

# WMAL VOICE

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



 **Happy  
Hanukkah**

 **Eid  
Mubarak**

 **Happy  
Kwanzaa**

**Happy**  **Winter Solstice**



## WMAL Voice

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Editor: Brian Thompson



### 2026 - 2028 Executive Board

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GRAND RAPIDS GMF UNION OFFICE (616) 776-1489 / 1535  
Fax: (833) 551-0821

P-CAMPUS UNION OFFICE (616) 977-1050  
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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  
Fax Number for FEHB and Other Documents (651) 456-6610

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· Glen· Gowen· Grand Haven· Grand Rapids· Grandville· Grant· Hamilton· Hesperia· Holland· Hopkins· Howard City· Hudsonville· Jamestown· Jenison· Lamont· Lowell· Macatawa· Marne· Mecosta· Middleville· Moline· Morley· Newaygo· New Era· 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 bthompsonapwu707@gmail.com of anything you would like included. Pictures are welcomed!



# The Long And Short Of It

By Michael Long, *Outgoing President*

As my final report as local President, I wanted to start off this article with a word of Thanks to you, the member. But more specifically, to you, the member who has stepped up and tries to make this local and the union movement as a whole, great. In my last paragraph, I will have a challenge for each of you, but in the meantime, I just wanted to say Thank you. This past sixteen months have flown by. While I will miss some of the aspects of the job, I am looking forward to returning to the floor to work on the machines and get dirty. As a mechanic, this is something I enjoy and get mentally lost in - almost Zen-like some days.

**APWU Health Plan Premiums** - By the time this edition of the Newsletter reaches you, the new year will be here already. However, during this timeframe of the newsletter, Open Season occurred for Health, Dental, Vision and FSA. One of the biggest points of contentions this year was the change in premiums for the Consumer Driven after the premium amounts were released (and the books and material were printed, etc.). As the Health Plan Director stated in a couple videos and through communications sent, this was unavoidable. Without OPM giving the weighted average to the plan before everything was sent out, the amount listed was correct. However, like most things in the government, nothing goes the way it should. By law, through OPM, the Agency is capped at paying the weighted average for each plan and type. In this case, the 95% was calculated directly and the agency costs exceeded the cap. The 2026 biweekly maximum government contribution for most employees and annuitants (72% of the weighted average) is \$304.64 for Self Only, \$657.50 for Self Plus One, and \$712.30 for Self and Family. The monthly maximum government contribution (72% of the weighted average) is \$660.05 for Self Only, \$1,424.58 for Self Plus One and \$1,543.32 for Self and Family. Thus the recalculation had to occur and the increase was then announced and sent to the field. The other confusing part is that when OPM gave the printouts on how much you were going pay, it showed the normal (everyone who isn't an APWU represented employee) amount. Rest assured, the amount that you will see deducted from your paycheck will reflect the APWU Bargaining Unit employee amount listed. If not, please let the President, HR Representative know. (Btw, just to keep this in the back of your mind, if you transfer to another craft, retire, or promote, you are no longer eligible for that reduced rate for Consumer Driven. Because it is a negotiated issue in the contract, it only covers those who are covered by the contract.

**PMARS** the replacement to eMARS for Maintenance is coming. Was notified by our NBA that when it does roll out, it isn't like the computer where we had an option of getting one or not, but we will be issued one, like tools. The packet

we received from National pretty much states that the new system will take over for eMARS system.



## **Per Diem and Off-Site Training** -

Starting January 1, 2026, the Full-Per Diem at the NCED (Norman) or any off-site training for any employee has been terminated by management. Management made the unilateral decision to revert back to forcing employees to eat the cafeteria and only provide Per Diem on the weekends (like it used to). This is being grieved at HQ level; however, if you are going to NCED or any other off-site training and not given your full per diem, you need to let your steward know to have a grievance filed, pending the results of the national dispute. You might ask why – the MOU says the parties can withdraw by notifying others – and you would be right; however, when management and the union negotiated the new agreement, this was one of the items that was agreed to carry-over to the new contract. By management changing their decision after already agreeing to it in negotiations, is bad faith bargaining.

**Overtime and Taxes** - The Postal Service has notified the APWU that they will be sending a letter to employees regarding the tax deduction for the premium portion of Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) overtime that *some employees* may be eligible to take. The letter explains what portion of overtime an employee was paid in 2025 that qualifies for the deduction. This is not a collective bargaining issue and no part of the deduction – the qualifying amount or whether overtime was eligible to be deducted – can or should be grieved. We (the APWU) cannot nor should we, give employees tax advice or advise on whether an employee is eligible to take this deduction. We (Union officers, stewards, etc.) will not be privy to, nor have access to what amount of their overtime qualifies for the deduction. Overtime payments are usually larger under the National Agreement than what is required by the FLSA, so not all overtime payments qualify for the deduction. Employees who have questions about the amount of qualified overtime or their eligibility for a tax deduction should direct those questions to their tax professional, the IRS, or the Postal Service.

