

Stepping UP

American Federation
of State, County and
Municipal Employees,
AFL-CIO

Issue 1
January - February 2019



THIS ISSUE

2019 Legislative Agenda

AFSCME locals give back

Corrections Officer Rick Neyssen wins
Never Quit Award

Volunteer member organizers share
their stories



Day on the Hill March 26, 2019

Day on the Hill is our biggest, most powerful event of the year. Over a thousand AFSCME members will gather to learn about lobbying and get to know our elected leaders. Then we'll flood the Capitol Rotunda with AFSCME green for a solidarity rally and go talk to our legislators about the issues that matter most to working Minnesotans like us.

Register to attend Day on the Hill 2019 on our website, www.afscmemn.org.

Registration closes on Friday, March 21.



AFSCME Council 5 is a union of 43,000 workers who advocate for excellence in services for the public, dignity in the workplace, and opportunity and prosperity for all working families.

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AFSCME's 2019 Legislative Agenda



The 2019 Legislative Session gaveled in on January 9. AFSCME members played a major role in electing pro-worker leaders to Minnesota's top elected offices and helped win a Democratic majority in the House of Representatives.

Our legislative priorities this session are big and bold. With Governor Tim Walz and Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan at Minnesota's helm, a full slate of pro-worker Constitutional Officers and a majority in the House, we're confident that 2019 will be a great year for working Minnesotans when it comes to cultivating a future that works for all of us.

With a \$1.5 billion projected surplus, expectations are high. AFSCME Council 5 is entering the session with a positive outlook as well as the reality that inflation alone accounts for over \$1 billion of the surplus.

The need for 328 correctional officers and increased staffing levels for state, county and higher education programs and services will require all hands on deck throughout the session.

Governor Walz and Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan have outlined a One Minnesota road map. They've tapped Sen. Tony Lourey, a leading supporter of maintaining the provider tax as opposed to pursuing a new funding source for health care, to serve as the new Commissioner of the Department of Health.

Governor Walz has advocated for an increase in the gas tax and a comprehensive transportation funding package for Minnesota. We will continue our support for a gas tax increase and needed transportation funding.

We continue to work with our coalition partners on enhancing and expanding paid family leave and sick and safe time, and will continue to advocate for inclusion of domestic violence in safety leave.

We will keep supporting funding for the Public Employee Relations Board (PERB) and to protect Public Employee Labor Relations Act (PELRA). As always, we will oppose any attacks on our defined benefit pensions.

With a DFL-controlled House and Governor's office and a Republican controlled Senate, it is incumbent on all of us to do our part to achieve our goals. We look forward to working with AFSCME members from across the state to assure a positive and productive 2019 legislative session.

Corrections Lobbying Day February 26, 2019

Hundreds of AFSCME correctional officers will head to the Capitol on Feb. 26 to talk to lawmakers about the work we do and how the decisions they make impact our jobs, our safety and the communities where we work and live.

Our top priorities this session include securing funding for safe staffing at all of our corrections facilities and banning private prisons in Minnesota.



Corrections Lobbying Day 2018

AFSCME members get in the giving spirit

As AFSCME members, we're committed to serving the public and giving back.

This holiday season, AFSCME Locals around the state lived our union values by taking part in a variety of community giving programs. It's just one more way we're walking our talk: helping our neighbors, lifting up working families and strengthening the communities where we work and live.

