



The Frontier Reporter

Spring-Summer Edition 2024

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The long and winding road to a final deal with Lee Enterprises

By Jon Harris – On a Sunday in late October 2022, Steve Watson, Rick Wiorkowski and I sat in the Albany Labor Temple and participated in mock contract negotiations. We crunched numbers, sized up our opponents and crafted proposals, guided by the teachings of Art Wheaton of the Cornell Industrial Labor Relations School.

Fast forward 16 months later, and Steve, Rick and I put our training to good use in bargaining with representatives from Lee Enterprises and The Buffalo News.

Joined at the table by Kim Leiser, chief negotiator and Buffalo Newspaper Guild administrative officer, and Digital Content Editor Trey Wydysh, our five-person bargaining team recently reached a tentative agreement with Lee Enterprises on a new three-year contract for our nearly 90 members at The Buffalo News.

That agreement was overwhelmingly ratified by members in a 57-3 vote, clearing the way for a 3% raise to hit members' paychecks in early August. Another 3% raise will follow on Aug. 1, 2025, and the contract's final 3% pay bump will become effective Aug. 1, 2026.

We bargained over the course of nearly five months, and our work was supported by the mobilization team, which was able to heighten the Guild's status in the community and get us involved in high-profile events such as the Pride Parade and the Juneteenth festival. The mobilization team also was able to get the attention of Lee with a successful campaign that harnessed reader outrage over the sorry state of our website and mobile app.

There were many twists and turns over the course of bargaining, but conversations with Lee's Astrid Garcia and The Buffalo News' Tammy Turnbull and Margaret Kenny remained productive throughout – and even cordial at times.

There were frustrating moments, too. We had to repeatedly make our case to the company about why cutting the mileage reimbursement rate, daily overtime and severance were non-starters. We had to explain to them, repeatedly and painstakingly, why the flexible credit system in Buffalo was not as easy as they thought to unwind. I even provided a few of my paychecks to them, to show them how excess flex credits flowed back as real money for those of us who chose high-deductible health plans.

The company's proposals also were often not well thought out. But that presented an opportunity for the Guild.

We were able to craft creative proposals that ended up in the final contract. Things like an inclement weather policy and remote work hours for district managers. Or artificial intelligence language. Or little, but meaningful tweaks, to the memorandum on The Buffalo News' digital products.

The company might not have liked all our proposals, but they didn't bring better ideas to the table. As such, we were able to get much of what we wanted on many items.

Our ability to bring creative proposals to the table was evident on the last day of bargaining on June 28, when the Guild and Lee battled over a bonus and the timing of the first 3% pay raise.

While the Guild was pushing for a larger bonus upon ratification, the company originally countered with a \$500 HSA/FSA contribution for full-timers and a \$200 HSA/FSA contribution for part-timers (which would not have been paid until 2025) instead of a signing bonus.

The Guild knew that wouldn't work, because not all of our members get benefits (many part-timers) and some also opt out of medical insurance.

We kept pushing, and the company came back with a one-time bonus of \$500 for full-timers and \$250 for part-timers – but it wouldn't be payable until Oct. 1 and Lee wanted to delay the first 3% raise until Oct. 1, as well.

At this juncture, it became clear to us that Astrid Garcia had tapped out what funds were available through the end of Lee's fiscal year at September's end.

So the Guild – as we usually do – came up with a creative solution: Let's keep the first 3% pay increase on Aug. 1, so our members don't lose two months of higher pay, and let's push the bonus until December.

We did this because that is the first quarter of a new fiscal year for Lee (when the budget gets reset). In addition, we figured a little extra money near the holidays would be well-timed.

The company agreed.

And here we are, with a new contract that was ratified by a wide margin.

While the bargaining process was exhausting and draining, it also was rewarding and even enjoyable at some points – particularly when the Guild, through hard work, was able to work out a solution to a difficult problem or was able to kill off a bad company proposal or was able to keep Steve Watson awake at 2 p.m. in the afternoon when his eyes got heavy from a lack of caffeine.

With this contract, we have three years of predictability on wages, benefits and job security.

But 2027 will be here before you know it.

If you have an interest in learning about bargaining for our next negotiation, please see me or Kim Leiser.

We might send you on a free trip to Albany, or another city, to learn a few tricks.

Final terms of the three-year collective bargaining agreement

By Jon Harris – The tentative agreement between the Buffalo Newspaper Guild bargaining team and Lee Enterprises was overwhelmingly ratified by the membership in a 57-3 vote on July 29.

Sixty out of an eligible 86 members voted, a solid turnout of nearly 70% of membership. In the interest of reaching all members, voting occurred in person in the main Larkin Building and all District Manager offices, as well as virtually over the course of three days, wrapping up on the 29th.

Below is a summary of the final contract terms. A more detailed version of this summary was emailed to members.

Wages

Under the tentative agreement, members would get wage increases of 3% in each year of the contract.

These would be the first 3% raises for Guild members since the mid-1990s. Further, if you added up all of the raises since 2008, you would get 8.5% – less than what members would get by the end of this three-year contract.

The first 3% pay increase will take effect on Aug. 1.

Signing bonus

There will be a one-time bonus of \$600 for full-time members and \$300 for part-time members payable in the first payroll week in December 2024. (This bonus will cost the company, cumulatively, roughly \$50,000.)

The bonus will be paid in December because that falls within the first quarter of a new fiscal year for Lee). In addition, members will receive a little extra money near the holidays

Job security changes

While the idea of “skips” – creating exceptions to the seniority protections in layoff situations – is not popular, the Guild agreed to a policy that limits the company's ability to avoid laying off least-senior Guild members.

During an involuntary layoff, The News shall have the ability to use skips in the Editorial Department under the following guidelines:

- Any employee who is laid off as the result of a less-senior Guild member being “skipped” shall receive an additional four weeks of severance.

- Skips shall be allotted by the size of the job group affected as described below.
 - 1-15 employees – one skip
 - 16 or more employees – two skips
- Skips must be used in inverse seniority order. (As explained previously, this means you start from the bottom, with the least senior employees. It means seniority still matters, because the most senior employees can't be touched.)
- In any group where a skip is used, equal the number of skips shall be used to protect the most senior employees in that group from involuntary layoff.

