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NEWS IN BRIEF



Davenport Hotel

Convention to be held in Spokane

Council 2's 49th biennial convention will be held June 4-7 at the newly remodeled Davenport Hotel in downtown Spokane.

The traditional pre-convention golf tournament will be held on Friday, June 5.

The convention will feature special speakers, workshops, a review of the last two years and plans for the next two years. A reception will be held on the evening of Friday, June 5 and a dinner-dance on the Saturday evening. Events will end by noon on Sunday, June 7.

Union membership jumps

Even as jobs were lost last year, union membership rose 12.4 percent, the largest gain since the government began compiling such data in 1983, the Bureau of Labor Statistics says.

Public sector unions, such as Council 2, accounted for most of the increase. Their membership rose to 36.8 percent.

The figures show the decline in union membership might have bottomed out, Gary Chaison, a labor specialist at Clark University in Worcester, Mass., told the Associated Press.

INSIDE

Workers receive unusual reward

— Page 4

Library becomes Council 2's second-largest local

— Page 3

Key mission is to save jobs

So far, so good. But the crisis is far from over.

That is the general feeling among Council 2 staff representatives as the economic downturn begins to take its toll on the budgets of city and county governments in Washington State.

Some are hurting. But for the most part few jobs have been lost and the benefits in most contracts remain in place.

Of course, anything can happen in coming months, depending on the severity of the downturn.

Adjustments in contracts are possible and layoffs could result in spite of everyone's best efforts.

But Council 2 will strive to see that members' best interests are put first.

"Our primary mission is to try to save jobs," says Council 2 Research Director

Bill Dennis. "That is key as we face these economic problems. That is why we will come up with creative ways to try to deal with the crisis whenever we can in order to avoid layoffs.

"Ultimately, that increase in wages does not mean a thing unless you have a job."

• Reports on Page 3 outline the situation in a number of areas around the state.

Seldom thanked and largely unappreciated, corrections officers are

Unsung heroes



Of all city and county jobs, that of corrections officer must rank as among the most physically and emotionally demanding, the most stressful — and the most unappreciated.

"We face some scary stuff," says Bruce Minker, a Pierce County corrections officer and member of Local 3752.

"We have to deal with violent criminals, face the possibilities of contracting diseases like tuberculosis, hepatitis and everything shy of ebola, and an administration that forgets who you are.

"You never know what each day will bring. One day recently I received a telephone call to say a co-worker had committed suicide. On another, a co-worker was taken hostage and stabbed with a pencil."

Andy Jennings, a 13-year veteran of the Spokane County Sheriff's Department and president of Local 492, says, "Criminals are starting to become more violent. In the past 10

years, violent crimes have gone up by quite a bit."

As officers meet these daily challenges they also complain about understaffing, overcrowding, deteriorating facilities and mismanagement. Yet most people, they add, do not give them a second thought because they are largely out of the public eye.

"Corrections officers are truly unsung heroes," says Council 2 Staff Representative Brock Logan, who represents corrections officers in Pierce and Thurston counties.

"No matter what's going on — problems with the county budget, staff shortages, weather closures — whatever the case, they show up and get the job done."

"They can expect to be disciplined if they do something wrong, but never get thanked for what they do right," says Council 2 Staff Representative Mike Smith, who represents corrections deputies in Spokane County. "It

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Budget is legislators' biggest challenge

The biggest challenge for Washington State legislators during the 2009 session is to balance the budget. Doing so will be an enormous task.

Not only does the legislature face a \$6-billion (and growing) budget shortfall, but Gov. Chris Gregoire also has pledged not to raise taxes.

"Although it may be popular to make such a commitment, it means that even basic services, such as health and safety, are jeopardized," says Council 2 Deputy Director Pat Thompson. "So, how are they going to get out of town?"

The most likely recipe, Thompson says, will be a combination of massive cuts in spending, a referendum to the people that raises revenue, and drawing on President Obama's federal stimulus package.

Council 2's biggest budget issues are centered on pension funding and local government options.

• Pension funding involves a choice of the projected unit credit (PUC) method as against the aggregate method.

Even though this is boring and confusing for anyone who is not an account-



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Council 2 to boost scholarships by \$50,000

Council 2 is set to add \$50,000 to its scholarship funds in the fall.

The money will be available in the form of an additional 10 scholarships of \$5,000 each for full-time students who are dependents of members. At present, only one such \$5,000 scholarship is available.

