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September - October 2024

WMAL VOICE

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





WMAL Voice

PO Box 2706
Grand Rapids, MI 49501
mpwueditor@yahoo.com
Editor: Michael Long



Executive Board

MICHAEL LONG, *president* (616) 822-5627
mdlblong@gmail.com

Currently Vacant, *vice president* (616) _____
Submit your name and info if you want to be considered

LINDA CHANDLER, *treasurer* (616) 776-1489
treasurer@wmal.org

AWANDA JENNINGS, *recording secretary* (616) 977-1050
preciouspalmer@sbcglobal.net

SUZI BOYD *clerk craft a director* (616) 581-4539
wmalccd@att.net

AMEKA JONES, *clerk craft b director* (616) 560-3279
ameka.stinson9960@gmail.com

JENNIFER MCKINNON, *maintenance craft director* (616) 350-5433
maintcraftapwu@yahoo.com

CHRIS FISHER, *motor vehicle craft director* (616) 308-8787
cafisher61@gmail.com

TODD HODGES, *sergeant-at-arms* (616) 247-4765
scrapper987@yahoo.com

Other Local Representatives

JENNIFER RIZZON, *human relations rep* (616) 443-3947
goldengirl0624@gmail.com

SCOTT ACHTERHOFF, *retirement specialist* (616) 977-1050
scott_achterhoff@yahoo.com

LINDA CHANDLER, *union hall manager* (616) 822-3520
sugarmell14@comcast.net

RAYMOND NOVAKOSKI, *retiree chapter president* (616) 560-7747
raynova@sbcglobal.net

Important Phone Numbers

GRAND RAPIDS MAIN OFFICE (616) 776-1489 / 1535
Fax: (616) 776-1536

P-CAMPUS OFFICE (616) 977-1050
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

REPRESENTING APWU BARGAINING EMPLOYEES IN:

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 mdlblong@gmail.com of these or anything you would like included. Pictures are also welcome!

The Long And Short Of It

By Michael Long, President

Welcome to Fall. As I sit down to type out this edition's article, I am struck in awe sometimes as nature unfolds its beauty around us. Michigan is truly one of a kind. While I was coming back from Oklahoma last month after training my wife and I had the opportunity to visit another Presidential museum and the St. Louis Arch. Even with these types of attractions, give me the beauty of the people and Michigan countryside.

As I was thinking of what to write this edition, I first wanted to thank you. Through your representatives on the board, I was appointed as President of this organization due to the early resignation of Michelle. I wanted to thank Michelle for all the work she had done for the local. Whether it was her working tirelessly behind the scenes filing grievances or making sure the local's Christmas parties went off without a hitch, and most recently, procuring the new local t-shirts.

Speaking of the T-Shirts, if you haven't received yours, please send me an email and let me know your size and where to send it. If you are in a small office with other members, please send me one with all information so I can send one box out to you (or if possible, visit you and bring with me).

In the Grand Rapids installation, management has moved the SIPS/SDUS machine from the PSA (where it was being used primarily over the holidays) to the P-3. However, this is now affecting more than just the Grand Rapids Installation, but the entire area. Management is intermingling non-machinable and machinable mail together. When it comes to the stations and offices, the clerks are finding that smaller packages are being

smashed by larger ones. We are still in discussions with management about this change.

With fall coming in strong, and elections mail showing us what mail volumes were once were, it might be a good time to think about Christmas. With this, a Christmas party for the kids and adults? However, we can't do it alone. If you are willing to help to make this a reality for you and your family along with your fellow union brothers and sisters, please let me know.

Updates - Are you in? If you are looking for update information, whether on grievance activity or contract negotiations, check out our Facebook page. If something needs to get out immediately, it will be posted there.

One thing I have been asked a few times since becoming President is: "When am I going to be converted? I have been a PSE for two years, and still not a regular yet." The language in the Clerk Craft MOU states that PSEs (in larger offices, if you are in a Level 4 RMPO, you are not automatically converted) will be converted once you reach 24 months, plus three full pay periods. So, if you have been a PSE for two years, you need to wait a few more weeks and then the reality of becoming a career will take place. However, one thing I need to make sure you are fully aware of....when you get your annual leave advanced to you at the two year mark, DO NOT use it, otherwise, you will be billed for it. You haven't earned it. You will only have earned maybe 12 hours (at the most) of leave by the time you are converted, and if you use more than that, you will be billed.

