

August 2024

**CWA Local 1031
Second Quarter Update
From Local 1031 President Kathleen Hernandez**

State Budget

From CWA District 1 Vice President, Dennis Trainor:

“With our nearly 70,000 members all across New Jersey, CWA made our voices heard this year to win a budget that supports public services and working families. We thank Governor Murphy, Senate President Scutari, Speaker Coughlin and the entire legislature for a final agreement that supports these priorities. We are heartened that this budget makes the required full pension payment – for the fourth year in a row – following decades of administrations of both political parties failing to do so. We’re also pleased that the state is making a historic investment for millions of New Jerseyans – with the first-ever dedicated source of funding for NJ Transit, paid for by a Corporate Transit Fee that will only apply to huge, profitable companies contributing their fair share. Although we are not thrilled with the general lack of transparency during the budget process – which came on the heels of gutting OPRA – we believe this is a good, fair budget that will benefit all those who live and work in the Garden State. As always, CWA members will continue fighting for a New Jersey with well-funded public services and a strong labor movement that puts the issues of working family’s front-and-center. This year’s budget is a step in the right direction, and we are proud of our union’s steadfast advocacy.”

State Worker Healthcare Update

CWA sent out an update regarding potential healthcare premium increases. It is important to note that the state must negotiate over increases and CWA is working to find ways to bring any potential increases down. We are also working with other unions regarding increases to local government to bring those costs down. CWA will be meeting and negotiating with the state throughout the summer.

State Workers Update on Raises

The CWA raises go into effect as of the first full-pay period of July of each year. This year, the first full pay period was July 13 – 26th. You should see your raise in your paycheck on August 2, 2024. If you did not see your raise, please contact payroll and ask why. If you cannot get an answer, then contact your Branch President.

State Worker Clarification and Contract

After the State Worker Contract was complete, it took several additional months to agree on the salary charts and to work out some language. The contract is now online and can be viewed on the CWA Local 1031 website www.cwa1031.org.

Clarification: We sent out information that in July of 2024 anyone whose title was a range 8 or lower would be brought to range 9 effective July 13, 2024. This confused a few members. Here is more information: We have 4 contracts, the Administrative Clerical, Professional, Supervisory and Higher Level Supervisory. Under each contract there are job titles listed in alphabetical order. The titles have a range, a job code, the title and the hours that title works. For example, a Clerk Typist is a range 6, the beginning salary of a range 6 would be \$32,380.89 in 2024 if we did not change the contract. All members who are a range 8 and lower will be brought to the range 9 based on their salary. Those migrating to range 9 will be placed at step 2 or higher. Step 2 for range 9 in July 2024 is \$38,339.48. Placement on steps will be the closest to their salary but not a lower salary. Those impacted by this change will receive information from their respective HR Departments to detail their new salary and step. Anniversary dates will remain the same. We have steps that are 1 – 10, with an 11th step added next year. The steps for each member will vary depending on the years you have been in the title.

CWA continues to work with the state and Civil Service on **telework** rules. This process is not yet complete.

Ombudsperson Update

Aetna is now officially a health insurance carrier option for our employees under the State Health Benefits Program. Any members who used the special open enrollment period this spring to switch to an Aetna plan should have their new plan information and their new insurance as of July 1. If anyone who switched is having difficulties, please contact the CWA Local 1031 Healthcare Ombudsperson.

Members interested in switching to an Aetna plan will have the option of doing so again during the annual open enrollment period in October. Watch www.cwa1031.org/members/health for more information as we get closer to open enrollment time.

Some of our members, particularly those in southern New Jersey, expressed concerns over losing access doctors in the Advocare system due to their contract with Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of NJ expiring. Fortunately, Horizon and Advocare have come to terms and members can still see their Advocare doctors in-network. We understand that sometimes the health care providers you've come to know and trust leave your

insurance company's network. This is an unfortunate reality of the health care system and how it is structured. It is a problem which is not unique to state workers or to your insurance company. What is unique to CWA members is that we have more options and resources available to us than most workers.

