

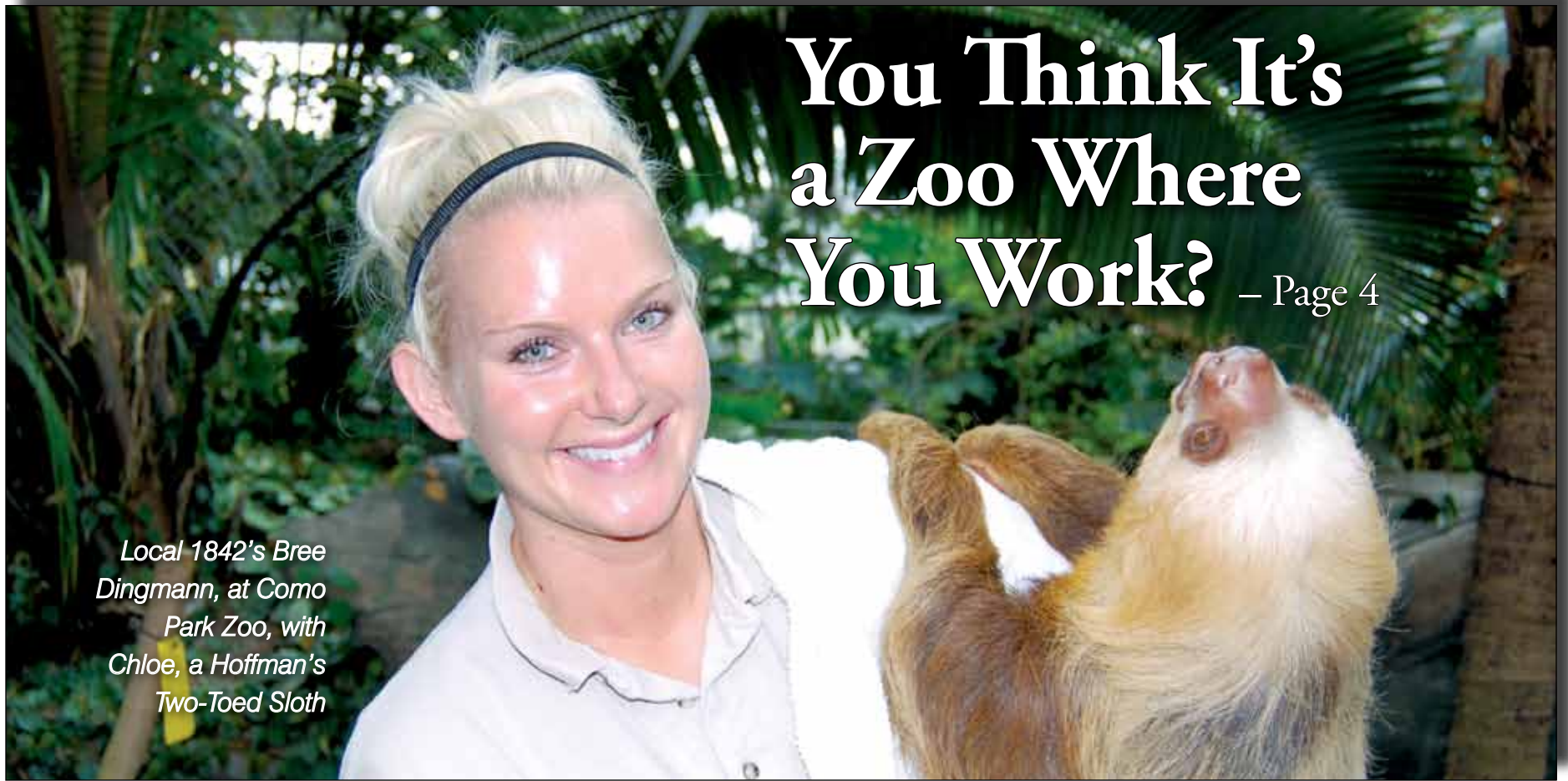


One strong united voice for Minnesota workers

# Stepping UP

July/August 2009 Volume 4 No. 4

[www.afscmemn.org](http://www.afscmemn.org)



## You Think It's a Zoo Where You Work? – Page 4

Local 1842's Bree Dingmann, at Como Park Zoo, with Chloe, a Hoffman's Two-Toed Sloth



## For the Next Wave, the Future Starts Now – Page 3

### We Run the Place

Three dozen AFSCME volunteers staffed a water stop for the debut running of the Minneapolis Marathon May 31. They greeted 2,250 half-marathoners and 1,200 marathoners a mile from the finish. Locals with members, family or friends who took part were 9, 34, 517, 920, 1092, 1307, 2829 and 3142.



Jessi Adams, Local 3142, keeps water filled. Left: Alex Gordon, Local 34, rakes discarded cups off the course.



## Health care can't wait

Making sure every American has access to quality, affordable health care is one of the most important challenges of our time. We can't fix the economy until we fix health care.

That goal has eluded presidents for six decades. Now is our opportunity to help President Obama fix our broken health-care system so it works for people and businesses, not just for insurance and drug companies.

After months of setbacks and uncertainty, House leaders unveiled a good plan to solve our nation's health-care crisis. The bill reflects much of what union members tell us they and their families need:

- It offers a choice of public or private insurance
- You won't lose coverage if you change or lose your job
- It prevents insurance companies from denying coverage because of a pre-existing medical condition

Details may change, but legislation must include four things to win our support.

### 1 A choice of public or private insurance.

Keep your current health plan, if you like it. Or join a new public plan so you're no longer at the mercy of the for-profit insurance industry. No matter which you choose, you should be guaranteed benefits that meet your needs.

### 2 No taxes on employer-paid benefits.

The House plan pays for its improvements by raising taxes on the wealthy and by charging employers who do not insure their workers. That's much better than an earlier idea to tax employer-paid benefits – benefits we've fought so hard to earn. Families, employers and government should have a shared responsibility to pay. Families should pay on a sliding scale based on their income. Employers should either provide health coverage or pay into a fund that pays for it. Their fee should be based on a percentage of their payroll. Government should provide assistance for families and small businesses to keep coverage affordable.



Cartoon by Blair Francis



Council 5 director Eliot Seide: "We're up against formidable opponents who are ready to do anything to keep the status quo."

### Spread the truth

Here are the facts you need to debunk the top 5 lies about health-care reform.

– Page 6

charge fees for services you don't need or that don't improve your health. A public plan is dedicated to healthy outcomes, not profits.

Public competition makes sense. That's why nearly three of every four voters want everyone to have the choice of a public plan.

How much will it cost for quality, affordable coverage for everyone? We'll need to invest up front to bring costs down in the long run. The only way to do that is to cover everyone and improve quality. That will cost about \$100 billion a year for 10 years.