"We realize that times are tough for

everybody and college costs are not getting any less expensive," says Council 2 President/Executive Director Chris Dugovich. "We are pleased we are able to do this to help out."

The new scholarships will be available only this year.

The existing six \$2,000 scholarships

for dependents will still be available, as will the four \$1,000 awards for members' continuing education.

Application forms for this year's scholarships are available from Council 2's Everett offices or online at www.council2.com/scholarships. They must be postmarked by March 31.

Insurance Trust increases benefits for this year

CHRIS DUGOVICH



Letter from the President

The Washington State Council of County and City Employees, AFSCME, AFL-CIO offers a cost-effective service to its members that seems to be well hidden.

The State Council operates a non-profit insurance trust through the trusteeship of its three elected officers — Vice-President Ron Fredin, Secretary-Treasurer Kathleen Etheredge and me. The trust offers, on a group basis, 10 dental plans, two vision plans, two long-term disability plans and five levels of term life insurance.

The trust, created in the late 60s, was, and still is, intended to provide the best benefits to members on a bargaining unit basis at the lowest possible cost. Naturally, more participants in the plan will reduce the cost — giving all participants the greatest

benefit for their dollars. Unlike other insurance benefit plans, our trust has been able to enhance benefits for 2009. Beginning in January all of our plans will cover 100 percent of the cost of preventive care (examinations, cleaning, and so on). We were able to do this with a small 1 percent increase in premiums.

Dental

Our 10 dental plans offer benefit options to match your employer's ability to pay.

With the exception of Plan 10, our payments per individual procedure are a set amount with frequent upgrades.

Plan 10 pays benefits on a usual, reasonable and customary basis rather than a scheduled payment. In addition to the 100 percent preventive care, this plan pays 80 percent for basic services, 50 percent for major services and 50 percent of orthodontia up to \$2,000.

These benefits would be paid no matter the actual cost, up to a \$2,000 calendar-year maximum.

Vision

Vision insurance is provided through the Northwest Benefit Network. It covers examinations, glasses and an amount toward contacts. The trust offers two plans at \$15.90 and \$18.75 a month. The benefits themselves are provided through an extensive list of optometrists and opticians throughout the state.

Disability

Long-term disability insurance is a benefit that really has not yet come to the forefront, although it's extremely important.

Generally, this coverage kicks in for an illness or injury that keeps you from the ability to work. It's salary insurance!

Although the state's Labor and Industries insurance offers you coverage for an on-the-job injury, the trust's disability insurance augments this coverage and will pay in many instances when the state plan will not. It also would cover you for either an illness or injury off the job.

The trust offers two plans. Plan I requires a 90-day and Plan II a 180-day waiting period after injury or illness.

The programs are extremely com-

petitively priced at \$32 per member per month (90-day) and \$25 per member per month (180-day).

Life/AD&D Insurance

The trust's newest program is group term life and accidental death and dismemberment insurance. In reviewing our collective bargaining agreements across the state, we noticed many employers offer little in life insurance.

We offer five levels of coverage from \$10,000 to \$100,000. The premiums range from \$4.20 to \$42 per member per month.

How Does My Local Participate?

Two ways! The first is to make your choice of the coverages as a proposal during your next set of contract negotiations and gain the agreement of the employer to pay the premium.

Additionally, by a simple majority vote of your local membership you can participate in the plan. Keep in mind that all members of your local must participate whether or not they voted for the plan, and you will need to gain your employer's agreement to deduct the premium from your pay.

If your local is interested in pursuing these coverages or you need additional information, ask your staff representative or call Council 2.

BUDGET, from Page 1

tant, it involves billions of members' pension dollars. "The governor's office has once again sought to use the PUC method to fund pensions," says Thompson. "This isn't the first time it has been discussed; it goes back to the Locke Administration.

"Although the PUC method is a legitimately recognized method in actuarial circles, it is riskier and will cost everyone more down the road," Thompson explains.

"A reason that our pension funding has stayed strong is that Washington State uses the more conservative method of aggregate funding.

"Simply put, PUC lowers the amount you pay now and hopes to catch up later, whereas the current aggregate method costs more upfront and lowers future cost due to the higher investment returns, saving everyone in the long run."

- Among the bills that involve local government options:

HB 1847:

This bill would increase the amount of work that counties and cities would be able to perform in-house.

SB 5228:

This is another bill dealing with bid limits for counties and would provide clarity for counties who want to use in-house labor for construction projects.