New Contract Information? Nothing as of the time of this writing. You know as much as I do by going to APWU.org and signing up for the text messages and listening to the update. However, do keep in mind that until we do reach a new contract, the current contract is still in force. While we don't get anymore raises, everything else is still there for our protection.

PTRs (Maintenance) in the Associate Offices - \$15 Million dollar pay out. If you were on the rolls as a PTR between January 1, 2018 and December 31, 2023, you will receive some of the payment. However, PTRs must fill out the Questionnaire on the APWU.org website to be paid.

Maintenance - Make sure you check your PAR & PER and if needed, make sure your rejection is up to date. This is YOUR responsibly.



(Continued on page 4)

WMAL Retiree Chapter Update

By Ray Novakowski, President

The APWU National Retiree Convention 2024, held from July 13-14, saw robust participation from delegates hailing from Michigan and various other states. The Michigan Postal Workers Union (MPWU) sent six delegates, while the Western Michigan Area Local (WMAL) Chapter sent two. Key topics covered included health benefits, legislative issues, and National Convention resolutions.

Legislative Director Judy Beard and APWU Health Plan Director Sara Jane Rodriguez led thorough discussions on health benefits, providing detailed reports. The Postal Service Health Benefit (PSHB) program is set to commence on January 1, 2025, making it crucial to review the available plans. Many of these plans have been approved for 2025, with rates expected to be announced by mid-October. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) will continue to manage these health plans, although they will be categorized differently from those of other agencies.

The APWU National Convention took place from July 15-18, featuring a variety of speakers and presentations. This was the first time retirees served as voting delegates, with one delegate per chapter. I attended as the MPWU Retiree Chapter President, and Vice President Deb Ohanesian represented the WMAL Chapter. While few retiree-specific issues were discussed, the primary focus was on the direction members wanted the negotiation team to take.

Both the Retiree and National Conventions were successful and well-organized, facilitating comprehensive discussions and voting on various issues through a democratic process.

On the legislative front, the APWU is advocating for the Social Security Fairness Act (H.R.82/S.597), which aims to repeal the



Government Pension Offset (GPO) and the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP). This would end the reduction of earned benefits for Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) retirees and their spouses who qualify for Social Security. Thanks to efforts from National and all members, the resolution for discharge has garnered 218 sponsors. The process will now move to the floor for a vote, likely in November, and we hope for its approval. We need to continue urging our representatives to vote in favor of the Social Security Fairness Act.

Please remember to vote on November 5, 2024, as it is our right as Americans.

Our next WMAL Retiree Chapter meeting is scheduled for November 12, 2024, at 11 AM at the Union Hall, 2554 Burlingame SW, Wyoming, MI. One of the issues to be addressed at this meeting will be filling the Recording Secretary position, as Sonia Berger will be resigning in December. We greatly appreciate all she has done for the chapter over the years and hope she will continue to be involved.

In Union Solidarity,

(Continued from page 3)

Lastly, those of you who might be on OWCP or in LWOP for over a year and wondering why you lost your health insurance, and maybe been moved off the Postal rolls. The language in the ELM is specific. If you are in a LWOP status for 365 days, you will/can lose your health insurance. Make sure you try to use, even an hour of paid leave or such within the year. You can also be moved off the postal rolls.

In closing, I want to bring up something very important to you, the local, and representation into the future. YOU NEED TO GET INVOLVED! Right now, there are four board members who can retire at any time. If we don't have new and younger members stepping up now, so we can help get you ready to take over after the elections at the end of next year, I am not sure what we will have. You are the future of our union. I ask each of you, whether you have ten, twenty or thirty years of time left before your retirement to step up now. You will be surprised how quickly the time goes by.

In Solidarity

Mike

*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!

Clerk Craft

By Suzi Boyd, Clerk Craft Director A

APWU Family,

Welcome to falling leaves and pumpkin spice season. I hope you all had a safe and enjoyable summer with family and friends.

As you may already know, Western Michigan Area Local is in the process of some changes on the Executive Board. Michelle stepped down from the President's position and per the local constitution, the Executive Vice-President assumed and was then appointed to the role of the President. This opened up the Vice-President position and is currently open for someone to put in for, which may also cause for another position to become open. I ask for your patience as we navigate through these changes together. I would like to reassure you that your Executive Board, along with the stewards of this local will continue to represent the membership and continue to fighting for your rights. Change is unavoidable; it will be always be there.

