

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

2010 Delegate Assembly

Good afternoon delegates, board, and staff. Today I begin my 2nd year as MSEA's Executive Director. I am so happy to be here with you as I celebrate my first anniversary with MSEA.

The Bylaws state that the Executive Director shall "present to the DA a complete report of the work done during the year and a report recommending the work that should be done during the ensuing year." This is a pretty big job – how can I possibly give you a complete report of the work done this year?

During the course of the year, I provided the board and staff with what I call "ED Updates." These updates are lengthy – usually weekly - reports of my work. So, to prepare this DA report, I went back and read the entire year's worth of ED Updates. What a great thing to do – to review the year, week by week. As a result, I took most of what is in the report I am about to give from those ED Updates. And yet it is still probably not a "complete" report, as required by the Bylaws. Maybe we should look at amending that requirement.....how can I possibly give you a complete report of the work done this year?

Which leads to my second point before I actually begin this report. The board and staff, after working with me this first year, have learned that I care about knowing the rules, following the rules, and having policies and internal rules in place that the laws that govern our operations require us to have. Part of this attention to rules comes from my many years working as an attorney, where rules and regulations are the name of the game. But it goes beyond that – my dad was a preacher. I was brought up to learn the rules – especially the rules about morals and virtues - and to follow them. However, my parents also brought me up to challenge rules that are unfair or wrong or that make no sense. I was brought up to fight for what is right and virtuous. I suppose that learning came from my parents' strong belief in the Golden Rule – do unto others what you would have done to you. The Golden Rule fits wonderfully into the labor union world in which we live and breathe. Labor unionism is about collectivism, and collectivism is about working with others to do what is best for the group, not the individual. Do for each other what we would want to be done for us. I hope and believe that here at MSEA, we approach our work with this attitude. That is my goal for myself, and one I work for MSEA to have as an organization and a union.

I have one more point before I begin my attempt to comply with our "rule" that I provide a complete report on the work done this year. The board and staff have also learned this year that I like to ask the Easter ham question. What is the Easter ham question? The Easter ham question is the question that asks why we do what we do. The story comes from the kid who is watching her mom cutting off the end of the Easter ham before she puts it in the oven. The kid asks her mom why she does that, and the mom says she does it because that's what her mom taught her to do. So the kid finds grandma and asks her why she taught mom to cut off the end of the Easter ham. Grandma says she did it because that's what *her* mom taught her to do. So the kid finds great-grandma and asks her the same question. Great-grandma says: I cut off the end of the ham because otherwise my pan was too small for the ham!

This is the question I have asked over and over during the last year. Why do we do this? Sometimes the answer is clear and obvious and makes total sense. Other times, it takes some digging to get to the answer and sometimes it doesn't always make the most sense. Then we keep talking about it and working on it to decide how and what to do. But sometimes, I get the "because my pan was too small for the Easter ham" answer. In those cases, I try to pursue some different avenues. I've learned a lot about MSEA and its history by asking the Easter ham question.

As I move into my 2nd year here, I plan to continue asking the Easter ham question. At the same time, I recognize and value the importance of traditions and rituals. It can be steadying and comforting to do something a certain way over and over again and from year to year. It gets to be something our members can count on, even if we no longer remember why we started doing it that way, way back when. And I look forward being here long enough that some day someone will ask *me* why we do something, and I will give them the Easter ham answer and say: because that's how we do it here at MSEA.

Now, let's get to what we have done this year. The list of board, member, and staff accomplishments is long and impressive! I've divided them into 8 categories.

1. Overall

- ✓ Hired new field staff to fill position that been sitting vacant.
- ✓ Adjusted field staff unit assignments to accommodate that hire and to move towards regionalizing field staff assignments.
- ✓ Redistributed the tasks that we had planned to assign to several new member task forces. Some were absorbed by staff, some by the board, some by already-existing committees. We did set up two of the member task forces, one to study the dues restructure questions and one to study the feasibility of relocating the MSEA office. The dues restructure task force is up and running; the office relocation task force will get started this year.
- ✓ Reviewed, revised, and updated several existing MSEA policies on everything from expense reimbursements to the model operating policy.
- ✓ Developed and adopted several new MSEA policies on everything from IRS issues to providing ASL interpreters to members at union meetings.
- ✓ Developed and adopted a 3-year strategic plan and 10-year goals.
- ✓ Renewed the employment contract with Lynn Jansen, MSEA's Assistant Director for Accounting and Benefits.
- ✓ New logo concept contest.
- ✓ Reviewed annual audit.
- ✓ Prepared and conducted the Spring Regionals.
- ✓ Prepared for this 30th anniversary DA!