**TACS Award** – Lead Clerks may be seeing some money in the paychecks in the near future from the Arbitration Award from National. While we are not aware of the exact amount each clerk will be receiving, just from my perspective, with the amount of the award and the number of lead clerks in the nation, it probably is not going to be substantial. However, what this award did do is finally give us teeth in our fight to get the work back. As of January 28, 2026, all offices must

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(Continued from page 3) Long and Short of It

have their clerks doing the input. This is Level 7 work too. So, if you are given the work to do, and are a Mail Processing / Sales & Services, or any Level 6 clerk, you need to make sure you are being paid Level 7 while you are doing these inputs. You also need to make sure you have received the proper training for this. By the way, TACS is not the only system you need access for when you are doing these inputs. You must be given eRMS access as well. A year or so ago, you were able to do inputs of Leave through the TACS interface; however, this was taken away and now you can only do leave inputs through eRMS. If you haven't been given this training and you are or will be doing the inputs, please let your steward or officer know.

**Hostile Working Environment** – We are awaiting the start of an environmental study to be conducted at the Grand Rapids Installation in the near future. This is part of the IMIP process due to hostile working conditions. To ensure this study works, those who are conducting the study (Labor, HR, etc.) needs to have ALL available information as to what is occurring on the workroom floor. Please, I can't stress this enough.... Please make sure to either fill out the questionnaire you might receive or if you are interviewed, tell them everything. Do NOT be intimidated or fear any retaliation. This is one of those protected activities and the only way to alleviate and fix the issue(s) is if the information is provided as thoroughly as possible. This is where you are truly needed and can make a big difference. Even though this isn't a court of law, but just like when you are being sworn in, make sure to Tell the Truth, the Whole Truth, and Nothing but the Truth!!

**Scholarships** – Since the new year is fast upon us, just remember that those of you who have children or grandchildren in college or is a senior in high school and graduating this year, that the scholarship program for the local awards five (5) - \$1,000 scholarships to the children/grandchildren of the local. As someone who had a couple kids go through college, I can definitely relate that it isn't cheap and every little thing can help. Information for the James Sweeny Scholarship is in this edition of the WMAL Voice. That being said, this is only one of many scholarships out there. National has two (one for college and one for trade schools). The Auxiliary has one. Union Plus has one. They are out there. You just need to do your due diligence and find them. Now a days, with AI, it is easier than ever to locate. If you don't have the ability to search, contact the school the child is in, and have them provide you with some. Go to the library, there are actually books on this subject. There is no reason, someone who would like to continue their education, not be able to. It is reported every year, that many scholarships go unclaimed because no one puts in for them. Believe it or not, are you a Ginger? There is a scholarship for you. Are you Indigenous, there are scholarships for you. Does the family belong or have lineage

to the Masons, or Revolution, or such...guess what, there is a scholarship for you too. Look. You will be surprised what is there!

**Closing and My Challenge to Each of You** - I would like to thank each of you. As I stated at the start of this article, these past 16 months have flown by. Things that I wanted to accomplish unfortunately was put the back burner and there they stay simmering. Hopefully David will look at them and have more time to try and make things better behind the scenes (i.e. Updated website, Hall Reservations, etc.) While I am remaining on as a steward of the local and in my current MPWU/state position, as my final word as an officer of this local (I said this before and look how that turned out); I want to end by saying we need people to step up and become active. While I sit down and write this, I am reminded of a discussion with a member I had yesterday regarding this. I was asked, why there aren't any stewards for employees to come and see all the time? I asked this person....so, "You are going to step up and become a steward then?", because people don't want to be involved. Even when some do, some don't come to work or have vacations and such and there isn't enough to go around. I also pointed to the current local election that just took place for the Recording Secretary (congratulations to Kayla McKie), to prove this point about involvement. Only 19% of our local membership voted in this past election; 14% voted in the National Elections, and only 11% voted to ratify the contract. All you had to do is open the envelope, put a check mark on a piece of paper, put it in the envelope, and mail it (which is just bringing it with you to work). However, with the local elections, 81% of the membership couldn't or didn't want to be bothered. Elections have consequences! Even though this election may have been a less significant one, it wasn't. This position ensures all the minutes to keep the membership informed and to ensure all motions for expenditures or new officers are recorded. If it isn't in the minutes, then we don't have the authority to do anything. However, now look at this one a large scale, as a Nation, or even in your city, and here in Michigan, elections can and do have major impact on lives. For those who may be indolent and don't want to vote or such, fine. Be complacent, but you lost your right to complain about what is happening. No Armchair Quarterback if you don't at least put a little effort into making a difference and be part of the call. You had a voice; you had a vote – but you gave it away. Remember, politicians love it when you don't vote or when you don't say anything. They don't have to worry about being chastised or possibly being challenged when people don't get out and make a difference. This New Years, instead of making a resolution going to the gym or being nicer to one another, you, along with others in your family or circle of influence resolve making your voice heard.