As a reminder, the company was pushing for 25% skips, which was repeatedly rejected.

Rejected company proposals

Here are some of the many proposals what the bargaining team was able to get off the table:

- Reduction in the mileage reimbursement rate. That means Guild members maintain the IRS rate.
- Limiting daily overtime beyond 7.5 hours and only paying overtime for hours beyond 37.5 in a week. This proposal mainly targeted district managers.
- Further reductions in our contractual severance.

Health care and benefits

The Guild was able to maintain quality, affordable health care options in the tentative agreement. While there was some compromise, we maintained the bulk of the unique medical credit system that our members enjoy.

Under the new agreement, there will no longer be credits for dental insurance or individual life and accidental death and dismemberment insurance. There also would no longer be a vision rider on our medical plans.

However, the company will provide – at no cost to employees – individual life and accidental death and dismembership insurance benefits equal to three times an employee's annual wage as well as the basic dental plan. The high dental plan would be 87-96% covered by the company, depending on the tier selected.

In addition, there will be a standalone vision plan offered to Guild members, which will be 100% company covered with no premium cost to employees.

Here is how medical benefits would break down over the length of the contract:

- In 2025, Lee will provide eligible employees medical credits equal to 90% of the cost of

the base option plan (which remains the 20/20 plan for the life of the contract). In plan year 2024, we are getting 91% of the base option. In 2025, the Buffalo Traditional Plan and the Buffalo 10/15 plans will be eliminated as offerings – collectively, two members select these plans.

- In 2026, Lee will provide medical credits equal to 88% of the cost of the 20/20 plan.
- In 2027, Lee will provide medical credits equal to 86% of the cost of the 20/20 plan.
- The 0/10 plan will be eliminated in 2027.
- In addition, in each year of the contract, Lee will offer all of its own plans (PPO Platinum, Gold HSA, Silver HSA and Bronze HSA) to members. The HSA plans come with a \$0 premium to employees, while employees would pay a cost share of between 4-8% on the PPO plan, depending on the tier selected.
- Importantly, for those selecting either the Buffalo high-deductible plan or the Lee HSA plans, Lee has agreed to contribute \$500 per year in a lump sum to the HSA accounts of employees.

A couple other important notes: All benefit plans, including medical, dental and vision, will now be offered with four tiers: Employee; Employee and Spouse; Employee and Child(ren); and Family. That is up from the current two-tier system: single and family.

In addition, the new agreement will eliminate opt-out payments in the last year of the contract, 2027, so there will no longer be any financial benefit to opting out of company insurance.

That allows the opt-out payments to continue for 2025 and 2026. By 2027, the wage increases in the contract will have made up for any impending loss of opt-out payments.

The Guild was able to preserve medical credits as well as the much better Buffalo plans of the 20/20, 25/40 and the Buffalo high-deductible. The plans also remain affordable.

Agreement on AI, digital language

In new contract language regarding artificial intelligence, we were able to build on language achieved by the Omaha World-Herald.

At least 45 days before the introduction of any AI policy, the Guild and The News will meet to negotiate the effects of the implementation of the policy at The Buffalo News. "Such policy shall ensure that there is meaningful human involvement and supervision in the use of AI, which includes the responsibility of journalists to verify AI-generated content's facts, sources and attribution," our agreement reads.

In addition, any AI-generated content must be marked as produced by artificial intelligence – this is an important win given Lee’s past failures on labeling sponsored content.

The new contract also clarifies MOA #11 (Digital News Products of The Buffalo News).

The new language includes the word “producing” in the part about how recording and editing video, audio and still photos is among the work that an editorial Guild member can be assigned. This adds slightly clearer protection to our photojournalists.

We also got some new language in MOA #11 about sponsored content. Specifically, over the next calendar year, the Guild and The News have committed to figuring out a resolution over where the lapses are happening in labeling social media and sports betting content.

Inclement weather policy

New language that allows full-time district managers to be allotted up to 15 hours of remote work time per winter season, which is defined as Nov. 1 to March 31.

This gives full-time DMs the ability to answer some calls from home and be compensated for their time when inclement weather strikes so they will no longer need to burn through all their personal time when a snowstorm hits.

Pension termination

In the tentative agreement, we agree to the termination of the pension plan but only under the following conditions:

- The company must inform the Guild of all companies selected as finalists in the process to pick an insurance company to provide the annuity payments. Any concerns the Guild would raise would be fully vetted and considered before a final selection is made.
- Lee must arrange for meetings with a qualified financial adviser to provide an overview of the options available to plan participants.
- Members who choose a lump-sum payment – rather than an annuity – would be able to directly roll over the amount to their Lee-sponsored 401(k) plan.

This agreement is the result of long meetings with Lee and pension administrator Aon, and input from the Guild’s financial adviser.

Extended absence termination policy

The new language no longer allows employees to remain on the payroll after an extended absence for an unlimited period of time.

Under the new agreement, employees who are absent from work due to illness, disability or workers’ compensation for 12 continuous months shall no longer receive benefits. There already was language in the contract that absent employees could only accrue vacation for up to 12 months.

Employees also can be terminated after 18 months of a continuous absence. But at least 30 days before an employee is due to be terminated, the News will notify the employee and the Guild in writing of their intent to terminate employment and the exact date of expected termination.

The Guild and the company also will meet to discuss the specifics of the long-term absence, and the employee will be given the opportunity to return to work prior to termination.

Upon contract ratification, any current employee absent for more than 12 months will be offered a buyout of contractual severance, plus nine weeks, up to a maximum of 52 weeks of severance.

Such an agreement also could free up Lee to do some hiring in the DM ranks, though that is not guaranteed.

Other agreements

Here is a brief overview of other agreements reached:

- New employees get their full five floating holidays in their first year
- The monthly cellphone reimbursement will increase to \$50 for full-timers and \$25 for part-timers
- Interns will now make roughly \$19 an hour, a major boost over minimum wage
- Night differentials will increase for the first time in two decades
- Lee Enterprises’ name as been added to the contract preamble
- The newsroom diversity fellowship program and the digital content producer agreement have been extended
- We eliminated the extended sick leave policy in exchange for company paid short- and long-term disability insurance that offers the ability to retain more paid time off in your bank
- We codified changes in the 401(k), ensuring that new hires can contribute their own money after 30 days and that employees do not move through the steps for 401(k) company contributions as they accrue seniority

Generosity abounds in fundraising for Guild colleague

By Sandra Tan – The Buffalo Newspaper Guild has played a key role this summer in offering fund-raising support for one of our newsroom journalists, Deb Sur, a native of India who has faced delays in the processing of her work visa, which has barred her from work for several months.

