

ASPTEA News



June 2009

Message from the President

By Ron Ramirez

ARE WE GETTING RAISES?

Inside This Issue

- 1 **Message from the President**
- 2 **Put me in Coach**
- 3 **Enlightened Leadership**
- 4 **Blue Card Money Memorial Committee Retirement Watches**

We have been receiving a lot of phone calls asking us if we are going to get our raises. The answer is YES!YES!YES!. I realize there has been a lot of concern and media press about not giving up our raises or negotiated benefits. As the City Manager has stated for his group, these are negotiated benefits that were mutually agreed to (in Management's case I guess they agreed with themselves). So, the same applies to us.

It is not to say that we have been living under a rock during these times and ASPTEA has submitted numerous recommendations and suggestions to help with the budget since January 2008. None of our recommendations or suggestions have been discussed with us or considered. Why? We are not sure why none of our suggestions have been considered or why no one from the City Manager's office has sat down with us to explore other possibilities. The only thing we can think of is our ideas might be a little too realistic and cause some people to have to re-evaluate what is really going on.

Recently one of our members developed an idea to save some money and help senior programs and after school programs. The idea was well received by City Council, but the City Manager immediately did not like the idea and thought it would violate our MOA, which is NOT TRUE! Once again we are continuously working on finding new ways to help but trying to attack us or not communicate is not the answer to establishing a harmonious relationship. Since our ideas have not been well received (in fact we have been accused of complaining by Management) we are no longer making any suggestions or recommendations.

ASPTEA will continue to support our Unit and keep everyone informed during these times.

Put Me In Coach....

by Richard Clewis

Some of you have been asking lately, what's happened to the relationship between Management and ASPTEA. Yes, the relationship has changed, but we believe this is a good thing. In past years, there was a pleasant relationship, but it wasn't an honest relationship. Over the years management has changed its approach in dealing with Unit 7 employees. Because of these changes, we have been faced with greater challenges which have become more harmful than productive.

Unfortunately, this has strained our relationship. It has become more unbalanced and unhealthy. For years we have been told by Management that we were on the same team. But when we now step back and take a broader look, these words ring hollow. As we move towards improving our benefits, work conditions and treatment, we find a greater disparity working against us.

ASPTEA has been around for over 30 years and has seen a lot of change during this time. We have always worked hard to maintain a positive relationship with Management. We were told we were on the same team and we believed it and it used to be true. Many of us are/were on management career paths, and in years past we were given the opportunity to work hard and move up the organization into management. Sadly, in the past 10-15 years, this has changed. We have seen the culture of management evolve in a way that does not include Unit 7 as it once did. While Management still tells us that "we're all part of management", their actions speak much louder than their words. And their actions tell a different tale.

During the past several negotiations, ASPTEA has been treated as less than team members. Aside from our issues over compensation (which we'll save for another article), our repeated attempts to negotiate fair consistent working conditions and no-cost benefits and were not even allowed to be discussed. It is truly a misnomer to continue calling this process "negotiations", it's more of a series of meetings where we are told what we will get and we haggle over details. This doesn't exactly make us feel like part of Management's team. Twenty years ago ASPTEA was usually negotiating with managers who had come from our ranks and had real life knowledge and compassion because they had been there themselves.

Last year ASPTEA tried to help the City during the budget crisis with many new ideas for saving money. The City Manager responded to these ideas with a memo to his Management team by calling us "complainers" and saying they should not utilize us for their annual PAP work. (I don't believe Management could get their PAP's done without us) The City Manager never called us to discuss this; he just lashed out in a public document. Calling us names is childish. Calling us to discuss serious issues is leadership. Again, if we're on the same team, we're apparently just here to warm the bench and shut up.

We represent members in a wide variety of disputes. The one thing that they all seem to have in common is Management's double standard. Over the years, Management has become more obstinate and less able to admit their own mistakes. Regardless of the situation, or evidence, Management always sides with their managers at the expense of the employee, the organization and citizens. While the game has always been stacked against the employees, there used to be some reasoning and compassion on behalf of management. This is not the case anymore, a serious double standard now exists which does not allow for good faith negotiations.

Our other concern is advancement of our employees. In years past, Management was made up of employees that largely came from our ranks. However, the trend over the past several years has been for Management to promote their own. Many of these promotions go to management interns and politically acceptable "yes men" at the expense of better qualified, technically proficient Unit 7 employees. We used to be part of the management team, but the system has been manipulated to allow the interns to be hired and promoted outside the normal process, thus shutting us out of many promotional opportunities.