If you're ever affected by changes to your insurance company's network which exclude any of your health care providers, your Healthcare Ombudsperson can help you understand what your rights are, find new in-network options, or even begin planning to change to a different network during the next open enrollment.

See the Ombudsperson Update on the CWA Local 1031 website, www.cwa1031.org.

UHNJ

The UHNJ contract expired on June 30, 2024. The first two negotiations dates that UHNJ offered CWA are in October and November. We will send out surveys and hold a membership meeting in September to hear from the membership. We know that additional compensation, crisis pay and staffing levels will be an important component of the new contract negotiations process.

In the past few months CWA has worked to save a supervisors job, submitted paperwork for potential reclassifications, continued to work with the Liver Transplant Department on an on-call plan and worked to change the hours and pay of some of our lab workers.

Rutgers

- We have a 4-year contract and in July of 2024, our members just received 3.5% across the board increase.
- We continue to follow up with Compensation on behalf of our members. Some members were not paid their first increase in 2022.
- We submitted a grievance regarding Compensation and the evaluation of titles in the UBHC.
- We had a member try and request Flex-work for the summer. The department denied the request without an explanation. The new policy requires an explanation.
- We have had several supervisors contact our Shop Stewards about EEO investigations. **Know Your Rights**, if you are called to an investigation, you are entitled to union representation, but you must ask for representation.
- We had a new manager try and suspend one of our members and we were able to prevent this, as our contract states that discipline will be held in abeyance until a step 2 hearing is held.

- We represented a member whose subordinate filed charges about a shift change and potential retaliation. We met with the other Union and management and resolved the issues.
- We have an ongoing issue with RU about Pay Equity for the title Supervisor of Maintenance and Construction. CWA is meeting with RU to discuss settlement in August.
- There is a NJ law about outsourcing work and Rutgers believes it does not apply to them. One of the RU Unions is challenging this and other Unions are investigating this practice. If you know of work that is or was previously performed by supervisors, but now is being performed by Barnabas or an outside agency, please let us know.
- The potential health benefits increases discussed previously in this newsletter may impact CWA RU members differently. Some of our members at RU are in a plan that is the same as the CWA State Workers, so any cost increases for them will be the same as the State Workers. However, some of our members are still in health benefits plans tied to Chapter 78 and CWA cannot negotiate over these plans. There will be an Open Enrollment in October before any increases go into effect. The CWA Ombudsperson, Roman Sohor, can answer questions if you consider changing plans.

Municipal and Library Contracts

Library Contracts – In this Update, we will be detailing the libraries and municipal workers where there have been changes. It should be noted several of our library and municipal workforces have the SHBP and we are fighting to keep the increases to the health benefits contained. Here is what is going on in our libraries:

- **Bergenfield Public Library** - At Bergenfield, we have two contracts, the supervisors and the non-supervisors. The non-supervisors contract has been ratified and the supervisor's unit will be ratifying their contract soon.
- **Bloomfield Public Library** - Although this contract was ratified last January, it took a while for CWA to receive the MOA. This process is almost complete and the contract should be available to the membership soon.
- **Clifton Public Library** – We are still in the process of negotiating the next contract.
- **Cranford Public Library** - This contract has been settled, the MOA is being prepared and a ratification vote is being set up.
- **East Brunswick Public Library** – CWA and EBPL are in the mediation process to settle a first contract. Both sides met with the mediator in late June and there is another meeting scheduled for August.
- **Elizabeth Public Library** - This contract was recently ratified. EPL has recently added a Social Worker who is on staff and assisting the public.
- **Glen Rock Public Library** – Negotiations will begin soon and surveys are being distributed.

