Jennifer Wagner-Harkonen, of University of Minnesota Clerical Workers Local 3800, is one of hundreds of AFSCME members whose “get out the vote” efforts help Minnesota buck national trends.

Cheryl Kallhoff, of Willmar DHS Local 701, joins dozens of other delegates to Council 5’s convention who committed in writing how she is fighting for the future of her union.

Jennifer Wagner-Harkonen, of University of Minnesota Clerical Workers Local 3800, is one of hundreds of AFSCME members whose “get out the vote” efforts help Minnesota buck national trends.
FIGHTING FOR OUR FUTURE

Coalition is proof that we can lift all boats
members or not. Our Raise the Wage
working people, whether they are union
We've focused on goals that benefit all
right to free speech and the right to vote.
It's a right just
to organize and bargain collectively over
the ability of ordinary working people
W
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Victories fought and won
In Minnesota, we:
• Beat back the “right to work for less”
• Dumped Team Extreme
• Fought two government shutdowns
• Won countless contract battles
Taxed the rich to save public services and our jobs
• Prevented the layoff of thousands of state and local government workers
• Protected our retirement security
• Expanded collective-bargaining rights
We've chosen to grow in the face of a raging anti-union storm. We believe that the ability of ordinary working people to organize and bargain collectively over their wages and working conditions is a fundamental human right. It's a right just as critical to a democratic society as the right to free speech and the right to vote.
We've focused on goals that benefit all working people, whether they are union members or not. Our Raise the Wage Coalition is proof that we can lift all boats when labor, faith, and community groups
join forces with common purpose.
Always on the march for justice
Despite enormous progress, our work is not complete. The arc of the moral universe may bend toward justice, but it doesn't bend on its own. It demands our constant vigilance.
Every time we demand a fair wage and
dignity on the job, we're marching. Every time
we help a new group of workers organize – we're marching. Every time we hold a politician accountable – we're marching. Every time we give mighty voice to our shared values – we're marching. Every time we stumble and get back up – we're marching. That's how a movement is built.
We are direct-care workers, corrections officers, maintenance workers, bus drivers, clerical workers, social workers, firefighters, nurses, lawyers, probation officers, and much, much more. We believe in the promise of the American Dream: If you work hard and play by the rules, you should earn enough to raise a family, own a home, send your kids to college, and retire with dignity. United, we have the power to improve our jobs, our lives, and our communities.

10 YEARS OF VISION AND GRIT

Sisters and brothers,
This year, we celebrate our 10th anniversary. Our union is a testament to collective action and the triumph of “we” over “me.” Together, we are stronger than anyone who threatens to outsource our work or drive down our wages and benefits.
We've learned to pull together as a family, because the alternative is to perish alone. As Mother Jones said, “The union is the school, the college; it’s where you learn to know and love each other and learn to work with each other and bear each other's burdens, each other's sorrows, and each other's joys.”
We fused our fingers into one mighty fist 10 years ago when we created Council 5. Thanks to the visionary decisions we made then, we've survived a decade that destroyed many other unions.

Executive Board Members 2014-2016 (selected September 2014)
OFFICERS
President Judy Wahlberg, Local 66
Vice President Mike Lindholt, Local 221
Secretary Mary Falk, Local 4001
Treasurer Nickson Nyankabaria, Local 3532

EXECUTIVE BOARD
Sabrina Bedler, Local 3688, State Sector
Carmen Brown, Local 977, District 6 (West Metro)
Melanie Castellanlan-Sorison, Local 3447, District 5 (East Metro)
Sara Chamberlain, Local 390, State Sector
Kevin Clark, Local 4001, State Sector
Jean-Diederich, Local 34, District 6 (West Metro)
Destiny Dusosky, Local 753, District 4 (Central)
Jody Ebert, Local 3857, District 6 (West Metro)
Gerry Firkus, Local 3887, District 1 (Northwest)
Dennis Frazier, Local 66, County Sector
Duane R. Gutzke, Local 2829, State Sector
Patrick Guernsey, Local 552, District 5 (East Metro)
Jen Guertin, Local 2508, District 5 (East Metro)
Mike Hartel, Local 221, District 6 (West Metro)
Eric Haase, Local 404, District 3 (South)
John Hillyard, Local 600, State Sector
Martin Hoerth, Local 844, K-12 Sector
JoAnn Holton, Local 607, State Sector
Cherrone Horazak, Local 3800, U of M Sector
Roger Janzig, Local 668, Private-Special Sector
Allison Kally, Local 5, District 5 (East Metro)
Anna Koenig, Local 398, State Sector
Travis Landender, Local 732, Private-Special Sector
Christine Main, Local 517, County Sector
Eric Mattson, Local 2829, District 6 (West Metro)
Sarah Maxwell, Local 9, District 6 (West Metro)
Kevin Olson, Local 701, District 2 (West)
Travis Ottum, Local 600, District 5 (East Metro)
Patriot Pearse, Local 628, District 3 (South)
Melinda Pearson, Local 4001, District 5 (East Metro)
Steve Reeves, Local 1935, County Sector
John Ross, Local 1842, City Sector
Willie Snyder, Local 707, County Sector
Sarah Sosa, Local 2822, County Sector
Delphine Steiner, Local 735, State Sector
Dahl Strohm, Local 66, District 1 (Northwest)
Sue Urness, Local 66, District 1 (Northwest)

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AFSCME Council 5 is a union of 43,000 workers who provide the vital services that make Minnesota happen. We advocate for excellence in public services, dignity in the workplace, and opportunity and prosperity for all workers.