- Members of Local 3558 participated in multiple holiday giving projects. At the Duluth YWCA, members collected supplies for the Young Moms Program, a transitional housing program that helps young moms and their kids get into the workforce and build secure lives. At the Head of the Lakes United Way, members planned and hosted the AFL-CIO Community Services' annual kid's holiday party, where union families decorated cookies, met Santa, and received holiday meal baskets and gifts.
- Local 3800, University of Minnesota Clerical Workers, held a toy drive for the U of M Masonic Children's Hospital. In addition to collecting toys in the weeks leading up to the holidays, local leaders held union coffee breaks at multiple campuses to collect toys and organize members. The local also hosted a holiday cookie and craft party for union kids.
- Local 552, Hennepin County Probation and Parole, donated \$1,000 to the John Servaty Toy Drive in Hennepin County.
- Local 404, Department of Human Services, participated in a campus-wide St. Peter Regional Treatment Center toy drive for Toys for Tots, collecting hundreds of toys for kids in need. They teamed up with their coworkers and members of other unions to collect the toys, which were given to children in Nicollet, Le Sueur, and Blue Earth Counties.
- Local 1539, Rush City Corrections, collected \$725 for St. Jude's Children's Hospital.
- Local 638, Minnesota State University – Mankato, participated in a campus-wide "Unions United" food drive for those in need. Together, the union members raised \$1216 in cash donations and collected 725 pounds of food to stock the pantry at the ECHO Food Shelf.
- AFSCME Retirees United Chapter 5 turned old AFSCME t-shirts into tote bags which they donated to customers at Fare for All, where the group volunteers to pack low-cost bundles of nutritious food for community members.



Giving union families a leg up in times of need



“I love the diversity of work that I get to do each day,” says Rachel Loeffler-Kemp, the Community Services Director at the Head of the Lakes United Way in Duluth and an AFSCME Council 5 Executive Board member out of Local 3558. For Loeffler-Kemp, giving back to the community and supporting union families is what keeps her workdays meaningful and exciting.

The AFL-CIO Community Services Program, a national partnership between the United Way and the AFL-CIO, exists to provide resources, services and assistance to union workers and their families during times of hardship. “In Minnesota, there are AFL-CIO United Way partnership programs based out of Duluth, Minneapolis and St. Paul,” Loeffler-Kemp explains. The focus of the program, she says, is supporting working families. “We know that if we can help support them and the issues they face, our whole community is stronger.”

The spirit of giving back and building community is a part of the program’s mission. From coordinating the annual Duluth Workers’ Memorial Day Service and Solidarity Pancake Breakfast to streamlining the National Letter Carriers’ Food Drive volunteer BBQ to coordinating an Emergency Member Assistance Fund for union members in times of need, the program provides crucial year-round services to union families and the communities where we work and live.

The giving back really picks up during the holiday season. Each year, the AFL-CIO’s Community Services Committee coordinates a kid’s holiday party at the Duluth Labor Temple. Loeffler-Kemp

takes the lead in planning and hosting the free event. Union families have the opportunity to make crafts, take pictures with Santa, eat a healthy lunch, read with Clifford the Big Red Dog, decorate cookies and more. While the kids are busy, parents and guardians are able to discreetly pick up holiday meal baskets and gifts donated by local unions and community partners.

“We coordinate the meal baskets with local union grocery stores,” Loeffler-Kemp says. “Several of our local unions donate funds to offset the cost.” Beyond that, she adds, many locals host toy drives, book drives and fundraisers to raise money specifically for the event.

“It is amazing to see the kid’s faces when they walk into the holiday party. Their eyes light up. Working with their parents and guardians and connecting them with the resources they need is very rewarding. You can see their eyes light up, too.”

While the holiday season may be their busiest, the Community Services Program helps union families year-round.

“At any time during the year, a member could contact us and utilize our Emergency Member Assistance Fund and get connected to local resources. We assist union members with anything from helping them with a FAFSA form to finding emergency housing,” Loeffler-Kemp explains. She says she loves helping union families, and that the job fits right in line with her AFSCME values. “I love that AFSCME empowers members to get involved in their communities in a variety of ways. It’s about solidarity. We all need each other. Our union and our community are only as strong as our most vulnerable member.”



This page: Christina St. Germaine, Local 1092, and Rachel Loeffler-Kemp, Local 3558, pack gift and meal baskets for union families attending the AFL-CIO Community Services annual Kid’s Holiday Party.