Yours in Solidarity,

Mike

## Out with the Old, In with the New

By David Hoyle, Incoming President

Hello Members,

My name is David Hoyle, and I am honored to introduce myself as the new local President of the Western Michigan Area Local 281.



To give you some background on myself, I am married to another APWU member (clerk) and have four children ranging from six to seventeen. I started my postal career as a non-career Rural Carrier Associate in Sparta, MI, and have since worked in nearly every facet of our operations—from Transitional Employee - City Carrier (before we had CCAs) and a casual clerk to a Postal Support Employee (PSE) and career clerk at the GMF and ANNEX. I have firsthand experience with the challenges we all face daily.

First, I want to express my sincere gratitude for your hard work this past Christmas season. Management often fails to do so, but your dedication is appreciated. It seems that every year, no matter how many times we have Peak Season, management continues to treat it like it is brand new. They forgot how the contract is suppose to be interpreted in regards to sectional overtime. Unfortunately, once it seems we get one person “trained”, they leave, get promoted, or such, and we get someone new that is naïve in the ways things are run.

I, along with the entire incoming Executive Board stand ready to handle the tasks that stand before us, but we can’t do it alone. I firmly believe we can build a stronger, more engaged union. I am looking for members to step up—to plan events, become stewards, and be our eyes and ears on the floor. All too often, I have heard people say - “I pay dues, that is enough.” While paying dues is essential, it is the minimum requirement, without you (U), there wouldn’t be a union (NION). True strength comes from active participation.

It is easy to criticize from the sidelines, but it is challenging to take a stand. I am here for you, but my efforts alone are not enough. Your help is essential to make this union everything it can be.

In solidarity,

**David Hoyle**  
Incoming President

*Looking for answers? Make sure to check out:  
[WWW.WMAL.ORG](http://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 Page/Group!*



LET'S MAKE OUR  
UNION STRONGER

**WE ALL HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY!**

BUILDING UNION POWER MAKES US ALL STRONGER, AND EVERY NEW MEMBER OF THE APWU IS AN ADDITIONAL POSTAL WORKER'S VOICE SPEAKING UP FOR GOOD JOBS AT THE USPS.

OUR STRENGTH IS IN OUR NUMBERS. THAT IS HOW WE WIN BETTER PAY, BETTER BENEFITS, AND STAND UP FOR OUR RIGHTS IN THE WORKPLACE.

BY STEPPING UP AND COMMITTING TO ORGANIZING FOR A STRONG APWU, YOU ARE HELPING BUILD A BETTER TOMORROW FOR US ALL.

**BUILDING UNION POWER,  
WHAT CAN YOU DO TO BUILD OUR UNION?**

- ☒ TALK TO YOUR COWORKERS ABOUT WHY THEY SHOULD JOIN THE UNION, AND SIGN THEM UP!
- ☒ ATTEND A UNION MEETING OR OTHER UNION EVENTS AND ASK YOUR COWORKERS TO JOIN YOU.
- ☒ JOIN A COMMITTEE WITHIN YOUR LOCAL OR CONSIDER BECOMING A SHOP STEWARD.

**CHECK OUT OUR ONLINE JOIN PROCESS:**

OUR ONLINE TOOL HAS MADE JOINING THE APWU EASY FOR BOTH NON-MEMBERS WHO WANT TO JOIN THE UNION, AND FOR MEMBERS LOOKING TO SIGN UP THEIR COWORKERS.

THE ENTIRE PROCESS TAKES JUST MINUTES TO COMPLETE. SCAN THE QR CODE WITH YOUR PHONE'S CAMERA TO JOIN ONLINE, AND SAVE A PICTURE OF THE CODE TO YOUR PHONE TO SHOW YOUR COWORKERS WHO WANT TO JOIN.

MAKE THE COMMITMENT TODAY AND ASK AT LEAST ONE NON-MEMBER COWORKER TO STAND WITH YOU.



