



# The Union Eye

NEWSLETTER OF GAS WORKERS UNION LOCAL G-555, UTILITY WORKERS UNION OF AMERICA, AFL-CIO

## ★ A Message from The President ★

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Your Executive Board has had a busy second quarter of 2018, culminating in the ratification of a new 4-year collective bargaining agreement on June 28<sup>th</sup>. I'd like to again take this opportunity to thank the members of the Wage & Grievance Committee who serve as your Negotiating Team; Robyn Arbogast (Chairperson/Executive Vice-President), Mick Prendergast (Executive Secretary), Paul Talboo (Executive Treasurer), Wil Soto (Business Manager), Jim Davis (Canton Dist. Rep.), Deb Moffitt (Cleveland Dist. Rep.), Rob Newsome (Dover/New Phi. – Marietta Dist. Rep.), Tim Reindel (Lima Dist. Rep.), and Dominic Rios (Akron Dist. Rep.). Without the hard work and dedication of these individuals we would not have been able to secure the contract that will see our members continue to set the industry standard in safety and production for four more years. This agreement was not perfect. There are some items in the package that we did not want to accept that we fought until the very last moment to try to hold off, but we felt that we had an obligation to bring this package to this membership to let you decide. Our membership voted overwhelmingly to approve this contract. We will go further in depth into the new CBA within this publication, but I am proud that we were able to secure a pay increase of 11% across the next four years to go along with the freeze of medical, dental and vision premiums for 2019 and increases over the remaining three years commensurate to our membership's usage, which we were able to prove to the Company continues to remain fairly level from year to year. Our members will be able to see more money in their pocket each year and that is a great thing.

I also need to thank all of our members for their continued support and acts of solidarity. The Company took notice that we had a unified membership standing behind us and that definitely made a difference in negotiations. We need to take this opportunity to remain unified as a membership; four years is not as far away as it seems. We, as the leadership, will continue to work to be better so that we can cultivate a stronger union. We will continue to build better means of communications. If you haven't come to union meetings before; start. If you haven't paid attention to what is happening politically in this country, especially as it pertains to unions and the right to bargain collectively; start. If you have ideas, share them with us. Now is the time to get involved. It is not getting any easier for our brothers and sisters in the Labor Movement. We must all fight together.

The contract and other important topics will be expounded upon in the following pages; please take some time to read this newsletter and if you have questions or concerns, please contact me or call the Union Office.

Fraternally yours,

Eddie Hall, Executive President  
Gas Workers Union Local G-555  
Utility Workers Union of America, AFL-CIO

## DOMINION WINS 2017 AGA SAFETY AWARD

Dominion Energy Ohio has received the 2017 American Gas Association's (AGA) Safety Achievement Award for excellence in employee safety. 2017 saw Dominion finish the year with the fewest OSHA recordable events in the Company's history. This was in large part due to the partnership between Union and the Company leading to safety innovations and initiatives. Dominion previously won the AGA Safety Award in 2008, 2011 and 2013. Our Members continue to prove time and again that we are the safest, hardest-working Gas Workers in the industry. Our Union's commitment to safety should hopefully see us earning another award soon. We salute our Members!

**AS OF JULY 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018 LOCAL G-555 HAS 1166 MEMBERS**



**GAS WORKERS UNION  
LOCAL G-555**

UTILITY WORKERS UNION of AMERICA,  
AFL-CIO  
[www.G-555.com](http://www.G-555.com)

**EDDIE HALL**  
EXECUTIVE PRESIDENT

**ROBYN ARBOGAST**  
EXECUTIVE VICE-PRESIDENT

**MICKY PRENDERGAST**  
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

**PAUL TALBOO**  
EXECUTIVE TREASURER

**WIL SOTO**  
BUSINESS MANAGER

7777 EXCHANGE ST., SUITE 11  
VALLEY VIEW, OH 44125  
PHONE: 216.328.0154  
FAX: 216.328.0368  
[info@G-555.com](mailto:info@G-555.com)



[www.UWUA.net](http://www.UWUA.net)