- **Highland Park Public Library** - This library has been under construction for more than a year now. The membership **recently** ratified their new contract
- **Hoboken Public Library** – Negotiations on a first CWA contract have begun and are progressing slowly. This library is one of the NJ libraries that became a Book Sanctuary, and Hoboken is proud to report that they were the first Book Sanctuary City in NJ. A book sanctuary is a library that strongly supports access to books, the right to read and bans “book bans”.
- **Irvington Public Library** – This contract was recently ratified.
- **Livingston Public Library** – We have two separate contracts for the supervisors and non-supervisors. The supervisory contract was ratified in early 2023. Preparations for the non-supervisory contract, which expires in December of 2024, will begin soon.
- **Maplewood Public Library** - This three year contract was ratified in May. This library is also undergoing a major renovation. The main building is closed and there is a temporary location open along with the Hilton Branch. The brand new building on Baker Street is slated to be complete later this year and should be open to the public in the New Year. Maplewood is also proud to be a Book Sanctuary Library. Lastly, CWA member Amanda Eigen, was recently promoted to the Assistant Director. Congratulations.
- **Middlesex Public Library** – This contract was recently ratified.
- **Millburn Public Library** – This library’s contract has not expired yet, but they have recently signed up a lot of new members. The Millburn Library Board has voted to designate the library as a Book Sanctuary.
- **Nutley Public Library** – Negotiations have not begun on a new contract. We are waiting for the Library Board to offer us dates.
- **Orange Public Library** - We have had many issues at this library for the last few years necessitating the filing of several ULP’s. We have sent a request to negotiate and are waiting to hear back from the library.
- **South Brunswick Public Library** - The bargaining team is preparing for negotiations. The contract expires at the end of the year. This library is undergoing a major renovation and an addition. This library applies for and has obtained many grants that have fueled these changes. SBPL also has a Social Worker on staff available to assist the public.
- **West Orange Public Library** – Negotiations on the new contract are in progress. WOPL constructed a brand new building which was opened to the public in December of 2023.
- **Westfield Public Library** – Westfield is also a NJ Book Sanctuary Library.

Municipal Contracts

- **Bergen County Board of Social Services** – This three year contract was recently settled and ratified.
- **Maplewood Township** – This three year contract was recently ratified. We are waiting on the Town Council to approve. Dates for the payment of raises and retro will be announced later this month.

- **Millburn Board of Education** - Contract negotiations will begin later in August.
- **West Long Branch Borough** - This three year contract was recently settled.

Spotlight on Union Activists in CWA 1031

Denise Williams

Denise Williams, our former CWA Local 1031 Rowan Branch President, retired on June 1, 2024. Denise was a Secretary Assistant I to the Chair in the History Department and was a CWA activist for more than 20 years. She served as a Steward and became the Branch President about 15 years ago.

Denise represented our members by resolving issues before they became grievances, challenging management and Labor Relations when we thought they were wrong, telling our members when they were wrong, running meetings, getting others involved to run a holiday lunch and collect food, helping members obtain promotions, and so much more. During Denise's time as a Steward and Branch President, she served on Local 1031's Election, Personnel, Budget and By-Laws Committees.

We asked Denise to highlight something that she did for CWA that made an impact. She stated negotiating the 4-day summer work week after Rowan University removed it as an option was something that benefited, and was appreciated by, a large number of members.

At Rowan, Denise chaired the Rosa Parks Committee and yearly luncheon. She worked with many local and national organizations to bring in speakers and local groups to educate those in attendance. She was asked to serve on the Rowan University Budget Committee, and was an adviser to the Africana American Studies Program. She will continue to help out at student orientations by signing in and speaking with parents. She is on a Committee at Rowan that obtained grant money to help a student from Rwanda attend Rowan, and plans to become active in the Alumni Association in the near future.

In her personal life, Denise loves to travel with her husband and two grown daughters. Denise is an avid reader, she crochets and knits and is a fan of the Walking Dead. She is always busy, and she and her husband will be at the US Open later this summer. She is active in many community service organizations and her church, The Giver's Place in Williamstown NJ. Denise just became the 32nd National President of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs (NACWC). This organization is dedicated to uplifting women, children and families through service. She will be working to "Get Out The Vote".

We are not sure if Denise will ever slow down, but we hope she finds time to relax a little and enjoy her retirement. Tom Nardi from Rowan Facilities is the current Rowan Branch President and he has big shoes to fill. We hope Denise will inspire others to be active within their Branches to improve our representation, as well as in their communities.