As of this writing, a [GoFundMe page](#) created by her Guild colleagues has nearly met its goal of raising \$5,500. In addition, the Guild held a Trivia Night Contest at the Magic Bear Beer Cellar, a fundraising effort that also raised well over \$1,000, with roughly 40 colleagues – Guild and non-Guild – and friends chipping in \$20 a ticket and having a great time with food, prizes and fun team competition. Deb has resubmitted her revised work visa application, and we all hope she gets some good news within the next couple of months.



She asked to share this note of thanks to everyone who contributed to her cause:

I moved to the United States in 2022, bringing two suitcases full of both ambitions and apprehensions. While I was ready to expand my horizons and learn in a truly cosmopolitan environment, the individualistic nature of American society, as portrayed in pop culture, terrified me.

I had never imagined making proper acquaintances, let alone finding a community, brimming with kindness and empathy, that would be resolute in their support in times of despair.

While I wait to hear back from immigration services about my future in this country, I want to extend a heartfelt gratitude to every single one of you for your generous support. It takes a village to keep an immigrant like myself afloat, and a simple “thank you” cannot measure the amount of indebtedness I have towards you for your love and kindness. In the next few weeks, I will let you know the outcome. Till then, here's wishing you good health and good vibes, always. Love and gratitude,

Deb



Major Guild happenings since the Winter Edition

- **April 2024** – Guild is awarded a grant from The NewsGuild of \$29,900 to help fund mobilization strategies during negotiations. Guild members participate in the annual Buffalo Waterkeepers Spring Sweep Cleanup. Roughly a dozen folks pulled trash out of the Scajaquada Creek banks. Guild donates \$1,000 to support Rochester Guild strike. Five current and prospective Guild leaders attend the Labor Notes Conference in Chicago. Guild successfully helps lobby to ensure the Buffalo News is eligible for a new state Local Journalism Sustainability Act that will provide tax credits to local news organizations.
- **May** – Guild issues a community survey regarding the use of artificial intelligence in journalism. Company announces it will stop printing the paper on major holidays. After a first missed attempt, the Guild gained a ratified agreement for its members at the Tonawanda News printing facility. The contract was approved in a 7-3 vote. It's a two-year contract with 50-cent per hour increases and other benefits.
- **June** – Guild members continue community outreach, participating in the Allen West Festival, Pride Parade and Juneteenth Festival. Members distributed hundreds of handouts, participated in some in-house and social media job actions over poor digital platform performance. Guild bargaining team reaches a tentative agreement with Lee Enterprises on June 28.



Guild members march in the Buffalo Pride Parade for the first time as part of community outreach efforts.

- **July** – The bargaining team tentative agreement with Lee Enterprises, a three-year deal with 3% raises each year in exchange for other concessions, is recommended by the Executive Committee in an 11-2 vote and ratified by the membership in a 57-3 vote.

Comings & Goings from The Buffalo News/Hamburg Sun

Comings:

Francesca Bond - Editorial
Mackenzie Shuman - Editorial
Vincent Gasparini - Editorial intern
Caitlin Stair - Editorial/Hamburg Sun - FT
Elizabeth Mahoney - Editorial intern

Georgia Pressley - Editorial intern
Justin O'Connor - Editorial intern
Abigail Lee - Editorial intern

Goings:

Charlie Specht - Editorial

Upcoming meetings

The next scheduled Executive Committee meetings are scheduled for Aug. 12, Sept. 9, Oct. 14 and Nov. 11. The next general membership meeting is currently scheduled for Aug. 15. For an updated meeting schedule, visit: buffaloguild.org

Meeting minutes

These approved meeting minutes in the Frontier Reporter are slightly abridged. To view full minutes, visit buffaloguild.org, select "Meeting Minutes" tab and enter the password. If you need the password, email aaron.besecker@gmail.com

Executive Committee Meeting Minutes: March 11, 2023

Attendance

Present: Vice President Mobilization and Communication
Aaron Besecker, District Manager Co-Steward Eric
Bridenbaker, Editorial Delegate Natalie Brophy, Sports/Photo
Steward Mike Harrington, President Jon Harris,
Administrative Officer Kim Leiser, Secretary/Treasurer Mike
McAndrew, Editorial Delegate David Robinson, Editorial
Delegate Scott Scanlon, Editorial Alternate Delegate Mark
Sommer, Past-President Sandra Tan, Editorial Delegate Ben
Tsujiimoto, Vice President Contract Administration Steve
Watson, District Manager Co- Steward Rick Wiorkowski,
Editorial Delegate Trey Wydysh.

Absent: District Manager Co-Steward Jason Kremblas

Excused: Editorial Delegate Rachel Lenzi, Editorial Alternate
Delegate Libby March.

Call to Order at 5 p.m.

Approval of Minutes

Jan. 18 Executive Committee minutes: Were edited to correct
Steve Trotsky's name and to delete print circulation numbers.
Wiorkowski motion to approve. Scanlon second. Approved.
Besecker abstained.

Feb. 12 Executive Committee minutes: Tan motion to approve. Harrington second. Approved. Besecker abstained.

Feb. 16 General Membership meeting minutes: Wiorkowski motion to approve. Tan second. Approved. Besecker abstained.

President’s Report – Jon Harris

We can skip over the president’s report. Bargaining is the big thing going on. We’ll talk about it later in the meeting. There is still a lot of the bigger stuff to come to work on.

Mobilization Report – Aaron Besecker

Besecker: Tan submitted a funding request to TNG for mobilization efforts on March 6. Marian Needham told us they have to have a committee meeting. Mobilization is planning a public event Thursday, March 21 at Fitz’s Books so the public can talk with us and we can get our message out.

You should have hopefully all ordered your Guild T-shirts and polo shirts.