# The Union Eye

NEWSLETTER OF GAS WORKERS UNION LOCAL G-555, UTILITY WORKERS UNION OF AMERICA, AFL-CIO

## NEW 4-YEAR CONTRACT RATIFIED

The Union is excited to announce that, as the result of a lot of hard work by the G-555 Wage & Grievance Committee (Negotiating Team), we have agreed to a new 4-year Collective Bargaining Agreement with the Company that will run through June of 2022. The initial tentative agreement was overwhelmingly approved by the Executive Committee, including a unanimous approval from the Wage & Grievance Committee. It was then taken to the Membership for a vote on June 28<sup>th</sup>, where it was ratified by a 718-233 margin, with nearly 82% of our Members voting.

Almost as important as the CBA itself is the fact that the Union was able to successfully negotiate a new contract without having to endure things like a lockout, a strike, or unfair labor practice charges (ULPs). It is no secret that in today's America, Labor is under constant attack. It has become increasingly difficult for Unions to negotiate fair and equitable Collective Bargaining Agreements, and our situation was no different. As talks progressed, the Company's proposals became increasingly concessionary, and our Negotiating Team remained diligent, patient, and determined to bring our Members a good contract. We feel very confident that this was accomplished, and judging by the over 75% approval, the Membership feels the same.

Before Negotiations began, we sent out a survey to all Members in an effort to gauge the importance of certain issues when it came time for the new CBA. Near the top of the list across the board was the issue of healthcare, and our team worked very hard to deliver on that for the Members, starting off with a freeze in medical premiums for the first year of the contract. On top of that, they were able to establish a new plan in which your premiums are capped at a 6% increase in each of the final 3 years of the contract. For a comparison, using Option C for Employee & Family, rates increased an average of over 16% per year between 2010 and 2018. Another big issue for our Members regarding medical has been the prescription plan through Express Scripts; while they will still be the plan provider, we were able to negotiate one huge change - the Mail-In program for maintenance drugs will now be optional, and you may now get those drugs at retail pharmacies.

Some other highlights of the new Collective Bargaining Agreement include:

- ✓ Wage Increases of 2.75% for each year of the contract
- ✓ \$1,000 lump sum signing bonus
- ✓ AIP Bonus of 4.5% in each year of the contract
- ✓ Active HRA increase from \$1800 per year to \$2100
- ✓ Increases in Meal Allowance, Shift Premiums, and Holiday Pay
- ✓ Increase in Education Assistance from \$5250 to \$7500
- ✓ 3 weeks of PAID Parental Leave
- ✓ Increase in Service Award amounts
- ✓ Retirement Award of \$50 for every year of service up to \$1000
- ✓ Updated Non-Discrimination Language to include sexual orientation, gender identity & disability
- ✓ Removed "reporting location only changes" from Article 14.4 (2 moves in 4 years)

While we are all very happy to have a new CBA in place, we cannot just sit back and be content. We will continually look to improve our current situation, and immediately begin to work on the next Collective Bargaining Agreement to ensure that the Membership receives the best deal possible.

## TELECOMMUNICATIONS JOB DESCRIPTIONS

Members in the Communications field (Telecomm) have always been part of the "Range Classification – Physical" group, in which wage increases were based on merit adjustments through performance evaluations. Under The merit system it could take 12 years for them to reach top pay in their field. As a resolution to a grievance, the Union was able to negotiate updated job descriptions for Communication Technicians and Specialists and get them placed into automatic progression. Job Titles of Communications Technician C, B, and A were created, as well as Specialist B and A. This will allow Members in this Department to progress much quicker. A special thanks to Akron Eastwood Representative, Kristi Grossholz and Subject Matter Expert, Paul Stone for their efforts. This process took roughly nine months from the grievance resolution until the Memorandum of Understanding could be signed into effect. The Union has been in discussions to bring automatic progression to other Departments.

