

Stepping

UP

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

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ONE STRONG, UNITED VOICE FOR MINNESOTA WORKERS



Turning the Capitol AFSCME green

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Tracy Alsaker of Local 744, who works at the Minneapolis Veterans Home, takes in the crowd at AFSCME Council 5's annual Day on the Hill. More than 1,000 members packed the first floor and both tiers of the Capitol rotunda for a rally, then asked their own legislators to pass laws that respect hardworking Minnesotans.



(Left) Correctional Sgt. Rick Neyssen testifies against another attempt to reopen the Appleton prison as part of the 2018 legislative agenda. (Right) An unusual bargaining process in Ramsey County involves sharing personal stories. Members Margaret Berger, Sara Nott and Dawn Flores of Local 151 celebrate after their contracts overwhelmingly pass.

Pages 5 and 6

We are not afraid

Moving ahead together in power and solidarity

We've all heard a lot about a case called Janus, but you won't hear much about it from me: It's been a done deal since Election Day of 2016.

As a union, AFSCME Council 5 is moving on. While it's true a negative U.S. Supreme Court ruling will make our entire nation "right-to-work" for public employees, it won't kill us, so what are we afraid of? We only need to look south to our brothers and sisters in Iowa to see a strong example of how to beat back "right to work" and thrive. If there's a problem, that's on us.

And we are not afraid. We have the right to form unions, organize and stand up for what we believe in as workers. That's what our country is all about: freedom. And we'll never give it up.

Fighting for our rights is in our DNA. AFSCME as a whole formed in 1937. We've got a local that turns 100 next year: Local 66 was formed in 1919 under the AFL before it merged with the CIO.

What's been consistent all along is that workers believed in collectively exercising their rights. They talked to each other, they stood together, and they recognized that an activist is not just Cesar Chavez or Norma Rae. It's any individual willing to stand up for anybody besides themselves, and damn anyone who thinks they have the ability to take that freedom away from us.

Our contracts, our grievance procedures and our pensions all exist because we organized. They are the byproducts of strong unions, not the other way around.

Before unions, our civil rights stopped the moment we walked on the job. The AFSCME Members' Bill of Rights was created to change that, and it still informs everything we do together as a union.

In what other organization than a union can you find these kind of rights enshrined? The workers who came before us organized around these rights. They shed actual blood, sweat and tears to earn the benefits we have today, and we've fought to keep them. We are standing on their shoulders, and we will not let their work go to waste.

CIVIL RIGHTS ARE WORKERS' RIGHTS

It's time for us to rejoin the Civil Rights Movement. Fifty years ago, the movement helped striking sanitation workers in Memphis after two workers were crushed to death on the job. Their brothers in AFSCME Local 1733 risked everything and went on

strike, carrying signs with the powerful words "I AM A MAN." Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was killed while helping fight for our freedom.

The condition of this nation is no better today than it was back then. After the November 2016 election, parts of America bought into the rhetoric that it was OK to be racist, OK to be a Nazi. It became publicly acceptable to attack our rights and take them away.

Today, there is more hatred, more anger and more absolute betrayal of humanity than ever. That is unacceptable. It is unacceptable for any union to talk about the collective and then let anybody fall through the cracks, suffering alone.

Civil rights, workers' rights and human rights are all the same thing. We need to stand up, look ahead and preserve humanity. Two months ago, hundreds of thousands of women across the nation marched. A few weeks ago, hundreds of thousands of students stood up and walked out.

When are you going to stand up?

THIS IS A CALL TO ACTION

We only have until November 6th. We must stand up, fight and elect the person who will protect collective bargaining, who will protect our freedom to organize in a union, who will protect our pensions, wages and health care, not someone who's going to take it away.

If you stay home, if you don't vote to protect your rights and freedoms, it's done.

All organizing is relational. Find someone you can talk to. Network your locals. Everyone you have a relationship with should understand what's at stake.

Door knock. Call. Vote.

We have the right to stand up for what we believe in, to organize and form a union. We have to defend these freedoms everywhere, to stand up and say no more loss of human rights, no more loss of human dignity, no more loss of person or place, no more loss of freedom.

Together, we are strong, we are loud, and we are unstoppable.