[www.apwu.org/join](http://www.apwu.org/join)

JOIN APWU



## Retiree's Corner -

By: *Raymond Novakoski*

At our November meeting we enjoyed a strong turnout, and both WMAL's new (incoming) President, David Hoyle, and current (outgoing) President Mike Long, along with the local's HR Representative Jennifer Rizzon. They were on-hand to share detailed information on the APWU Health Plan. Handouts were also distributed for the APWU plan and the Blue Cross and Blue Shield plans so that everyone could gather the facts needed to choose the coverage that best fits their lifestyle and needs.



Looking ahead to February, I'm working on securing a speaker to explain Social Security benefits—what retirees should watch for and how to apply. Please bring any ideas you have for summer events to that meeting. We've sponsored a Whitecaps game in the past, but we'd love fresh suggestions for activities that'll help keep our retirees connected.

On the political front, there's growing frustration—regardless of party, over the gridlock in Washington. Economic inequality continues to widen, and with key elections coming in November, now is the time for all of us to think about how we can influence change.

Finally, the U.S. Postal Service remains at risk of privatization. Although it operates without federal subsidies, USPS is a vital public service for urban and rural communities alike. Please contact your Representatives and Senators to insist that the Postal Service be preserved—it belongs to the people, not to private interests.

*Ray Novakoski*

WMAL & MPWU Retiree Chapter President

## Veterans - Learn how to navigate the season when you're already experiencing challenges.

The holidays are a fun and joyful time of year, but the season can also bring many challenges, especially for those already coping with depression, stress, anxiety or alcohol misuse. As a Veteran, you might feel on edge in crowds, find your usual activities less enjoyable or struggle to celebrate due to lingering survivor guilt.

Here are six strategies that can help you stay healthy and cope with challenges during the holiday season:

- 1) Make a plan. If you know a situation might be stressful, write down a plan and practice it in your head. Include activities you can use as a healthy break, like listening to music, spending time outside or going to a movie. Let family members know that you might sometimes need a break and why, so you can feel comfortable stepping away without having your motives questioned.
- 2) Stick to healthy routines. Holidays can disrupt your usual schedule, but good sleep, daily activity and healthy food have been shown to support better mental health. Avoid substances; alcohol and drugs can make anxiety, depression and anger worse, even if they seem to help at first.
- 3) Set boundaries. Learn to say "no." Setting boundaries is normal and healthy. This isn't the time to try to push your limits beyond what you know you can handle. For example, if you're not comfortable with long periods in a crowd, you can spend quality time with family and friends at your home and skip going to the packed holiday market.
- 4) Honor feelings of grief or survivor guilt in a healthy way. Spend a few minutes remembering the people you lost. Light a candle, say their names, or follow a tradition that

honors them. Talk about your feelings with a trusted person, chaplain or counselor instead of keeping it all inside.

- 5) Seek social support. You may also be able to draw strength from the season through social support. Opportunities to be with trusted family or friends can provide comfort, support and joy.
- 6) Reach out for help. If you're starting to feel overwhelmed, connect with resources and support systems. Even if you're not enrolled in VA health care or benefits, this resource locator can help you. If you already have a therapist, peer support group or sponsor, reach out to them.

Experiencing a crisis? Contact the Veterans Crisis Line: dial 988, then press 1; or text 838255; or chat at VeteransCrisisLine.net.

### Explore VA benefits and health care (on VA.gov or through the APP)

<b>Health care</b> Apply for VA health care, find out how to access services, and manage your health and benefits online.	<b>Disability</b> File a claim for disability compensation for conditions related to your military service, and manage your benefits over time.	<b>Education and training</b> Apply for and manage your GI Bill and other education benefits to help pay for college and training programs.
<b>Careers and employment</b> Apply for vocational rehabilitation services, get support for your veteran-owned small business, and access other career resources.	<b>Pension</b> Apply for monthly payments for wartime Veterans and survivors with limited or no income who meet certain age and disability requirements.	<b>Housing assistance</b> Find out if you're eligible for a VA-backed home loan, if you have a service-connected disability, see if you qualify for a housing grant to help you live more independently.
<b>Life insurance</b> Explore VA life insurance options for Veterans, service members, and families. Manage your policy online, file claims for benefits, and access helpful resources.	<b>Marials and memorials</b> Get help planning a burial in a VA national cemetery, order a headstone or other memorial item to honor a veteran's service, and apply for survivor and dependent benefits.	<b>Records</b> Apply for a printed Veteran ID card, get your VA benefit letters and medical records, and learn how to apply for a discharge upgrade.
<b>Service members</b> Find out what benefits you may be eligible for during service and which time-sensitive benefits to consider when separating or retiring.	<b>Family and caregivers</b> Learn about the benefits you may be eligible for as the spouse, dependent, survivor, or caregiver of a Veteran.	<b>VA department information</b> Learn more about the VA departments that manage our benefit and health care programs.