## UNION & COMPANY AGREE TO CHANGES IN MERIT RAISE PROCESS

The Union has been working for some time on changing the process concerning Members who are in classifications subject to the merit raise process. Traditionally, those employees, once off the Physical or Clerical progression associated with their job title would be eligible to receive a 5% merit raise every two years. The Company recently agreed to begin reviewing those employees yearly for 2.5% wage increases. This will allow employees' wages to compound quicker, thus, reaching the top rate for their classification sooner. Employees on merit who received a merit raise last year will be eligible for a 2.5% merit wage increase this year. If an employee on merit did not receive a merit raise last year, they will still be eligible for a 5% increase this year, with the 2.5% increase starting next year.



## CHARGES & APPEALS

### UPDATES

In the previous issue of The Union Eye, Executive President Eddie Hall discussed a number of charges regarding various union matters that were filed by Members. At the time, most of the outcomes were pending, but have since been resolved and are outlined below:

- Brother Craig Vernon (FMS – Northeast Shop) filed an election challenge of our Executive Board Elections held in October of 2017. At the time of the previous newsletter, Brother Vernon's challenge had been heard by the G-555 Investigative Committee and was recommended to be dismissed. He then appealed the decision with UWUA National Union, which concluded that he "was unable to provide any evidence of wrongdoing that could have affected the outcome of the election for any of the Officer positions", and then dismissed all of his allegations.

**UPDATE:** Brother Vernon's charges were then appealed to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), and the Union was notified on May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018 that all 14 allegations were dismissed, on account of there being no violations by the Union.

- Brother J.J. Popio (FMS – Akron Wilbeth Shop) filed an internal charge against Sister Kristi Grossholz involving conduct during the October 2017 Executive Board elections. The charge was dismissed by the Executive Board as it had no merit, and it was then appealed and heard at the Akron District meeting in January 2018, where it was dismissed by a vote of the Members at the meeting.

**UPDATE:** Brother Popio then appealed to the UWUA and the appeal was denied on February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

- Brother Claude Bailey III (FMS – Eastern Shop) filed an Unfair Labor Practice charge against the Executive Board for allegedly failing to fairly represent him.

**UPDATE:** Brother Bailey has since withdrawn the charge.

- Brother Jody Chapek (FMS – Western Shop) brought an internal charge against the entire Executive Board for allegedly "interfering with elected representatives in the performance of their duties, interfering with the rights of members, improper performance of duty, malfeasance and unbecoming conduct".

**UPDATE:** Brother Chapek's charge has been withdrawn.

### NEW CHARGES

Sister Kristi Grossholz (ISC – Eastwood Shop) filed an election challenge for the Akron District Election that was held in March of 2018. The Executive Board appointed a 3-person Investigative Committee to hear the challenge, and that committee found there was no election violation. She then appealed this decision to the National Union and the charge was ultimately dismissed.

Sister Grossholz also filed internal charges against Brother Craig Vernon and Brother J.J. Popio. Per the By-laws, the Executive Board served as the Trial Committee and found that there was not a chargeable offense within the evidence provided. Sister Grossholz then appealed the decision to the Akron District Meeting and the ruling of the Trial Committee was upheld by the Members in attendance who voted.

## UWUA COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS

The UWUA has named two Members of Local G-555 to National Committees. Executive Secretary, **Micky Prendergast** was named to the newly-formed UWUA Health & Safety Committee. He will be the Region III Delegate representing the Gas Industry. Cleveland District Chair, **Rick Higinbotham** was named Region III Delegate to the UWUA's Young Workers Initiative Committee (YWIC), replacing outgoing YWIC Co-Chair, Paul Talboo. Congratulations to both of them; we know they will do an excellent job representing our Local.

## UNION INTERN PROGRAM

Due to such great success in the past, we are once again partnering with the Company on the Union Intern Program. Like last year, interns have been hired to participate in a 13-week program where they will be exposed to different areas of the Operations side of the company. The interns will get a one-week class introducing them to the gas industry, and then spend 3 weeks each in FMS, C&M, Leak Detection and GM&R. Out of last year's group of 6 interns, 5 were offered jobs and 4 were hired. With that amount of success, it is easy to see why the program was expanded to 11 interns this year across 6 shops. This is one more way to place young, educated, skilled people into our workforce, and we look forward to seeing the results of this year's program.

