

The Philadelphia POSTAL WORKER

Vol. 20 No. 1

A Member of the APWU Postal Press Association

February 2010

The President's Report



*Gwen Ivey,
President*

First, I'd like to wish everyone a Happy New Year. I know, as postal workers, we hope this year is a better year for us than the last year was. Let's recap some of the bombs the Postal Service dropped

on us in 2009: downsizing, more contracting out of our jobs, job abolishments, excessing, the the national reassessment program (NRP), consolidation, and closing city stations and the Air Mail Center...cuts, cuts and more cuts. The Postal Service did, in fact, offer a \$15,000 early out incentive to employees who wanted to retire or resign. To those who took the incentive we wish you peace, happiness and our blessings as you move forward in your life. I am happy to report that because of the number of employees who did take the incentive it eliminated the need to excess more of our members from the Philadelphia Installation. Hopefully, the economy will improve and the worst is behind us.

We have been put through a lot of changes in our jobs, our lives and the lives of our family members because of the decisions that postal leaders have made concerning the economy. We know the Postal Service is always crying about the decline of mail volume being a major problem, along with the economy, as to why so many changes had to be made the way they were. But we all know that if they stop and look at what they've done so far they would realize they've created more problems than they've solved. Changes for the sake of change is not going to solve the problems we face, only magnify them.

Optimization Plan?

The Philadelphia P&DC underwent yet another change in job assignments and created another bid matrix. Management is calling this latest round of personnel action their "Optimization Plan." Management was mandated by Area Management to get the building productivity up to 75% by any means possible. This resulted in the loss of 116 positions. There was a reduction in the number of positions in 14 different work sections, across all three work tours.

Management wasted little time to make more changes after implementing the Two Tour Initiative, which went into effect June of 2009. About two months into the tour compression,

management started working on the latest changes. They did this knowing full well employees at Lindbergh were still recovering from earlier changes.

The only positive thing I can say about these latest changes is this, even with the loss of the 116 positions no employee had to be excessed outside the Philadelphia Bid Installation. The union is staying on top of all the changes, and filing all the appropriate grievances. We are meeting with management on an ongoing basis.

You, the members on the work floor must report any and all violations that you are aware of to your union representative. You do not have to accept violations; exercise your right to file a grievance, it is your job and it is your future. FIGHT FOR YOUR RIGHTS.

Sales and Service Associates (SSA) I can not express this enough, DO NOT TAKE SHORT CUTS ON THE POS SYSTEM. There are function keys on POS for all the transactions the SSA clerk performs. Taking short cuts to help save time will only cause us to lose window clerk jobs. We will continue to file grievances on all violations; keep your eyes and ears open to what is going on around you. If you see a violation report it to your union representative, and remember, my door is always open to all APWU members.

The full-time officers and maintenance craft officers met with maintenance management on Jan. 22, 2010, to address issues going on in the maintenance craft. We will meet with them on an ongoing basis. As Mr. Lester reports in his article, the maintenance craft is starting to experience the same kinds of changes the clerk craft has been going through for years now; one change after another, one cut after another. Management is expecting that the same amount of work will get done with fewer people. Remember, you are one person, not two. Give a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. Be sure to work in a safe manner, because its always safety first. Make sure to report all violations to a union steward as soon as you see or hear of one. We

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Articles must be submitted by the second Thursday of the month. They must be typed. Letters must be signed. Name withheld upon request.

Visit our web site at
www.phillyapwu.org

The President's Report

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will always fight for our rights.

\$75 Billion Overpayment

National APWU President Bill Burrus has reported that according to an announcement made by the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) the USPS has been overcharged \$75 billion in contributions to the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) pension fund.

The OIG study, which was conducted in conjunction with the well-known economic consulting firm the Hay Group, concluded that an inequitable computing system that determines the Postal Service's CSRS pension responsibility is the cause of the huge overpayment.

This is not the first time a funding error has been found in the USPS funding of the CSRS pension fund. In 2002 it was found that the Postal Service was on course to overfund its CSRS obligation by \$78 billion and again in 2003 it was found the Postal Service was overcharged \$27 billion for CSRS military service credits. Both of these overpayments were corrected by legislation in 2003 and 2006, respectively.