Besecker: We have a standing meeting for the mobilization committee at 5 p.m. Wednesdays.

Tan: Our mobilization committee members are creating Guild videos. We also did the joint statement with the St. Louis Guild at Lee’s annual shareholders meeting.

Grievance Report – Steve Watson

Watson: Mark Sommer brought to my attention that last week’s Gusto cover story had three submitted photos with a story on where you can get a fish sandwich in Buffalo.

Sommer: For a local story on restaurants, we’ve always used our own photographers. There was one staff photo and three other images submitted by the proprietor.

Leiser: There is past practice where we only use submitted photos when The News is unable to send a photographer because it is breaking news.

Harrington: Restaurants can create a misleading image in a submitted photo.

Harris: If we put submitted images in Blox, designers at the Lee Hub will just grab them. All of us need to be the staff photographers’ best advocate and pick their photos to put into the story.

Old Business

Bargaining updates:

Harris: We’ve made a lot of progress. On some of the big topics we’re still a long way away. Primarily pension and health care benefits. They reiterated they still want to terminate the pension. We’re still gathering info. We have a meeting scheduled with Level Financial to see what they say.

On health care, after we rejected management’s initial proposal, they modified their proposal by a lot. They want to change to cost share instead of credits. There wouldn’t be excess flex credits anymore for people who take the high deductible plan.

Leiser: There is a big difference between flex credits and cost share. My take on it was a lot of it had to do with their inability to administratively deal with credits in the system we have. They also want to eliminate the opt-out credits.

Leiser: They’re offering to pay 90% of the 20-20 plan.

Harris: They are fighting us on getting Lee Enterprises’ name in the preamble of the contract. They argue they don’t have Lee in the preamble in any other contract.

Leiser: We’ve always listed our parent company in the preamble. When we negotiated the contract three years ago Lee Enterprises didn’t want Lee Enterprises’ name in there. After their argument in the classified advertising outsourcing grievance, they said that that contract language that refers to Berkshire Hathaway doesn’t apply to Lee Enterprises, this became more important. We proposed in our last proposal that it says The Buffalo News, a subsidiary of Lee Enterprises.

Harris: We’re continuing to propose an Artificial intelligence policy. They say they don’t have a company policy yet on AI.

Harris: We continue to reject some proposals including

-Use of skips in layoffs.

-Limit on overtime.

-Reimbursement for mileage. Their latest proposal is 50 cents.

-Monthly cell phone reimbursement. They came up to \$50 a month for full-time and \$25 a month for part-timers. We proposed \$60 for full-time and \$30 for part-timers.

They rejected our proposal to delete MOA11 on digital jurisdiction. Their argument is more of a local rejection because they want to maintain maximum flexibility in the newsroom in our digital operation. I think we can have some good discussions and craft an improvement to MOA11.

Also negotiating:

-They rejected our original proposal on the inclement weather policy. We’re trying to give DMs flexibility when the print papers don’t arrive from Cleveland. We countered that DMs get six snow days every winter.

-It appears vacation allotments will remain the same. They wanted to cap new employees at three weeks of vacation maximum. We both withdrew our proposals.

-We agreed to allow the company to add enterprise editors in Group A. Right now we have different titles, like Scott Scanlon’s, which are not traditional editor titles. They want to be able to put them in Group A.

Leiser: The reasoning behind it is they don’t want to have to update the contract every time we change an editor’s title. They can use enterprise editor as the title for Group A.

Harris: Both sides agreed to extend the diversity fellowship.

Holidays: They rejected our proposal to add paid holidays. We countered with adding just Juneteenth.

Harris: They’re pushing the idea of creating a new title for reporters. They wanted a new reporter title in Group C. Enterprise reporter. I think we rejected that first. Margaret Kenny came back with senior reporter.

Leiser: Kenny wants to separate reporters who are paid above scale from those paid scale.

Tan: It would create serious morale problems.

General Membership In-Person Meeting is scheduled at noon Monday, March 18. We’ll see if the Barton Room is available.

Labor Notes Conference update:

Leiser: Five people are going. Me, Harris, Wydysh, March and Bridenbaker. We leave April 18. The conference is April 19th-21st.

New Business

Defense fund Transfer:

Leiser: We approved a deficit budget last year. With an increase in mobilization and Labor Notes conference costs, which we did not budget for, we were short in our checking account. On Monday, McAndrew arranged for the transfer of \$30,000 from the defense fund. We approved a budget with an \$80,000 deficit. But we only transferred \$30,000.

Guild communications with DMs:

Bridenbaker initiated a discussion about whether DMs are getting notified about all of the Guild mobilization activities and getting notices from the Guild via email or text.

Wiorkowski: Said he will be back in the North Office next week and will make sure all of the DMs are getting notices.

Tan: It would be a good idea to send out a flyer that is tailored directly to the district managers. She also recommended the Guild check its email list to see what DMs are not getting emails from the Guild.

Harris adjourned the meeting at 6:25 p.m.

Executive Committee Meeting Minutes: April 9, 2024

Attendance

Present: Vice President Mobilization and Communication Aaron Besecker, District Manager Central Steward Eric Bridenbaker, Editorial Delegate Natalie Brophy, Sports/Photo Steward Mike Harrington, President Jon Harris, Administrative Officer Kim Leiser, Editorial Delegate Rachel Lenzi, Secretary/Treasurer Mike McAndrew, Editorial Delegate Scott Scanlon, Past-President Sandra Tan, Editorial Delegate Ben Tsujimoto, Vice President Contract Administration Steve Watson, District Manager North Steward Rick Wiorkowski, Editorial Steward Trey Wydysh.

Absent: District Manager South Steward Jason Kremblas, Editorial Delegate David Robinson, Editorial Alternate Delegate Mark Sommer.

Excused: Editorial Alternate Delegate Libby March.

Call to Order at 5:04 p.m.

Approval of March Minutes

Correct spelling of Eric Bridenbaker's first name. Correct that Bridenbaker went to Labor Notes, not Besecker. Motion by Wiorkowski. Second by Besecker. Minutes approved.

President's Report – Harris

We continue to bargain with the company. We're making progress on non-economic issues. We had a bargaining caucus today. We have our next meeting with the company tomorrow via Zoom. They owe us a proposal and we will be asking them about the pension proposal.