Opposite page, top to bottom: : A holiday tree and cart full of hand-selected gifts await their recipients in the community room at the Spirit Valley YWCA; AFSCME Retirees United members Mary Lee, Judie Atkins, Carol Gurst, Ron Krueger and Gloria Alt turn AFSCME t-shirts into tote bags for Fare for All customers; Local 3800 members Brad Sigal, Janaya Martin, Cherrene Horazuk and Marie Dino show off the toys they collected for the U of M’s Masonic Children’s Hospital.

Workers serve young moms with pride and compassion at Duluth YWCA

“This is the most rewarding job I’ve ever had,” says Takeesha Coon, Local 3558 steward. For the staff at the Spirit Valley YWCA in Duluth, going in to work is about a lot more than earning a paycheck. It’s about building community, helping people and getting working families and their kids off to a healthy start. “Having a strong AFSCME presence at work makes it even better,” she adds.

The stand-alone red brick building on the city’s West side houses an Early Childhood Education Center and the Young Mother’s Supportive Housing Program, a transitional housing program that helps moms between 16 and 21 get on their feet, into the workforce and on the path to a safe, secure future for themselves and their children.

“They come here and learn independence, life skills, parenting skills, self-motivation, just basically how to be a young mom. Because when you’re young you’re still trying to learn how to take care of yourself,” says Coon, a health and wellness case manager at the YWCA.

“We help them reach life goals. If they want to get back into college or finish high

school, if they want to get employment, get a license; any kind of goals they want to reach, we help them,” adds Nicole Williams, a former program resident who now works at the center as a youth advocate.

The program provides a life-changing leg up for young moms who are homeless or on the verge of homelessness, she says.

In December, the Spirit Valley staff went above and beyond to ensure a joyful holiday season for residents of the housing program. Workers set up a holiday tree in the building’s basement community room and spent their personal time shopping for and wrapping gifts for the young moms, kids and babies who reside in the housing program. Coons and Williams cooked up a holiday feast for the residents and invited former program participants,

community members and allies.

The pair spent the day whipping up huge batches of barbecue ribs, roasted chicken, homemade baked beans, potato salad, banana pudding and even sugar cookies for the kids to decorate. “I’m going to open up my own restaurant one day, and Nicole’s going to be my assistant,” Coons joked as they sliced boiled eggs into a steel tub of potatoes for the salad. “We’ve got a lot of gifts to spread around this building tonight! We’re just in the giving spirit.”

(Continued on page 12)



Left: Takeesha Coon reminisces about the moms and kids she’s worked with in the YWCA’s Young Moms Program.

Above: Youth advocate Nicole Williams brews sweet tea for the YWCA holiday party.

Local 599 Corrections Officer honored with AFSCME Never Quit Service Award

Story by Pete Levine
AFSCME International

Chattiness may seem like an unlikely job qualification for someone responsible for keeping the peace among some of Minnesota's most violent offenders, but in fact, it's one of the most essential.

"You have to be able to communicate. To be a good corrections officer, you have to be quick and smart and be a good communicator," explains Neyssen, the winner of a Never Quit Service Award. He firmly dispels the notion that being a successful corrections officer is about intimidation, though being 6'5", 275 pounds, with a booming voice doesn't hurt.

But over the course of his 26-year career at the Minnesota Correctional Facility-St. Cloud, Neyssen, a member of AFSCME Local 599 (Council 5), attributes his success to being able to communicate with the prisoners who reside in Baker House, the 174 offenders living in the cell hall under his charge, as well as with the larger St. Cloud prison population.

They are men whose crimes "run the gamut. We have people in here for everything from DUIs, to rape, to murder," he says.

Even though Neyssen is among the most seasoned COs at the more-than 1,000-person prison,

which serves as the sole intake center for all of Minnesota's male prisoners, the stress that accompanies the job and its inherent risks weigh heavily on him.

"There are a lot of us who suffer from mental health issues," acknowledges Neyssen, who points to incidents like the recent death on the job of another Minnesota CO, Joseph Gomm, that haunt him and his co-workers. "It beats you up mentally. We need to acknowledge the problem."

A 2017 survey by researchers at the University of California-Berkeley says COs "are exposed to violence at rates roughly comparable to military vets." For many, depression, anxiety and even thoughts of suicide are a way of life.