Those of us, that currently serve this local, whether as a steward, member of the executive board or both, may not be running for re-election for the 2026-2028 term. Some may choose to retire and will no longer be around to represent the membership. We need those members, who have many more years of a career ahead of them to step up and get involved. The time is now! Becoming a steward is not for everyone. You may be afraid to even give it a try. Maybe you are worried you wouldn't be good at it, or not even like it. We have got you. We are here to answer any questions you may have about how to get started. I will tell you from experience; at times it is not easy. Some days, you will feel like throwing in the towel. There are days you will feel unappreciated. Do not let what I am telling you, keep you from taking that step. If you choose to become a steward, you will, have a lot to learn. You will make mistakes. Own

up to them; use them as a learning tool and keep fighting forward. As you read this, you are most likely saying to yourself: "Then why do you do it?" We do it because we choose to represent and advocate for our fellow co-workers.. United we stand, divided we fail. Those of use, that are stewards now, did not know what we were doing either when we started. We asked a lot of questions. We learned from our mentors, our successors. I am going to be forthright here. Nobody likes to go to their supervisor and ask to see a steward only to hear them say "there isn't one available or we don't have one." We need more eyes and ears on the workroom floor. We need more representation. Stepping up and becoming a steward is the way to accomplish that. If we do not get the younger work force to step up, before the seasoned stewards leave; the future stewards of this local may not have any successors to mentor ad guide them. If you are interested in becoming a steward, please contact your craft director or a member of the Executive Board and them know. Let us fight for workers' right, safe working conditions and a workplace free of harassment and intimidation TOGETHER! The WMAL offers local and state training. In addition, you can also learn from our national officers (directly from some who negotiated the language). If this is something you choose to do take all the training courses offered to you: Knowledge is Power. If becoming a steward is just not for you, there are other ways to get involved within your local. You can attend union meetings, volunteer to serve on a committee or at a local event. If you would like to get involved in any of these other ways, please let one of us know.



I would also like to share with you, that APWU held an organization drive between April 1 – June 25 of this year. We were successful in gaining over 8,700 new members across the nation. Thank you to those that took the time to talk with a non-member and let them know the importance of becoming a member and having a voice. I also would like to extend a warm Welcome to those of you that joined and became new members of the Western Michigan Area Local #281.

When we stand together, that's when we ALL WIN!

In Solidarity,
Suzi

Clerk in the Know

By AmeKa Jones
 Clerk Craft Director - B



Members,

We have PSE's who just got converted and have questions about if they should automatically get 40 hours. Unfortunately PSE's have to wait for three full pay periods to be converted after their 24 months and this is only for those PSEs in larger post offices. If you are in a Level 4 RMPO, the automatic conversion does not apply.

We also are having PSE's who are being charged for their Advanced Annual Leave. If this happens to you, it is most likely because you used your advanced leave that was given to you at your one & two year mark but didn't actually earn it. The Post Office gives leave to employees before they earn it and then have to cash them out when they either go on to their 5-day break or get converted. It might not be fair, but it has to be paid back. Just remember, if you are going to be converted in the next three pay periods after your 24 months, do not use leave that you haven't earned. Don't look at your check stub and see all the leave, because you haven't earned it.

By the way, the union is giving out union shirts to our members. If you haven't gotten a shirt please let me know by contacting me at 616-560-3279 or the union office at 616-776-1489.

Thank you
 AmeKa

An Injury to One is an Injury to All

By Jennifer Rizzon
 HR/Injury Compensation Representative



I will be at the GMF and P Campus locations for the health fairs. At this time, it is uncertain if I will have the materials from APWU UHC in time for the Health Fairs. I was told that OPM does not release the information until the second week of October. I will bring what information I can, and I will keep a log of information a APWU member is requesting regarding APWU UHC insurance. So when I receive the materials I will be able to pass them out to the union members that are requesting the information.

I will be attending the 39th Annual Open Season Seminar being presented by APWU Health Plan. I am looking forward to learning more about the 2025 APWU Health Plans and bringing additional information back to our members. I will be putting information in the breakroom at the GMF and P Campus. And I hope to be able to make room on our union boards to display some of the information. And come to the union meetings because we will have information there also. If you have any questions regarding the new Postal Service Health Benefits Plan in reference to the APWU Health Plans, please feel free to come see me.

Along with the Health Plan, I am also the point of contact to assist our membership with Workers Compensation. If you are having issues with an injury that was either caused at work, or aggravated/exasperated at work, you may qualify to have your injury covered by OWCP and also any time off that may have been associated with this injury.