The good news here is that if this latest overfunding error is corrected it would more than offset the USPS deficit from Fiscal Year 2009 and eliminate the expected shortfalls in the next

two Fiscal Years. This report is fantastic news for a battered government service. Our service standards and productivity are at high levels, and have been there for some time now; the economy is showing signs of recovery; and if this overfunding is corrected, as it should be, the shroud of insolvency could be lifted.

Not Fighting Alone

The National League of Postmasters has sent a letter to Postmaster General Jack Potter, informing him of their intent to take their issues to Congress since the Postal Service has not made an effort to engage their issues in a meaningful way for the last 3 ½ years.

It would seem that some of their issues are our issues and vice versa. They complain that due to the failure of the Postal Service to properly staff supervisors, clerks and carriers it has forced Postmasters to work, "horribly long work weeks," and that "many of your Postmasters have reached the point of physical and mental exhaustion, their health and personal lives jeopardized." All I have to say is this, welcome to the fight. What affects one group of employees will surely affect all groups of employees. Together we stand, divided we will fall. So let's all stick together in Solidarity! □

General Membership Meeting

Thursday, March 18, 2010

7:30 p.m.

**864 Main Street
Darby, PA 19023**

Shuttle Service from Lindbergh
to the
Union Hall Available

Light Refreshments Will be Served

Following Meeting: April 15, 2010

Postal Surplus?



**Stacey
Franklin,
Treasurer**

Hello Brothers and Sisters! The USPS's 2009 annual report stated that, "our current debt is more than \$10 billion, the direct result of a requirement that we pre-fund retiree health benefits through

annual payments of \$5.4 billion to \$5.8 billion through 2016. Although we are thankful the U.S. Congress reduced that amount by \$4 billion for fiscal year 2009, we will again face this sizeable outlay next year."

However, our National union reported that on Jan 20, 2010, the U.S. Postal Service's Office of Inspector General (OIG) study was released stating that, "the current system of funding the Postal Service's Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) pension responsibility is inequitable and has resulted in the Postal Service overpaying \$75 billion to the pension fund." The OIG stated that this is the third time that the USPS has been overcharged, once in 2002 and again in 2006. The previous overpayments were corrected by legislation. The OIG suggests that the overpayment be returned to the Postal Service's CSRS pension fund, which would satisfy its' health care liability, and eliminate the need for additional congressional assistance. The pension and health care obligations would be fully funded.

The USPS also cited, in the 2009 annual report, that their ability to negotiate fair contracts with the two largest unions (APWU & NALC) in November 2010, and November 2011, respectively, would reflect the state of the economy and current and future mail revenue is essential to maintaining financial stability and a failure to do so could have significant adverse consequences on meeting obligations. Also stated was the intent to engage in activities that will include reducing additional work hours and headcount. Our national union reported that if the overfunding is corrected, the Postal deficit from Fiscal Year 2009, and the expected shortfalls in Fiscal Year 2010 and 2011 would be more than balanced. National APWU President William Burrus reported that our members have contributed their share; the attrition of 115,000 APWU-represented positions since 2002 warrants public recognition.

Our workforce has already been reduced drastically, and we are chronically understaffed. Our members have been forced to undergo many life altering changes; contract drivers who have limited accountability; contracting maintenance services; the tour compression; excessing members inside and outside of the installation continuously; closing stations and retail units; reducing the presence of Postal Police, who are there to protect the members and the funds at the stations; closing all the medical units across the country, diminishing the overall morale, and the list continues.

Every sales and service associate, and most

customers, are aware that during the first of the month you will experience an increased waiting time to perform transactions at the stations. However, this increased waiting time has become the norm due to chronic understaffing. It is extremely unfair to our members, who are often blamed and harassed for the long wait time, and to the dedicated customers that continue to patronize the USPS.

If the stations were not understaffed, management would not continually perform our duties, resulting in many bargaining unit grievances being initiated by our union. This problem is ongoing, and is increasing at an alarming rate. The USPS has the opportunity to fully staff these stations, improving customer service and possibly generating additional revenue, but so far they haven't done so.