The next few months won't be easy. We're up against formidable opponents who are ready to do anything to keep the status quo and their massive profits. In fact, the health-care industry is spending \$1.4 million a day to defeat reform. They'll outspend us. But American workers are more powerful if we speak with one voice and fight together for the health care we all deserve.

President Obama is determined to deliver real reform this year. But he needs help from Minnesota's Congressional delegation, especially:

- **Sen. Amy Klobuchar** (202-224-3244 or toll-free at 888-224-9043)
- **Rep. Collin Peterson** (202-225-2165 or through the toll-free switchboard at 877-264-4226)

Join the fight. Call your senators and representative today. Ask them to support quality, affordable health care for everyone – now.

**3 Comprehensive benefits you can count on.** Even if you lose or change your job, the choice of a new public plan should always be there. The benefits should meet your needs, from preventive to chronic care. You should get the treatment you need, when you need it, from the doctor you choose.

**4 Coverage you can afford.** Health insurance is eating away our paychecks. Average family premiums in Minnesota have increased 90 percent since 2000. Costs are skyrocketing an average of 13 percent each year. It's so bad that nearly 1 million Minnesotans now spend more than 10 percent of their income on health care.

To drive costs down, we need a public option not controlled by insurance companies. It's not new – we've already got a proven public plan with Medicare.

To drive costs down, we need a public option not controlled by insurance companies. It's not new or scary – we've already got a proven public plan with Medicare.

Unlike private plans that subsidize high executive salaries and maximize shareholder profits, a public plan exists to pay for people's health care. Private plans



### Executive Board Members 2008-2010 (elected September 2008)

#### Officers

<b>President</b>	Mike Buesing, Local 1011
<b>Vice President</b>	Judy Wahlberg, Local 66
<b>Treasurer</b>	Clifford Poehler, Local 2938
<b>Secretary</b>	Mary Falk, Local 4001

#### Executive Board

Jeff Birttnen, Local 517, County Sector  
 Paul Bissen, Local 868, District 3 South/SE  
 Dennis Blumke, Local 694, State Sector  
 Leon Bowman, Local 945, District 3 South/SE  
 Carmen Brown, Local 977, District 6 West Metro  
 Jean Diederich, Local 34, District 6 West Metro  
 Jody Ebert, Local 3937, District 6 West Metro  
 John Ewaldt, Local 8, District 5 East Metro  
 Steve Fitze, Local 1164, Private/Special Sector  
 Karen Foreman, Local 638, State Sector  
 Dennis Frazier, Local 66, County Sector  
 Duane Gatzke, Local 2829, State Sector  
 Pat Guernsey, Local 552, District 5 East Metro  
 Jen Guertin, Local 2508, District 5 East Metro  
 Mark Hedlund, Local 753, State Sector  
 Tim Henderson, Local 2728, District 6 West Metro  
 John Hillyard, Local 600, State Sector  
 JoAnn Holton, Local 607, State Sector  
 Roger Janzig, Local 668, Private/Special Sector  
 Robin Madsen, Local 1842, City Sector  
 John Magnuson, Local 1574, District 4 Central  
 Molly Malecki, Local 2822, County Sector  
 John McGovern, Local 695, District 1 NE  
 Mike Nelson, Local 2829, District 6 West Metro  
 Alan Netland, Local 66, District 1 NE  
 Kevin Olson, Local 701, District 2 West  
 Cliff Robinson, Local 34, County Sector  
 Mike Rumpee, Local 9, District 5 East Metro  
 Judy Schultz, Local 151, District 5 East Metro  
 Monica Shockency, Local 56, K-12 Sector  
 Willie Snyder, Local 707, County Sector  
 Jane Spaude, Local 753, District 4 Central  
 Dean Steiner, Local 735, State Sector  
 Deb Strohm, Local 66, City Sector  
 Jim Ullmer, Local 3142, District 6 West Metro  
 Sue Urness, Local 66, District 1 NE  
 Phyllis Walker, Local 3800, U of M Sector  
 Tamera Weller, Local 607, State Sector  
 Bryce Wickstrom, Local 2792, District 5 East Metro

## Stepping UP

Mike Buesing, President  
 Eliot Seide, Executive Director



Member International Labor  
 Communications Association

Information and story ideas should be submitted to:

**Michael Kuchta**, Editor  
 AFSCME Minnesota Council 5  
 300 Hardman Ave. South, Suite 2  
 South Saint Paul, MN 55075-2469

Published by AFSCME Minnesota, AFL-CIO  
 300 Hardman Ave. South, Suite 2  
 South Saint Paul, MN 55075-2469  
 six times yearly:

January/February, March/April, May/June,  
 July/August, September/October,  
 November/December

Subscription price \$1 per copy; \$5 per year  
 POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:  
**Stepping Up**, 300 Hardman Ave. South,  
 Suite 2, South Saint Paul, MN 55075-2469  
 Periodicals postage paid at St. Paul, MN  
 Publication No. 352180



# What young members want

During an electronic town meeting, more than 500 Next Wavers discussed their vision for a young workers movement in AFSCME. Here's some of what they said.

**Mentors.** Next Wavers want to be trained and confident in their ability to move the union forward. They hunger for mentors who will lead by example and share their knowledge. Local 4001's Jackie Root said it best: "Help us stand on the shoulders of giants."

**History.** Next Wavers don't want to relive the past, they want to learn from it. They want to know about AFSCME's history and the hard-fought struggles for the benefits they now enjoy. They also want a better understanding of how the labor movement impacts all of us.

**Outreach.** Next Wavers want their union to be part of their community, not just part of their workday. They want to develop one-on-one networks to introduce other young members to AFSCME when they first start a job. They also want to network nationally, and say new technology is the best way for them to communicate.

**Inclusion.** Younger members want to have a voice in the decisions that shape their union. They say it's important that the union reflect the diversity of its membership, including young people.

Some Next Wavers already have moved into elected positions. For example, Melanie Preczewski and Kyle Borg both were elected to the board of Local 2829. "The gray tsunami is ready for the next wave of activists," says their local president, Mike Nelson.



Mara Hill (left), of Local 34, and Jessica Johnson, of Local 2728, rally at Resurrection Medical Center in suburban Chicago for workers who want to join AFSCME.

## Making waves

AFSCME is hard at work preparing the next generation of union leaders. In June, nearly 600 members, age 35 or younger, met in Chicago for our union's first national Next Wave Conference.