John P. Westmoreland
Executive Director

AFSCME Members' Bill of Rights

1. Membership: No person otherwise eligible for membership in this union shall be denied membership, on a basis of unqualified equality, because of race, creed, color, national origin, sex, age, sexual orientation, disability or political belief.
2. Freedom of speech: Members shall suffer no impairment of freedom of speech concerning the operations of this union. Active discussion of union affairs shall be encouraged and protected within this organization.
3. Freedom from bosses: Members shall have the right to conduct the internal affairs of the union free from employer domination.
4. Fair elections: Members shall have the right to fair and democratic elections at all levels of the union. This includes due notice of nominations and elections, equal opportunity for competing candidates and proper election procedures constitutionally specified.
5. Hold office: Members shall have an equal right to run for and hold office, subject only to constitutionally specified qualifications, uniformly applied.

6. Review financial records: Members shall have the right to a full and clear accounting of all union funds at all levels. Such accounting shall include, but not be limited to, periodic reports to the membership by the appropriate fiscal officers and periodic audits by officers elected for that purpose or by independent auditors not otherwise connected with the union.
7. Vote: Members shall have the right to full participation, through discussion and vote, in the decision-making processes of the union, and to pertinent information needed for the exercise of this right. This right shall specifically include decisions concerning the acceptance or rejection of collective bargaining contracts, memoranda of understanding, or any other agreements affecting their wages, hours, or other terms and conditions of employment. All members shall have an equal right to vote and each vote cast shall be of equal weight.
8. Due process: Charges against a member or officer shall be specific and shall be only on grounds provided in the International Constitution. Accused members or officers shall have the right to a fair trial with strict adherence to due process. The accused shall be considered innocent until proven guilty.



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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Stepping UP

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David Garmany and Diane Moe are Minneapolis park directors who help lead one of AFSCME's newest locals.

New local makes parks happen

Workers who make sure parks in Minneapolis are filled with sports, activities and fun year-round are among Council 5's newest members.

The group that includes park directors, athletic directors, youth program specialists, IT, and event, volunteer and natural resources coordinators for the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board are now AFSCME Local 3279.

"We're the public face of the Minneapolis Park and Recreation division," says local president David Garmany, the Windom Park director. "We're the people the public engages with most directly.

The workers had been part of the Minnesota Professional Employees Association for 25 years, but learned the MPEA board planned to kick them out after they voted for a different board president candidate, Garmany says. He adds there was resistance to giving the park workers an additional seat on the board that their membership size entitled them to.

Local vice president Eric Cherland, director of Pearl Park, says their contract had expired, and workers worried whether it would be honored if they lost representation.

The parks workers decided to go out on their own or transfer membership to a different union. They auditioned several, including AFSCME. The vote to join Council 5 was unanimous, Garmany says.

"Sometimes the things that seem to goof you up can be an opportunity," says Diane Moe, Pershing Park director and Local 3279 secretary. "It turned out to be a good thing."

Up until that point, "We were in survival mode," Garmany says. "We were hoping to actually have some form of union representation. In the short-term, we just wanted to find a safe harbor. We chose the best harbor available to us.

"On every front, from a disciplinary situation to an arbitration AFSCME has taken over, to contract negotiations, we have been amazed at the support and professionalism that we are deriving."

The local is coming out of several tumultuous years that included the Great Recession, reorganizations, and a big reclassification. That made members so active, the local is at more than 90 percent full membership, and nearly half routinely turn out at general membership meetings. Now they're negotiating their first contract as an AFSCME local.

State Contracts Approved

The Minnesota Legislature just approved contracts for state public workers.

Both chambers overwhelmingly approved the two-year deals Monday, March 26: the Senate by a vote of 56-10 and the House by a vote of 93-33. The contracts were headed to Gov. Dayton for his signature at press time.

About 30,000 public workers will get a 2 percent raise retroactive to July 1, 2017; and 2.25 percent on July 1, 2018; plus step increases both years. Those workers include the AFSCME Council 5 multi-unit, Unit 8 (corrections) and Unit 25 (radio communication operators).

