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WMAL VOICE

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE
WESTERN MICHIGAN AREA LOCAL #281
AMERICAN POSTAL WORKERS UNION, AFL-CIO





WMAL Voice

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Fax: (616) 977-1020

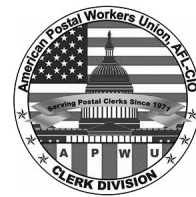
OFFICE OF PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT 888-767-6738
retirement line

HR SHARED SERVICES CENTER—Shared Services Line 877-477-3273
PostalEase option 1
Job Bidding Line option 2
Sick/Unscheduled Leave Request option 4
Human Resources option 5

HARD OF HEARING - FEDERAL RELAY SERVICE 800-877-8339

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Ada · Allendale · Alto · Baldwin · Belmont · Big Rapids · Bitely · Blanchard · Bradley · Branch · Burnips · Byron Center · Caledonia · Cannonsburg · Cedar Springs · Comstock Park · Conklin · Coopersville · Coral · Custer · Dorr · Douglas · Fennville · Ferrysburg · Fountain · Free Soil · Gowen · Grand Haven · Grand Rapids · Grandville · Grant · Hamilton · Hesperia · Holland · Hopkins · Howard City · Hudsonville · Jamestown · Jenison · Lamont · Lowell · Macatawa · Marne · Mecosta · Middleville · Moline · Morley · New Era · Newaygo · Nunica · Paris · Pierson · Pullman · Ravenna · Remus · Rockford · Rodney · Rothbury · Sand Lake · Scottville · Shelby · Shelbyville · Sparta · Spring Lake · Stanwood · Trufant · Walhalla · Wayland · West Olive · Zeeland



Editorial Policy: Submissions are welcome from all APWU members, sent to the address or email listed above. In accordance with the local constitution, the editor reserves the right to determine if material submitted to this publication shall be printed, and reserves the right to edit as needed for space and clarity. The views and opinions expressed within are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the editor, local officers, or the APWU. All material must be signed, though names may be withheld upon request. The WMAL Voice is published bimonthly.

As of March 2005, a policy was instated to publish member condolences, births, marriages, and anniversaries. Please let me know at editor@wmal.org of anything you would like included. Pictures are welcomed!

The Long And Short Of It

By Mike Long, Vice President

Summertime, another time when we spend time with friends and family. We take vacation which we have earned and hopefully we use it for rest, relaxation, and to keep in touch with those we care about. The reason I say this, is you don't know when it is yours or their last days. Make sure you take advantage of every day and make the best of it.

At the time of this writing, the National APWU is about to start negotiation for our next contract. It is going to be a long, tedious, and contentious time before we get our next contract. But as a member, we can show our support by wearing union gear on Thursdays (at a minimum). Also if you are given any surveys or such from the Postal Service, make sure you turn these into the union. Do NOT fill them out. Once management gives you the survey, it belongs to you. Don't let them try to intimidate you and tell you that you have to fill it out. You don't. When they get these surveys returned to them, they use them against the union. When they ask - "Are you content with the current compensation you receive?" What does that mean? They are asking you if you need a raise or not. Guess

what will happen if the majority of people return the survey and tell them they are content? Management then takes it front of an arbitrator or in front of the negotiation team and say - "why do you need a raise, your own people say they are content with what they get already." See how it can be twisted to their own need. They will twist every word to their benefit.



Another point I would like to remind you - When you fill out a grievance form, you need to fill it out in its entirety. We need your Name, EIN, Mailing Address (and this needs to be updated if the grievance takes a while), your e-Mail address (same as your mailing address, keep it updated if you change it), Phone number. Also your Seniority is important - especially if it is you and seniority makes a difference as to who is paid or who should have received the overtime, and your current level and step. If we win the grievance, we need to figure out the proper remedy.

Being that it is summer, just a reminder that we have suspended the union meetings until September. Hope to see you in the fall.

If you have any questions, concerns, or need help, please feel free to give me a call. Just a reminder, this is a benefit of being a member. A non-member only has a right to file a grievance. A member has access to the officers of this union and help in filling out forms, and being provided information on retirement, FMLA, OWCP, how to file a grievance, etc. This is just a small part of why it pays to belong to the union.