Participants spent three power-packed days of activism, strategizing and learning about the union movement. "You're the future leaders of the flagship union in the American labor movement," said AFSCME International President Gerald McEntee. Council 5 and its locals showed their commitment to the Next Wave by sending the second-largest delegation of future leaders. Now the 61 participants are bursting with energy, ideas and enthusiasm to inherit the torch from the union's more-seasoned leaders.



Tim Olaosebiken and Tabitha Mitchell grew up in union families, and now are getting active in their union: AFSCME and Local 1842.

## Starting out strapped

America's 20- and 30-somethings are struggling to get ahead, build careers, buy homes and start families. But **getting ahead is getting harder. That, many young people say, is why they need a union.**

A college degree is the new high school diploma – but it now costs a fortune to get that degree, meaning students graduate with crippling debts. In Minnesota, nearly 63 percent of high school graduates go directly to college; 55 percent complete their degree within six years. But their average student loan of \$3,050 a year doesn't come close to covering tuition, books and expenses.

**Once students graduate, good jobs are scarce, wages are stagnant and benefits are disappearing.** One cause is clear – as union density has declined since 1975, so has the quality of American jobs.

According to census figures, **men between 25 and 34 actually earn \$8,316 a year less than they did 30 years ago** (\$43,416 in 1975, \$35,100 in 2005, adjusted for inflation). Typical earnings for women ages 25-34 have risen only 3.8 percent in 30 years – up \$1,116 from \$29,184 in 1975 to \$30,300 in 2005.

Today, fewer employers provide health

insurance and pensions; that's why **18 million young people between the ages of 18 and 34 are uninsured.**

To make matters worse, the cost of everything – starter homes, health coverage and raising children – is soaring. Young families, even those with two incomes, struggle to pay their bills. Then credit cards become their safety net. **Today two-thirds of 18- to 34-year-olds have credit card debt, averaging just over \$8,000.**

The top reasons driving debt are car repairs, job loss and home repairs. But 45 percent also use credit cards to pay basic living expenses such as rent, mortgage payments, groceries and utilities, according to figures in Tamara Drauf's book "Strapped."

### Bargaining priorities: The Next Wave

Job security	48.3%
Salary	22.1%
Paid Health Insurance	17.2%
Pension	5.2%
Domestic Partner Benefits	2.8%
Child-Care Benefits	1.7%
Tuition Benefits	1.0%
Parental Leave	1.0%
Flexible Schedule	0.7%

That's how young adults get behind the financial eight-ball, borrow their way into adulthood, and wonder whatever happened to the American Dream.



### Mentoring new leaders

Eric Janssen and his mentor, Mike Buesing, both work for the Department of Transportation and were raised in southwest Minnesota. While these two AFSCME members have much in common, Eric joined the union 25 years after Mike. Check out how popular culture, technology and the cost of living differed for these two generations of leaders.

AFSCME member	Mike Buesing	Eric Janssen
Leadership role	President of Council 5	President of Local 1011
Age	60	29
Year he joined AFSCME	1975	2000
Union density in U.S.	21.6% in 1975	12.9% in 2000
Average income in U.S.	\$14,100 in 1975	\$40,343 in 2000
Average monthly rent	\$200 in 1975	\$675 in 2000
Cost of gallon of gas	\$0.44 in 1975	\$1.26 in 2000
President	Gerald Ford	Bill Clinton
Historical event	Watergate scandal, Vietnam War ends	Bush defeats Gore after Supreme Court ruling
Social revolution	Equal Rights Amendment seeks to guarantee legal equality of the sexes	Vermont legalizes civil unions for same-sex couples
Popular film	"Jaws"	"X-Men"
Popular TV show	"All in the Family"	"ER"
Popular musician	Elton John	Blink-182
Popular athlete	Boxer Muhammad Ali	Golfer Tiger Woods
Technology	Bill Gates and Paul Allen form Microsoft	Y2K passes without widespread computer shutdowns





### Our primary candidates in St. Paul, Maplewood

Members are asked to vote for these AFSCME-endorsed candidates in their Sept. 15 municipal primaries:

- **St. Paul Mayor:** Chris Coleman
- **Maplewood Mayor:** Will Rossbach
- **Maplewood City Council (at-large):** Kathy Juenemann, James Llanas

For more information, call metro political organizer Jon Grebner at 651-287-0587.

### AFSCME makes the race for governor a priority

When it comes to the campaign to succeed Tim Pawlenty as governor, "there is no race that's more important to our members," said Council 5 president Mike Buesing.

On Oct. 9, candidates will take part in a forum at Council 5's convention in Duluth. KBJR (Channel 6) will televise the forum; news anchor Barbara Reyelts, will be the moderator. The forum also will be taped for later broadcast by public access channels statewide.

On Oct. 24, Council 5's Executive Board will meet in Minneapolis to interview candidates for a possible endorsement. The council's constitution gives the board the sole power to decide if and when to endorse. Interviews begin at 10 a.m. at the Ramada Plaza, 1330 Industrial Blvd. Members are welcome to attend.

### How state camouflages ongoing budget deficit

Heading into the current 2010-2011 budget cycle, Minnesota officially faced a deficit of \$6.4 billion. The independent Minnesota Budget Project says state officials erased it this way:

- Taking advantage of one-time federal stimulus money: \$2.6 billion
- Spending cuts in budget bills passed by the Legislature: \$700 million
- Spending cuts through line-item vetoes by Gov. Tim Pawlenty: \$400 million
- Spending cuts through Pawlenty's unallotment decisions: \$2.7 billion

Despite \$3.8 billion in reduced spending, the Budget Project calculates that the state will face another budget deficit of \$4.9 billion in the next budget cycle, which starts in July 2011.

To track how these budget cuts are hurting your community, visit [www.defendminnesota.com](http://www.defendminnesota.com)

## WE DO THE WORK

# Getting down and dirty with zookeepers

Bree Dingmann shatters young peoples' illusions all the time. The Como Park zookeeper meets frequently with students who are thinking about a degree in biology or zoology. She tells them what it takes to pursue a career as a keeper. Then she levels with them: Zookeepers *do not* get to play with animals all day.

"It's such a misconception," says Dingmann, now in her third year at Como. "It's far from the truth," says Larry Vorwerk, a keeper at The Minnesota Zoo since it opened 31 years ago.