At our outreach event at Fitz Books and Waffles, we had a pretty good turnout.

In the newsroom, we're finally seeing some open jobs filled. Francesca Bond started last Monday. Mackenzie Shuman started yesterday. Justin Sondel will start April 22.

Mobilization Report – Besecker

The Fitz Books and Waffles event was a success, credit to Elizabeth Licata, March and lots of other people for organizing it. We're working on our next event.

We have a Happy Hour tomorrow.

We're soliciting volunteers for the April 20 spring cleanup along Scajaquada Creek.

We moved the standing mobilization committee meetings to Thursdays. We have ongoing video creation projects. There are videos of individual members coming up, talking about what they do for the Guild and their roles.

Tan: We received a grant for the Guild from The News Guild, \$29,900 to fund various mobilization activities. Much of it will go to pay for the Guild shirts we purchased. It can also be used to cover the cost of yard signs, if we participate in Pride Parade and the Allen West Art Festival, or for window clings. That's very positive. We have access to the money on a reimbursement basis. The Guild shirts are in. We are planning to distribute them at the Happy Hour. Anyone who is not there, we can hand them out.

Grievance Report – Watson

Sommer raised a concern about the number of submitted photos in Gusto. There was a food and drink story on fish sandwiches, and every photo was a submitted photo. I talked to Gusto editor Toni Ruberto about it. There are a lot of issues that are coming into play. No photo editor. No dedicated Thursday afternoon Gusto photographer. Ruberto is doing it all by herself. It's primarily stories written by freelancers who don't put in photo requests for Gusto. Managing Editor Margaret Kenny said she doesn't reject photo assignments for Gusto. She'll follow up with Ruberto on some things. I'm hoping with Bond coming on the staff that will improve.

We had a complaint from someone on the call about some recent Erik Brady columns that went beyond what he's supposed to write about. Brady is writing stories about the NCAA Tournament that are not nostalgia based, which is largely what he's supposed to be doing. Kenny said they will work on better communication between Steve Trosky, city editors that work with Brady, and Brady.

Lenzi: It's been 4 or 5 years that we have been going through this. My understanding is he's supposed to write about history, nostalgia and ex-pats. Brady needs to communicate better about what he's writing about. I'd rather see them with a Guild byline than a freelancer's byline.

Harrington: He's not supposed to be writing live news.

Leiser: Brady is a freelancer. He should not be telling anyone he is writing for The Buffalo News.

Watson: Kenny said they have turned down columns from Brady because they tread on what staff reporters are doing and go beyond what he's supposed to do. Bruce Andriatch is usually his editor. I'll talk with Andriatch.

Watson: Mackenzie was unable to access our articles on buffalonews.com while in the newsroom. In the old building you used to have unfettered access to our website and archives. Here, we don't have access to it.

Wydysh: That has been the case since we moved to Larkinville.

Leiser: We have not filed an official grievance, but we have a number of DMs who have not gotten cellphone stipends since March 2023. By the end of this week, most should get back

pay of around \$250, some will receive \$641, and some will get less.

Old Business

Bargaining update:

Harris: Our next session is tomorrow. The company owes us counter proposals on proposals we made March 20, the last time we met for bargaining. We've been busy since then. We had a Zoom call with Lee Enterprises' director of benefits, Mark Hall, and asked a bunch of questions about management wanting to shift us to Lee's short and long-term disability policy. They want to move all new hires after Aug. 1 to the Lee policy. There are some pros to their policy. New hires are eligible after one year, as opposed to our current contract which is eligible after three years.

Last Wednesday we met with Level Financial. That was the bargaining team plus McAndrew and Robinson. The Level advisors gave us feedback.

We plan to ask Lee officials questions tomorrow. They will probably have to set up a new meeting with Aon, our pension administrator. Once we get more answers, we are getting closer to the point where we can counter more on the Lee pension and economics proposals.

Harris: On MOA-11, we are working on ways to improve MOA-11 and to get additional language about sponsored content, sports betting and content produced by AI. We need stronger language on photo creation in MOA-11 to give more protection to our photographers.

Leiser: We are getting closer to the point where we can get into wages, term and health care.

Harris: They have shown movement on health care since their terrible first proposal.

Pittsburgh Guild strike support:

Harris: We agreed to fund one striking Pittsburgh Guild member through the end of June 2024 at \$200 a week, and to reevaluate our commitment in June. They went on strike in Oct 2022. It would cost us \$4,800 to fund one striker from July 1 through the end of the year.

McAndrew: Volunteered to reach out to the Pittsburgh Guild VP for an update. Said the Guild and other striking unions had last met with the Block's company negotiators in mid-February and that was the first meeting in five months, according to the Pittsburgh Guild's website.

Wiorkowski: They had a lot of people that crossed the picket line.

Leiser: The total of all of our expenses supporting the Pittsburgh strike since Nov. 2022 is \$25,255.

Watson: That is not an insignificant sum.

Leiser: Our defense fund is at about \$1.2 million. Just on adopting a striker, we've spent \$17,000.

Harris: It's not that we can't afford it. We can talk to people in The News Guild at Labor Notes and vote on something next month.

Scanlon: Let's wait until May to decide.

Tan: Agreed we should wait a month and decide then.

New Business

Tonawanda News contract:

Leiser: We have a tentative contract agreement for members of the Guild at the Tonawanda News, a three-year agreement, through March 31, 2027.

Mailroom employees would get \$.25 cent per hour raises now and in 2026. They got an \$.80 cent per hour raise in January due to the increase in the state minimum wage.

We got them Juneteenth as a holiday, up to five personal days a year from three, kept their work week at 37.5 hours (the company wanted to go to 30 hours). The operators who hadn't had a raise in two years will get raises.

There is a bereavement leave increase. An inclement weather policy that states if they are called and told not to come in they will get paid for that time.

Twelve employees are affected by the contract. The workers still have to vote on the proposed contract. The Guild Executive Board doesn't have to vote on it yet.

These are the mailroom employees of the former Tonawanda News. They do work for the Lockport Union Sun and Journal and Niagara Gazette.

