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ECCFA NEWS

The Sentinel: Elgin Community College Faculty Association Newsletter

What is in the February issue:

ISSUE CONTENTS - 1

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE - 1

ECCFA SOCIAL MEDIA - 1

UNION STORIES - 1 & 2



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ECCFA President's Message

As I've been receiving messages of gratitude and congratulations over the last few days regarding the tentative agreement, one that sticks out for me is from Laura Haske, one of our Grievance Committee co-chairs. Laura wrote that this experience left her feeling "more connected than ever to ECCFA as a collective force", and I could not agree more.

Our show of solidarity at the January 27th ECC Board of Trustees meeting was nothing short of inspirational. I think I speak for the team when I say that it significantly raised our spirits as we moved into mediation. I know I was awe-struck at the collective energy and enthusiasm.

One aspect of that evening that sticks with me was the solidarity with our union brothers and sisters. Members of SSECCA continued to wear blue every Thursday and quite a few were in attendance with us at that meeting. Multiple Waubensee Community College Faculty Council members came and picketed with us as well. Local trades union members also came to picket and sit in support with us.

Seeing so many with no connection to ECC come and join us really resonated with me, and reinforced the value in doing the same when the next opportunity comes. I hope we can all remember that once our final contract is signed and others call for support. It matters. Seeing others come to support your drive for a fair contract is validating and encouraging. I know I felt it, and I want to look for more opportunities in the future to return the favor.

Thanks to all who supported us in any myriad of ways during this process. We could not have done it without you! We have a couple more steps to take - including seeking your approval of this tentative agreement - but hopefully we can return soon to doing what we love and supporting students in their educational journeys. Enjoy this especially unique edition of the ECCFA Sentinel, where we focus on submitted union stories from our members.

In Unity, Dan Kernler, Prof. of Mathematics
President, ECCFA, IFT Local #3791

Emily K. Healy's Story

I'm a "Harper Baby." My father, Mark Healy (the O.G. Mark Healy!) taught at William Rainey Harper College, our sibling community college in Palatine, Illinois. My father was the reason I was inspired to join the Peace Corps and in addition, the cornerstone of my decision to pursue dedicating my life to public education in community college. When Harper College went on strike at several points throughout my young adulthood, including when I was a student there myself, I struck with them. Being a fashion student at the time, I designed fabric banners for the Union to utilize in their demonstration, which my father displayed proudly in his office (along with his many typewriters!) until his retirement. I believe so strongly in the Union and if we march, I will be there on the front lines, blue fairy lights at the ready, with my little guitar, cold hands, and some Union songs to keep our spirits up.

Lauren Sullivan's Story

My dad, Paul Taylor, was a middle school teacher who taught woodshop, then design technology, and finally computer applications. Teaching wasn't his only job over the course of his life, as he was a USPS Mail Carrier, a photographer, a bus driver, and even a stage manager for Second City Chicago, among other things. In every job possible, he joined the union; i.e. the Actors' Equity Association, the American Postal Workers Union, the Illinois Federation of Teachers, etc. Dad is retired now, but the IFT is the union he credits with the modest comfort level at which he and my mom are able to live. It was always clear to me that unions are a good thing. We pay into them to ensure that our coworkers are all taken care of, and if we stumble, the union will help catch us. I was raised under the radical idea of caring for the well-being of others, and that 'Unity is Community!'

When I started working at ECC and had my first opportunity to join a union, it was an obvious choice. Over the last 4.5 years, I've slowly gotten more involved and then the negotiations committee needed volunteers, it felt like a responsibility I needed to take on to represent my coworkers in the library. Once I was in it, it snowballed a little. Running the Discord turned into Communications Liaison turned into Spokesperson turned into well, I guess I'll be Webmaster, too. Once negotiations are over, I'll probably need a spa retreat, but I've learned so much - you're probably not going to be rid of me entirely.

Dr. Lori Clark's Story

Jessie Laughlin, my great-grandmother, was a member of The International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), Central States Region. As a garment worker in Pana, IL and then Hillsboro, IL, she was a proud and active member of the ILGWU. Every summer, she would attend union meetings and classes in Wisconsin. She recognized the importance of the union in regard to making sure everyone is treated with respect and treated fairly. Even though I didn't know her well (she died when I was in sixth grade), I learned from my great-grandmother that there is nothing wrong with being a strong, independent woman who stands up for what she believes in. That is what Grandma Laughlin did through her union work. As a proud member of the ECCFA, I carry my great-grandmother's passion for unions and the importance and power they have when it comes to workers' rights. Knowing how important the union was to Grandma Laughlin, I like to think that my involvement with the ECCFA and the fact that I understand and support the ideals of the union would make her a happy woman.

Dr. Javier Coronado-Aliegro's Story

When I started at ECC, some of the first people I chatted with were from the union. They both made sure I understood the perks of being in a union, how it could ensure that my job as an instructor was fairly compensated and that I'd always be treated right. That sparked my interest immediately. At my previous university job, I wasn't part of the teacher's union; nobody asked me to join, and being fresh out of grad school, I had no idea how to go about it.

But ECC was a whole different story. The folks there made sure I understood what ECCFA could do for me, and I was sold right away. I've never looked back since and I've also tried to volunteer every time we've had to negotiate a contract because being part of the process makes me feel like I'm doing something not just for myself as a professor, but also for my colleagues, both union and non-union members. Honestly, there are no downsides to joining a worker's union. There's a shared goal and camaraderie that goes beyond just being colleagues when you're in a union, giving our daily work a sense of purpose.

And let's be real, in today's world, we all need a bit of purpose. Being part of the union has been a game-changer for me, and I'd encourage anyone to jump in and experience the benefits firsthand. Whether it's about fair pay, job security, or simply having that support system, it's all worth it. Plus, there's something special about knowing you're part of a bigger movement, contributing to positive changes for everyone involved.

Kim Tarver's Story

One of several stories about how unions have impacted my life is one about how I was able to remain at ECC after the Physical Therapist Assistant (PTA) Program closed in 2002. In response to the 1998 Balanced Budget Act, PTA programs across the country shut down as reimbursement for services provided by PTAs was reduced; ECC's program, which opened in 1996, was one of those.

This was an especially tumultuous time in my life. I was still grieving the loss of a child, recovering from a divorce, and we were all feeling the lingering effects of the 2001 strike. I fully expected to return to full-time physical therapy practice. What I didn't realize at the time was that union leaders were advocating on my behalf. Because of Reduction in Force (RIF), the contract language designed to protect faculty was triggered. Meetings were held to review my education and experience to determine other areas of the college which is why I began earning certifications that would allow me to remain at ECC for the foreseeable future.

Today, I am proud to be part of one of the top PTA programs in the country thanks to another act of Congress, combined with the needs of an aging population, that eventually led to the reopening of the PTA program. The rest, as they say, is history.