In fact, much of a keeper's day is underwhelmingly routine: reading reports, checking animals' health, cleaning exhibits,

**Larry Vorwerk:** "If you're scraping manure off the walls of the macaques cages, there's nothing glorious about that."

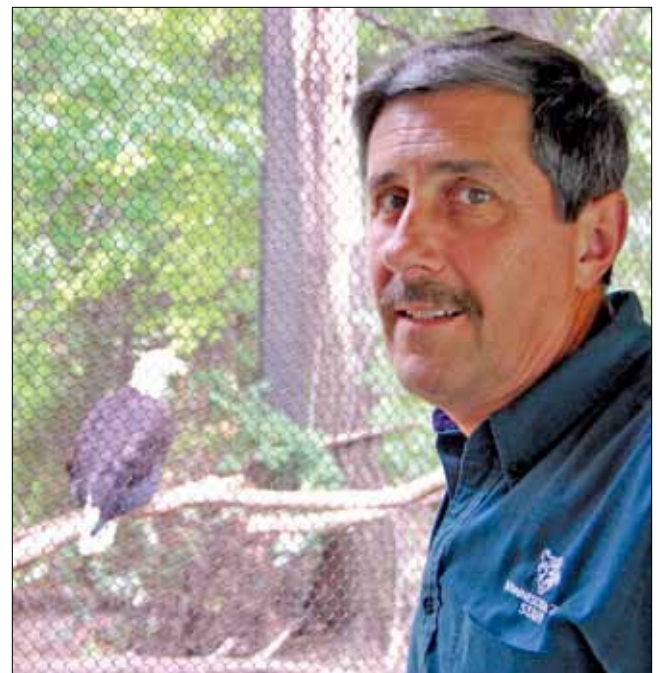
preparing the animals' diets, feeding the animals, moving the animals from their holding areas to their exhibits, cleaning the holding areas, feeding the animals again, moving the animals again, writing reports.

"It's pretty basic work that isn't so glamorous," Vorwerk says. "If you're scraping

manure off the walls of the macaques cages, there's nothing glorious about that part of the job."

"There are at least three or four hours every day that are exactly the same," says Peter Lee, a keeper at Como for 21 years. "It's incredibly routine, a lot of it. It has to happen 365 days a year. It has to happen in this order. If you can't handle routine, you can't be a zookeeper."

Yet the rest of the job is completely unpredictable. "Anything can happen on any given day, and frequently



Larry Vorwerk works the Minnesota Trails at the Minnesota Zoo.

does," Lee says. "If you can't deal with moving outside of your comfort zone, you can't really be a zookeeper, either."

"Animals don't behave exactly the same from one day to the next," Vorwerk says. "There's always changes of seasons, animals being born, animals that are transferred in or out of here. No two days are exactly alike."

"That's what makes our job so special," Dingmann says.

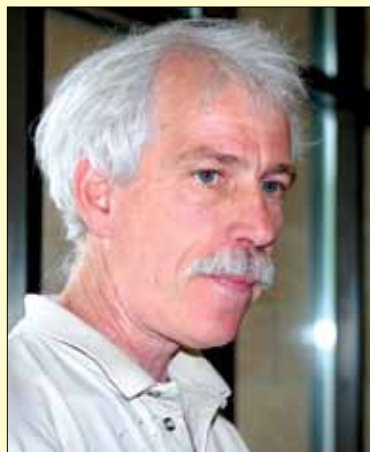
**Job keeps changing.** When Lee and Vorwerk started, you could get a job with just a high school diploma. Now college degrees (which they both had) are mandatory. The physical chores remain, but other duties have expanded, including educating the public, connecting with worldwide networks for animal care and conservation, and developing animal training and enrichment (*see story at right*).

### Betcha didn't know

Como is the last completely free zoo in the country – no admission fee, no parking fee. That definitely makes Como affordable for families.

The policy also makes it a destination for regulars who visit almost every day. That includes a group of what zookeeper Peter Lee calls vulnerable adults.

"This is a safe place for them," Lee says. "In fact, there's one guy that really likes the primates. He's the rule keeper – 'It says don't go on the rail.' 'It says don't feed them.' 'I'm sorry, no smoking.' And he answers



Peter Lee

the questions about their names and ages. "It's great. We should put him on the payroll."

At both zoos, almost all keepers give public talks or group tours. That's not always easy for people who have, after all, chosen to work with animals. "You can't walk from point A to point B without being an unofficial ambassador for the zoo," Lee says. "Answering simple questions to more philosophical ones. We have anti-zoo people visiting, and you have to gracefully engage them."

An explosion in research has changed animals' care and diets. Computers, the internet and animal-specific listserves make any keeper part of far-flung networks, including worldwide conservation efforts for endangered habitat and species, Vorwerk says.

"We try to make a difference for the animals that we have," Dingmann says. "That's the reason we're here."

# The public can't get enough of public zoos

The Minnesota and Como Park Zoos had record attendance last year. The Minnesota Zoo attracted 1.355 million visitors, up 16 percent. Attendance at Como climbed 12 percent; this year, it's on pace to attract more than 2 million visitors. Here are some other facts:

**Minnesota Zoo:** Opened in 1978. Occupies 485 acres in Apple Valley. Nearly 400 species.

The zoo is a state agency. All 240 workers are state employees. "I think it's under the radar that we're state-run," says Melissa Warhol, president of Local 1929, which represents not quite half of the zoo's workers.

"The zoo is just one of many things that make our state unique. I think people should be proud of it."

The zoo receives \$6.845 million in state funding. That's 32 percent of the zoo's total revenue, says chief financial officer Peggy Adelman. The state used to provide nearly 60 percent of the zoo's budget, Adelman says, "but we've been challenged to become more entrepreneurial."

**Como Park Zoo:** Dates to 1897. Current zoo opened in 1936 and occupies 14 acres in St. Paul. More than 175 species. The zoo is operated by the city parks department. The zoo's

### Betcha didn't know

At The Minnesota Zoo, all front-line staff wear green shirts. At Como, staff shirts are color-coded. Zookeepers wear tan. Customer service staff wear blue. Volunteers wear khaki vests.

108 workers are city employees represented by Local 1842. There is no admission charge, but free-will offerings contribute 20 percent of the zoo's \$5.9 million budget. The city provides about \$2.6 million annually through its general fund.





Yarrington works with CC during the "Sparky" show at Como Zoo. The sea lion knows roughly 100 behaviors.

## Training enriches keepers' lives, too

Visitors to the "Sparky" show at Como Zoo explode in laughter and applause when CC "dances" or performs some other trick on cue. Yes, it's crowd-pleasing, say zookeepers Becky Heitzman and Julie Yarrington, who help train the sea lion and other animals. But what the public sees as "tricks" really stems from broader training programs designed not for entertainment, but for the animals' well-being. And training is just one piece of enrichment regimens that are virtually zoo-wide at the Minnesota and Como zoos.

### Members roar support for endangered species

The Minnesota Zoo's annual Ride and Roar Motorcycle event takes place Saturday, Sept. 12. Local 1929 member Matt Keating is one of the event organizers. The 115-mile ride supports the habitat and wildlife conservation projects of the Ulysses S. Grant Fund.