HB 1722 / SB 5307:

These bills would change the default option for newly hired employees who don't choose a retirement plan from Plan 3 to Plan 2.

HB 1317:

This bill would protect the personal information of public safety employees by making it exempt from public disclosure.

HB 1862/SB 5782:

These bills would assist in the operation of the Municipal Courts.

HB 1947:

This bill allows cities to create a street utility option to raise revenue for local improvements.

Scholarships honor past union members

Council 2 scholarships for 2009 have been named for several people.

\$2,000 AWARD

In memory of:

Rhonda Jo Carson, deceased, social worker for the Lewis/Thurston/Mason Counties Area on Aging and past member of Local 618, Thurston County.

Celia Travis, deceased past member of Local 874-HC, Prosser Memorial Hospital.

Matt Williams, deceased past member of Local 113, City of Everett.

In honor of:

Chuck Delgado, retired member of Local 1553, Spokane County, who served as a Public Defender's

Investigator for 18 years.

\$5,000 4-YEAR AWARD

In memory of:

Nick Camarando, past member of Local 618, City of Olympia

Jim Ott, deceased, who retired in 2007 with 12 years as a Database Analyst with the City of Tacoma; a past member of Local 120, City of Tacoma.

EIGHT \$1,000 AWARDS

In honor of:

Red Abicht, who retired in 2007 as an Application Developer Systems Analyst; past member of Local 120, City of Tacoma.

Sally Bronow, retired in 2007 as a graphic artist; past member of Local 120 City of Tacoma.

Sheryl Kemper, retired in 2007

as Application Developer Systems Analyst, past member of Local 120, City of Tacoma.

Pauline Tang, retired in 2007 as GIS Analyst; past member of Local 120.

Terry Person, retired in 2007 as a Computer Systems Programmer; past member of Local 120.

Joanne Vaughn, retired member of Local 270, City of Spokane which she served as secretary-treasurer and was a member for 20 years.

Earl Welander, retired in 2006 as an Application Developer Systems Analyst; past member of Local 120.

Leonard Whitney, retired with 34 years as a Senior Photographer; past member of Local 120.

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King County library unions merge to form second largest local in Council 2

Several years ago Local 1652-LM, King County Library Maintenance, had about 15 members who were the only union workers in the library system. The local has now merged with Local 1857, the King County library workers, and the resulting local is 970 members strong.

Local 1857 is now the second largest Council 2 local in the state.

The rapid growth in the local has its origin in 2002. It was then that 550 members of the library voted to join Council 2. At the time they became local 1857 and eventually bargained their first contract. Then, last year, 400 library pages voted to join Council 2.

Now the 550 members of local 1857 have merged with the pages as well as the original maintenance workers to become one big local 1857, putting it second only



2002: Some of the 550 King County library workers celebrate their decision to join Council 2.

to the City of Spokane local, which has 1,100 members.

"Our eventual goal is to negotiate one



2008: Authorization cards are mailed for 400 library pages' successful election to join Council 2.

contract for all of these library workers," says Council 2 Director of Organizing Bill Keenan.

"That is one of the benefits of merging them into one unit."

In addition to the newly merged local,

Council 2 represents the 83 supervisors, Local 1857-s, of the King County Library System. They recently joined Council 2 and now have a contract as well.

Keenan worked on the project to organize the library workers from the day it first started.

Assisted by a large group of dedicated and enthusiastic members of the organizing committees from the library system, he worked steadfastly to ensure the project's ultimate success.

Almost all of the eligible employees at the library system are now members of Council 2.

BARGAINING AGREEMENTS HOLD AS ECONOMY SLUMPS

Contracts with City of Seattle extended until 2011

When the economy started sliding downhill last year, managers at the City of Seattle approached the coalition of unions that represents most of the city's workers. Council 2 is included in the coalition.

The managers suggested extending all the union agreements for an additional year. Instead of running to the end of 2010, they said, the contracts would run until the end of 2011. All the current contract terms — including 100 percent cost-of-living adjustments based on the consumer price index — would be retained for an additional year.

The reason: Extending the contracts would provide direction for the city in preparing its budgets over the next two years. It also would provide predictability

for the employees.

In November, the coalition tentatively agreed to the extension. Since then, the individual unions have considered the proposal and ratified it.

"This was a significant event," explains Council 2 Research Director Bill Dennis, who represents all the union's locals in the City of Seattle (21, 21-Z, 21-P and 2083). "Without this agreement, we would have had to return to the bargaining table next year when the economy might still be in dire straits."

