

SSA President's Report 2009

MESSA as a company is under more pressure than ever before due to legislative attacks, the overall economic downturn, and increasing competition for our business. The MEA membership is changing, in terms of overall numbers, and in what those members want and can afford in a health insurance plan. In addition to trying to remain competitive in the market, and maintain and acquire business, MESSA is also looking internally—at the efficiency of our workflows and staffing.

This is not the MESSA of 20 years ago, or even 5 years ago. This is a “leaner, meaner MESSA” in survival mode. The number of staff positions, and the effectiveness of those positions, is under review. Vacancies resulting from members leaving employment or moving to different positions are not automatically being posted; we are seeing positions being eliminated. We are also seeing postings of new, higher level jobs. Departments are undergoing re-organizations, both in the number of staff members as well as the types of jobs.

Management has decided to focus on what they are calling “absenteeism” at MESSA. Particular areas of concern for management are the use, and suspected abuse, of sick time, and, as they put it, the “culture” of leave time that exists here at MESSA. Notations of sick time, Tardy, and DOC statistics are appearing in annual evaluations. SSA leadership has reminded members not to provide management with ammunition to use against them. We also recommend each member tracking your use of leave time, as well as circumstances around any Tardy or DOC times.

As with all of the USO affiliates, SSA is having issues with HR regarding FMLA. This employer chooses to run FMLA concurrent with sick leave. In their effort to determine if sick leave qualifies as FMLA, HR asks for more clinical details than they need, and sends threatening letters to members in order to get this information. USO has renewed talks with HR over this issue, and we are working toward a resolution that is livable and consistent across the affiliates.

We have seen a rise in the use of Independent Medical Exams by HR in making determinations about both the extensions of sick leaves, and in readiness to return to work.

The 8-week schedules bargained in 2007 went into effect in early 2008. After a few bumps adjusting during the first few times through, they are now going smoothly.

The Benefits Call Center has implemented electronic monitoring of Call Center phone calls for “quality monitoring and assessment of training needs.” It is very early in this process. The measurement tool itself, and consistency among those members doing the monitoring, need to be evaluated. The Call Center staff is the focus of the monitoring, however, the monitoring also extends to any other department the Call Center member communicates with on that call.

The face of SSA is changing. Approximately one third of our members have been here for five years or less. Many of our new members (and some not-so-new members) are not familiar with our contract, or with working in a union environment. SSA has implemented a “Meet & Greet” initiative. Once a month, SSA representatives are making themselves available in the cafeteria over lunch time to answer contractual questions and field concerns raised by members.

Per our Bylaws, we will be electing a Bargaining Chair this spring. We will also be voting on amending our Bylaws. We need to have our fiscal year consistent with NSO's, which begins Sept 1. This is per

recommendation from a Department of Labor audit USO underwent last year. We would also like to move our terms of office to coincide with the fiscal year.

Your Union continues to remind Management that we are a group of motivated and committed employees who take pride in doing a good job. This is our company too. Management tends to paint us all with the same broad brush. Perceptions about the actions of a few have lead to greater scrutiny of all of us. We are asking you to do what is within your power to remain effective, valued employees.

The whole is as strong as the sum of its parts. In solidarity,
Sue Silvernail, SSA President