

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

2008 MSEA Delegate Assembly
Mary Kearney, MSEA Executive Director

I will keep this short and to the point. MSEA has stayed the course in the past 12 months with little turmoil. No union tried to raid us. In fact, the opposite occurred, with unions who are our friends providing information and assistance that helped us prevent a loss of membership. Tim Geelan, who was the Organizing Director until earlier this month, and I met with other unions regularly in contexts that served the whole labor community and thus helped to shore up these alliances. Unions need to work side by side in making life better for members. MSEA, with our "no raid" policy, is out in front in building bridges.

We have 78 labor contracts with districts. This year field representatives successfully settled approximately 15 labor agreements. In the upcoming 12 months, the majority of MSEA contracts will be open and reps will work hard to reach agreement at a level satisfactory to our members and, we hope, without any work stoppages unless absolutely necessary. Right now economics are tough. Districts are feeling the squeeze. Our members know that it will not be an easy year to get what we deserve. Stewards are taking a beating. The staff of MSEA, along with Board members, will do everything we can to support you during this downturn.

On the organizing front two new bargaining units have joined us in the past year: one in Bird Island/Olivia/Lake Lillian, known as BOLD, and the other located in Runestone. Recently we have had promising leads from several other units that Alyssa Mueller, our new Organizing Director is pursuing with the help of field reps and Vice President Mary Schaufenbuel, who has been instrumental in developing and furthering two of the leads. Perhaps the lower economic tone of the country is pushing people toward unionizing. This could be the silver lining for us and we need to be poised to help when people are searching for representation.

There are ways you as unit leaders can really help. The statistics demonstrate that although our overall membership is increasing, the ratio of fair share people to full members is also growing. I would appeal to you as leaders to work on your own and with your field representative to convince those in your units who are fair share about the benefits of full membership. Develop ways to bring them into the fold. This kind of effort is necessary to the long-term survival of the union. Further, think about who you know in other districts that are not in a union. Contact them. Let them know we are here to help. In helping them, you will help all of MSEA. Get the word out. You will notice that Alyssa Mueller is videotaping member interviews at this Delegate Assembly. She is developing a tool that we all should be able to use to let people know how good we are and that we can help.

Finally, in January and February, members participated in an intense training called Navigating Conflict. During the training we simulated bargaining. I was floored to see the quality of effort and ability that you demonstrated. You are the best advertising we have. We are here only to serve you. Step forward. Shine your light. Tell us how to move out of the way. It is a privilege being with you today.