## UWUA EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCE

In June, the Executive Board, along with some other Local G-555 officers, attended the UWUA Regional Conference in Pittsburgh for Regions II & III, which includes Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Florida, Texas and a few other surrounding states. This year's conference was aimed at educating and empowering UWUA Members all across the country, and to help make them better leaders and advocates for their Local Unions. In addition to a variety of excellent speakers that included Richard Bloomingdale, President of the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO, three educational workshops were held for Members to sharpen their knowledge and skills in "Labor Law 101", "Effective Contract Campaign Planning", and "Offensive Bargaining". Not only are the speakers and workshops great learning tools, but the conference is the perfect opportunity to meet with Members and Leadership from other Locals across our region and discuss what is happening in other areas of the Country. Our Local was able to work with the National's Leadership, as well as renowned Labor Attorney, David A. Rosenfeld to develop some of the strategy that enabled the Wage & Grievance to secure some of the benefits in the CBA.

## ARBITRATOR'S DECISION DEALS BLOW TO LOCAL G-555

This month the Union got the Arbitrator's decision in the case of a terminated Member from the Integrated Service Center (ISC). The employee was terminated by the Company for Work Performance – Failure to Follow Company Procedures. The stated failures include: (1) The expectation that you call a supervisor when you are going to be late for work. (2) The expectation that you report to a supervisor on the floor when you arrive at work late. (3) The expectation that you shut down your computer every day. (4) The expectation that you are honest and responsible. Said employee had a Type III Discipline with a 3-Day suspension in 2010 with additional disciplines that kept the 2010 discipline from going stale. The employee was found to have swiped in to the building after the start of their shift multiple times over a few month period. On numerous occasions, upon arriving after the beginning of the shift, the employee sent communication to the supervisor that a computer program error prevented them from being signed on and insinuating that they had, in fact, been at work at the start of their shift. The Union argued that the employee's termination did not meet the statutes of just cause. We contend that corrective action should have been taken prior to discharge. The Union also was able to show that the Company failed to adhere to its own imposed weekly and monthly reviews that were the result of a resolution to a grievance in 2014. In the Arbitrator's decision, he contends, "The Company had no obligation... [to] tell the Grievant that [their] continued tardiness may lead to further discipline. Management had every reason to wait and carefully evaluate the Grievant's deceptive misconduct before confronting [them]". The Arbitrator also ruled that, "Dishonesty in the workplace is a dischargeable offense regardless of an employee's disciplinary record. In this case... the Company had no choice but to discharge Grievant."

The Union disagrees with the Arbitrator's ruling. This decision only sets precedent for the Company to continue to discipline employees who are less than truthful. Over the past year, our Members have faced increasingly severe disciplines, including termination, for being deceitful in their dealings with management or during the course of an investigation.



# UTILITY WORKERS PROTECTION ACT



Columbus, OH

On May 15<sup>th</sup> of this year, Ohio House Bill 276 (also known as "The Utility Workers Protection Act") was set to go before the Senate Judiciary Committee at the Statehouse in Columbus. At the hearing, testimony in favor of or opposing the Bill would be heard on the floor. With the continued safety of our Members remaining of the utmost importance to us, the Union and the Company were able to secure the ability for Local G-555 Executive Treasurer, Paul Talboo to testify in support of the Bill. His testimony, in-full, is as follows:

*"Chairman Bacon, Vice-Chairman Dolan, Ranking Member Thomas and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today as a proponent of House Bill 276. My name is Paul Talboo and I work for Dominion Energy Ohio as an Engineering Technician and serve as the Executive Treasurer of Gas Workers Union Local G-555 of the Utility Workers Union of America. Dominion Energy Ohio is a natural gas utility in Ohio headquartered in Cleveland serving 1.2 million natural gas customers. We have approximately 1500 employees who work in the state of Ohio; approximately 1160 of those employees are represented by Local G-555.*

