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October 2008

# *The APA NEWSLETTER*

## *SPECIAL EDITION*

*From the desk of Maurice Koffman, MSU APA President/Chairperson*

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### **MSU APA Members:**

During my time as president of the APA, I have had the opportunity to meet individually and collectively with members during informal lunch events held periodically around campus. Getting out and about to meet with members has offered the chance to put individual faces to the make-up of the APA membership — the real people and not just the numbers behind the Association. In my discussions with members, I have faced many questions and had to resolve difficult issues, including several rumors and misinformation that have been brought to my attention. As we continue to move forward with improved and more open communications and other related common goals and plans, I hope to address all general membership concerns and communicate official responses in a timely, comprehensive manner.

As mentioned, we, as an Association, have come together over many issues this year. Another issue that is pending for the Association is the reality of a dues increase for this coming year. Commencing with the October 31 paycheck, dues for the APA will need to be assessed at a flat rate fee of \$60 per month for each FTE; part-time employees who currently pay 75% or 50% APA dues will be assessed accordingly. As usual, dues assessment includes MEA and NEA fees.

While you may be troubled by this increase in dues and respond with a myriad of questions and concerns, please let me try to explain how we got to this point, the history of the relationship between the APA and MEA, and what exactly we get for our dues.

As your Association's chairperson, please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns. Or contact any of the other officers and board members. We are here for the best interests of our local as well as your interests as a member.

### **So Why a Dues Increase Now?**

In the spring of 2006, the APA Executive Board helped to offset the impending dues increase as a result of the MEA billing full dues for ESP groups by phasing it in with a supplemental drawdown of the APA treasury. At the time of this decision, the APA treasury had grown to nearly \$750,000. This was due to investments, including high interest bearing CDs, which paid off very well in the mid-late 90s.

Over the last couple of years, APA has drawn down roughly \$350,000 through a dues subsidy. Of course, once the decision was made to use a portion of our reserves to phase in a dues increase, the Executive Board knew that an annual drawdown could not be indefinitely sustained. As the inherent responsibility of the Executive Board is to oversee the fiscal well-being of the Association, it was determined that the Association would begin reducing the subsidy when our fund balance was between \$300,000 and \$400,000. Being that we have achieved this, the APA Executive Board took action to increase dues to ensure that we meet our dues to our state and national organizations.

Furthermore, the APA was able to secure a general salary increase of 2.75% for this October. With the average APA member making just over \$53,000, the average member will gross \$122 more per month. Noting the average member's annual salary increase, the Executive Board felt that a \$6 per month increase, to fully remove the current subsidy, would be better instituted in this raise cycle.

Special information sessions have been scheduled for Tuesday, October 7, 2008, to address member concerns for the dues increase. Times and locations are denoted on the last page of this newsletter.



## Percentage Dues & the APA

Percentage dues assessment had been proposed and debated at the MEA Representative Assembly (RA) for more than twenty years and was passed at the 2004 Spring RA. Prior to that, the APA had a two-tiered dues structure – full dues for all EA members (those actually named as teachers instructing in the classroom) and half dues for ESP members (educational support members which include APA members). The half-dues for ESP members had been instituted as an incentive back when the MEA first began organizing ESP locals; it was intended to be phased out eventually. In the past few years, there had been proposals to have bracketed dues based on salary, as well as a percentage dues structure with a five-year phase-in. Neither of these passed the RA. The straight percentage dues proposal was the one passed in spring of 2004, jointly proposed by EA and ESP members.

Today, the APA is billed a percentage rate to a cap of members' annual salary for the MEA dues and a flat rate for NEA dues. While the APA has visited the idea of a percentage based dues structure, the APA has always maintained a flat rate policy, equally dividing the annual aggregate amount of billed dues among the membership. The philosophy being that everyone gets the same APA and MEA/NEA benefits and therefore should pay the same amount. Unlike many local affiliates, the APA does not collect local dues.

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## Why are we affiliated with the MEA?



MSU APA has a rich tradition as part of the MEA. In 1984, MSU Administrative Professionals were ordered by the Michigan Employment Relations Commission to

separate the then single bargaining unit encompassing both academic professionals and supervisors into two separate units, today known as the Administrative Professional Supervisors Association (APSA) and the Administrative Professional Association (APA).

In 1986, the then APA Executive Board encouraged affiliation with the MEA at a time when the APA was in poor financial condition. At the time, MSU APA had no money in savings and was \$50,000 in debt—\$18,000 of which was owed for legal fees during negotiations, grievances, and arbitration. Upon affiliation with the MEA later that summer, the MEA paid off the APA debt, provided paid legal services, began providing and paying for a professional labor consultant and staff, offered a fully equipped office, gave grievance and other union advocate related training to APA representatives and provided financial assistance in creating and disseminating publications to the entire membership. Because of these types of services provided to MSU APA by the MEA, it has been a positive move for us to affiliate with MEA/NEA.