The contract not only holds the line on health insurance costs for workers, it improves health and dental benefits; includes a pilot program for people with diabetes; and offers six weeks of paid parental leave to bond with newborn and adopted children.

The Senate also approved a plan 66-0 Monday to make public employee pensions sustainable for decades through shared sacrifice and responsibility by the employer, workers and retirees; the House did not take action. The Minnesota Management and Budget commissioner has warned that delaying full funding for pensions will cost more in the long run.

"The tone and tenor, I've gone through four or five different contract negotiations," Garmany says. "This is the first time I've seen passion. This is the first time I've seen the person representing us speak with authority and challenge management, to the point where in our second meeting they were yelling at each other, which I thought was great. It's great somebody gets to yell at management and it doesn't have to be one of us because we still have to be in a relationship."

"We've got a strong voice and support from our union to negotiate contracts, help resolve disputes like grievances and tackle other work-related issues," Cherland adds. All three are just starting to realize how big of a family they've joined with AFSCME, and the kind of support they can count on from fellow members, too.

MLK stories, family ties inspire civil rights passion in AFSCME member

Renardo Straughter grew up in Memphis, Tenn., hearing his mom's stories about marching with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at the peak of the Civil Rights Movement.

"They marched a lot back then. Everyone who was oppressed back then, it was just what you had to do," the Local 66 member says.

Those same stories have inspired the St. Louis County financial services worker to carry on his mother Elaine's fight for equality and justice. She participated in multiple marches in 1967 and '68, just before she graduated from high school. She marched with Dr. King on the first day of the Memphis Sanitation Strike, and watched him deliver his famous "Mountaintop" speech on the eve of his assassination.

One of Renardo's mother's most heart-wrenching stories involves marching with Dr. King past the Orpheum Theatre in Memphis. People on the balcony threw jars of urine down onto the marchers.

"I think a lot of people can't forget the things they've endured, all the hate," Renardo says. "There's a lot of anger, a lot of fear still in those people, and a lot of the things they're angry about. It's systematic stuff like predatory lending and redlining."

Today, Renardo and his wife Angie (a public health



Renardo and Angie Straughter

nurse and fellow Local 66 member) live in a cozy house in Virginia, Minn., with their three kids and two cats. A basketball hoop stands in for a welcome sign. Angie is white, Renardo is black. They both know none of this would be possible without the strength and sacrifices of marchers like Dr. King and Renardo's mom.

"Some of Dr. King's sacrifices made it so that I could marry a white woman and not get killed," Renardo notes. "And the unions helped with a lot of that, too," Angie adds.

But in today's political climate, they say, it seems like we're going backward. Angie says fake news and

President Trump's attacks on the media are silencing our voices and dividing working people, and that's heightening racial tensions.

In their predominantly white community, she says, "having the union for Renardo, as a black man, is fantastic. I feel more secure because I know things are going to be fair for him."

"There's a long way to go, as far as things getting better," Renardo says.

It makes him proud to know he's a member of the same union Dr. King fought alongside during the Sanitation Strike and the Civil Rights Movement, and that AFSCME is still fighting to make sure every working person gets an even playing field.

"We all deserve a living wage where you can afford things. Health care, paid time off, all of the benefits a family really needs," Renardo says. That's why he's getting more active in AFSCME.

"I wouldn't want Minnesota to be a 'right-to-work' state where they push unions out. I want to help protect workers' rights. There's someone fighting to protect my rights. I want to keep that fight going.

"Regardless of what adversity you face, you've got to keep trying and not let it break you," he says.

AFSCME raises Capitol ‘roof’ on Day on the Hill

More than 1,000 AFSCME Council 5 members from across Minnesota turned our Capitol green Tuesday, March 20, for Day on the Hill.

Chanting “Whose Freedom? Our Freedom!” workers stood up for their freedom to form strong unions and to speak up for themselves, their families and their communities. Members also visited their own senators and representatives to help shape a legislative agenda that respects hardworking Minnesotans.

Workers are standing up to big corporations and wealthy extremists who want to strip away decades of union progress in winning strong contracts, pensions and grievance procedures.

“They’re here, and they’re going to take our freedom,” Council 5 executive director John P. Westmoreland said. “If you don’t stand up, you’ve just desecrated everything everybody else died to earn and protect.”