The ride leaves the zoo at 8:30 a.m. Riders return for an afternoon of food, music, door prizes and raffles. Registration fees are \$30 for riders, \$20 for passengers.

Members can find more information at [www.minnzoos.com/donate/donate\\_event\\_RnR09.asp](http://www.minnzoos.com/donate/donate_event_RnR09.asp)

Enrichment can include giving animals toys, piping in sounds or forcing them to forage for food. "Anything you can do to mentally stimulate them, to vary their day, is what enrichment is," Yarrington says.

Although zoos have switched from cages to larger, realistic habitats, "you can't build something big enough to keep one of these animals from getting bored," says Como zookeeper Peter Lee. "So we've got to engage their minds."

Training encourages specific behavior without stressing the animals out. In the old days, Lee says, keepers might handle animals, or squirt them with a hose, to get what they needed. "Now we ask them to do it voluntarily," he says. Zoos do this through positive reinforcement – which Lee calls "zoo talk for treats."

For medical exams, animals often were anesthetized. Some are trained to cooperate with such routine procedures: oral exams, eye exams, blood draws, x-rays, and taking medication. Some animals learn only a few behaviors; others can learn many. "It's a lot of work and a lot of dedication, but it's a lot of fun," says Como keeper Bree Dingmann.

"It's a nice way to take care of them," Heitzman says, "and they're able to interact with them and reward them for cooperating. It's easier on them, it's easier on the vets, and it's easier on us."

## You see the results of their work, not them

When the zoo closes, visitors aren't the only ones who go home. So do the keepers. That leaves animals and property in the care of security personnel and AFSCME maintenance crews. "Maintenance people, they're our backbone," says Como zookeeper Bree Dingmann. "We couldn't do what we do without them."

One critical duty these crews have is making sure water and air temperatures stay at levels that keep animals safe.

The Minnesota Zoo, for example, heats three dozen buildings (and the exhibits they contain) with a high-pressure hot-water system. If pipes leak or boilers act up, "people will get called in the middle of the night to deal with it," says Ernie Opheim. "It does not take long for the heat to go out of the system, especially in winter, and that can create some real problems for the animals and birds."

Opheim has worked at the zoo for 16 years as an engineer and boiler operator. These days, his job still requires maintaining pumps and replacing belts by hand. But electronic fire systems and the direct digital controls of the zoo's zone energy systems mean the job is a lot more high tech than it used to be.

Opheim's days include the freedom of driving the grounds to visually inspect equipment and infrastructure. But his shifts can also require staying put for hours in front of a computer monitor or baby-sitting a boiler overnight.

At Como Zoo, Perry Thompson



Above: Ernie Opheim at The Minnesota Zoo's heating plant.

Right: Perry Thompson at a Como maintenance garage.

knows pre-dawn hours well. He gets up with the birds, literally. Thompson, a maintenance worker for 23 years, reports to work at 5 a.m. His job: Get the grounds ready – picking up trash, mopping floors, and cleaning the glass of exhibits so they're ready for another day's worth of kids' handprints.

Matt Keating is another guy visitors don't see. In his 25 years at the Minnesota Zoo, he's done everything from plant flowers to build exhibits. Nowadays, he keeps doors, locks and all 300 fire extinguishers up to code. But mostly he works the storeroom – a warehouse where crews handle all



shipments, and stock and deliver all the supplies other zoo workers need.

"We've got just about anything you'd find in a hardware store," he says. He's also got a few supplies you won't find at Ace – including 120 cases of frozen meats for the zoo's tigers.

## The real visitors' guides

Zoo visitors always have questions. It's up to customer service staff like Abu Kawo to have answers. "What's that animal's name? How old is it? What does it eat? How much does it weigh?" "Where's the bathroom?" "How do I get out of here?"

When Kawo started at Como Zoo two years ago, he went through two weeks of training to learn the answers – or at least to learn who's got answers if he doesn't. On a typical day, he's assigned to a particular exhibit or section of the zoo, where he's part answer man, part security. "You just walk around, make sure people are not messing with the animals." He's also certified in first aid, so he can respond to a medical emergency until paramedics arrive.

The more crowded the zoo, the better Kawo likes it, he says. "I just like meeting people."

At the Minnesota Zoo, Melissa Warhol meets people in a different way. She works in membership. That means she fields the phone calls and emails from people who want to join.

More than 44,000 households are paying members of the Minnesota Zoo, up 21 percent in the past year alone. There are days when Warhol has to enter 200 or 300 new members

### Betcha didn't know

Como Park zookeepers must be certified every year in firearms. "Every single building has a 12-gauge shotgun in it," says keeper Peter Lee. "Every single zookeeper is ready to take the gun and do what needs to be done if and when that day comes."

"Some of the animals are shoot on sight, no questions asked. The idea of 'Maybe you could put a dart in them,' that's great. But it takes about 20 minutes for them to go to sleep. They could eat a lot of 4-year-olds before they go down."

into the database. Her office is turning into a seven-day-a-week operation.

Membership is "a huge piece of the puzzle" for the zoo's financial health, she says. Paid memberships bring in \$3 million a year, or about 15 percent of the zoo's revenue.

"I believe it's one of the greatest deals around town," she says. "For a family of four, you can go to the zoo as many times as you want, with free parking, for \$95."



Abu Kawo, Como Park Zoo



Melissa Warhol, Minnesota Zoo

Keeping members informed and engaged is another part of Warhol's job. "We really take pride in reaching out, communicating with the members, making them feel like they belong here, that we want them here."

She puts out email newsletters twice a month to 31,000 households, letting members know about new exhibits, member-only discounts, special events and, of course, the latest baby animals.



## HCMC brings a fresh idea to hospital food

“Fresh herbs” and “hospital food” are concepts that usually don’t fit in the same sentence. But on a third-floor rooftop at Hennepin County Medical Center, six raised garden beds with more than a dozen varieties of herbs and peppers are changing the taste of food for patients – and maybe their health as well.

Members of Local 977 helped grow the herbs from seed. They water and care for the plants now that they’re

outdoors. “It’s kind of a big deal for us,” said Jody Jacobs, Local 977’s vice president, who works in food services. “If we need fresh cumin, we go get it. If we need fresh dill, we go get it. It gives food a nice, fresh taste. It’s much different than dried herbs.”

The herb garden actually is the result of a Climate Change Grant from the City of Minneapolis. It’s also helping meet some of the dietary and cultural needs of hospital patients.

Among women, for example, traditionally eat steamed rice and chicken soup with a special blend of spices after giving birth. It’s supposed to help them regain strength and help in nursing the newborn. HCMC’s garden grows all eight herbs the traditional recipes call for.