"The City would then have been able to say, 'We cannot afford to give you that increase in cost-of-living.' By extending the agreement, our members retain that benefit. We will be bargaining again in mid-2011. We hope that at least there

will have been some recovery by then. If not, the picture will be clearer as to where the economy is likely to go in the following years."

Dennis explains that it is difficult to get any commitments from management on long-term agreements because of the nation's cloudy economic future. If any discussions are held, the union might be forced to settle for something less because everyone is trying to be cautious.

"We are now saying let's give it another year and over that time we will keep what we have. That's pretty good."

The extension includes medical benefits, which stay the same.

"The city could come back at any time and say they cannot afford to pay as much in medical benefits any longer, but

that is much less likely to happen now that the agreement has been extended," Dennis says.

The extension does not mean that union members will be untouched should the economy continue to go downhill, Dennis cautions. There is always the possibility that the city's budget picture could take a turn for the worse, he says, and that the city could call for a mid-year correction that could lead to layoffs.

"City departments are all preparing for possible reductions later this year," he says. "We are meeting now to discuss how we should deal with the impacts of that if it becomes necessary. Bargaining as a coalition gives us strength."

"Our primary mission will be to save jobs."

King County workers choose furloughs

The choice was placed before King County's union employees.

In the light of the county's \$93 million shortfall, they could:

- Accept a drop in the cost-of-living allowance from 5 to 3 percent along with hundreds of layoffs; or
- Retain the 5 percent cost-of-living allowance, but take 10 days off without pay during the year.

The coalition of unions that represents most county workers — including Council 2 — weighed up the choices and negotiated the second option. As a result, county offices will be closed for an additional 10 days this year.

The closed days are mostly connected to existing public holidays, giving in many instances an extended long weekend. But, unlike the pub-

lic holiday, the furlough day will be without pay.

"We were able to keep the wage adjustment and avoid hundreds of layoffs," says Council 2 Staff Representative Diana Prenguber, who represents Council 2 employees in the coalition.

"Basically, all county employees, except for essential workers, such as police, firemen and corrections officers, will take 10 days without pay during the year."

Part of the deal with King County also was to extend the existing COLA formula for an additional year, thereby avoiding new wage bargaining during a year in which the economy is under siege.

The COLA formula is now guaranteed through 2010.

All Spokane contracts are settled until next year

No Council 2 contracts are up for renewal in Spokane County or in the City of Spokane for the rest of the year.

"In Spokane County, they are all settled through the end of 2010," says Council 2 Staff Representative Gordon Smith. "It is a good time to be under a contract and not to have to bargain a new one right now."

One contract was bargained after the economy turned sour. That situation made for some tough negotiating and provided an illustration of what could have happened were more contracts to have come up for bargaining in coming months.

Yet the end result was not as bad as some had feared it could have been.

"Although it involved a \$3 million budget shortfall and a number of jobs were put at risk, at the end of it all we lost only two actual members," Smith says. "And one of those already is back to work part

time. Another was in a position to obtain full retirement."

"We are not doing cartwheels, but we did not get as badly hit as some other places were. By the time it all shook out it was not as heinous as we first thought it might be, even though we made contingency plans in case things turned out bad."

But, even though no contracts are being negotiated, inevitably the slow economy is having an impact.

"We are losing vacant positions," Smith says.

"They would have been filled were it not for the economic situation."

As for the 1,100 Council 2 members in the City of Spokane, "all the contracts were settled about two months before the economy crashed," says Council 2 Representative Mike Smith.

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Outstanding job on snow removal earns workers unusual reward

Here's one for the record books: In late January, managers in Snohomish County served a free breakfast to 160 road maintenance employees and support staff.

They were saying "thank you" to the workers, most of them members of Council 2, for the outstanding job they performed in handling the impact of a series of snow storms followed by flooding that struck the county — and the rest of the Puget Sound area — in late December and early January.

"As far as I know, something like this breakfast has never happened before," says Roger Moller, president of Local 109, of which most of the employees at the breakfast are members. "I have worked here for 18 years and I have never had breakfast served to me by managers before.

"It was a fabulous breakfast. More than anybody could ever want to eat. We had everything — scrambled eggs, pancakes, French toast, sausages, muffins, five or six different types of fruit juice. You name it.

"The managers prepared all the food and served all of it. All we did was go through the line and eat. It was so filling we all wanted to take a nap afterward."