Since the election of November 2016, freedom is under attack like never before, he said. Westmoreland called on AFSCME to rejoin the Civil Rights Movement and help show that civil rights, workers’ rights and human rights are the same thing.

Council 5 president Judy Wahlberg says despite the constant attacks, AFSCME members are facing the future with hope, not fear.

“Today we are stronger together than ever,” Wahlberg said. “We have record membership. We have record numbers in PEOPLE. That’s thanks to your hard work. We did it together.

“No matter what happens, we’re not giving up our voice,” she said.

MnDOT maintenance worker Bryan Kirsch of Local 221 called on members to door knock, talk to people and vote.

“We need somebody in office who will protect our rights, not take them away,” Kirsch said. “If we don’t do anything, nothing will change. I don’t want to end up like Iowa or Wisconsin. We’ve got to do something to stop them.”

Workers shared stories about how having strong unions has bettered their lives, from a pregnant couple depending on health care and paid parental leave, to a MnDOT worker fighting for safer roads and bridges, to a correctional officer fighting for improved staffing to keep workers and inmates safe, to having a secure retirement.

PERA worker Denna Thurmond of Local 2829 said she’s 62 and near retirement. She says members must hold lawmakers accountable to pass a pension bill that took three years to create. It passed the Legislative Commission on Pensions and Retirement on a bipartisan vote and sailed through the Senate 66-0, but awaits House action..

Members at DOTH asked legislators to: protect retirement security, retain and train child protection workers, support local control, invest in safe staffing and transportation, support worker rights and approve state public worker contracts, which we won less than a week later on March 26. (See page 3 for details.)

Clockwise from top: Amorette Robeck, Local 34; Jacqueline Terry of L22; the packed Rotunda; retirees Judie Atkins and Gloria Alt; Joe Sockel of L221 reads from the AFSCME Members’ Bill of Rights; Andrea Lazo-Rice, L34; and Council 5 executive director John P. Westmoreland.



Watch the video at <https://tinyurl.com/yd6c3bfr>.
View and download photos at <https://www.flickr.com/gp/afscmemn/vc4K89>.



Council 5's packed legislative agenda

Here's what AFSCME members are asking lawmakers to do to improve life for workers, our families and our communities:

DEFEND WORKER FREEDOMS

Working people deserve the same freedom that corporate CEOs have: the right to negotiate a fair return for our hard work and to provide for our families. Unfortunately, these freedoms are under attack by corporate CEOs and the politicians who do their bidding. We won't let the super-rich further rig the system against working people.

- Support the freedom of public workers to form strong unions and speak up together for ourselves and our communities.
- Oppose recertification and any effort that makes it harder to maintain union representation.

REINVEST IN THE WORK WE DO

Minnesota's economic forecast shows a budget surplus, thanks to Gov. Dayton's work to invest in a better Minnesota for all of us, not just a select few. We are asking the Legislature to work with him and give all state workers the freedom to get ahead.

- Support Gov. Dayton's budget to reinvest in the work we do and in the communities where we live, including ongoing funding to Local Government Aid and County Program Aid.
- Oppose tax breaks for billionaires and big businesses who are trying to rig the rules against working people.

PROTECT RETIREMENT SECURITY

Workers who have dedicated their lives to public service deserve the freedom to retire with dignity and respect.

- Support the 2018 Omnibus Retirement Bill (SF 2620 and HF 3053) as introduced.
- Defend the freedom for workers to keep defined-benefit pensions.
- Oppose any attempt to take away our secure pensions and force us into risky savings plans or 401(k) hybrids.

PROTECT CHILDREN

AFSCME child protection workers strive to protect Minnesota's children and want all kids to have the freedom to grow to their full potential. But workers are so short-staffed and caseloads so heavy, our biggest fear is a child coming to harm because we don't have the needed time or resources to protect them. The Legislature must invest in child protection and foster care.

- Help counties hire, train and retain child protection workers (Support House File 2996 and Senate File 2979).
- Direct the Department of Human Services to recommend caseload standards for screeners, investigators and caseworkers.