2. Member Rights

Leaders and field staff handled countless situations involving investigations into alleged misconduct, disciplinary actions, denials of contractual rights, and a variety of other contract violations. Most were resolved without having to file grievances, but several did lead to grievances. Most of the time, staff and leaders are able to settle these grievances without going to hearing. The one case that did go to hearing this year involved a termination. The case went to hearing and we prevailed. Unfortunately, the district is appealing the decision. Of course, field

staff have a variety of cases that are still pending, too numerous in number and issues to outline in detail. We also handled one disciplinary action within our own membership ranks.

3. Bargaining

During a time where districts are asking for take-backs, threatening to subcontract our services, and we are relieved to see a district proposal with just a soft freeze instead of a hard freeze, staff and negotiations teams have stayed at the table until the contracts are done. As you know, for contracts that expire in the odd-numbered years, many districts delay bargaining with us until after the January 15th teacher contract deadline, which is well into the first year of the next contract term.

Nevertheless, we currently have settled 18 contracts with terms starting July 2009, and bargaining is underway in earnest for the rest of those 31 contracts. We've already settled one contract with a term starting July 2010, and the bargaining process is just getting started for the other contracts in the rest of those units.

4. Organizing

- ✓ New unit in CSEC.
- ✓ Runestone unit merging into Alex unit.
- ✓ Bemidji para/secys and bus drivers voted to have separate operating policies.
- ✓ Subcontracting threats to units in Warroad, LaCrescent, Fergus Falls, Kingsland, and Leroy.
- ✓ Had booths at paraprofessional conference and food service convention.
- ✓ Followed up on leads in 6-10 possible new units.
- ✓ Working on finding new benefits to add to our member benefits package.
- ✓ I visited units in 30 of the 60 districts where MSEA has a unit.

5. Political/Legislative

- ✓ NCCSEU.
- ✓ DOTH.
- ✓ Contract w/SEIU for legislative tracking.
- ✓ VRC.
- ✓ Political Committee.
- ✓ MnUHCC.
- ✓ Registered as a lobbyist with the state and started filing the required lobbyist reports.
- ✓ Voluntary para credential hearing.
- ✓ Lobbying, testifying at the legislature.
- ✓ Member alerts going by email asking members to contact their legislators.
- ✓ Grasstops, Inc. working on member awareness and mobilization plan.

6. Communications

- ✓ Prepared and distributed 4 quarterly Newsletters – “*The Classified*”.
- ✓ Prepared and distributed 8 Board Updates.
- ✓ Increasing use of electronic survey tool – SurveyMonkey for negotiations surveys, evaluations of events, and more.
- ✓ Webpage improvements and enhancements.
- ✓ New Member Kit and contents.
- ✓ Started distributing daily newsclips on union and school district issues to board and staff.
- ✓ In conjunction with our review of our IT structure, reviewing our information flow.
- ✓ My ED updates.

7. Trainings/Staff Development

- ✓ New board member orientation.
- ✓ Board member training on being the best board you can be.
- ✓ August Rally at St. Benedict's on finding our place in the union movement and mobilizing our members to do the same.
- ✓ Core Trainings on "Hitting the Brick Wall" in Mankato and Bemidji.
- ✓ Some field staff attended workshops on arbitrations, school law, and other public sector labor and employment issues.
- ✓ One field staff attended a Council 65 training.
- ✓ PERA info session at Spring Regionals.
- ✓ Staff attended the annual nonprofit technology and communications conference.
- ✓ Lynn and I attended workshops on human resources issues, financial management and budgeting.
- ✓ Member trainings – BR, chief stewards, negotiations – by field staff with their units.

8. Office/Systems/Technology

- ✓ Devoted some "Bless this Mess" days to cleaning out MSEA's office "closets".
- ✓ Reviewing and researching a variety of improvements to our IT structure.
- ✓ Processed dues, paid our bills, reimbursed member and staff expenses, prepared and presented monthly financial statements, prepared for the audit, developed the proposed budget, revised the Unit Treasury Code of Standards, worked with the credit union and units that have unit dues, and all the other work involved in keeping MSEA's finances safe and secure.

This is still not a complete report of the work MSEA did this past year. You – and especially the board and the staff – are probably saying, but what about this, and what about that? She didn't mention several other things that we did this year! I know you are right, and I'm sorry if I missed something that you particularly remember. But I'm frankly grateful and pleased that I simply couldn't capture it all. We did a lot this year and you should be proud of yourselves, your colleagues, your leaders, staff and board members for a very full year of work and accomplishments.