Denise at her Retirement Party:



Mike Milling

Mike Milling has been actively assisting our members as Local 1031's William Paterson University Branch President since 2019. However, many of you may not be aware that Mike has been a Coach for the Special Olympics for 25 years. He started as a Unified Athlete and then a Assistant Coach at the age of 15 in Winter and Summer sports. Mike and his wife Erin, who has been his Assistant Coach for the past 6 years, coach his current team, Rosie Runners, in Winter Snowshoe and Summer Track. Mike previously coached his team in Cross Country Skiing, but he transitioned to Snowshoe in 2022 due to the ease of access to families and the growth of the sport in NJ State Games. In his 25 years as Coach, two of Mike's athletes have gone on to perform in National Games in Washington State, World Games in Austria, and two have been inducted in to the NJ Special Olympics Hall of Fame.

According to Mike, participating in these Games continues to be one of the most rewarding experiences of his life, and mean as much to him now as it did when he first started as a teenager. Every year, on his birthday, he is out at the Summer Games training his friends and watching them compete. He has seen many of his athletes grow from young children into adults and believes it's an experience that's been hard to top! Mike recommends taking a look into helping and supporting your local Special Olympic programs and encourages all school age children to look into becoming a Unified

Athlete to expose themselves to this world of special people out there. He believes “it is one of the most gratifying ways to make a very big difference in a person’s life, and your own as well.”

Mike’s Team:



Legislative Update

CWA was busy during the budget time fighting for full pension funding, a millionaires tax, trying to prevent the gutting of the Open Public Records Act (OPRA), a Safe Staffing Bill, the Family Leave Extension Act and the Freedom to Read Act, to name a few. We have also been meeting with and endorsing some NJ candidates. We sent out a questionnaire and then met with candidates to ask additional questions about matters that are important to our members who are public workers. As public workers, we need to be active since the legislature can and will make decisions about our future.

There will be opportunities to help local and National candidates and to **Get Out The Vote** (GOTV) before November. If you are interested in Local or National politics, we encourage you to become active. You can contact your Branch President or the Local for ways to become involved.

FHE HEALTH, Stay Healthy - Does a Healthy Lifestyle Help Your Brain?

Many people think of physical health and brain function as entirely different, but this isn't true. In fact, there's a growing body of research that's increasingly providing evidence to the contrary.

A Harvard Health article explains that various studies have found that people who get more exercise every day enjoy an improvement in memory and overall cognitive function. This can lead to a longer, happier life, especially in older people. Something as simple as walking for five to 10 minutes extra per day can extend memory, increase

concentration and help stave off the loss of cognitive function that tends to come naturally with age.

This makes sense. After all, exercise isn't the only physically beneficial lifestyle that supports brain health. Eating a healthy diet provides your body and mind with nutrients they need to stay strong over time. But newfound links between exercise and memory provides an additional reason to consider getting active.

The Link between Brain Function and Mental Health

It's thought that many mental health issues are due to a change in the balance of brain chemicals. This raises a question: If exercise can help keep the brain healthier, does it also hold the key to maintaining mental wellness?

The answer is yes. Here are some benefits that exercise and living an overall healthy lifestyle can provide to your mental well-being:

- You're able to rationalize and build coping strategies
- Your self-esteem improves
- You feel better
- You have more energy

These factors are part of the reason exercise and caring for basic physical needs are widely recommended to people experiencing depression and anxiety. It's because of the link between physical and mental health — exercise and memory.

Tips for Making Positive Changes in Your Own Life

Any time you're making a change in your daily routine, even one that will almost certainly bring considerable benefits to your health, **it's important to take small steps**. If you completely transform your lifestyle, it may be so unfamiliar that it takes longer to experience benefits. It also may not be sustainable. Try to create small changes and make set reasonable goals. One day at a time, for example, setting a goal to walk 10 – 15 minutes a day, 4 days a week is a good goal. If you do this for a month, it becomes a healthy habit.

If you would like additional information or have questions, please reach out to Janet Gerhard at (267)-249-0513 of FHE Health.