# To the Next Generation of Postal Workers - Your Voice, Your Future, Your APWU

By *Brittany Thompson* -  
Steward @ Hesperia & MPWU Area 9 Director

Are you under 35 and just starting your career at the Postal Service? You're entering a workforce with a proud history, and it's essential to understand that the wages, benefits, and working conditions you enjoy today exist because of the union and the dedication of members who came before you. The American Postal Workers Union (APWU) needs your energy and perspective to shape the future.

## The 1970 Strike: The Foundation of Your Career

Before 1970, postal workers were low-paid, often working long hours just to make ends meet, with wages depending on the whim of Congress. Many even qualified for food stamps. In March 1970, tired of being underpaid and undervalued, postal workers in New York City went on an illegal strike. They were soon joined by 200,000 others across the country, bringing mail service to a halt. This historic action led to:

- **Collective Bargaining Rights:** The Postal Reorganization Act of 1970 was enacted, granting unions the legal right to negotiate wages, benefits, and working conditions, rather than relying on Congress.
- **Significantly Higher Pay:** The starting salary was immediately and substantially raised, with subsequent contracts securing regular annual wage increases and cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs).
- **Job Security and Protections:** The foundation was laid for the "no-layoff" clause, a strong grievance procedure, and guaranteed work hours for full-time employees.

Every raise, every holiday, and your very right to decent working conditions is a direct result of the power of workers standing together.

## Why Active Involvement Matters for You

The APWU is not a "grievance machine," but an activist organization that needs your involvement to remain strong and responsive to your generation's needs.

## Direct Benefits of Membership

- ◇ **A Voice in Your Future:** Only members can vote on the contract, elect officers, and run for union office. Don't let someone else decide your working conditions.
- ◇ **Stronger Protections:** Your union membership provides job security, protection from unfair discipline ("just cause"), and the right to report unsafe working conditions without repercussions.
- ◇ **Valuable Benefits:** Access to comprehensive health insurance plans (including specific provisions for Postal Support Employees (PSEs), paid annual and sick leave, and retirement planning resources.

- ◇ **Exclusive Opportunities:** APWU members and their families are eligible for a wide range of scholarships for college or vocational training, life insurance, and discounts on things like entertainment, auto insurance, and tech.
- ◇ **Mentorship and Networking:** Get the chance to connect with experienced mentors and shape the union's direction through young worker committees.



## Building a Better Workplace

Involvement allows you to make a tangible difference. You can help address work-floor issues, advocate for safer environments, and ensure that management respects your rights and the contract. Your fresh perspectives are needed to face modern challenges and help innovate the union for the future.

The power of the APWU lies in its members. By getting involved, educating yourself, and standing in solidarity with your coworkers, you help ensure that the gains won in 1970 are protected and built upon for the next 50 years.

Join the movement, use your voice, and secure your future. Learn more about getting involved on the American Postal Workers Union website, or going to a local union meeting or talking to a steward.

If you are under 35 (or even over) and interested in, and/or learning more about your local, the union and what you can do to become involved, please feel free to reach out to me. Let's talk about how this, our generation will continue and improve on this legacy with what we are being entrusted.

Brittany Thompson  
231-519-1971





Do You Know One or More of these Individuals. Could you use \$50.00 bucks each time you signed up one? If so, now is your chance to not get involved in the union, and help strengthen the union as a whole by organizing these non-members into the union. Contact the union office to learn more.



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

PO Box 2706; Grand Rapids, MI 49501-2706  
GMF: Phone: (616) 776-1489 / 1535; Fax: (833) 551-0821  
P-Campus: Phone: (616) 977-1050; Fax (616) 977-1020



### Membership Eligible List

#### Grand Rapids Installation (495)

##### Clerks (Career)

David Abraczinskas	Ali Ahmed	Jennifer Baadke	Tia Bibler
Alexxes Bieschke	Justin Braun	Steven Carlson	Sopita Decharat
Benjamin Dehaan	Tabitha Edmonds	Robert Flikkema	Cheryl Fryling
Nicole Hodges	Darnell Johnson	Rick Manning	Eliel Martinez
Tamara McNabb	Ronda Myers	Teyarra Nathan	Matthew Piccolo
Lisa Robson	Michael Rusky	Blake Sandee	Wesley Schafer
Richard Shimmin	Nathan Stevens	Robbin Stevenson	David Verkade
Michelle Webb	Robert Wisner		