The stations could initiate accepting utility bill payments and other services that people utilize elsewhere. The truth is that some people will not utilize the mail system to remit payments for utility and other bill payments, however, many of them will pay their bills at a check cashing agency for a fee. If we lose revenue due to the remittance through the mail system, maybe we can recapture some, or all of it, by allowing customers to remit payment at the USPS stations for a nominal fee. There are tons of ideas that many USPS employees have that if brought to fruition could increase savings and generate revenue within the organization, thus eliminating contracting out more of our services which may not be performed cheaper in other places.

President Burrus stated that, "the overpayment is good news for the USPS and that we should be able to take a deep breath and stop the momentum for another round of harmful postal reform." It will be quite interesting to monitor how management will handle and address this news in reference to further reduction of work hours and head count, and our upcoming contract negotiations this year for APWU represented crafts.

Important 2009 Income Tax Incentives

As we approach the April 15th deadline to file our personal income taxes I would like to inform you of some tax incentives that are a direct result of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009, which may be helpful

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Safety Update



Mark Reeves,
Vice
President

Hello Brothers and sisters! I hope everyone had a safe and happy holiday season. I wanted to share some information with you that did not make the last edition of our local newspaper due to the size

of our financial report, along with more current news.

On October 19-20, 2009, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to attend the Governor's Occupational Safety and Health Conference in Hershey, Pennsylvania. I was very impressed with the selection of speakers that participated in the conference, such as William M. George, President Pennsylvania AFL-CIO, and Acting Assistant Secretary of Labor for Occupational Safety & Health U.S. Department of Labor Jordan Barab, and Bruce Wilkinson, president and chief leadership officer for Workplace Consultants Inc.

Mr. Wilkinson served as the keynote speaker for the conference; and conducted by far, the most popular class during the conference workshops titled, "Redefining Safety Leadership & Accountability: Managing and Motivating Employees to Work Safely." Mr. Wilkinson's unique method of getting the message of safety

leadership and accountability across to the class was truly inspirational.

Local Safety Complaints Updates

On October 28, 2009, I filed a formal complaint with the Philadelphia area office for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) on behalf of the Philadelphia PA Area Local 89 for Electrical Hazards related to the continuing failure of the Postal Service to comply with OSHA Subpart S - Electrical Standards. This action was taken in conjunction with hundreds of local unions across the country in a nationally coordinated APWU effort seeking compliance from the Postal Service on this issue. On December 4, 2009, OSHA showed up at the Philadelphia P&DC to start the on-site

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Postal \$urplus?

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to you and your family members.

On November 9, 2009, President Obama approved the first-time homebuyer tax credit extension which will extend the tax credit until April 30, 2010. The tax credit for first-time homebuyers equals \$8,000.00 and the program has been expanded to offer a credit that totals \$6,500.00 to homeowners who have lived in their current home for at least five years and are seeking to relocate.

In order to be eligible for the first-time homebuyer tax credit, buyers cannot have owned a principal residence during the three year period prior to the purchase and existing homeowners who have resided in their principal residence for five consecutive years out of the last eight and are purchasing a home to be their principal residence. Additionally, to be eligible for the tax credit, the home had to be purchased after November 6, 2009, and before May 1, 2010. There are some applicable income limits which may determine if a homebuyer receives the total or partial credit.

The tax credit is refundable, which means that if the amount of taxes owed is less than the qualified credit amount, the government will pay the difference to the buyer, i.e. a first time buyer who qualifies for the entire \$8,000 credit and owed the IRS \$4,000 in federal taxes, would not be obligated to remit a payment, the IRS would send the taxpayer a \$4,000.00 check. If

the first time buyer qualifies for the entire \$8,000 credit and is expected to receive a refund from the IRS, the first time buyer would receive the expected refund amount in addition to the credit amount. All qualified homebuyers can take the tax credit on their 2009 or 2010 income tax return. The tax credit would have to be repaid if the home owner sells or stops using the home as the principal residence within three years after the purchase.