So while management continues to beat the drum of "we're on the same team", we know these are just words without conviction. Until they eliminate the double standard, stop manipulating the interview system, start bargaining in good faith, treating us the same as they treat themselves; we have a problem. We

Put Me in Coach... – Cont.

have tried going along to get along and it has only served to dig this hole deeper. Because of our silence, we have gone from team players, to bench warmers, and now to locker room attendants.

ASPTEA recognizes this and is working hard to get back in the game. We have identified this relationship is not balanced as it once was, and decided to be open and honest about the situation. As with families, sometimes it's a little painful to sit at the dinner table and discuss difficult issues. But we believe that ignoring the situation will not make it go away. ASPTEA wants to have a healthy relationship with management and a healthy relationship begins with honesty.

Enlightened Leadership & Budget Reductions – by Jason Stokes

Throughout the budget reduction process ASPTEA has asked and pleaded to be included in the decision making or at least have our input considered. On a city-wide basis we have been mostly ignored, with one exception, Police. As we point out the shortcomings we see, we will also gladly give credit when appropriate.

The Police Department developed a Budget Review Committee. This committee is comprised of members from Management, Fiscal, Planning and yes, Unions and Associations, including ASPTEA. The focus of this group is to identify budget savings while minimizing reductions of positions and service. It also ensures that the Associations and Unions receive timely information regarding plans and decisions, instead of learning about them on the local news. While Police is arguably the least affected department monetarily, it is refreshing to see innovative efforts directed at reducing costs by something other than "cut the workers."

The committee is specifically reviewing the following areas: Vehicle Fleet, Take Home Vehicles, Overnight Vehicle Permits, Overtime, Stand-by, Holiday pay, Technology and the efficiency of the department's operational structure.

While we recognize that the amounts cut from the overall city budget couldn't all be found through innovative means, there is no question that the cuts would not have been as deep if savings in other areas could be realized by implementing ideas such as motor pools and reducing fleet sizes so vehicles don't "rot in the lot" and incur unnecessary repair expenses. Additionally, process improvements like the termination of the PAP program would allow greater productivity from fewer workers.

We applaud this integrative approach to problem solving and recommend it as a model for the other departments.

Colleen's Corner: Driving on City Business – by Colleen Lockwood

ASPTEA has recently been involved with two different cases related to PD 96. For those of you who don't know what PD 96 is please take the time to go to ASPTEA's web site and re-read it. This can save your career.

www.asptea.net

Blue Card Money – by Jason Stokes

It has come to our attention some Department Heads have taken it upon themselves to suspend the approval of Employee Development Funds in a misguided attempt to reduce the City's budget concerns. This is an issue of great concern to us. Your association has not been approached by City Management requesting any such suspension of this benefit. ASPTEA has always encouraged fiscal responsibility and will continue to do so. However, Employee Development Funds, or "Blue Card" funds are a negotiated benefit that is budgeted and our overall wage and benefit packages are charged for. Denying this benefit for budgetary reasons is a violation of our MOA, no different than denying our longevity to save money. During the last negotiations we fought to develop a process to clearly define and explain the incidents where our members requests to use Blue Card money were denied. The City's management team saw no reason for this unnecessary process, opting to stay with the "because I said so" method. We all understand that operational issues take precedent; we merely want those operational issues defined as a component of good management. Unspent Employee Development Funds do two things, add money into the city's coffers and reduce our overall wage and benefit package. Those of you who attended the Wage and Benefit informational meetings that we held during the negotiations process may remember the discussion surrounding selling back Blue Card money and taking it in wages not subject to Management discretion. While that wasn't done, it was just these types of situations that prompted the discussion. As your representatives we are committed to protecting this benefit for our members as well as ensuring that it is applied in a fair manner. If you receive a denial or are directed by your management not to even submit a request, please try to get the denial with reason(s) in writing. Contact ASPTEA if you are denied use of this benefit without adequate justification.

ASPTEA Memorial Committee

ASPTEA sends a card or small gift to members and their immediate families when they experience a loss in their immediate family or to a member who is hospitalized or is severely ill or hurt.

For more information or to inquire about this benefit, contact Colleen Lockwood at colleen.lockwood@asptea.com or call 602-254-8474.

ASPTEA Retirement Watches

ASPTEA issues retirement watches to retirees who have had 10 or more continuous years of membership in ASPTEA. Members who feel they are eligible for this award should contact Colleen Lockwood at colleen.lockwood@asptea.com or 602-254-8474.

Upcoming Events

***Visit our Website for Details: www.asptea.net**

Recruitment Incentive

Sign up a new member and we'll send you \$25 for helping to build a stronger ASPTEA.