Kitchen staff hope to keep using the herbs even as seasons change, Jacobs said. Where possible, plants will be kept indoors under grow lamps.



Local 977 food service workers (from left) Mark Bumphurs, Gordy Richardson, Erica Forest, Donald Hubbert and Jody Jacobs soak in a little rain amid HCMC’s rooftop herb garden.

### LIE #1

**President Obama wants to euthanize your grandma.**

**The truth:** These accusations – of

“death panels” and forced euthanasia – are flatly untrue. There is no “death panel” in any of the health-care bills moving through Congressional committees. Reform legislation *does* include a provision, supported by AARP, to offer senior citizens access to a professional medical counselor who will provide them with information on preparing a living will.

### LIE #2

**Democrats will outlaw private insurance and force you into a government plan.**

**The truth:** With

reform, choices will increase, not decrease. President Obama’s reform plan creates a health insurance exchange, a one-stop marketplace for affordable, high-quality insurance options. Included in the exchange is the public health-insurance option – a nationwide plan with a broad network of providers – that will operate alongside private insurance companies. The public option will inject competition into the market to drive quality up and drive costs down.

If you’re happy with your coverage and your doctors, you can keep them. But the public plan would expand choices for millions of businesses or individuals who choose to opt into it. It will cover many who simply can’t afford health care now.

### LIE #3

**President Obama wants to implement Soviet/British/Canadian-style rationing.**

**The truth:** Health-care reform will expand access to high-quality health insurance. It will give individuals, families and businesses more choices for coverage. Right now, big corporations decide whether to give



## SPREAD THE TRUTH

How to Debunk the Top 5 Lies about National Health-Care Reform

Insurance and drug companies are spending \$1.4 million a day to kill real health-care reform. Through TV ads, the internet, talk radio and paid operatives, they and their political allies are breeding fear and distraction. They’re spreading rumors like cold germs in order to create doubt about the benefits of reform. We’re closer to real reform than we’ve ever been. The next few weeks will decide whether it happens. Here are the top five lies – and the truths you can spread to counteract them.

you coverage, which doctors you get to see, and whether a particular procedure or medicine is covered. *That* is rationed care.

Health-care reform will do away with some of the most nefarious aspects of this economic rationing: It will do away with discrimination for pre-existing conditions, gender discrimination, insurers who cancel coverage when you get sick, and lifetime and yearly limits on coverage.

### LIE #4

**President Obama is plotting to cut seniors’ Medicare benefits.**

**The truth:** Health-care reform plans

do not reduce Medicare benefits. The reform plans *do* expect savings from Medicare, but these savings are unrelated to direct patient care. The savings don’t come from cutting benefits; they come from cutting billions of dollars in overpayments to insurance companies and from eliminating waste, fraud and abuse.

### LIE #5

**President Obama’s health-care plan will bankrupt America.**

**The truth:** We need

health-care reform now in order to *prevent* bankruptcy. We need reform to control the skyrocketing costs that affect individuals, families, businesses and the overall American economy.

Each year, nearly 1 million people face personal bankruptcy because they can’t pay their medical expenses. Right now, we spend more than \$2 trillion dollars a year on health care. The average family premium is projected to rise to more than \$22,000 in the next decade.

Reform – with an affordable, high-quality public option that can spur competition – is necessary to bring costs down.

Besides, Obama’s reform plan is fully paid for over 10 years and does not add a penny to the national debt.

### Members, daughters win scholarships

Congratulations to the following Council 5 scholarship winners:

- **Scott Haire**, of Local 668 at the Metropolitan Council
- **Samantha Fischer**, of Local 2980 at the Department of Agriculture

They are winners of the 2009 Robert Norberg Scholarships. The \$250 awards allow them to pursue studies at a public college or university in the state.

- **Alysa Bjorklund**, winner of the \$1,000 Richard Patterson Scholarship. Alysa is the daughter of Gary Bjorklund, of Local 3761 at the Northern Minnesota Public Attorneys and Investigations Unit.

- **Jennifer Kienzle**, winner of the \$1,000 Clarence J. Moss Scholarship. Jennifer is the daughter of Nancy Alice Kienzle, of Local 3801 at the University of Minnesota-Duluth.

The Moss and Peterson scholarships will allow the two high school seniors to pursue a college education. In addition, **Norah Carroll** received a \$1,000 national Union Plus Scholarship. Norah is majoring in magazine journalism at Drake University in Des Moines. Her father, Kevin Carroll, is a member of Local 9 in the City of Minneapolis.

### Applications available

AFSCME’s 2010 Family Scholarships are worth \$2,000 each toward a college education. They can be renewed each year. Forms and complete details on eligibility can be found at [www.afscme.org/members/880.cfm](http://www.afscme.org/members/880.cfm).

### Corrections

The May/June issue of *Stepping Up* had incorrect information about the following members:

- Local 2728 member David Thone’s name was misspelled.
- Nick Ayala is president of Local 977. Carmen Brown is chief steward.

## Good things happen when managers work with unions

Stronger trust between workers and supervisors. Better results for taxpayers. A workplace that functions more smoothly and effectively.

Those are among the concrete reasons why members of Local 9 in Minneapolis’ 311 Call Center received this year’s Earl Willford

Labor Management Cooperation and Partnership Award, the highest honor given by the Twin City Area Labor Management Council.

The call center’s labor-management teams have worked out policies on issues as diverse as having plants in the office to how workers pick shifts

and vacation slots, says labor co-chair Kim Besch. In less than three years, cooperative efforts have improved the rate at which callers get issues resolved the first time to nearly 85 percent.

Committees are now working on standardizing policies on working from home, scheduling and training.



## DNR Green and Growing campaign creates road map for connecting one-on-one

When it comes to building membership strength, it's tough to top the challenges facing Council 5's five DNR locals.

Members work at 179 sites. For many members, getting to a union meeting requires driving a couple of hours – each way. For local leaders, visiting job sites isn't any easier. "Most of the sites, you don't just drive by," says Local 1692 president Linden Anderson. "You have to go somewhere to get there."

Then you throw in the nature of natural resources work – a tangle of full-time, part-time, seasonal, temporary and intermittent shifts. "We're finding members who have been here 20, 25, 30 years who have never seen anybody from the union," says Local 1623's Carol Wheeler.

### Hard work makes it work.

For local leaders, however, these challenges were just another logistical problem to solve. They wanted to increase their membership's day-to-day leverage, increase their influence on policy and spending decisions at the Legislature, convert more fee-payers to full membership, and begin to develop the next generation of leaders. They knew it was going to take



Carol Wheeler, Local 1623, talks with members at Lake Carlos State Park.

hard work, period. So they created Green and Growing, an internal organizing drive designed to visit every DNR site in the state, increase membership, and increase contributions to the union's PEOPLE political fund.