We give our pledge to protect and support you.

WELCOME to the NEW 2025 Postal Service Health Benefits (PSHB) Program.



I was elected as director of APWU Health Plan in 2019 to help create and foster the kind of health insurance benefits and services you and I would want for our families—and to keep your best interest at heart. I'm not only the Health Plan director, I'm also a member and feel a huge sense of security knowing my family is protected from high-cost healthcare bills.

Sarah J. Rodriguez
Director, APWU Health Plan

APWU HEALTH PLAN

All eligible postal employees and retirees can enroll.

Compare premiums for the 2025 plan year.

High Option premiums

High Option members will pay a lower premium in 2025. A yearly savings up to \$829.

Self PSHB enrollment code 23A		Self Plus One PSHB enrollment code 23C		Self & Family PSHB enrollment code 23B	
Biweekly	Monthly	Biweekly	Monthly	Biweekly	Monthly
\$109.86	\$238.03	\$213.05	\$461.61	\$277.28	\$600.77

Consumer Driven Option premiums

Self PSHB enrollment code 23D		Self Plus One PSHB enrollment code 23F		Self & Family PSHB enrollment code 23E	
Biweekly	Monthly	Biweekly	Monthly	Biweekly	Monthly
\$80.62	\$174.68	\$175.23	\$379.66	\$191.16	\$414.17

★ APWU special rates biweekly ★
For APWU career bargaining unit employees with more than 1 year in PSHB/FEHB.

Self PSHB enrollment code 23D		Self Plus One PSHB enrollment code 23F		Self & Family PSHB enrollment code 23E	
APWU career less than 1 year and PSE	APWU career more than 1 year	APWU career less than 1 year and PSE	APWU career more than 1 year	APWU career less than 1 year and PSE	APWU career more than 1 year
\$80.62	-\$16.12	\$175.23	\$35.05	\$191.16	\$38.23

OPEN SEASON 2024
Nov. 11 - Dec. 9

Access care from 1.7+ million providers in the UnitedHealthcare® network.

OPEN SEASON HOTLINE:
800.PIC.APWU (Opens Oct. 28)
openseason@apwuhp.com (response within 48 hrs)
openseason.apwuhp.com

This is a summary of benefits and features offered by the APWU Health Plan. All benefits are subject to the definitions, limitations, and exclusions set forth in the Plan's Brochure (R175-004).

Union Meetings

Next General Membership:
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 Meeting is:
November 12th

Deadline - Next Submission for WMAL Voice is: November 15, 2024



Western Michigan Area Local #281 American Postal Workers Union, AFL-CIO Western Michigan Postal Workers, Inc.



Per the June 2024 General Meeting - these are the new rates for renting the Union Hall, effective 1/1/25.

HALL RENTALS for APWU MEMBERS & the GENERAL PUBLIC 2554 Burlingame Ave SW; Wyoming, Michigan 49509



See More Pictures of Hall on the WMAU.org website

Hall Rental Information

(Not Provided with Rental)

Lighted Parking for vehicles; Entry Foyer/Vestibule with Coat Room and Restrooms.
Kitchen Facilities: Sink, Stove, Oven, Refrigerator, Microwave, Coffee Pot & Serving Window; Walk-In Cooler.
Hall: 30 Six-Foot Long Tables and 10 Round Tables with seating for over 120 people (hall capacity - 188).
Fully Air Conditioned and Heated. Generous set-up time prior to your event with a six-hour event timeframe.
Trash disposal on-site.

Call: (616) 822-3520 for more information, to schedule a rental, and/or to view the hall/accommodation. Please leave a message (with a number to call you back) if not answered and you will be contacted as soon as possible.

All communication and correspondence is in English.

Rental Breakdown (as of January 1, 2025)	WMAU Member (Active & Retiree*)	Non-Profit (Meetings Only (no events))	General Public
Security Deposit: <small>(This fee is refundable and will be credited after event and is not a charge)</small>	\$300	None	\$400
Agent Fee:	None	None	\$100
Hall Rental Fee:	\$350	\$150	\$1000
Total Amount:	\$650	\$150	\$1500

*Retirees must be a member of the APWU local retiree chapter to receive rate. Member must be present throughout the entire event and setup.

Western Michigan Area Local
American Postal Workers Union
PO Box 2706
Grand Rapids, MI 49501-2706

Address Service Requested