Despite the constant pressures of the job, Neyssen believes he's making a difference, savoring small victories as they come.

"It can be very rewarding. I appreciate every day when I can work with someone to have an 'aha moment,' or just to change their behavior," he says.

Neyssen's days adhere to a precisely regimented pattern: a 6:25 a.m. briefing, followed by a 6:45 breakfast for the inmates, after which prisoners attend classes or do vocational work, punctuated by cell counts, lunch, yard time and rest periods.

To some, the routine may seem boring, but Neyssen says adamantly, "Boring is good. Mundane days are your best."

Showing up to work and collecting a paycheck isn't enough for Neyssen, who views his job as having a direct impact on his community, since most of the men he works with will, one day, return to that community. Since he's been living and raising his family in St. Cloud, the stakes feel personal.

Neyssen is also a member of AFSCME's Racial, Social and Economic Justice Working Group, which aims to ensure that AFSCME remains a leader in promoting equality and respect both within our union and beyond, and to fostering a fair economic system that benefits all people.

The father of a 23-year-old son and a 20-year-old daughter, Neyssen knows that a strong union improves the world his children will inherit, and given those stakes, he doesn't plan on shutting up any time soon.

"It can be very rewarding. I appreciate every day when I can work with someone to have an 'aha moment,' or just to change their behavior."



An experience I will forever cherish



*David Yang, Child Protection
AFSCME Local 34*

My name is David Xai Yang. I am your union brother, Local 34's recording secretary, and a Hennepin County Child Protection Social Worker. I want to share my recent experience of taking a leave of absence from my job and going on lost-time as a political member organizer at our union, AFSCME Council 5.

I had a lot of fear leaving my job for about six months because of my love of working with my clients and how this absence would affect them. Thankfully, my fellow union members and my partner encouraged me to take advantage of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and I am forever grateful that I did.

The program that our AFSCME Council 5 ran this summer and fall is one that other councils are going to emulate because of its effectiveness.

While I was on leave, I had two roles. The first was as a member organizer. Teams of three to five of us would go to AFSCME members' work sites – libraries, waste management facilities, county offices, the Minnesota Zoo and many more. We talked to workers about how they feel about the union, the issues they're concerned about, contract negotiations and what we as a union can do. Our goal was to build stronger relationships with our fellow members, encourage non-members to join, and get workers more active in our union.

I met countless members who knew they were part of the union but didn't understand the importance of being represented by a union. I explained to members and non-members alike that being part of a union includes benefits of:

- Collective bargaining
- Workplace safety
- Higher wages
- A voice at work
- Job security
- Rewards and benefits
- Strength in numbers
- Equality

I felt a sense of accomplishment conveying these benefits to everyone, but there were some difficulties as well. One example is the recent Janus v. AFSCME Supreme Court ruling that affected unions' ability to collect agency fees.

By law, our union is required to provide representational services to everyone covered by a contract – even if they've elected not to join. Before the ruling, workers could choose whether or not to join the union, but they still had to pay agency fees to cover the cost of representation and contract negotiations (by law, agency fees cannot be used for political activities by the union – members may choose to contribute to our political activities by joining PEOPLE and making



David Yang and Starr Suggs knock doors for Tim Walz and Peggy Flanagan in Richfield

additional financial contributions to a separate fund). Now, because of Janus, workers covered by a union contract can choose to pay nothing, but still receive the raises, benefits and retirement security that we negotiate as a union.

Some of the workers I talked to were perfectly content about not paying for their union representation, but we still talked to them about the benefits of being an AFSCME member. We sought out and met all kinds of members and non-members to discuss the Supreme Court ruling, the power of working together, and the importance of joining or recommitting to our union.

As member organizers, we had a chance to hear about the injustices and unfair treatment facing some of our fellow AFSCME members, and connect them to Council 5 staff to resolve the issues.

We were able to develop relationships with the workers and really show them the value of having union representation.