Based on the success of this June's two-week blitz, it seems likely that Green and Growing 1) will be back and 2) may be a model for other locals to follow.

### Personal connections pay off.

Green and Growing's numbers are impressive enough: 30 volunteers visited 162 job sites, signed up 71 new full members, and increased the percentage of members making PEOPLE donations by 20 percent.

## Leadership Academy prods officers to turn their locals into a potent force

You can build a system for handling grievances and paperwork. Or, you can build a movement.

That's one of the blunt decisions local executive board members face when they attend Council 5's Local Union Leadership Academy.

The academy is a two-day training session that pushes local leaders to figure out how to unleash their potential – and, more importantly, their members' potential – to create a more active, more powerful union where they work.

The training can be fun. It can be intense. It makes executive boards face up to burnout and personality conflicts. It forces them to grade themselves. Using presentations, games, role playing and team building, it challenges them to step back and second-guess how they run their locals.

"No matter how good or how perfect you think you

are, or don't think you are, you're always going to pick something up," says Jean Diederich, president of Local 34 in Hennepin County Human Services.

Sometimes that happens by getting a glimpse of other locals' challenges and how they meet them – or don't.

"Often, it's good for some locals to realize that there's always an element of dysfunction," says John Ewaldt, president of Local 8 in Ramsey County and a Leadership Academy instructor. "It's actually made them better about moving forward, because it's made them realize that other locals deal with the same stuff."

**Getting mobilized.** The Leadership Academy is designed to agitate, says instructor John Westmoreland, who is northern area field director for Council 5. Too many locals and too many members treat their union as



Lorraine Hallgren (left) and Joni Liljedahl, both of Local 1465, drop in at the Onamia Field Station.

## BUILDING POWER

Local leaders go out of their way to re-energize worksites

The best result, however, was the ability to connect with members face to face. "It's made a lot of people aware that they have somebody they can actually talk to," says Candi Anderson, of Local 1623. "Union officers aren't so scary anymore."

"We had one guy tell us he liked us, that we were a lot like him," Wheeler says. "They find out that we're no more union than they are. We're just more active."

The visits gave volunteers plenty of time to find out what's on members' minds. They talked about contract provisions. They talked about what union activists did this past legislative session to fight privatization and to minimize layoffs. They fielded ideas and questions about divisional mergers, early retirement incentives and health insurance for seasonal workers.

"The most important thing is, they know we came," says

Local 718's Connie Andrews, "that we made the effort to get to their worksite."

Council 5 staff trained volunteers and created information packs to leave at job sites. The Council and DNR Policy Committee helped the locals cover lost wages. A lot of Department of Natural Resources managers cooperated and let the campaign do its thing.

Actually getting co-workers to become full members or to make PEOPLE donations was often easier than expected, volunteers say. In fact, a lot of fee-payers thought they already *were* union members.

"A lot of times, people just need to be asked," Andrews says. "It's different from organizing somebody who's not in a union. Our people already know what the union's done for them."



Andie O'Brien (right), Local 306, and Laura Hagen, Local 607, talk with Chalmers Davis, Local 34, during a LULA training in Mankato.

another consumer product, he says. Members don't have to get involved; they just have to pay their dues.

In return, they get an entire off-the-shelf package: wages, benefits and someone who intervenes when they run into issues with their boss. That's fine, Westmoreland says. But that creates a mindset of "the union," not "our union."

"If there are 50 people in a work area, and those 50 people don't like what's going on, if those 50 people all stood up and said this shouldn't be happening, it would end tomorrow," he says.

When "the union" simply means a steward or the local president, members turn into little more than spectators, Ewaldt says. "We didn't grow the labor movement by pushing paper around. We grew the labor movement around collective action and everybody being part of it."

**Accountability is key.** To make sure the training is not just two days of great ideas that quickly get swamped by the daily routine, locals must develop a written plan of action, assign responsibilities, then follow up.

"Holding people accountable for their piece of the action, that's the piece we've dropped the ball on," says Tamera Weller, vice president of Local 607, the Department of Human Services local for much of southern Minnesota.

To add yet another level of accountability, Council 5 is assembling the leaders of all 37 locals that have gone through Leadership Academy training so far this year. Executive boards will gather in St. Cloud on Sept. 12 for a one-day assessment of how they're doing.



# NOT YOUR ORDINARY PRIEST

In AFSCME's history, there was never anyone like Father Albert Blatz.

The Roman Catholic priest joined AFSCME after being named chaplain at St. Peter State Hospital. Within a decade, he became a leading force in the state and national union. He was part of a movement in the 1960s that transformed AFSCME from an organization of civil servants into a powerful union of public workers – a union rooted in organizing, collective bargaining and local democracy.

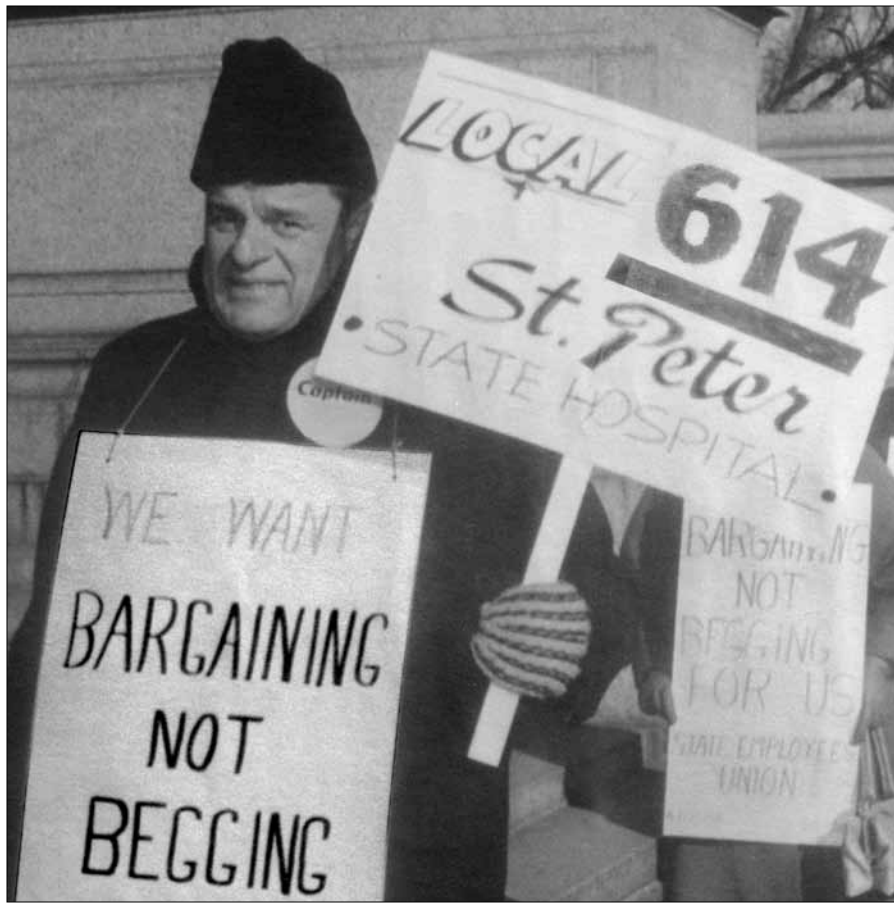
“He was a visionary,” says Bernard Brommer, former president of the Minnesota AFL-CIO and former director of AFSCME Council 6. “He had experience in the deficiencies of the civil service system. He saw the injustices, saw what workers were doing for next to nothing.”