The below named co-workers are eligible for membership in your local - the Western Michigan Area Local of the APWU. Show and provide them with the benefits of belonging to the local and to the APWU. The local offers every member\* who organizes an eligible non-member \$50 for each person they sign-up and get to join.  
(\*does not apply to Executive Board members)

##### Postal Support Employees (PSEs) Clerks

Crystal Cook	Mirela Gaita	Kelly Goldner	Joshua Holley
Cameron Hathaway	Kristine Johnson	Kenneth Lucas	Eriel Mutagoma
David Ross	Seongmi Seo	Antwanette Spencer	Michael VanMeter

##### Motor Vehicle Service (TTO & VME) -

Moses Kil	Brandon Smith
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##### Maintenance

Nakisha Cannon	David Chiodo	Erin Crouner	John Cushman
Charles Goedken	Donald Merchant	Shawn Palmer	David Pieper
Amber Wiley	Diane Williams		

#### Associate Offices (493/494) - All Crafts

(To see list of all offices represented by the local, go to WMAL.org)

Allendale - Sage Kramer    Big Rapids - Edwin Courser; Alyssa Paez    Blanchard - Kenneth Lau  
 Bitley - Amanda Purnell    Bradley - Grace Norris    Branch - Serena Collins  
 Comstock Park - Jeremy Aldrich    Dorr - Kevin Myers    Fountain - Debra Mohr  
 Free Soil - Toni Burke    Grand Haven - Marie Bart; Aiyanna Dixon; Rolando Vela  
 Holland - Jason Auchtung; Warren Bismarck; Tyler Cheek; Morgan Dopp; Samantha Fealy; Jamie Inthisane;  
 Holland (cont.) - Eugene Marciniak; Deanna Runions; Bryon Warren; Craig Underly  
 Hudsonville - Austin VanderLaan    Jenison - Jerry Arens    Lamont - Elizabeth Olson  
 Lowell - Jessica Bradley; Jessica Needham    Morley - Meredith Linder    Newaygo - Cleveland Agee  
 New Era - Steven Knoblauch    Remus - Ginger Bartlett    Rockford - Anikka Quinn; Shelbi Frowein  
 Sand Lake - Valarie Mourer    Scottville - Ashlee Parks    Shelby - Hope Ernst; Roxann Vaniaan  
 Walhalla - Brian Melvin    Wayland - Janine Rairigh    West Olive - Shirely Sukes; Audra Warrick  
 Zeeland - Matt Locher; Linda Hagger



## The Value of Union Membership - How the APWU Has Raised Wages and Protected Workers from the Beginning.

*Written by: Michael Long with information from APWU.org and Various sources through ChatGPT's interface.*

Every day, someone asks me: What has the union ever done for me? Are you one of those too... Well... read this:

Since its founding on July 1, 1971, the American Postal Workers Union (APWU) has played a central role in ensuring fair wages, improved working conditions, and economic security for postal workers across the United States. The union was formed through the merger of five postal unions at a moment when federal postal workers were gaining collective bargaining rights, fundamentally changing the landscape of postal employment. Prior to the Postal Reorganization Act of 1970, postal workers had no real bargaining power: Congress controlled wages, and pay increases were rare or nonexistent, leaving many workers struggling financially. In 1970, before collective bargaining, a full-time postal worker earned roughly \$6,200 to start, with even long-tenured employees averaging only about \$8,440 — incomes so low that many postal workers qualified for food stamps. Meanwhile, Congress granted itself significant pay boosts during this same period.

The union's historic achievements began quickly. Following the widespread postal strike of 1970, which brought nationwide attention to worker grievances, Congress approved wage increases and passed the Postal Reorganization Act, granting postal unions the right to negotiate wages and working conditions. The first union contract raised starting salaries from levels that barely sustained workers to higher pay scales reflecting earned experience and collective negotiation. A starting postal worker's salary under the first APWU-era contract rose to \$8,488, already higher than what long-serving workers had been making just a few years earlier.