The following list identifies some additional incentives for individuals; *The Making Work Pay Tax Credit* could increase take-home pay for many taxpayers, *Money Back for New Vehicle Purchases* - taxpayers that bought certain vehicles in 2009 could possibly deduct state and local taxes paid or other taxes and fees paid in states with no sales tax, *American Opportunity Credit* - The credit modifies the existing Hope Credit for tax years 2009 and 2010, enabling the Hope Credit to be available to more taxpayers, including many with higher incomes and those who owe no tax. This new credit also expands qualifying expenses and helps families and students find ways to pay higher education expenses. The previous credit only applied to the first two years of college, but has been expanded to the first four years of college. Eli-

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Maintenance Report



Ken Lester,
Director,
Maintenance
Craft

Greetings APWU maintenance members! As many of you are already aware, our craft has begun to sustain some of the very same staffing impacts that our brothers and sisters in the clerk craft have

long suffered. It has become painfully clear the Postal Service is intent on salvaging their precarious financial state through budget cuts, namely us. If you've been here long enough you recognize that employee salary and benefits is the first place that our esteemed employer looks to make reductions. That's right... us!

We have seen these 'reductions' daily in the shortage of cleaning supplies, and the availability of parts for the automation machines and building equipment. We've seen many jobs randomly withheld or abolished, despite no change in the workload. We've gone from being allegedly over-staffed to being most certainly under-staffed very quickly, and it is unlikely that management is through making job cuts. None the less, we are still required to get the job done and on time.

Our current workforce is stressed out, and many are fed up. Morale in our workplace has sunk to an all time low. The average employee's

morale has been in a death spiral for some time now. If you've been here long enough you were anticipating this, and if not, let me enlighten you. At the end of every contract we have this type of workplace climate. There has always been turmoil and upheaval in the life of the postal worker around this time. We live in very dire times, where the bottom line is more important than anything else. Companies have suddenly failed, closed shop and moved overseas, or simply ceased to exist. We now live in a time where success is measured in the size of your performance bonus rather than how well you actually perform your job.

The time for working class people to unite has never been clearer than it is now; the unionized worker is facing extinction in the work environment. Many of you have been very loyal

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Postal \$urplus?

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gible taxpayers could qualify for the maximum annual credit of \$2,500 per student. *Enhanced Credits for Tax Years 2009 & 2010* includes earned income tax credit which is a refundable credit intended to help people who work, but earn modest incomes and the additional child tax credit that may help more families' to become eligible due to the change in how the credit is figured. *Up to \$2,400 in Unemployment Benefits Tax Free in 2009* - The first \$2,400 of unemployment benefits received in 2009 are tax free. Normally, unemployment benefits are taxable. The *Economic Recovery Payment* is a one-time payment of \$250 made in 2009 to retirees, disabled individuals, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients, disabled veterans receiving benefits from the US Department of Veterans Affairs, and railroad retirement beneficiaries. The payment will not be issued by the IRS; qualifying individuals should contact their respective agency for more information. The *Residential Energy Property Credit* increases the energy tax credit to thirty percent of the cost of all qualifying improvements. Improvements could include adding insulation, energy efficient exterior windows and energy-efficient heating and air conditioning systems.

To view a complete and more detailed listing of the tax incentives you may access the Internal Revenue Service's website at www.irs.gov

for more information.

Philadelphia Recycling Rewards

Recycling is important to improving our environment. It involves processing used materials into new products to prevent waste, reduce the consumption of fresh raw materials, reduce energy usage, air and water pollution, and lowers greenhouse gas emissions. In the United States, used aluminum beverage cans are the most recycled item. It has been reported that recycling one aluminum can save enough energy to run a TV for three hours. If every American recycled just one-tenth of their newspapers about 25,000,000 trees a year would be saved. Recycling plastic saves twice as much energy as burning it in an incinerator, and a modern glass bottle would take 4000 years or more to decompose. On average, it costs \$30 per ton to recycle trash, \$50 to send it to the landfill, and \$65 to \$75 to incinerate it.

The City of Philadelphia has initiated a new city-wide recycling rewards program controlled by RecycleBank which will enable residents of the city to earn rewards for recycling correctly. The program will be phased in beginning in February of 2010, and by July of 2010,

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The Principal Assignment Area



Eugene Chieffo,
Director of Industrial Relations

A couple years ago the union and management agreed on a new job description called Mail Processing Clerk. This job description merged a number of old job descriptions into one and now covers

positions that include, but isn't limited to, mail processor, flat sorter operator and manual distribution clerk to name a few. To help eliminate confusion on what the duties of a particular Mail Processing Clerk job bid might be the parties agreed to attach a principal assignment area (PAA) to each bid position.