The second part of my role was political

organizing, knocking doors for our endorsed candidates for Governor, the Minnesota House of Representatives and county and city candidates. We door-knocked in the heart of the humid summer all the way into the other extremes of Minnesota cold.

One of the most exciting things about this role was getting to meet candidates and elected officials. My most memorable experience was attending the Humphrey Mondale Dinner, where I had the chance to shake hands with New Jersey U.S. Senator Cory Booker, U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar, and U.S. Senator Tina Smith. This is an experience that I will never forget.

We had teams of member organizers in Duluth, St. Cloud, St. Paul and Bemidji doing this same work, and it paid off.

Our candidates for Governor, Lt. Governor, State Auditor, Attorney General and U.S. Senate all won their races, and we won a Democratic majority in the Minnesota House. The victories were especially strong in the regions where our teams had been

working. It was a statewide effort that we hope to expand with more members in the future.

Here in Minnesota, union busters won't be able to wage the kind of war on workers we've seen in Wisconsin and Iowa, because we flipped the House and elected leaders we know we can count on to protect and expand our rights, not the other way around.

I am going to remember this for the rest of my life because it was an important rebuke of the current 45th President. I played a role in limiting the President's power and positively affecting our state government. This is an experience that I will forever cherish.

My lost-time experience further enhanced and strengthened my love for being part of our union. I'll only work union from now on. I want to encourage everyone who doesn't know much about the union or is looking for change, to consider participating in our member organizing program.

Working together, we can make change

*Starr Suggs, Public Safety
AFSCME Local 3142*

My experience as a member organizer for AFSCME has been a dream come true!

I didn't know what to expect when I signed up to leave my job for six months to be trained in a completely different field than where I was working.

I learned how to solidify my values and share my passion for what I believe in. We gained skills in engaging and helping others and learning to be a great listener while visiting our members and non-members. I got to have meaningful conversations with all kinds of Minnesotans while door knocking for our AFSCME-endorsed candidates during election season.

Through the process, I discovered how important it is to share my own story, and how to really listen when others share with you.

I developed important relationships and friendships both personally and politically. I learned that I have a voice to speak up when things are not justifiable. I learned how important my vote is in Minnesota.

Working as a member organizer with AFSCME has given me hope, faith and peace in my life and future.

Working together, we can make change.



Hennepin County Parole Officers wins Corrections Association Award

Congratulations to Mitch Gundgovi of AFSCME Local 552! Gundgovi was honored with the Minnesota Corrections Association's Professional Achievement Award for 2018. He was nominated by DOC Deputy Commissioner Ron Solheid for his outstanding work helping former inmates transition into supervised release. Mitch's supervisors and coworkers praised his commitment to serving his clients with dignity and respect so they can successfully and meaningfully re-enter our communities.

"Mitch values public service. He supervises some of Minnesota's toughest parolees," says AFSCME Council 5 President Pat Guernsey, who's worked with Gundgovi for more than two decades.

"Mitch's commitment to helping parolees re-enter our communities safely and responsibly, along with his dedication to supporting his colleagues, make him an asset to our team and to our union. I'm proud to serve alongside him as a parole officer, and to call him my AFSCME brother," Guernsey adds.

Gundgovi says being part of AFSCME gives him the support and confidence to be able to serve the public with such dedication and grace. Intensive parole may be done between individual parolees and their parole officers, but it requires guidance and support from colleagues.

"I'm one of 17 and we're all out here trying to help create change," Gundgovi relates, speaking of his union team members. The workers depend on each other to succeed.

"Working in Intensive Supervised Release (ISR), I've got people supporting me, fellow colleagues, AFSCME members. It's just a

positive environment that I feel every day when I go to work," he says. "I basically view everybody I work with in the agency like a brother and sister. I learn from everybody. They help me on a day-to-day basis. I don't do it alone. I appreciate knowing I have my fellow probation and parole officers with me. We're all in this together, helping people with their lives."

The MCA award is especially meaningful because of the impact Gundgovi's work has on the clients he serves and the communities where we all live.

