



# CONTACT

United to Lead, to Promote, to Secure and to Defend

December 2008

National Staff Organization

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## Now that the Oregon PSO strike is over

"Your principles mean more to you than any success or money."

That was the fortune cookie message Catherine Alexander, Oregon Education Association Professional Staff Organization president (OEA PSO) got during the staff strike. It turned out to be her guide during the month-long walk-out.

While Alexander and her members are back at work, it certainly isn't all business as usual. "We still have a lot of work to do regarding moving OEA forward. And as a union, we want to strengthen the member solidarity that was established during the strike."

That solidarity extended beyond PSO. Associate staff members took up picket signs on their own time, despite management's refusal to pay for personal days to do so. That show of support and collaboration continues.

The back-to-work agreement has already been challenged by governance and management.

"With the help of Jack Schamel, we're preparing for an arbitration over the blog we created during the strike. They would like us to take it down but we still see it as a valuable communication tool," said Alexander.

However, the relationship between staffers and the rank and file members is strengthening. Alexander believes the strike was a wake-up call when members saw the people they count on for job security on the picket line.

Alexander observed, "Strikes always bring out strong emotions on both sides. Any healing is going to take time. And it has to involve an examination of what this organization will look like in the future and what roles all of us will play in it."

Her previous strike experience as a staffer with hotel workers served Alexander well. More than a year ago, PSO began hosting events to strengthen member solidarity and educate OEA members on issues. From there, Alexander made sure she chose good people for her Organizing and Communication Committees. She then stepped back to watch the magic happen.

"I learned to delegate. It wasn't hard when I had amazing people to carry out PSO's strategy. I trusted their decisions and gave them the space to do their work. They met daily to strategize," Alexander said.

NSO also helped with the payment of \$45,000 from the Charlie Love Crisis Fund.



PSO on strike at the Oregon Education Association

Alexander is in her first term as president and this strike gave her new insight into herself.

"Knowing what was important to my members and realizing that sometimes I would have to make decisions that were not always popular helped define my role during the strike. But we believed in what we were doing. There were times when I would have to be emotionally detached and I discovered an amazing ability to maintain my sense of humor in a crisis."

PSO is currently in the process of an internal evaluation of the strike—looking at what worked and what needs tweaking. And you can be sure that fortune cookie is in the "what went right" column.

## Colorado EASO continues “local option equity” work

by Jeanne Byer, Colorado

For the last three years, the members of the Colorado Education Association Staff Organization (CEASO) have been working to get equity for “local option” UniServ staff. As one of a handful of NEA affiliates with a majority of UniServ staff locally employed by teacher/ESP locals, we know we have an uncommon problem. We were born this way – we’ve had local option UniServ since the first UniServ unit was formed in Colorado in the late 1960s.

We have approximately 40 local option employees in our state-wide, wall-to-wall NSO affiliate, compared to about 30 state staff (CEA) employees. The state staff work under a wall-to-wall collective bargaining agreement, but all local option UniServ staff do not.

Here’s a sampling of some of the differences:

- Some local option UniServ have wall-to-wall contracts in their UniServ offices, while others have individual contracts.
- We do not have joint-employer or multi-employer bargaining.
- The local option staff do not have the same insurance benefits as state staff have. They can be in the state staff pension plan if all the staff in a unit are in the plan.
- Many local option staff have inferior language, salary, and benefits compared to the state staff.

- and although “state UniServ” has been available since the early 1980s, only three of 17 UniServ units are state units whose employees are CEA employees.

This hodgepodge gave rise to our issue – Local Option Equity – and has resulted in a joint Union-Management exploration of a better way to run CEA than with an ineffective, outdated 1960s model.

In September 2005, CEASO local option members drew a line in the sand, saying they were refraining from doing “state/CEA directed” work until the equity issue is addressed. We took the matter to our labor-management meetings with then-CEA Executive Director David Duvall who had been on the job less than a year. The CEA Board of Directors decided to engage in talks with CEASO about the issue and the “20-20” was launched: 20 CEASO members and 20 CEA governance leaders/management staff assisted by Tom Greene (Michigan USO president) and Tim Fitzgerald (NEA staff).

