUR MEMBERSHIP CARD YET?***

This union is run by employees of the University of Minnesota who, like yourself, have thought about the changes they would like to see in their workplaces. This union needs your support if we are going to put these changes into effect. Please take time to make sure you have signed and returned a membership card.

**AFSCME Local 3937**

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