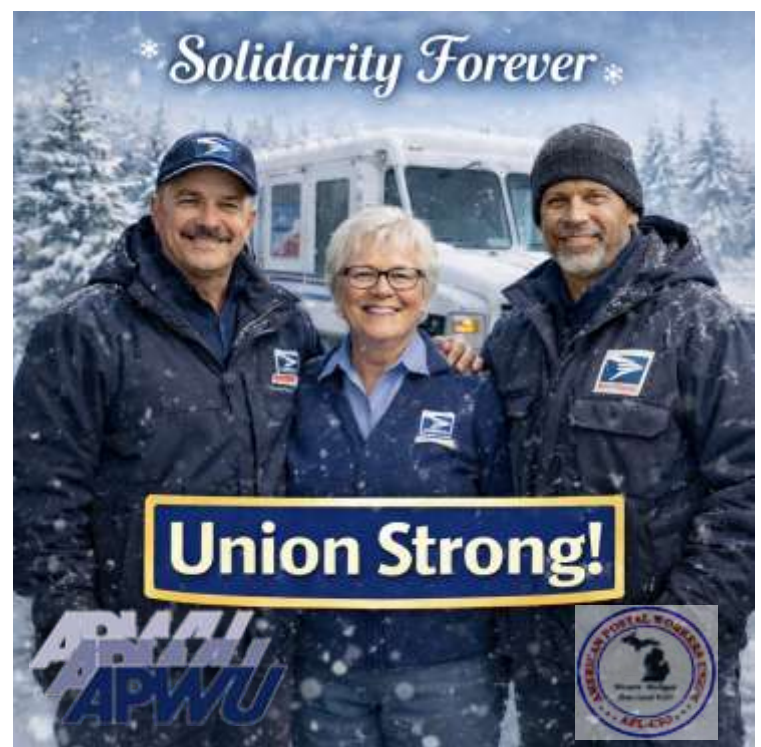
Over the decades, APWU members have continued to secure meaningful annual wage increases and cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) through collective bargaining agreements with the U.S. Postal Service. For example, under the 2021–2024 contract, career employees received multiple semi-annual COLAs based on the Consumer Price Index, increasing pay by thousands of dollars annually beyond standard wage hikes — providing crucial inflation protection during a period of rising prices. More recently, the 2024–2027 tentative agreement includes general wage increases of 1.3%–1.5% per year, full COLA protection for career employees (six adjustments over the contract term), and additional pay enhancements for Postal Support Employees (PSEs), ensuring that workers' earnings keep pace with living costs.

These negotiated wage gains mean that postal workers today earn significantly higher wages than they would have without union representation — wages that are tied not to arbitrary congressional decisions but to structured bargaining and union negotiations and/or Arbitrations. Had the APWU not

existed, postal workers would likely still be at the mercy of sporadic cost-of-living raises determined by external political bodies (i.e. Other mailing/packaging company lobbyists) or limited across-the-board increases imposed by management or Congress. Before collective bargaining rights, postal wages were stagnated for years (with no increases from 1967–1969) even as the cost of living rose, eroding worker purchasing power. Without the APWU's contracts, modern postal workers would likely earn far less, lacking COLA protections, systemic wage steps tied to experience and inflation, and the leverage to secure meaningful annual wage increases.

In addition to wage gains, APWU membership offers vital protections such as seniority rights, job security provisions, structured grievance procedures, and a voice in workplace safety and benefit negotiations. These protections help ensure that wage increases are just one part of a broader strategy to improve postal employees' overall quality of life.

Today, membership in the American Postal Workers Union continues to offer tangible economic benefits — from historically negotiated wage increases and inflation safeguards to structured pay progression and a collective voice at the bargaining table, not to mention a sundry of discounts and reduced premiums for health care. In a labor landscape where wage stagnation is a real risk for non-union workers, the APWU stands as a powerful example of what organized labor can achieve for working families.



## James A. Sweeney Scholarship Fund Rules

- ◇ There will be five (5) scholarships of \$1,000 each, given out annually.
- ◇ The applicant's sponsor(s) (parent or legal guardian) must have been a member of the bargaining unit, in good standing, of the Western Michigan Area Local #281 of the American Postal Workers Union for a minimum of one (1) year, immediately preceding application deadline; provided the sponsor is not an EAS or postal manager. Children of retired members of the bargaining unit are eligible to apply, provided the retiree had been a member of the local for at least one year, immediately prior to his/her retirement, and a member of the local Retiree Chapter. To ensure an equal opportunity to obtain a scholarship, the applicant's name can only be submitted once per annum.
- ◇ Applicant(s) must be a senior attending, or has graduated from high school or other corresponding secondary school.
- ◇ The application form(s) for the scholarship shall appear in the Western Michigan Area Local's newsletter/publication representing the month of February. The submission deadline will be March 15 or the first Monday thereafter. Applications will be accepted through the mail only and should be addressed as follows:

WMAL  
Attn: James A. Sweeney Scholarship  
PO Box 2706  
Grand Rapids, MI 49501

- ◇ The Scholarship Committee shall consist of up to five (5) members. Two (2) of these members shall be the currently elected Recording Secretary and Treasurer. One (1) member shall be the currently elected President, and he/she shall be designated as the Chairperson of the committee. The two (2) remaining members shall be appointed by the President.
- ◇ The committee shall convene before the regular April meeting to verify the parent(s)/legal guardian's membership qualifications; but not sooner than March 25<sup>th</sup>.
- ◇ The committee, upon verification of each application, shall number each application and place the number in a container designated by the committee. There shall be five (5) winners and a sufficient number of alternates drawn. The drawing will be held at the April General membership meeting during new business.
- ◇ Scholarship recipients must attend an accredited college; including community colleges and/or universities of his/her choice as a full-time student (Trade and vocational schools do not qualify for scholarship). Applicants must make their own applications to college.
- ◇ When the recipient notifies the Western Michigan Area Local's Treasurer that he/she has been accepted to the school, provided the winner notifies the union at least one month prior to the start of the academic year (to ensure that if an alternate needs to be chosen, it can be done so in a timely manner), the local treasurer will send to the school's business office a check, paid directly to the school attended by the winner, in the recipient's name. The scholarship will be sent to the respective school using the quarterly system in three (3) parts, or with schools using semesters, in two (2) parts. The scholarship must be used within the following scholastic year for tuition, books, or room and board.
- ◇ All disputes arising from the scholarship program shall be submitted to the local President, within thirty (30) days of the drawing, in written form. They shall be placed before the Scholarship Committee for review and shall be answered in writing within fifteen (15) days.
- ◇ These rules governing the Western Michigan Area Local Scholarship Program can only be amended, changed, or deleted once a year at the November membership meeting and will take effect for the next scholastic year.





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

PO Box 2706; Grand Rapids, MI 49501-2706  
GMF: Phone: (616) 776-1489 / 1535; Fax: (833) 551-0821  
P-Campus: Phone: (616) 977-1050; Fax (616) 977-1020



Submission of Scholarship Applications must be postmarked by the March 16, 2025 deadline.

**Mail to: WMAL; Attn: James A. Sweeny Scholarship; PO Box 2706; Grand Rapids, MI 49501**

**Applicant's Information**

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Have you filed a financial aid statement with the financial aid office applying for financial aid? Yes No

Scholarship Applicant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant's Home Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant's Home Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant's High School: \_\_\_\_\_

**APWU Member (Sponsor's) Information**

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Have you been a member of the Western Michigan Area Local for over one year? Yes No

Parent or Guardian's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Craft: \_\_\_\_\_

Work Location / Office Pay Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Work Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

**WMAL Office Information (To be completed by the Scholarship Committee)**

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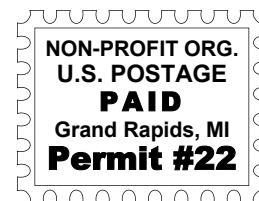
Date of Postmark on Application: \_\_\_\_\_ Verified by: \_\_\_\_\_

Membership Verification of One Year prior to submission? Yes No Verified by: \_\_\_\_\_

Drawing Number Application is Assigned: \_\_\_\_\_

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

*Address Service Requested*



## *Dates/Information to Remember:*

### **WMAL Retiree Chapter Meetings**

are held at the Union Hall  
(2554 Burlingame Ave SW; Wyoming, MI 49509)

on the second Tuesday in

February, April, June, September and November -  
starting at 11:00 a.m.

#### **Put The Following Dates on Your Calendar for 2026**

February 10th; April 7th; June 9th;  
September 8th; & November 10th

**Deadline** - submissions for the next edition of  
the local's newsletter - **WMAL Voice** is:  
**January 30, 2026**

### **General Membership Union Meetings**

Held at the Union Hall—2554 Burlingame Ave SW; Wyoming, MI 49509

**Next Meeting:** January 3, 2026 @ 7:00 p.m.  
February 7, 2026 @ 7:00 p.m.

## **HALL RENTAL INFORMATION** for APWU MEMBERS & the GENERAL PUBLIC 2554 Burlingame Ave SW; Wyoming, Michigan 49509

<b>Rental Rates/Breakdown</b> <small>(as of January 1, 2025)</small>	<b>WMAL Member</b> <small>(Active &amp; Retiree*)</small>	<b>Non-Profit</b> <small>(Meetings Only (no events))</small>	<b>General Public</b>
<b>Security Deposit:</b> <small>(Must be returned if hall is cleaned after rental and no damage found.)</small>	\$300	None	\$400
<b>Agent Fee:</b>	None	None	\$100
<b>Hall Rental Fee:</b>	\$350	\$150	\$1000
<b>Total Amount:</b>	\$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 (including setup).