Using an interest-based problem solving process, we met in February, March, and April 2006 and formed an eight-person group (the 4x4) to create a “straw design” for dual-employer and multi-employer employment models (the latter based on Wisconsin’s model). We expanded the steering committee to 6x6 and formed joint subcommittees to figure out how these models could work in Colorado.

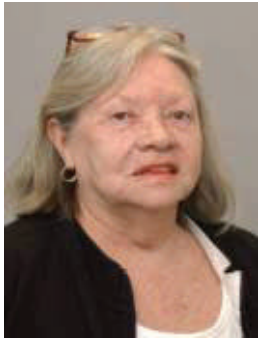
The subgroups worked until April 2006. Tim Fitzgerald went on to other NEA jobs, but Tom Greene stuck with us and our somewhat laborious process.

Along the way, one subgroup asked, “Why not go straight to a single-employer model?” Last April, the 20-20 explored this idea and decided to communicate with a larger group of leaders and staff in June.

Our next step was to have been holding 20-20 discussions in all 17 UniServ Units. This move was postponed when CEA faced a trio of anti-union ballot initiatives on the November ‘08 ballot. We beat two—including right-to-work and a ban on union dues payroll deduction—so now we are again moving ahead with a 20-20 meeting on December 6.

Along the way, we’ve worked very hard; lost a few participants who got fed up and found something else to do with their Saturdays; and we learned a lot about how we got here – and how dearly we want to change things so we can better meet the challenges that CEA and public school employees face.

We’re still working on it.



Billie Lawrence passed away Nov. 26, 2008 at the age of 74.

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*“she believed in integrity—that’s how she lived her life.”*

## Massachusetts ASO loses staunch supporter

by Cheryl Singleton, Region 1 Director

Billie Lawrence lived her life on her terms with no regrets. That’s why she’ll be deeply missed by her colleagues. Lawrence passed away on Nov. 26, 2008 at the age of 74.

Lawrence is remembered for her strong belief in unions, especially the Massachusetts Teachers Association Staff Organization (MTASO).

Seven years ago, Lawrence had done all the necessary paperwork for her pending retirement. When she heard that MTA was going to turn her job into three part-time positions

after her retirement, she cancelled her retirement plans and continued working until Nov. 20, 2008.

Billie was straight forward in her praise if you deserved it but she didn’t hesitate to challenge you when she knew she was right—and she usually was.

Lawrence was well-known in MTASO and going above and beyond was her normal work style. It was Billie who tirelessly negotiated fares and ticket change fees with vendors for staff. She will be sorely missed this holiday season because it

was Billie who made sure just the right holiday greetings and gift emails were chosen.

Billie didn’t believe in titles; she believed in integrity—that’s how she lived her life.

And there was much more to Lawrence than her job. She was an intellectual; she was witty and she loved to travel.

On Nov. 19, Lawrence received her 25-year service award. And for all of us—what a ride!

## Winter Advocacy Retreat to feature Mel Myler

Mel Myler, former NEA Assistant Executive Director, will be guest speaker and a session presenter at the NSO 2009 Winter Advocacy Retreat, Jan. 16-17, 2009 at the Hyatt Orange County in California.

Myler, who first addressed the 2008 RA, is an organizational systems expert. He believes strongly that the Union must play a key role in the organiza-

tion. Through his talk and his sessions, he’ll show participants how we develop that role to help move the system toward positive change.

In addition to Myler, 11 new sessions are being offered along with a variety of core favorites for the more than 300 Retreat registrants. Training is provided by NSO members.

Networking opportunities have always been a part of the Retreat and this time is no different. First-time attendees will meet for an orientation on Jan. 15 and the annual solidarity reception is on Jan. 16.

# National Staff Organization

The world's largest union of union staff—that's what the National Staff Organization has become. Through the efforts of literally hundreds of staff leaders, NSO has grown from a mere 35 members in a handful of states in 1969, to 5,013 (as of August, 2008) from 89 affiliates in 50 states and the District of Columbia. A major portion of that growth came with the decision by the 1978 NSO Representative Assembly to organize associate staff members.

Today, NSO has over 2,300 full-time and over 106 part-time associate staff members.

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## **NSO Executive Committee**

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Region 6 – Michael Coleman

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At Large-B – Ruth Ivory

Communications – Rosemary Carey

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Check out the newly-designed Web site,  
[www.nationalstaff.org](http://www.nationalstaff.org) for the latest news.

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