(Top) Child protection workers Melissa Dolan, Eric Jayne and David Yang and Council 5 legislative representative Ethan Vogel testify before a state Senate committee. They're fighting for adequate staffing and training to attract and retain workers to keep kids safe.

(Left) AFSCME members and retirees gather to watch as a bipartisan bill designed to strengthen our pension systems for decades clears an important first hurdle. It's since passed the Senate and awaits House action.

- Fund adequate staffing to respond to reports of abuse in the time required by law.

SUPPORT SAFE STAFFING

- Clocking in should never mean putting your life on the line. That's why AFSCME members who work with violent patients and inmates are coming together for safe and adequate staffing:
- Invest in safe staffing at state-run security hospitals, group homes, psychiatric and correctional facilities.
- Support Gov. Dayton's \$1.5 billion bonding proposal to improve safety at public facilities where AFSCME members work:
 - \$5.7 million for a safer admissions unit at Anoka Regional Treatment Center
 - \$13 million to add residential treatment facilities at MSOP
 - \$16 million to add 50 transition beds at the St. Peter Sex Offender Program
 - \$5.2 million to add 60 prison beds at MCF Lino Lakes
 - \$16.2 million for plumbing and ventilation upgrades at MCF St. Cloud
 - \$40 million to repair and renew prisons

INVEST IN TRANSPORTATION

The Legislature keeps authorizing extra borrowing to build new roads without funds for maintenance. That's like buying a car and never changing the oil. They're creating crumbling infrastructure

and dangerous potholes. We need a dedicated, continuous funding source.

- Budget for investment in our infrastructure and the workers who maintain, design and inspect it. There is no federal funding for plowing snow, patching potholes or inspecting bridges.
- Dedicate new revenue for a 10-year plan to fix crumbling roads and bridges, expand access to transit, and create safer bicycle and pedestrian routes in communities across the state.

SUPPORT LOCAL CONTROL

AFSCME supports local governments' freedom to make life better for residents. We oppose efforts by the Legislature to strip local governments of their authority to pass earned sick and safe time, paid parental leave and higher minimum wages.

- Oppose all efforts to enact local interference laws (SF 580/HF 600).
- Support local governments that raise minimum wages and require paid parental leave and earned sick and safe time.

Find more details about all of these issues at <http://afscmemn.org/issues>.





Ramsey County workers celebrate an overwhelming vote to approve their contracts. (Front row, left to right): Griffin Hughes, Local 8; Gina Soggiorno, L1076; Margaret Berger and Sara Nott, L151. (Back row): AFSCME field rep Suzanne Kocurek; Mike Schaeppi, L1935; Nambago Kalema and Eric Praml, L707; Linda Oeltjenbruns, and Dawn Flores, L151; Susan Rowan and Joan Brown, L8; and field rep Jeff Dains. (Below) Rowan counts ballots.

Stories Shape Unusual Bargaining Process

Imagine looking around a room full of supervisors and fellow AFSCME members, knowing you're about to speak publicly and share an emotional story.

The management negotiations team sits poker-faced.

And to raise the stakes even higher, your story could lead to a contract with better benefits and working conditions for everyone.

"Your voice shakes when you talk because who are you? It's a room of 50 people," recalls Douangta Vang-Sitcler, a Ramsey County public health nurse and Local 8 steward. "You need managers to acknowledge this is their workforce, and they make decisions that affect how workers feel when they come to work.

"They don't have a choice but to listen," she adds. "We take advantage of that. We have the floor."

Sharing stories is an essential part of interest-based bargaining, an unusual and intense process that involves even more give-and-take than traditional bargaining. Instead of exchanging proposals, the negotiating teams for workers and employers share a list of their interests. They discuss each interest and why it's worth negotiating. Then workers share personal stories about why certain contract language or benefits are crucial.

"Emotionally, people respond to things," says Tim Blase, Local 8's chief steward and an assistant probation officer at the Ramsey County Juvenile Detention Center. "There's a human element to it. Management needs to understand how we are affected by contract language or policies. It affects our lives and our families and loved ones, too."

It was through interest-based bargaining – combined with strong unity and months of planning – that Ramsey County workers won their best new contract in years.