*I am here today as a proponent of HB 276. In recent years, we have seen our employees in the field increasingly face menacing, threats and even violence while they are performing the duties of their job. Dominion is a 24 hour a day / 7 day a week operation, which requires our men and women to work all hours of the day or night in every neighborhood we serve.*

*In the last few years we continue to see a rise in incidents involving utility workers. If I may, I'd like to share some of those with you now:*

- *On July 18, 2017, while working on a pipeline replacement job in the City of Cleveland, a Dominion crew was involved in a drive-by shooting where one of Dominion's traffic control contractors was struck in the leg with a bullet. Luckily the young man survived and no other employees were injured.*
- *Early in 2017, two employees in our Gas Measurement & Regulation Department were involved in a terrifying armed robbery. One of our female employees, while maintaining a pressure station, was approached by person with a gun. The assailant made lewd comments to her and proceeded to steal her Company vehicle. A second employee, parked a few hundred feet away, while doing paperwork, was startled as the door to his truck was flung open and the barrel of a pistol was placed to the side of his head. The gunman demanded his wallet and cell phone and was basically told, in language more colorful than I feel comfortable using here, that he was going to die today.*
- *Last year we had a Customer Servicemen in the basement of a multi-unit rental property held at gunpoint for turning off a unit for non-payment. This, unfortunately is not uncommon for these men and women. Each year there are multiple incidents involving service men and women being held within the homes of angry customers, either with weapons, threats of violence, or physical intimidation.*
- *Each year there are incidents of our men and women being mugged on duty, many in broad daylight.*
- *Every day my members are subjected to threats as they perform their normal duties; threatened with violence if we step foot onto their property, met at the customer's doors with weapons; held inside of homes against their will; harassed by passersby. We have been shot at. We have been assaulted. We have had our lives threatened.*

*I'm not here to suggest that a Utility Worker's life is more important than anyone else's, but I ask you to appreciate that our men and women are first responders. When there is an emergency, no matter where or when, our men and women respond immediately; all utility workers do. Whether there is blowing gas, downed power lines, or ruptured water lines, utility workers respond in order to protect the lives and property of the people and communities we serve. We go into places alone, that many choose not to, at all hours of the night to do a job that won't wait for the relative safety of daylight. Our work makes us vulnerable; whether our heads are down as we work in a ditch, we are inside of the home of a stranger, or are up on a utility pole with no means of escape.*

*Our men and women and all utility workers should feel safe while we serve the communities of this great state. In the times we are living in, people are becoming increasingly desperate. It is my belief that increasing the penalty for those who threaten utility workers could serve as a deterrent and may make someone think twice before they act. If this bill can save the life of one of the men or women I serve alongside or prevent the mental and physical harm that these incidents can cause for them, it will have done its job.*

*I thank you for your time today and I look forward to answering any questions that you may have."*

HB 276 was added to the agenda only a few days before the hearing date, and though it fell in the middle of contract negotiations, the Union felt it was crucial to make sure that the need to protect Ohio's Utility Workers was voiced by the workers themselves. Again, not only was Local G-555 the only voice representing Organized Labor on this issue, we were the only group to testify in-person on behalf of HB 276. While various Governmental Affairs Officers and Directors of Companies including Dayton Power & Light and AEP and coalitions including the Ohio Gas Association, the Ohio Telecommunications Association and the Ohio Municipal Electric Association took time to prepare written testimony, Local G-555 was the only concerned party to take the time to provide a voice and a face to the safety issues Utility Workers, like our Members, face every single day. Of that, we couldn't be more proud.

The Utility Worker Protection Act will have to be voted in the Ohio Senate before it can reach the desk of the Governor to be signed into law. We will continue to update you on the progress of this legislation as the information becomes available.

**PLEASE VISIT THE G-555 WEBSITE AT [www.G-555.com](http://www.G-555.com) MEMBERS PASSWORD: G-555**  
**& IF YOU ARE ON FACEBOOK, PLEASE LIKE THE OFFICIAL G-555 PAGE: [www.facebook.com/LocalG555/](https://www.facebook.com/LocalG555/)**