"This type of work is not easy, it's not for everyone. It's really difficult to plug into other people's dysfunction, but the reward at the end of the day is when you can help somebody do things a little bit differently and affect some change in their life so they can be law abiding citizens," he says.

The expectations of ISR participants are high. Unlike other probation units, parolees in the program see officers face to face three times a week.

The members of Local 552 work directly with the parolees, and their work helps offenders to rehabilitate and learn in the community.

"They have a lot of contact with me at all times. I can see and measure change and progress. It impacts them very formally," Gundgovi says.

Communication, engagement and relationship building are key skills Gundgovi has honed in his work as a parole officer in the ISR program.

"I believe that the purpose of corrections, you can look at it three ways. Certainly there's an aspect where we have to be punitive. And then there's education and rehabilitation. Ideally you have all three elements working to help people change their lives. In intense parole, we have

reduced caseloads, so we can have intense one-on-one contact.

"We can see them and act and react right away. It's great for the public. Rather than spending money on incarceration, we're giving people a second chance. It allows the parolees to rehabilitate and learn in the community while

holding them accountable for their actions," he says.

Receiving the MCA award has reinvigorated Gundgovi's commitment to serving his parolees and the public. He says it's an honor to be acknowledged, but the real reward is knowing he's helping rehabilitate parolees to better themselves and strengthen our communities, and knowing his AFSCME colleagues have his back and share his values.

"We really want to do the best we can to keep the parolees in the community, following rules so they can assimilate back into society to the best of their ability.

"That's the goal: get people back in so they can be productive members of our communities - givers, not takers. I think that's what we all strive to do."



Deputy Commissioner of Corrections Ron Solheid, Local 552 member Mitch Gundgovi and Commissioner of Corrections Tom Roy

Taking our 'Rise Up!' Message to Vegas

Christina Eichorn, Human Services
AFSCME Local 34

At the AFSCME International Conference in Boston this year, we remembered that, despite the attacks on labor unions, AFSCME will and does Rise Up! Taking the 'Rise Up!' message to Las Vegas, AFSCME International gathered over 160 volunteer member organizers (VMOs) from around the country to share the benefits of collective bargaining.

In the midterm elections, Nevada elected a new governor, who has publically shared that he will sign a collective bargaining bill, one that will give over 20,000 state employees the right to come together and be a voice at the bargaining table. AFSCME has been there, door knocking for Governor-Elect Sisolak, and talking to members and potential members about what it truly means to bargain and gain a contract with employers.

To share this message, member to member, AFSCME hosted over 160 members from around the nation (Puerto Rico and Alaska were in the house!) as volunteer member organizers. Our own MN Council 5 sent eight members from across the state, me included. Together, we learned and shared with each other the impacts that collective bargaining has had on our own lives and in our communities. We heard from organizers who had just recently become unionized in Chicago, and from the correctional officers in New Mexico, who came together to fight for fair wages.

Coming from a well-established Local, much of the gains that many locals are seeking are already written into our contracts, providing stable avenues for us to stand together and share our voices collectively. Local 34's current contract already includes every example of union language that was given in our workshops, and so does the contract we ratified for 2019-2021. These are items such as:

- Access to employees: We are able to put on events like labor lunches, thanks to language granting our union access to employees.
- New Employee Orientation: Our number one way of introducing people to our union is protected by language in our contract.

But that wasn't all this conference set out to do. We went out and talked to people working for the state, who currently don't even have the right to a contract for their work – union or not.

I spoke with a Nevada corrections officer who shared concerns about her coworkers being fired, with no appeal or grievance process, just in time for the holidays. She shared worries about safety, as minimum staffing continues to be set by the employer, and watching that ratio get scarier and more dangerous, for staff and inmates. She spoke about "the raise [her] director got" for her and her coworkers.

I shared with her the true power of bargaining. We started with the truth about the raise, and that AFSCME takes a holistic approach to representing public employees that extends beyond the contract, including negotiating funding for raises for state employees. We also screen, endorse, and campaign for policy makers who will do right by the workers.