Not every interest listed during this type of bargaining makes it into the contract. As workers learn more about each other's working conditions and needs, workers band together to solve the most pressing issues.

"It's not just one group's issue anymore – it's AFSCME and Ramsey County's issues," says Blase, who spoke up for some Local 8 custodians on the overnight shift. The county planned to move them to days, where they'd lose their shift differential and have to pay to park.

"I gave an emotional appeal to management: You guys don't understand how this is affecting their lives," Blase says. "We're looking at thousands of dollars these people are going to lose. If I lost thousands of dollars a year, I'd have a hard time

paying my bills – and these are some of our lowest-paid members. To do that to somebody is just wrong."

The county decided that the differential would be grandfathered in for this contract. Blase and Local 1935 treasurer Steve Reeves pushed for paid parental leave, which the county didn't offer when Reeves had children.

"I drained my vacation right down," says Reeves, a maintenance and operations worker in the parks and ice arenas. "I would have been able to spend more time with my family if I had had paid parental leave. What happens if there's an emergency later? What do you do then?"

Workers also won general pay increases, along with extra pay to help retain correctional health nurses.



"We train correctional nurses in, they leave. We train them in, they leave," Vang-Sitcler says. "Who suffers? It's the clients we serve, it's the public we serve. These women and men do really hard work. How do we support them being there?"

Other issues included preventing mandated, unscheduled overtime shifts at the county nursing home; increasing tuition reimbursement and improving transparency so more people can get the benefit; and trying to win contract language to give preference to qualified internal job candidates and address racial disparities.

Interest-based bargaining has its pros and cons. Workers describe it as laborious, long and even tedious.

"Emotionally, it was really hard," Vang-Sitcler says. "The membership doesn't know the level of sacrifice, of vulnerability, of preparation."

But Reeves says it also can be empowering and lead to more solidarity. "This is for the betterment of the county, making the county a better employer, giving better benefits to attract and retain people."

And making the county better for workers makes it better for the whole community.

Communication and unity win strong contracts

Five Ramsey County locals won what they're calling their best contract in years, thanks to months of solidarity and planning.

The three-year contracts include 2.5 percent raises each year; paid parental leave; increased tuition reimbursement; safety leave and expanded sick leave; and largely hold the line on health care costs. The contracts cover 2,180 workers.

"It's awesome!" says Local 8 steward Susan Rowan. "It's a good contract. It's nice to see that many voters come out."

"I was excited," says Peggy Bloomstrand, a Local 151 chief steward and Executive Board member. "It reinforces my decision to want to work for Ramsey County and continue to make a difference. It makes us feel valuable and it affirms the work is hard, but it's rewarding."

All the Ramsey County locals (except county attorneys and public defenders) bargain together: Local 8 general unit, professional unit and public health nurses/registered nurses; Local 151 general unit, LPNs and Workforce Solutions; Local 707, Lake Owasso Residence; Local 1076, Ramsey County Care Center; and Local 1935 parks and recreation.

Months before negotiations even started, these locals took steps to build unity and support.

Local 8's Rowan says they met early on and surveyed workers, which reminded everyone it was contract time and got them fired up.

Local 707 had such strong interest in its election, 100 percent of workers became full AFSCME members so they could vote. That engagement continued into negotiations and the contract vote.

Local 151 increased its outreach, member education and the number of events, including pizza lunches, labor history talks, AFSCME legislative updates and tailgating at St. Paul Saints games. It increased communication with members and updated them regularly on negotiations. Last summer, Local 151 designed and bought new T-shirts. Membership has grown from 57 percent to 79 percent.

"We've become visible to our members but also more visible to management, and they've become more aware of the power we've got," says vice president Linda Oeltjenbruns, who co-chairs the negotiations team with Local 1935 president Jim Kurkowski. "People are interested. They want to take part."

A power outage that shut down the Government Center East was a turning point. When workers from Locals 8 and 151 arrived to work, they were locked out. The county refused to pay them and made them take vacation days.

Workers were so outraged, they overflowed the next union meeting wearing AFSCME green and walked three blocks to the courthouse chanting, "Pay us now, pay us now," Local 151 president Dawn Flores recalls. They won new contract language to cover future emergencies like this.