Mike

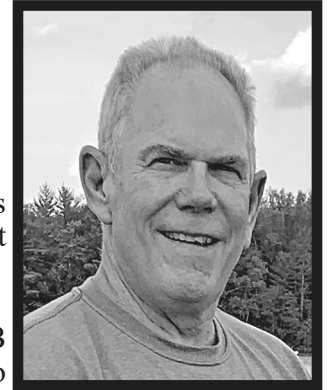


WMAL Retiree Chapter Update *By Ray Novakowski, President*

Greetings everyone. A lot has been going on, the MPWU Retiree Chapter Convention, plans for the National Retiree Convention and Whitecaps Game in July.

At the MPWU Retiree Convention our five delegates did an outstanding job and were involved in discussion and other activities. I had the honor of being nominated, by our chapter and elected as the new Michigan Postal Workers Al LaBrecque Retiree Chapter President. I have some big shoes to fill, past President Paul Browning, did a fantastic job leading the MPWU Chapter and I hope to continue that journey. At the convention we passed a few constitution changes and were able to have discussion with other retiree chapter delegates and officers.

I am now the MPWU Retiree Chapter delegate to the APWU National retiree convention with expenses paid by the state. The WMAL Chapter will send Vice President Deb Ohanesion and Treasurer Cathy Strunk to the APWU retiree convention. We filled a trustee position, as Jim Weber had to resign due to health issues, we want to thank him for all his work and support for the chapter, he was here from the beginning and worked tirelessly to make the Chapter a



success. Hattie Mitchell has stepped up and will fill that position, thank you Hattie.

Hope to have updates on PSHB program (with a video presentation if wanted), legislative issues and other issues that come up. I hope to see you at the September 10, 2024, meeting at the WMAL Union Hall @11am. The hall is located at 2554 Burlingame Ave SW, Wyoming MI. Come join us for the meeting and some socializing afterwards, light refreshments will be provided.

If you have any questions or concerns, or would like a certain issue discussed, please contact me at 616 560 7747 or email me at raynova@sbcglobal.net
Yours in union solidarity,

Raymond Novakowski, President
WMAL Retiree Chapter

Looking for answers? Make sure to check out:
WWW.WMAL.ORG

To review:

- Meeting Minutes***
- Contact information for stewards and officers***
- Job bids and awards***
- Upcoming events***
and so much more!

Also join our Facebook Group!

Looking for a location to hold an event?
Check out your Union Hall!
Great rates for members!

Union Hall Rentals
2554 Burlingame Ave SW
Wyoming MI 49509
616-822-3520 | Capacity 188

	Hall Rental	Security Agent	Agent Fee
Members:	\$250.00	\$200.00	\$0
Non-Profit: (meetings only)	\$125.00	\$0	\$0
Public:	\$650.00	\$300.00	\$100.00

Veterans Information

Muskegon Clinic Opening



Muskegon VA Outpatient Clinic is Moving! Open House and Ribbon Cutting will be on June 21 at 1:00 p.m., and the clinic will begin seeing patients at the new location on June 24.

The new clinic will be located at 2734 E. Apple Ave, Muskegon, MI 49442

Veteran Tele Town Hall



Veterans Tele Town Hall will have a lot of information about upcoming events, Changes to Community Care, Tele Urgent Care, the National Cemetery, and other important topics. Join in on June 6, from Noon to 1:00 p.m. to learn more.

Veterans can stream on our Facebook page or at www.access.live/BattleCreekVAMC and can call (855) 274-1447 to call in.



VA Health Coverage While Traveling Overseas

Learn how VA's Foreign Medical Program may be able to help you get reimbursed for care received while living or traveling abroad.

WATCH



VA Home Loan Update Allows Veterans to Be Competitive When House Shopping

Beginning Aug. 10, 2024, eligible Veterans, active duty service members and surviving spouses who use their VA home loan benefits can opt to pay for certain real estate buyer-broker fees when purchasing a home.

LEARN MORE



VA Now Providing More Care and Benefits to Women Veterans than Ever Before in Our Nation's History

Today, on Women Veterans Recognition Day, VA announced that more than 53,000 women Veterans enrolled in VA health care between May 2023 and May 2024, marking a 20% increase over the previous year and the largest enrollment year for women Veterans on record.

VETERAN'S CRISIS LINE

If a veteran or service member you know is showing signs of crisis, such as hopelessness, anxiety, or withdrawal, call on the caring professionals at the VA's Veterans Crisis Line who are ready to listen and provide support.