The reason the managers were willing to reward the employees in this way was that the road maintenance crews, fleet management and support staff had worked 16 days of 12-on and 12-off shifts, including working on Christmas Day.

They sanded roads, cleared snow and ice, cut and moved downed trees and ensured people could move around on all the major arterials as well as many

side roads.

It seemed that just as they had got on top of the impact of one storm, another moved in and they had to start all over again.

"But it was not over even when the snow stopped," adds Moller. "Once we had dealt with the snow storms, we had to deal with flooding."

Moller points out, too, that they ran their equipment for 24 hours a day yet had no failures. The performance was evidence of the great work that the mechanics perform in maintaining the equipment, he says.

During the breakfast, Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon told the workers how much he appreciated the great job they had done.

Even though people in Seattle and King County were having trouble negotiating their roads, he was able to move around freely throughout Snohomish County, Reardon said.

And he had received no complaints from the public.

The Local members received an additional recognition for the hard work they had performed under difficult circumstances, this one financial. Although the Local 109 contract with the county provides for up to 10 hours of holiday pay, many of the workers had spent 12 hours working on a holiday, Moller explains.



"I made overtures to my superiors, pointing out that it is only reasonable that if we are on duty for 12 hours we should receive 12 hours of holiday pay. It went all the way to Reardon's office. He said: Absolutely. We were sacrificing our time and we deserved 12 hours of holiday pay for Christmas. And, he added: 'Merry Christmas.'

"He signed an agreement, pointing out that it was a special agreement for the particular circumstances and was not precedent-setting.

"Everybody was happy with that."

CORRECTIONS, from Page 1

seems to them as if nobody really cares. They feel the need to stand together. It is a really tough job. You get a lot of bad people in jail."

Early retirement is a major issue for the corrections officers, who now have to wait until they are at least 63 to retire. Yet they have to deal with 15-to-21-year-olds who are becoming increasingly violent.

Here is a closer look at two of the largest jails in the state.

• **In Pierce County** a major issue raised by corrections officers is mismanagement. Training, for example in CPR, is always given only at the last minute, just before



Andy Jennings, President, Local 492

cards need to be updated, officers say. The administration is always reactive, never proactive, they add.

Although overcrowding is not an issue in the Pierce County jail, Minker says, the lack of efficient administration means that empty beds go unused when they could be rented out to other facilities.

"We moved into a new building in 2003 and about 250 empty beds became available each day," Minker says.

"Between Thanksgiving and Christmas I counted 515 vacant beds. My thought is that we should be renting out those beds and getting money in that way. We could use that money to expand our training, buy more equipment and hire more officers.

"To perform at 100 percent of my ability, I need to be trained and equipped and I need to be respected."

National organization assists AFSCME corrections officers

Mike Smith of Council 2's Spokane office is a representative of the AFSCME Corrections United Committee, a group of individuals from AFSCME organizations in each state. The organization meets once a year to discuss correctional issues, such as improved life insurance, stab vests and other ways in which officers can be assisted.

The organization represents some 85,000 corrections officers throughout the United States, Smith adds, and is holding its biennial conference later this year. For details, contact Mike Smith at the Council 2 Spokane offices, 509-328-2830.

• **In Spokane County**, two facilities recently came under one roof, the Spokane County Jail, at which members of local 492 work, and the Geiger facility, at which members of local 492-G work.

"Our officers' dedication is what pulls us through," says Jennings. "On the one hand, Spokane County has one of the better initial training programs in the state, which includes a 13-week in-house program, 12 weeks with the field training office and a month in the state academy.

"But, on the other hand, we face understaffing and an extremely outdated facility.

"I know the county commissioners are working hard to get a new facility up and running, but with the economy the way it is I don't know how they will fare."

Council 2 Spokane Staff Representative Gordon Smith says the jail houses more inmates than the facilities can



Bruce Minker, Local 3752, giving evidence at a meeting of the Pierce County Council.

handle without the number of staff they need to run it as efficiently as possible.

"That increases safety issues," he says. "This has been the case for years, but in spite of that they somehow manage to keep things more than just afloat," Smith adds.

"They do a top-notch job despite those challenges."

The good news is that, so far, most of the state's corrections officers have not had to face layoffs, in spite of tough budgets

But the officers realize that the economic malaise is likely to delay much-needed improvements for much longer than would otherwise have been the case.

In the meantime, they stand together, dedicated and determined to do their jobs to the best of their ability — even when no one stops to say "thank you."