"A lot of people have this conception that the union is this thing somewhere that does stuff, it's the Executive Board," Flores says. "We try to get the message out we're all in this together."

"We are all the union," adds Local 151 Executive Board member Margaret Berger.



Sewing on a button, giving hope



A Saint Paul resident pulls a red winter coat out of her folding shopping cart at the West 7th Community Center and holds it up so volunteers can take a closer look.

The zipper pull is broken, Sue Urban explains. Can they fix it? She hands it to Michelle Ooley for inspection as several other women with sewing machines hem jeans and pants nearby.

Ooley assures her they'll try to repair the coat, plus three more with broken zippers or ripped pockets that Urban brought in.

invisible, know that they matter.

More than 200 volunteers from across the region – including members of Ooley's AFSCME Local 2829 and coworkers at the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency – provide free mending in the Twin Cities for people in need. They hem pants and skirts, mend torn seams and patch holes for people at food shelves, missions, schools and community centers.

"A lot of times, these are the only pair of pants people have got and they're donated, so they may not fit or be too long or torn," Ooley says. "If you have clothes that fit, you feel good. To think I'm helping

someone succeed is very humbling, very gratifying."

Ooley got the idea when she volunteered to mend clothes at Union Gospel Mission during MPCA's Lafayette Park Earth Week.

A man named Jim walked up with a bathrobe with a ripped seam and a donated jacket. He told Ooley he'd never been able to zip it. Ooley didn't have a zipper, so she asked Jim if she could bring his jacket home to mend.

He was shocked someone would do

that for him. When she met Jim a few weeks later to return his jacket, he cried and gave her a big hug. It was the first time he'd been able to close his winter jacket.

"When I went back inside, I had goosebumps," Ooley says. "I thought, we have to do something. There's a need here that's not being met. I want to let people know they matter."

One of her colleagues at MPCA, Mel Preczewski,

who's vice president of their local, says Ooley gives her entire heart and soul to building community, hope and kindness.

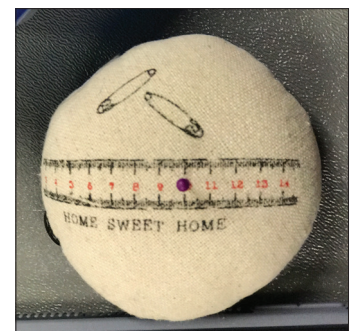
"Michelle represents what so many AFSCME workers do," Preczewski says. "We are more than our jobs; we are givers and changers of the communities we live and work in. Michelle applied the principles of our agency – reduce and reuse – and found a way to do even more for the people of Minnesota than she already does with her job as a public servant."

Today Mobile Menders has a dozen agency partners. People in several other cities and states want to start chapters. Next up, Ooley wants to teach

people how to mend their own clothes and to work with the VA to adapt clothing for vets with disabilities. She also hopes to help domestic violence survivors and to buy a truck and fill it with sewing machines to be truly mobile.

"I think the reason this resonates with so many people right now is it's something so simple," Ooley says. "In the climate we're in, we need something positive to get us through everything that's going on in the outside world."

Want to help? Mobile Menders needs monetary donations and sewing supplies.
<https://mobilemenders.weebly.com/>.



(Top left) AFSCME Local 2829 member Michelle Ooley started Mobile Menders to offer free mending to the community. (Top right) Several volunteers do repairs at the West 7th Community Center. (Below) Saint Paul resident Sue Urban (right) brings Ooley coats for mending, plus gloves and scarves to donate to those in need.

"I thought, before we buy new coats, we'll see what they can do," Urban says. "I think it's great. If you go to a tailor, they're going to charge you a lot of money. These would have either sat in the closet needing work, or I would have had to throw them away. I hate to trash them."

Helping people get more use out of their clothing and diverting it from landfills is part of the mission behind Ooley's Mobile Menders. So is letting our most vulnerable people, people who can feel



MnDOT worker saves driver from freezing to death

Jake Tillotson was out patrolling the rural highways for MnDOT in the middle of a frozen night when he spotted something a little off.