We talked about bargaining for safe staffing requirements, especially after we lost CO Parise this September, as well as the



AFSCME family coming together for his family. We talked about our fight to keep private prisons out of Minnesota, and our influence at the capital to address the real impacts state policies have on our work and our community.

All of these gains we've have been able to secure because we came together. Our contract language that was fought for by our predecessors that we continue to defend, using our voice to influence our community policies at all levels, and coming together as a community are all ways that union activism has been impactful for me.

No matter what stage of the game you're in, from a Local that has been around longer than I have been alive, to a Local that just chartered, AFSCME is looking at all angles to best set our communities up for success, and that is only possible because our members continue to Rise Up!

- Union Leave: This made it much easier for me to participate in the conference, without giving up my PTO.

St. Paul workers win \$15/hour

In a major victory for low-wage workers, the St. Paul City Council unanimously approved a city ordinance mandating a \$15 per hour minimum wage, with no penalty for tipped workers.

AFSCME was part of a strong coalition of labor, community and faith organizations that spent over a year working to get the ordinance passed. St. Paul Mayor Melvin Carter proudly signed the new minimum wage requirements into law the same evening it was passed by the City Council.

Tabitha Mitchell, a St. Paul resident and community education worker for the City of St. Paul (AFSCME Local 1842), provided heartfelt testimony to the City Council, emphasizing the fact that many of the workers we rely on for crucial public services struggle to pay their bills and meet their basic needs.

“The people we pay the least are the exact same people we rely on to care for our children and elders,” Mitchell says. “How can anyone be expected to do their best work - to serve our community and lift people up - when they’re trapped in the same systems of poverty as the people they’re caring for? It’s a hard reality that too many folks work long days at two or three jobs just to make ends meet.”

Mitchell says a city’s minimum wage reflects the value residents and policymakers place on crucial public services intended to lift up our families and communities, and on the workers who provide those services.

“Raising St. Paul’s minimum wage to \$15 an hour won’t just make life better for low-wage workers,” Mitchell says. “It will improve workers’ ability to provide the community-enriching care and services we rely on so much.”

Spirit Valley YWCA

(Continued from page 6)

Upstairs in the Early Childhood Education Center, AFSCME members care for dozens of children ranging in age from infant to five years old.

Theresa Fox, a 22-year employee who worked at the YWCA when they organized to join AFSCME in 1999, has been a steward for Local 3558 for more than 15 years. She says her union job at the child care center has made it possible for her to get ahead. Fox glows with pride as she talks about her personal journey while working at the YWCA.

“First I was a toddler teacher and I had ten students, then I was the infant teacher and I had 16. I started as an aide and went to college while I was working here, then became a teacher and raised my kid – he went through the daycare here. He’s sixteen now,” she says. Her coworker April, a floating teacher, started working at the YWCA in 2006. She says she left to work at a non-union child care center for a few years, but came back to Spirit Valley in 2016 because she missed the benefits of working union. “I was excited to come back. Where I was, I loved my position, but our manager was like night and day – you never knew what you were going to get each day. It was really difficult. We were promised raises but we had to fight for them every year. It was pretty bad,” she explains.

At the Spirit Valley YWCA, the union spirit is strong. The members make up their own bargaining unit of Local 3558, a group of Duluth-area private sector organizations and nonprofits whose employees are represented by AFSCME.

“Having my union behind me makes me feel so good,” Coons says. “Knowing I’ve got support, we all have support - it makes doing this work easier and more rewarding. It inspires me to organize more workers so we can help improve more lives.”

Cover photos, clockwise from bottom left: AFSCME Never Quit Award winner Rick Neyssen; Local 3800’s Janaya Martin and her children Anevay, Quinten and Kingston make cookies with other union families; Local 3800 hosts a holiday cookies and crafts party for union kids; Local 3558’s April Maalis; Local 3558 members Felicia Fanaselle, Rhonda Brogdon, Takeesha Coon, April Maalis, Porcha Shadd and Kate Mensing meet Santa at the AFL-CIO Community Services Kid’s Holiday Party.

Photo, inside cover: Day on the Hill 2018