**Equal standing.** Under civil service rules, public employees had no legal bargaining rights. They could not sit down and negotiate with the employer as equals. Instead, they had to rely primarily on what they derisively called “collective begging.”

“There was great difficulty achieving fairness in the civil service system,” says Bill Lucy, AFSCME's international secretary-treasurer. That did not sit well with Blatz, who had “an absolute commitment to fairness,” Lucy says. “He just fundamentally believed people should be treated fairly, and respected, irrespective of their station in life.”

**A rare individual.** Blatz was born in Bloomington in 1916 into what became an influential family. His brother, Jerome, became a state senator; his niece, Kathleen, became a state legislator and, eventually, the state's first female chief justice.

Blatz was ordained in 1942. He was a parish priest, an Army chaplain in World War II, and taught Greek and Latin at both St. Thomas College and the old Nazareth Hall before being assigned to St. Peter in 1950. There, as a member of Local 614, he pushed his vision through the internal politics of AFSCME, through the fight for legal bargaining rights in Minnesota, and through his personal integrity, colleagues say. He was elected



Father Albert Blatz leads demonstrators at the state Capitol in this undated photo.

## Father Albert Blatz fought to turn AFSCME into a real union

repeatedly to the Council 6 executive board, and was president in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Being a priest gave Blatz an aura, but he gained more respect through his actions and authenticity, says Paul Goldberg, former Council 6 director and international area director. “He was a down-to-earth guy who could walk into a group of workers and just talk to them.”

“You have to remember, he was not a priest coming in as an outsider,” says former Council 6 director Peter Benner. “He was part of that community of workers. He made a very conscious choice that part of his vocation was being in the labor movement. That was an integral part of what it meant for him to be a priest.”

**Faith in action.** Blatz's activism was not the only trait that surprised people. He also was quite a poker player and wine aficionado, according to those who shared both pastimes with him. “He was a delightful guy, full of life, full of fun,” Lucy says, “but serious about the role of the union. He would not sit quietly by if he thought power was being abused.”

Blatz's activism, like that of Chicago's Monsignor George Higgins, was well within the tradition of Catholic social teaching, Brommer points out. “He represented the very best of the involvement of the church in the struggle of workers and their families. Lots of faiths talk about their support for workers; here was a living example of putting that to work. He gave a voice and a face to those principles.”

### Changing Minnesota's future.

Blatz was a persuasive, passionate speaker who, combined with his imposing 6-foot frame, commanded attention, say those who knew him.

“He was such a thinker, such a moral force for making his case,” Lucy says. “I don't think he used the collar to do that. He just became a formidable spokesperson for the kind of change he thought the union needed.”

Blatz helped build the political force that, in 1972, made Minnesota the third state in the nation to give union rights to public employees. “He was a key figure at AFL-CIO conventions, arguing for the right of collective bargaining for public employees,” Brommer says.

“Prior to that time, public employees were not viewed as real trade unionists by the rest of the labor movement. He helped educate the rest of the labor movement, so we could then take our position alongside them, shoulder to shoulder.”

## The union grows 2 by 2

Council 5's latest organizing victory doesn't sound like much. But it's the kind of get-in-on-the-ground-floor success that can deliver a much bigger impact years down the road.

Both employees in the city clerk's office in Elko New Market voted to join AFSCME in June. That's right, two employees – deputy clerks Sandra Green and Lynette Frederickson.

Their pioneering decision means the union will also represent any future administrative, clerical or technical workers that the city hires. Among the practical benefits: “As the city grows, it means we won't have to organize as large a group,” says organizer Beth Neubert.

The city itself, in Scott County, is only two years old. “With the growth of that area, who knows how many people they've paved the way for?” Neubert says.

The women pursued a union after the city abruptly fired all its police officers this spring. Public pressure forced the council to reverse that decision, but Neubert says: “They wondered, if that happens to us, who's going to be our voice? Now they have a voice in the process.” The women also live in Elko New Market. As public employees, that gives them another advantage, Neubert says. “I tell them, remember, you don't work for them – they work for you.”



## Anyway You Measure It

**110,200**

Jobs gained in Minnesota in the 8 years from February 2000 to February 2008

**127,400**

Jobs lost in Minnesota in the 16 months from February 2008 to June 2009

**4,700**

Number of public- and private-sector jobs likely to be eliminated as a direct result of Gov. Tim Pawlenty's unilateral budget decisions

**1,000**

Number of public- and private-sector jobs that would have been lost under the budget passed by the Legislature – a plan that Pawlenty vetoed

Sources: Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development; Minnesota State Economist Tom Stinson

### Blatz helped lead insurgency that changed the union

For years, Father Albert Blatz worked to unseat Al Zander, AFSCME's first president, who held the job for nearly 30 years. Beginning in 1958, Blatz gave the nominating speech at every national convention for Jerry Wurf, head of New York City's Council 37. Blatz worked

publicly and privately to push Wurf's candidacy and their shared vision of turning AFSCME into an organizing union.

At the 1964 convention, they won. Wurf defeated Zander by 21 votes, and his slate captured 11 of the 12 international executive board seats. Blatz was one of Wurf's international vice presidents – the first priest and one of the few

rank-and-filers to ever sit on the executive board.

In the next 15 years, AFSCME grew from 220,000 members to nearly 1 million. Public employees moved from an afterthought in the labor movement to leaders.

Under Wurf, Blatz took on a variety of special assignments, including helping Joseph Ames

create a more democratic union constitution. When adopted in 1965, the constitution eliminated the staff patronage that was common under Zander. It included a “member bill of rights” and stronger autonomy for local unions.

Blatz remained an international vice president until he retired in 1984. He died of cancer on Aug. 5, 1995.