The AFSCME Local 604 member saw a twisted, missing section of guardrail on Highway 47 north of Ogilvie. He turned around, figuring he'd put out barrels or cones to keep other drivers safe until workers could fix the rail.

"Then I saw a vehicle out in the swamp," he says. "It looked like it had been there for a while. There was frost all over it. Normally you'll see a bunch of tracks from people walking to it and from it several times. There weren't any tracks. That's when I figured I'd better go and check it out."

The old Ford pickup had rolled several times, landing on the driver's side. Tillotson peered into the frosted windows and saw somebody inside.

Tillotson is part of MnDOT's Dawn Patrol, a team of workers who routinely patrol 150 to 200 miles a night from October through April. They add a much-needed layer of safety in our coldest, most dangerous months.

The Dawn Patrol functions as our on-the-ground, early warning system for bad weather. If a bridge deck is getting icy, a Dawn Patrol worker will grab a plow. When the roads get bad, they alert supervisors to call in a crew. Their reports help inform 511 road condition reports.

They work hand in hand with state troopers and deputies. They clear roads of debris, fallen trees and dead animals. After an accident, they help direct traffic and bring in cones. During downtime, workers clean trucks, sweep floors and do whatever else needs doing at the MnDOT shop.

The night of the accident, Tillotson looked in the pickup and discovered an older man trapped inside. He was wrapped in a sleeping bag and scrunched against the door. The vehicle was ice cold.



"I kept asking him if was hurt," Tillotson says. "All I could get was mumbling. It was 10 or 15 below. I tried to get him out. I couldn't get the door open. It was all bent up because it had rolled several times."

The driver was in good hands with Tillotson, who has served on the Milaca Volunteer Fire Department, as a contract firefighter in Iraq and as an oil field firefighter all over the U.S.

Tillotson thought about kicking out the windshield, but couldn't without potentially hurting the driver.

"I sat there and talked to him until the Fire Department got there," he says. First responders got the driver out and took him to the hospital.

Tillotson later learned the driver was OK. He saved that man's life: The driver had been trapped in his truck at 13 below zero for up to seven hours.

"I'm just glad that I noticed the accident and stopped and went and actually checked the vehicle," Tillotson says.

"Jake is talented, he's energetic and he did the right thing," says Rick Frauendienst, vice president of MnDOT Local 604. "He deserves all the recognition we can give him."

"There's an awful lot of dedication in these workers," Frauendienst adds. "They are committed and they do a darn good job."

AFSCME Local Like Family

the **UNION** difference

When Kim Jorgensen's partner, Sam, faced a life-threatening illness, the Hennepin

County child protection social worker didn't have enough time off to stay by Sam's side. Then Jorgensen's co-workers in Local 34 rallied behind them.

"We had to go to the ER for a breathing issue. We thought it was pneumonia, we'd just get treatment and be able to leave. They wanted to observe and do at least an overnight hospitalization. It got worse very quickly and resulted in respiratory failure, acute respiratory distress. Sam was put on a ventilator. My partner was in ICU for four weeks.

It was really scary. Sam almost died. I would be in there for several hours a day. It was very intense.

I knew I couldn't try to work full time or even part time during that critical period. Especially with child protection, it's not an easy job to divide your attention between something very serious in your life and the families we serve. They both require a lot of emotional investment.

I did not qualify for FMLA at the federal level. My partner and I were not married yet. But the Hennepin County policy extends to a significant other. First you use up your Paid Time Off. What I had to do was request people to donate their PTO to me. I would have not been paid at all if people hadn't donated leave time.



Because that leave was granted, I wasn't going to get fired, my job was protected. People basically took over my caseload.

And because of their donations, I was paid the entire two months! I used four or more weeks of donated PTO. People were very, very generous. My partner didn't have to be scared to be alone in the hospital. Since my partner is transgender, it's a vulnerable position to be in in the hospital. You're not sure what treatment you'll get. I did a lot of advocating.

I'm astounded. I wish I could know who everybody was. Someone donated a whole week, 40 hours! I feel honored.

Having the love and support of my union and co-workers helped. I think being involved in my union, people donate because they see me, we're working together on the board. Even though we don't work directly together, it's a connection.

My partner is doing well now. We're just really grateful."