The Veterans Crisis Line is a free, confidential resource. Veterans, service members, and their families can access the line anytime.

There are three ways to take advantage of this benefit:

- ⇒ Call 1-800-273-8255 and choose option one
- ⇒ Go to VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat
- ⇒ Text 838255

Each option has free, confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

You can start a conversation today! Visit VeteransCrisisLine.net to download free Veterans Crisis Line materials so you can tell others how to do it, too.



Associate Office Scuttle

By Dana McLean -
Steward @ Newaygo & Grant & MPWU Areas 7 & 9 Director

Balancing Level 18 Responsibilities and Custodial Work

Clerks in the level 18's really have a lot on their plate. Not only are they responsible for customer service, sorting mail and various administrative duties but now we have added custodial work, which adds an additional layer of responsibility to their already demanding role.

Level 18's are typically smaller facilities that serve smaller communities. The clerks in these offices are versatile workers who manage a range of tasks such as customer service, mailing out packages for customers, addressing any questions about postal services, selling stamps, etc . They must sort and distribute the mail to the carriers, making sure it's accurate and done in a timely matter. They have admin duties which consist of handling financial transactions, managing inventory and maintaining accurate records. These duties require a high level of attention to detail and a commitment to the maintaining the standards of the USPS. In addition to all of these duties they often also get custodial duties added on.

It's not uncommon for postmasters to try to get clerks to do custodial work while they are waiting on or in between customers; which not only a violation of the National Agreement, it also a bad look for the post office. It disrupts the workflow, leaves customers feeling like they aren't getting attentive service and the biggest issue - IT VIOLATES THE CONTRACT. The union doesn't know it happens if you don't relay that information. We need to know it's happening to put a stop to it. Each office has a staffing package that shows how many hours a day/week/year the office qualifies for cleaning hours. If your office gets, for example 10 hours a week, 2 hours a day, then you CANNOT be scheduled for 5 hours on one day. If it doesn't get done each day, those day's hours are lost. You can't mop a floor 3 times in one day because you missed it 2 others days. Pay attention to what your postmaster is trying to "pull". Stand up and say something. You have to be our eyes and ears. In order for you to clean in a level 18 you are required to have the necessary training too. If you haven't had the necessary training, please let the union know.

On June 25, contract negotiations begin. It really is a big year with a lot on the line and we need to support each other in fighting for a great contract.

I am looking forward to the National Convention in July. This year it's in Detroit. Looks like Detroit is having a great year in the spotlight for events. APWU members from every state in the US and its' properties will be there.

On a personal note, in my office, we have three employees who are related and their family had a unexpected event occur recently. It's heartbreaking and tragic. It just makes me want to stress - if you are experiencing ANY kind of depression, suicidal thoughts or just having a hard time please call EAP and they will help. It is a free service which is totally anonymous. Take time for yourself, your family and your mental health.

Have a great summer!



Union Meetings

Next General Membership:

September 7, 2024 @ 7:00 p.m.

October 5, 2024 @ 7:00 p.m.

WMAL Retiree Chapter Meetings

are on the second Tuesday in February, April, June, September and November - starting at 11:00 a.m.

Remaining 2024 Meetings are:

September 10th; & November 12th

**Deadline - Next Submission for
WMAL Voice is: July 31, 2024**

Medicare Integration

The Postal Service Reform Act of 2022 (PSRA) was signed into law in April 2022. Since then, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), in conjunction with the Postal Service, has been working to implement a new Postal Service Health Benefits (PSHB) Program, as required under the new law. PSHB is a new, separate program within the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program and will be administered by OPM. Coverage under the PSHB Program will be effective January 1, 2025. APWU.org will continue to be updated with information and important links about the PSHB program as they are created.

For an introduction to PSHB and Medicare, there are five videos to view and provide you with information. It provides background on the Postal Service Reform Act of 2022 (PSRA), which created the PSHB Program, a new, separate program within the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program. It also covers how the PSHB Program integrates with Medicare Part B, and how to enroll through both open season and the one-time PSHB Special Enrollment Period (SEP). For the full five-part educational video series, please visit KeepingPosted.org.