Rochester Guild strike:

Dawn Bracely was going to talk to Rochester Guild member Gary Craig to see how we could support them. They have \$19,000 raised in their strike fund. They are hoping to raise \$30,000. They are part of the New York News Guild, which has a lot of resources.

Tan: The Austin American Statesmen is on a four-day strike. Rochester's is an open-ended strike. Gannett is having non-Guild reporters from other Gannett papers do the work the Rochester strikers were doing. They had settled many issues and were down to 1 to 2 issues. They went on strike to get movement on compensation issues. I think we should contribute to strike fund, buy them lunch and go walk the picket line with them. It was a unanimous decision by the Rochester Guild to go on strike.

Harris: The Guild there only has 19 members.

Leiser: With Pittsburgh we gave \$5,000 to their strike fund and \$500 to a Christmas fund.

Harris: In New York the strikers can get unemployment. They could not in Pennsylvania.

Leiser: The GoFundMe for the Rochester Guild is not just for Rochester's guild. It's also for any Gannett guild.

Tan: Motion to contribute a minimum of \$1000 to the Rochester Guild.

Second by Watson.

McAndrew: Let's wait until tomorrow until we can get more information.

Tan: I'll amend my motion. Move the Executive Committee agrees to support the Newspaper Guild of Rochester financially and a determination on how much money we will donate will be made after we discuss with them how we can contribute directly to the Rochester Guild.

Second by Watson. Motion passes.

By an email vote on April 12, the Executive Committee voted 13-0 to donate a total of \$1,000 to the Rochester Guild. Of that amount, \$500 would go to the Gannett strike fund on

GoFundMe, which would help the striking Rochester Guild members, and \$500 would go to the Rochester Guild’s post-settlement celebratory party.

Harris adjourned the meeting.

Executive Committee Meeting Minutes: May 13, 2024

Attendance

Present: Vice President Mobilization and Communication Aaron Besecker, District Manager Central Steward Eric Bridenbaker, Editorial Delegate Natalie Brophy, Sports/Photo Steward Mike Harrington, President Jon Harris, Administrative Officer Kim Leiser, Secretary/Treasurer Mike McAndrew, Editorial Alternate Delegate Mark Sommer, Past-President Sandra Tan, Editorial Delegate Ben Tsujimoto, Vice President Contract Administration Steve Watson, District Manager North Steward Rick Wiorkowski, Editorial Steward Trey Wydysh.

Absent: District Manager South Steward Jason Kremblas, Editorial Alternate Delegate Libby March, Editorial Delegate Scott Scanlon.

Excused: Editorial Delegate Rachel Lenzi, Editorial Delegate David Robinson.

Call to Order at 5:32 p.m.

Approval of Minutes

Wiorkowski motion to approve. Second by Wydysh. Approved.

President’s Report – Harris

It’s been a fairly quiet last month. Waiting to schedule bargaining sessions. Our mobilization team has been busy. A couple weeks ago – me, Kim, Trey, Libby and Eric – went to the Labor Notes conference. There were sessions on bargaining, pensions and how to get more people involved in your union and on reducing burnout by making activities more fun. Another that stood out was developing leaders within your union. New York State lawmakers included a version of a bill in the state budget that will create payroll tax credits for newspapers. For The Buffalo News that could mean up to \$900,000 over the next three years. I think it’s worth \$300,000 per year. Some earlier versions of the bill left us out. We want to see transparency on the dollars so that the money is spent the way it should be. At noon on Wednesday, May 15 the General Membership meeting will be in the Larkin Building. Then we’ll have a virtual General Membership meeting a couple days later on May 20.

Mobilization Report – Besecker

We have a number of events coming up. You should have gotten an email about marching in the Pride Parade on June 2. Only four people have signed up. You have to be there by 10 a.m. and start marching at 11. Spread the word to people around you in the office. We need a minimum of 10 participants.

We had a happy hour and will have another one on May 22.

We had a dozen people participate in the Spring Sweep cleanup on April 20 along Scajaquada Creek. That was a good turnout.

You should have received a flyer over the weekend about changing your avatar on Social Media to the black Guild logo.

We put out a survey on artificial intelligence. We’re asking the public to answer it. I think we will use that at the bargaining table.

Mobilization videos are coming out. We’re doing a “How you can help the Guild” flyer. We’ll have it on our website and have copies of printed cards available to hand out.

Bridenbaker: We’re planning a Guild gathering at a time convenient for district managers. I suggested doing a Saturday picnic in the park. We’re shooting for June 22 or June 15 at Cheektowaga Town Park. It’s for anyone, not just DMs. But it will be at a time appropriate for DMs.

Grievance Report – Watson

We don’t have any active outstanding grievances now. We’re keeping an eye on a few things: A photo that I took at an Amherst Industrial Development Agency meeting was used in print. I flagged it for Managing Editor Margaret Kenny. Freelancer Don Paul occasionally writes about climate. We now have a Guild environment/climate change reporter, so that should be Guild work.

Leiser: Regarding dues reports, we’re having a problem. We’re supposed to get a report weekly showing what members paid dues. Since January we have received only one-third of the reports. I’m working with HR Director Tammy Turnbull to make sure we get them.

Bridenbaker: OT is being offered to DMs without following seniority. Leiser will look into that.

Watson: We’ll update our website soon on the status of resolved grievances.

Old Business

Bargaining update:

Harris: It’s been a while since we were at the bargaining table. The last session was April 10. We’ve been trying to get dates that work for VP Astrid Garcia of Lee Enterprises. We have two days this week – Tuesday and Friday. Tomorrow we will spend time catching up on where we are. We have been having our regular caucuses and doing research on economic proposals.

We might have more to tell everyone on Wednesday at the General Membership meeting.

Pittsburgh striker support

Harris: We previously agreed to fund a striking Pittsburgh Post-Gazette Guild member through the end of June. That’s \$200 a week. We talked to Pittsburgh Guild folks at the Labor Notes conference. The National Labor Relations Board signaled it will seek an injunction that would bring the strikers back to work and compel the company to bargain in good faith. Given this, a lot of us that attended Labor Notes think it might be tough to end our support now. We could say we will continue our support through the end of the summer. I think we should kick it down the road.

Sommer: I agree with Jon.