This is addressed in the national Collective Bargaining Agreement under Article 37.3.E.5, which requires the Postal Service to include a PAA on all posted duty assignments. The PAA must include the duties of the position as well as the area. Furthermore, it is insufficient merely to list a station or a branch as the PAA.

A pre-arbitration settlement between the USPS and the APWU dated Oct. 29, 2002, makes it clear that the purpose of a PAA is "to provide relevant information to employees who are interested in bidding for jobs in order that they may make an informed decision when deciding to bid for jobs."

This position is clearly supported in the Mail Processing Clerk Memorandum that was negotiated by the APWU and USPS. Some of the other questions surrounding the PAA, and Mail Processing Clerk job description, are also addressed in this memorandum and are listed as follows.

Other Duties as Assigned

The phrase, "other duties as assigned" on a vacant duty assignment notice cannot be used in conflict with the Collective Bargaining Agreement or other agreements between the union and management.

The union had grieved the inclusion of the phrase on postings if it is not included in the Standard Position Description. Some supervisors had used the phrase to justify assigning work far outside the scope of the job description, such as assigning retail duties to a mail processing clerk.

The union asserts that when clerks are assigned duties outside their position description, it must be done in accordance with Article 7.2 of the Collective Bargaining Agreement and other applicable provisions.

Schemes and the PAA

Management must move mail processing clerks from their PAA by juniority. The sole exception to this requirement is when a clerk's duty assignment requires scheme knowledge.

An excerpt from the Scheme Training

Instructor's Guide, Handbook 402-T, explains the 30-hour rule: scheme assignments may be made if management "has reasonable expectation" that employees will work the scheme "for at least 30 hours within an accounting period."

If your duty assignment contains a scheme, and does not meet the 30-hour criteria, a grievance should be filed requesting that the assignment be reposted without the scheme.

Also, the F-1 Handbook, Post Office Accounting Procedures, outlines the requirement that the USPS must cancel stamp credits that are not used at least once per accounting period. Grievances should be filed requesting management remove stamp credits that are not used at least once per accounting period and repost the assignment without the stamp credit. Duty assignments should be worked as posted.

Distribution and Window Assignments

Arbitrators have ruled that the USPS be required to repost duty assignments as Distribution Clerk positions, rather than as Distribution and Window Clerk assignments because the incumbents were not sent for window training, were not issued stamp credits, and did not work at the retail window.

In other instances Arbitrators have found it to be a violation of the Collective Bargaining Agreement when management assigned window duties to a Distribution Clerk who had previously served as a window clerk and had a "live record."

The union grieved the assignment, asserting that window duties could not be added to a Distribution Clerk duty assignment and that the duty assignment must be reposted as a Distribution and Window Clerk duty assignment.

I hope this helps to clear up any confusion you have about what a PAA is and what duties management may or may not have you perform as a Mail Processing Clerk. Please be vigilant and report any violations to your union steward. If you have any questions about this, or any other contractual topic, please see your steward or give me a call at the union hall, 610-522-4520. □



Safety Update

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investigation process of the formal complaint that was initiated by the Local.

The process is comprised of the physical inspection of the area where the hazardous conditions exist; inspection of postal service documents relevant to the hazardous conditions; and investigatory interviews conducted by OSHA with maintenance employees from different occupational groups who work in areas where these hazardous conditions exist.

OSHA will review the findings of the investigation and render a decision on whether or not the Postal Service is in compliance with the regulations. If, at the conclusion of the OSHA investigation, the Postal Service is found not to be in compliance with OSHA Subpart S- Electrical Standards, then OSHA will issue a citation with a monetary penalty.

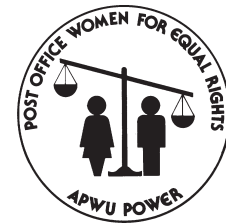
Currently, as of January 29, 2010, the investigation is ongoing with employee interviews still being conducted. As more information becomes available I will keep you informed.