The USPS Benefits and Wellness team will hold Lunch and Learn Seminars about the PSHB Program every other Thursday through December. The seminars will take place from noon to 1 p.m. Eastern, via Zoom and using passcode 314858 (Webinar ID: 161 422 7062), and from 4 to 5 p.m. Eastern, via Zoom and using passcode 366159 (Webinar ID: 160 320 9569).

How to enroll during the SEP? Complete the provided CMS-40B form, Application for Enrollment in Medicare - Part B (Medical Insurance) and mail it with the copy of the notification letter in the return envelope you receive in March 2024. The return envelope must be postmarked by Sept. 30, 2024.

If I received a notification letter for the PSHB SEP, do I have to enroll in Medicare Part B? If you are an annuitant of the Postal Service, you are not required to enroll in Medicare Part B. If you are a covered family member of an annuitant, please refer to your notification letter to determine if you have the option, or are required to, enroll in Medicare Part B. As a general rule, if the primary enrollee for health coverage is enrolled in Medicare Part B, eligible family members must also enroll in Medicare Part B when they become eligible.

What happens once I return my enrollment form and copy of my notification letter? Once your enrollment is received, it will initiate your Medicare Part B coverage with an effective date of Jan. 1, 2025. Please refer to your PSHB SEP notification letter to determine if Medicare Part B enrollment is an option or a requirement for you to remain eligible for the Postal Service Health Benefits (PSHB) Program.

What happens if my individual enrollment period overlaps with the PSHB SEP? If your individual enrollment period (IEP)* for Medicare Part B overlaps with the PSHB SEP, your IEP will take precedence and your enrollment for Medicare Part B will become effective the month following receipt of your CMB-40 enrollment form.

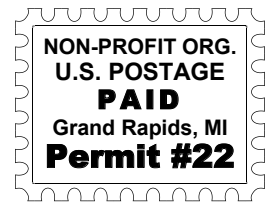
*An individual enrollment period will occur when a person first becomes eligible to receive Medicare benefits. In most cases this coincides with an individual's 65th birthday enrollment period, for a total of 7 months; 3 months prior to the birthday, the month of, and 3 months following the birthday. For individuals who are still working at the time of eligibility, your individual special enrollment period begins on the date of retirement and concludes 8 months following individual's retirement date.

You can get additional information on the PSHB Program and how it works with Medicare by reviewing the resources available on the PSHB page, viewing the PSHB-Medicare 5 Part video series, or by attending a PSHB Seminar. Additional resources include the Consumers Checkbook Guide and your local State Health Insurance Program office. If you have misplaced the notification letter mailed to you or believe that you are eligible to participate in the PSHB and did not receive notification letter, please contact the PSHB Navigator Help Line's toll-free number at 833-712-PSHB (7742), or email retirementbenefits@usps.gov.

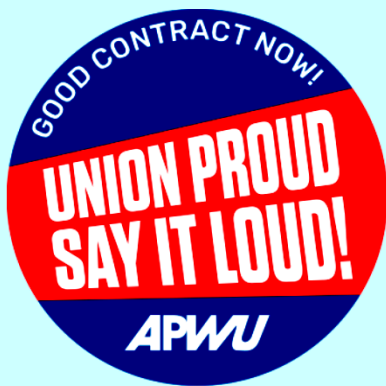
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American Postal Workers Union
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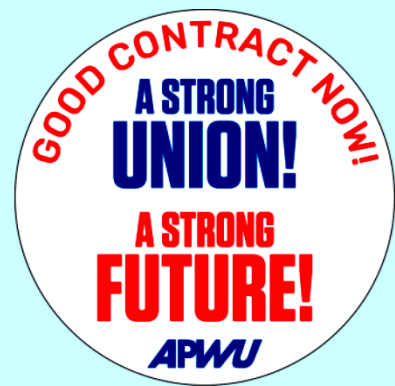
2024 CONTRACT CAMPAIGN LOGOS



Union Proud, Say It Loud - Good Contract Now!



Unite, Organize, and Mobilize - Good Contract Now!



A Strong Union, A Strong Future - Good Contract Now!

Annual Leave Exchange and Carryover for 2025

For Leave Year 2025 (begins Jan. 11, 2025 and ends Jan. 9, 2026), APWU-represented employees aforementioned are entitled to carryover a maximum of 520 hours of earned annual leave. Employees who meet the exchange requirements may continue to exchange up to 80 hours of annual leave prior to the beginning of Leave Year 2025.