Equally important is the political influence the MEA/NEA has on both a state and national level. We can all agree that labor politics beyond the boundaries of our campus affect the entire membership of our Association. It was the State Legislature in 1947 that passed into law the Public Employment Relations Act, allowing us to unionize and bargain collectively. Today, the same political process dictates the role unions can play in our labor society. The MEA and NEA continue to battle for union rights of public education employees in the state of Michigan and on the federal level. College affordability and retiree health care benefits are among the many issues being fought via House Bills and other initiatives.

The issues facing education, higher education in particular, are of importance to all campus employees. If college is not affordable to the middle class, then how will we be able to fill the classrooms? Along with state funding, tuition is a driving revenue force within higher education. Discounting the importance of the “politics of work” leaves our positions as unionized higher education support staff vulnerable to anti-union, anti-labor initiatives.

Our Association as part of the MEA and NEA has allowed us to influence the political labor movements in this country. It has given us the political clout to actively battle current initiatives like privatization and “right to work”. These political issues are currently targeting our union to dissolve our strength and allow management to be the sole player in the employment arena without recourse for capricious actions. Ultimately, the

MEA/NEA demonstrated more than 20 years ago that they were the right organization for the APA and today continues providing the same superb service to the APA membership, ensuring professional representation and enforcement of member rights.

As a tangible note, the MEA also provides us our physical Association office at the MEA headquarters and hired full-time staff, provides most office supplies, pays the APA land line phone bill, covers the cost of training APA members, and provides significant financial support through alternative training grants which are increasingly being requested, approved, and utilized by the APA. Moreover, as the Executive Board has attempted to make changes for the betterment of the Association, the APA has requested further staff assistance fully paid by the MEA. In response, the MEA has now begun the process of securing another staff member to assist with member engagement and other needed membership services.

## Myths, Fables and Other Falsehoods



### ***Why are APA dues much higher than other unions?***

Comparatively, they are not. Most significant labor unions, consistent both on and off the MSU campus, bill an average rate of 2 hours of pay per month. Of course, this also means that some bill more than 2 hours while others bill less. The average salary of an APA member is just over \$53,000. With a full-time work year being 2080 hours annually, that equates to roughly \$26 per hour or \$52 per month for the average APA member. That places the APA in-line with the average labor union regarding the rate of dues. While we understand that not all members make the APA average, -- some higher, some lower -- please know that we continue to explore viable changes to the dues structure.

At this time, however, MSU is transitioning to a new financial system and is unable to accommodate a

change in flat rate dues structure. When the new system is fully functional, further discussions and review will be conducted regarding dues assessment with the hope a new structure may be a better fit for the APA membership to meet the financial obligations necessary to operate our Association.

### ***Why don't APA Executive Board members pay dues?***

APA Executive Board members, just as a rank and file member, have their dues deducted from their pay check each month. About two years ago, the Executive Board passed a motion to allow a dues reimbursement to any Executive Board member, in good standing, who attends at least 50% of the meetings and has served on the Executive Board for at least one year. Executive Board members volunteer their time to the organization and are assessed the same annually in dues as every APA member. This financial incentive of dues reimbursement is in alignment with other unions that compensate Executive Board members for their contributions to their union.

### ***Why won't the APA Executive Board get APA members' pay cycle to be every second week instead of once monthly?***

Despite some of the rumors around campus, please know that this issue was broached several times with the University including during our last round of negotiations back in August/September 2007. The University preferred not to make any movement on the issue. Noting that there were more pressing issues germane to the majority of the APA membership, the bargaining team opted to set this issue aside in an effort to achieve greater improvements in other areas of the APA contract.

Furthermore, the new financial system being implemented throughout all bargaining units on campus administers pay periods every two weeks. Once the system is in place for our bargaining unit, we anticipate moving to the 2-week pay period.

NEA/MEA/APA are all one voice for one cause— collective bargaining. Together, we continue to move ahead in a volatile marketplace that would place the blame for high unemployment and soaring prices in goods and services on a unionized workforce. Together we will continue to fight these non-truths and scapegoat tactics that threaten our ability to sustain quality, paid healthcare, annual raises, and other amenities that are only afforded to the unionized worker. Together we will continue to fight for a strong, active voice at the bargaining table and after the contract is signed.

## APA Executive Board

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### WEBSITE:

[www.msu.edu/~msuapa](http://www.msu.edu/~msuapa)

Please feel free to attend any information session below scheduled to address members' concerns regarding the dues increase. Information sessions have been established on Tuesday, October 7, 2008, at the following times and locations:

Wells Hall, room B106 from 9am to 9:45am  
Akers Hall, room 133 from 4pm to 4:45pm  
Communication Arts, room 147 from 5:15pm to 6pm

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