Before I talk about the upcoming year, I want to stop and give some thanks. I came to MSEA last year as an unknown quantity. I came from a strong legal career with a responsible and sensitive position working with public sector unions in school districts, but I had not served in a management or executive position. I came following a time of uncertainty and turmoil. I came at a time when changes in leadership were all too familiar, and many of the changes resulted in hard feelings and a pervasive lack of trust. I came during a time when the MSEA staff and board were craving for the days when the answer to the Easter ham question was a unanimous and positive: because that's the way we do it here at MSEA.

Despite those circumstances, I have had a great first year. It's been a steep learning curve, and I'm still on the curve. I've made plenty of mistakes, sometimes out of ignorance and innocence about the "MSEA way", sometimes due to inexperience with a topic, and sometimes when I should have known better. But the reason I had such a good start is because of the board and the staff. Naturally, at first, many of you were a little bit hesitant or cautious with me. But soon, you seemed to take a deep breath and with great determination you showed me that you were not only willing to give me a chance, but that you wanted and hoped that I would do well. You

hoped that I would give MSEA a chance to show me its best rather than its worst. You did this – despite how easy or tempting it might have been for you to stand there with arms folded and see if I would sink or swim. You helped me, you answered my questions candidly, and you only occasionally rolled your eyes at how much I didn't know. Your willing attitude and assistance helped me immensely, and I thank you for it. It brought me a good first year, which helped make this a good year for the MSEA. We are still learning about each other, and we have much more work to do together on that. As Paul Wellstone said, we all do better when we all do better. We did, and we are, and I thank you for that.

I want to make a special note about the MSEA staff. Our staff brings to the table such a treasure chest of knowledge, experience, and ideas. Each person has thoughtful support for their position on any given issue, as well as the ability to communicate it. At each staff meeting, we discuss some of what MSEA does and why – as I ask the Easter ham question - which helps me immensely as I continue to learn this job, this union, and its people. The staff are primarily responsible for the long list of tasks that we accomplished this year that I just finished reciting to you. I am proud to be working with such quality staff, and I give them great thanks for helping me during my first MSEA year.

Finally, I want to thank the MSEA president, Evan Mapes. I am grateful every day for the opportunity to work with Evan. First of all, he devotes a great deal of time and thought to MSEA. He worries about you, the members, and your union health, and he works hard towards getting the best for you and for MSEA as a whole. I see this every time we talk, which we do several times each week. Second, Evan supports my work. We talk about an issue, we exchange our views – which are sometimes quite different – and then he steps back and lets me do my job. Third, Evan understands the differences between the role of the President and the role of the Executive Director. This is not an easy understanding to obtain, and I very much appreciate that I have not had to struggle with Evan about this. Finally, Evan wisely does not try to mold me into something I'm not. My style and approach are my own, and quite different from his. It's probably not easy for him to do, but he lets me be me. Again, I very much appreciate it, and I look forward to working with him for the rest of his three-year term.

Now: What should MSEA do during the upcoming year?

Tomorrow we will review with you the 3-year strategic plan and the 10-year goals, which will outline what MSEA plans to do next year and beyond. So I'm going to take this opportunity to talk about what I want to focus on next year, within the context of the strategic plan.

There are three basic areas where I plan to focus my attention. First, growing the union. Second, as President Mapes stated in his State of the Union speech, empowering the membership. Third, upgrading MSEA's operational and technological systems so we are using the best and the most of what is available for our members.

These three areas are simply stated, but complicated and even overwhelming in their potential and in the resources they require. Most of the work needed to make progress in these areas – especially in the areas of growing the union and empowering the membership - is on the backs of the MSEA staff. You probably know that their backpacks are already quite full. So I will be working with them to work productively, efficiently, and as a team, to make the best and most forward progress that we can, to organize new MSEA units, increase the membership capacity and self-sufficiency within our existing units, and expand and modernize our operational and

technological systems. It's a daunting task, much easier said than done. It is a task that we are undertaking and I will work hard to guide it.

I'm sure you are ready for me to stop talking and get started on these audacious plans and goals. Unfortunately for some of you, you will be subjected to even more of my talking during the Unit Treasurer and Chief Steward training after the break! So I'll bring my first Executive Director's annual DA report to a close. Once again, my thanks to all of you for making my first year a good one. And never forget what Cesar Chavez said:
¡ Sí, se puede!