Leiser: This will be a federal court injunction. It’s got a lot more teeth than just an NLRB ruling.

Leiser: It would be another \$1,600 to support a striker through the end of August.

Sommer: I move we extend support for the strike through the end of August unless the strike ends sooner than that. Second by Wiorkowski. Approved.

Tonawanda News Tentative Agreement:

Harris: We reached a tentative agreement for Guild members at the Tonawanda News. But the members voted it down by a vote of 4-2. We reached another tentative agreement that will give the members a little more money per hour. Plus a \$100 signing bonus. It would be a two-year contract, rather than a three-year contract like we had in the first tentative agreement. We will schedule a vote, hopefully in a room at their workplace. The last time around, we only got five workers to show up to vote and another person sent their vote later to Kim.

We're hopeful they will like this tentative agreement a little more.

New Business

Sommer: Suggested the bargaining team ask Lee Enterprises if they have any plans to print fewer days, given their announcement about not printing The Buffalo News on holidays?

Harrington: The News hasn't told the public about ceasing to publish on holidays. I haven't seen a word on social media about it.

Leiser: They have a half-page disclaimer in print. It tells readers they can avoid delivery charges if they pick up their paper. I was told today that they're going to take that out. It's something they do at small papers in the midwest. They're not going to be doing that here.

Wiorkowski: I believe they're not going to give subscribers any money back for those nine holidays. Because they'll say it's published online. Complaints are going to skyrocket on July 5.

Leiser: The newsroom will function like it's a regular day. The DMs can't function like it's a regular day. The design office will put things on pages, but they won't print them.

Besecker: Sandy Tan sent me an email with some mobilization committee stuff. Nearly all of the Guild shirts have been distributed so we can start doing events with members wearing Guild shirts. Phil Fairbanks and Henry Davis pledged support in mobilizing the alumni group.

Hirings:

Harris: On the Albany reporter hiring, Robert Gavin will not be a Guild member.

Margaret Kenny is working on advertising for a Guild-represented city desk editor. Money is approved to hire a reporter to fill Caitlin Dewey's old job, but they don't know yet what the posting will be for.

Harris adjourned the meeting at 6:25 p.m.

General Membership Meeting: May 15, 2024

President's Report – Harris

Obviously, a lot of stuff is going on right now. We have some new faces in the newsroom, with more hires to come. In addition, we have five interns who will start on Monday, June 3. That's a photo intern, three metro reporters and one Gusto reporter.

We also recently learned that The Buffalo News, starting July 4, will no longer print on holidays, though we'll still have an e-edition on those days. The News was one of only four remaining Lee papers that still printed on holidays, along with St. Louis, Madison and Richmond.

While all this has been going on, we've still been supporting other guilds in need across the country. The Executive Committee this week approved continuing our support of a Pittsburgh striker through the end of August, though we're hopeful we're going to see those folks back to work before long with a recent NLRB move.

We also contributed \$500 to the strike fund for the folks in Rochester, and we still have \$500 earmarked for whenever they have a post-settlement celebration.

A couple weeks ago, five of us – me, Kim, Trey, Libby and Eric Bridenbaker – went to the Labor Notes conference in Chicago, where we heard from labor leaders from the across the country and attended topic-specific sessions on everything from bargaining to pensions to how to get people more involved in your union.

While we were at the Labor Notes conference, New York State lawmakers also included a version of a bill in the state budget that will provide payroll tax credits to news organizations across the state for retaining and creating journalism jobs.

For The Buffalo News, that could mean hundreds of thousands of dollars over the next three years. So we'll see where that goes. The Guild advocated for passage of that law, but we also want to see those dollars spent as intended.

We also recently reached a tentative agreement for our dozen or so members at the Tonawanda News, and we're working on setting up a time for them to vote on that.

Burying the lede here, we're obviously deep into bargaining for a new collective bargaining contract at The Buffalo News. It's been a fairly quiet last month, because we've been on a little bit of a break from bargaining while waiting for our next session, mostly because of Astrid Garcia's busy schedule.

We met with the company yesterday for the first time since April 10, which we mostly spent the time getting on the same page as we move forward and then we deliberated for 2.5 hours and worked on some proposals.

We meet with the company all day Friday, and we plan to present them with a non-economic package proposal and then a comprehensive economic proposal.

So we expect to have more updates in the weeks ahead.

In the meantime, our mobilization team has been busy.

I'll turn it over to Steve and then Aaron.

Grievance Report – Watson

It's been much quieter recently. We recently resolved a grievance over cell phone reimbursements. Some workers didn't get reimbursement for 10 months. Kim arranged for the workers to get paid. We never got a clear understanding why this happened.

We're keeping an eye on:

Reporter photos showing up in print.

Contributed photos showing up in print. We'd rather see our own staff photographer's photos used whenever possible.

We've been talking with management about workers who don't have digital subscriptions getting online access to buffalonews.com in the newsroom.

Brophy: Said she successfully uses her Buffalo News email address and password to log onto buffalonews.com in the newsroom and at home. It works.

Mobilization Report – Besecker

We have a number of events coming up. You should have gotten an email about marching in the Pride Parade on June 2. There is an online sign-up. There's a signup sheet next to Kim, too. You have to be there by 10 a.m. and start marching at 11. Spread the word to people around you in the office. We need a minimum of 10 participants.

We had a happy hour and will have another one on May 22 at 5 p.m. It's our fourth one.

We had a dozen people participate in the Spring Sweep cleanup on April 20 along Scajaquada Creek. That was a good turnout.

You should have received a flyer over the weekend about changing your avatar on Social Media to the black Guild logo.

We put out a survey on artificial intelligence. We're asking the public to answer it. I think we will use that at the bargaining table. About 180 people responded as of this morning.

Guild shirts have been delivered to everyone. We will have events and ask you to wear them.

We're doing a "How you can help the Guild" flyer. We'll have it on our website and have copies of printed cards available to hand out to the public.

Eric Bridenbaker, one of the district managers, is organizing a Saturday Guild picnic for workers who can't make it to the Wednesday happy hours. It will be a Guild gathering at a time convenient for district managers. A Saturday picnic in the park. We're shooting for June 22 or June 15 at Cheektowaga Town Park. It's for anyone, not just DMs. But it will be at a time appropriate for DMs.