To follow up on the April 7, 2009, formal complaint that I filed with OSHA's Philadelphia office concerning ergonomic issues related to delivery barcode sorter (DBCS) machine operations; while attending the Governor's Occupational Safety and Health Conference I had the opportunity to personally speak with Jordan Barab, Acting Assistant Secretary of Labor, about the status of this issue. He basically stated that the process is moving forward, but did not provide any specifics. As

of January 29, 2010, I have no new information to share with you on this issue, but I will keep you informed of the progress as information does become available. □

POWER

Post Office Women for Equal Rights



Meeting Date:
Thursday, March 18, 2010
6:30 p.m.
864 Main Street
Darby, PA 19023

A Woman's Place is In Her Union!

Next Meeting:
Thursday, April 15, 2010

Maintenance Report

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and have supported this union, while others, I'm sorry to say, are biding their time to abandon that very same support. I am equally sorry to learn that many of those that are not members are in our craft. The future, our future, and survival depend on supporting our union. Without our collective voice, without a strong unified hand, we will continue to lose contractual ground in this, and every workplace. The workplace must be maintained to ensure workers survival in the future. Many will leave, supposedly to save money, but, while they may save a few dollars today, it will most certainly cost them more dollars in the future.

Many have said the union is nothing more than a protector to employees who are always in trouble. The union is much more than that. Together we are an upholder of the contract, the entire contract. It includes salary, benefits and safety in the workplace. Do you think that any one employee could get management to agree to any of those rights alone?

The Local, like all unions, has suffered a loss of revenue. These losses affect our ability to represent the membership, and are directly re-

lated to loss of members. That's right, for every employee that has resigned, retired, transferred, got fired or who was unwillingly excessed, this Local lost a member.

Sadly, there are a growing number who have decided not to, or are unwilling to, support our fight. Though they are our coworkers and friends, they fail to see the ultimate impact that this will have on our future. The time has come to solicit and encourage their participation in this fight. If not, this Local will surely fail, and with it the outlook for your future, my future and future generations is definitely looking bleak. We must find some common ground and work together. We must protect our future and ensure that our families not join the many families that have suffered throughout this economic trouble. It will take all of us moving and working together to one end, one goal. I ask that you join me and maintain your support of this Local and encourage others to do so. Take your future into your own hands.

Thank you for your time and commitment to moving forward and working together. □

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the entire city should be taking part. All that is needed to get started is the Philadelphia Recycling Rewards sticker placed on your recycling container, any container will do. The bar-coded sticker will be scanned each time your recyclables are collected. Your rewards points can be redeemed for gift cards, gift certificates, discounts, and more. The City of Philadelphia will save money by recycling and would like to encourage and reward its residents for participating in the recycle program.

To register and earn 100 RecycleBank points, view more information about how the program works, find out when your neighborhood is scheduled to start, and receive your rewards sticker you can access RecycleBank's website at www.RecycleBank.com/philly or call the hotline at 888-769-7960. Although this incentive program will be new to Philadelphia it is already in existence in Wilmington, DE. If you live in other counties of Pennsylvania, or in the states of New Jersey or Delaware, please contact the appropriate county to participate in recycling or to see if your county offers incentives for recycling.

Locally

As I have previously reported, due to attrition and the Postal Service's freeze on hiring, our revenue has declined. The vast majority of the Local's revenue is directly related to the collection of member's dues. As dedicated members

leave the organization they are not being replaced due to the freeze on hiring. The Local has made several changes to reduce expenses and will continue to pursue other cost cutting methods.

The November/December 2009 Newsletter and the 2010 APWU Calendar was processed completely in-house for the first time; enabling the Local to eliminate more expensive outside printing costs. Additionally, interest in renting our meeting room for a range of social events has increased. We have had many successful events. The meeting room has been rented for birthday parties (all ages), retirement celebrations, baby and wedding showers, various social group functions, and wedding receptions. Remember, APWU members receive a 20% discount on the hourly rate and other union members affiliated with the AFL-CIO receive a 10% discount on the hourly rate. For additional information about renting the meeting room, or to check for available dates, please contact the Treasurer's office. In Solidarity! ☐