Videos are being made by a team on the mobilization committee.

We will have a tent at the Allen West Arts Festival one day on June 8 and will need volunteers to sit in the tent and talk to the public about our negotiations for a contract.

Bargaining – Harris/Leiser

They gave members an update on Guild proposals to management for the next contract, including proposals for raises, an AI policy, health insurance, paid holidays.

Executive Committee Meeting Minutes: June 13, 2024

Attendance

Present: Vice President Mobilization and Communication Aaron Besecker, Editorial Delegate Natalie Brophy, Sports/Photo Steward Mike Harrington, President Jon Harris, District Manager South Steward Jason Kremblas, Administrative Officer Kim Leiser, Editorial Delegate Rachel Lenzi, Secretary/Treasurer Mike McAndrew, Editorial Delegate David Robinson, Editorial Delegate Scott Scanlon, Past-President Sandra Tan, Editorial Delegate Ben Tsujimoto, Vice President Contract Administration Steve Watson, District Manager North Steward Rick Wiorkowski, Editorial Steward Trey Wydysh.

Absent: None

Excused: District Manager Central Steward Eric Bridenbaker, Editorial Alternate Delegate Libby March, Editorial Alternate Delegate Mark Sommer.

Call to order at 5:07 p.m.

Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve minutes of May 13, 2024 Guild Executive Committee meeting by Besecker, second by Tan. Approved.

Motion to approve minutes of May 15, 2024 General Membership meeting, after fixing the spelling of Eric Bridenbaker's first name, by Wiorkowski. Second by Tan. Approved.

President's Report - Harris

Obviously, there is a lot going on. We continue to bargain with Lee Enterprises for a new contract. We're bargaining in person three days this week. We are closer on some issues but there are still some outstanding major issues. We now have a ratified two-year agreement with the Tonawanda News.

Mobilization - Besecker

The Guild was at the Allen West Art Festival last weekend and participated in the Pride Parade before that. We have a tent at Juneteenth on Saturday. Eleven volunteers signed up for that. Thank you to them. We have swag to hand out, chip clips with the Guild logo, information cards for the public on how you can help, and copies of the Kirst column on Juneteenth visionary Gail Wells from last Sunday.



Guild members Mike McAndrew and Elizabeth Licata at the Allen West Art Festival table.

A Happy Hour on June 19, our sixth, is upcoming. Lunch in the Park is on June 22 at Cheektowaga Town Park. Only six people are signed up. We will send out a reminder.

Shirt mobilizations are scheduled Monday and Wednesday this week.

We did a social media post about the overall shabbiness of the digital product, buffalonews.com. We had 50 retweets. 31,000 impressions, so 31,000 people saw the tweet thread. We will pursue additional mobilization based on the Executive Committee's discussion of how bargaining is going.

Grievances - Watson

We don't have an active grievance right now. We have a potential grievance regarding district managers and scheduling.

Occasionally issues come up about photos by reporters being published in the paper. We continue to pay attention to columns that Erik Brady does.

Old Business

Tonawanda News tentative agreement

Harris: There were two days of voting. The contract was ratified in a 7 to 3 vote. Pretty much everyone voted. The first time Guild members voted down the tentative agreement 4-2.

It's a two-year contract. Mailroom employees get a .50 cents an hour salary increase. Operators also get raises. All members get a \$100 signing bonus and Juneteenth is a new paid holiday. All employees get three days of bereavement leave; some only got two before. There is a new policy for states of emergency; employees will get paid for hours they are scheduled to work during inclement weather. More money in raises and a signing bonus are the main differences.

New Business

Member loan proposal

Harris: Guild member Deb Sur started last September. She's been trying to get a visa renewal to be eligible to continue to work for The News. Her visa expires June 19. The government said it needed more info about her application. We're going to help provide more info. We don't know how long it will drag out. Immigration is anything but fast. She's going to have a period of time where she is going to run out of money because she won't be legally allowed to work. The News is trying to continue providing her health benefits. We want to discuss a potential loan from the Guild to Deb to bridge the gap. Also, we want to do a fundraiser for her that won't be a loan.

Leiser: Legally, the federal government allows the Guild to make one \$2,000 loan to a member.

McAndrew: Motion to loan Deb Sur \$2,000. Besecker seconded McAndrew's motion.

Leiser said the terms of the loan are up to the Guild, but Leiser said the Guild has to seek repayment of the loan or turn the loan into a dues refund.

McAndrew amended his motion to say the loan to Sur will be interest free for a two-year period, and that it may be reviewed by the Guild at the end of the two years if it has not been repaid, and that the Guild should make the loan immediately, or as quickly as is possible.

Besecker: Agreed to the friendly amendment.

The motion to loan Sur \$2,000 was approved unanimously. Harris noted that anyone who wants to help organize a fundraiser for Deb Sur should contact March to volunteer.

Bargaining update

Harris said he has emailed a lengthy update to Guild members about the ongoing bargaining with Lee Enterprises and The News.

He and Leiser gave the Executive Committee a summary of the bargaining progress.

Harris said the Guild is still negotiating on several major issues, including:
-Over the health insurance flex credit system, which Lee Enterprises wants to unwind.
-Wages.
-Layoff skips, which Lee Enterprises wants but the Guild continues to reject.

- He said Lee has withdrawn several nonstarters, including proposals to:
- Decrease the mileage rate.
 - Decrease contractual severance.
 - Eliminate daily OT.
- There are tentative agreements on:
- Terminating the pension.
 - Making new employees eligible for 5 float days 3 months after they are hired.
 - An AI policy.
 - Cell phone reimbursement goes to \$50 for full timers \$25 for part-timers.
 - Getting Lee Enterprises into the preamble of the contract.
 - Interns would get a raise to \$18 an hour.
 - Night differentials would increase slightly for the first time in two decades.
 - Moving to Lee long and short term disability policies in place of the existing extended sick leave plan.
 - Getting written into the contract that new employees can contribute to 401k after 30 days.

Executive Committee members participated in an extensive discussion about the bargaining, thanking the bargaining team for their hard work, asking questions and giving the bargaining team feedback about issues still to be negotiated.

Harris adjourned the meeting at 6:27 p.m.