Mary Falk, Local 4001
Nickson Nyankabaria, Local 3532

10 YEARS
OF VISION AND GRIT

United, we have the power to improve our jobs,
our lives, and our communities.

Dream: If you work hard and play by the rules,
you may earn enough to raise a family,
own a home, send your kids to college,
and retire with dignity. United, we have
the power to improve our jobs, our
lives, and our communities.

AFSCME Minnesota, AFL-CIO

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CORRECTIONS LOCALS WIN VICTORY TO INSOURCE FOOD SERVICE

FIGHTING FOR OUR FUTURE

The determined campaign by Council 5’s corrections locals to end Minnesota’s risky outsourcing of food service in state prisons has paid off. The department will quit privatizing food service when the current vendor’s contract expires in June 2015, corrections commissioner Tom Roy says. The victory will improve security inside prisons and add 64 bargaining-unit jobs next year.

AFSCME corrections locals documented problems with both the quality and quantity of food that outside vendors provide. The locals tracked how often vendors serve food that is spoiled or inedible, and how often they run out of food before every inmate has a chance to eat. In one case at Moose Lake, the vendor ran out of chicken, so it served offenders five ice cream sandwiches as a substitute.

Further, outside vendors lack the specialized training to properly supervise offenders who work in prison kitchens. That means corrections officers must keep an eye not just on offenders, but on vendor staff as well. Vendor employees have been caught bringing in contraband and implicated in other inappropriate behavior.

Bringing food service back in-house will re-establish the position of “security cook” as a state employee. Security cooks are corrections officers who serve as kitchen supervisors and are trained specifically to work in that kind of risky environment with offenders.

A’viands, a Roseville-based corporation, is the latest vendor to hold the prison system’s food contract. A’viands serves more than 8,000 inmates at seven state prisons – every facility except Red Wing and St. Cloud, where AFSCME security cooks already staff the kitchens.

Our mission
We advocate for excellence in public services, dignity in the workplace, and opportunity and prosperity for all workers.

Our values
- We believe there is dignity in all work, and should be dignity for all workers.
- We build power for all workers.
- We all do better when we all do better!
- We advance and defend the common good.
- We are leaders in building a movement for social and economic justice.
- We treat each other with respect and compassion.
- We value pride, passion, excellence, integrity, and courage in the work we do.
- We practice solidarity and member involvement.
- What we do away from the negotiating table is more important than what we do at the table.

Our path to success

Grow Membership: Organizing is the lifeblood of the labor movement. Robust unions like ours help Minnesota remain a high-wage, high-skill state where the profits of labor are shared fairly. Those strong economic roots are why we enjoy a higher standard of living and stronger economic growth than most states. That is why we’re healthier, better-educated, and poised for a promising future.

Mobilize Members: Workers who came before us marched, went on strike, and even gave their lives in the struggles that won the weekend, safe working conditions, secure retirement benefits, and the right to a voice on the job. To protect those hard-earned gains, we build strong local unions that mobilize their members to take action. Together, we build power to get the pay, benefits, and respect we deserve.

Take Political Action: Better politics means better budgets and better contracts. It’s all about protecting our jobs, our retirement, and the public services Minnesota needs. We never surrender at the Capitol or the ballot box. Our tenacity makes us the most politically active union in Minnesota.

Build Public Support: We project a bold, proud image of AFSCME. Our identity builds member pride and loyalty, and attracts new members. We reach politicians, allies and reporters with a powerful message of who we are and what we’re fighting to protect. Our side of the story gets attention on the news.

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Constitution delegates voted overwhelmingly to increase Council 5’s per capita rate by $5 a month beginning Jan. 1, 2015. The “Five for the Fight” increase is the first constitutional increase since the unification that created Council 5 in 2005.

The vote amends Council 5’s constitution so the per capita amount that local unions pay to Council 5 will rise from $23.64 per member per month to $28.64. The increase takes effect Jan. 1. Delegates opted against an alternative proposal to phase the increase in over four years.

The increase in the per capita payment does not automatically mean dues will increase for individual members. Any dues increase will be on a local-by-local basis. However, delegates did pass a resolution encouraging locals to adjust dues to ensure that their local remains healthy and active.

Choosing a stronger future
Council 5’s Executive Board recommended the increase and promoted the vote as a decision about what kind of future AFSCME members will have in Minnesota.

“The most important convention before today was when we decided to unify,” executive director Eliot Seide said before the vote. “We unified and we didn’t become Wisconsin. "You have to decide: Are we going to be stronger, or are we going to be weaker? Are we going to fight or are we going to disappear into oblivion like other unions?”

The Executive Board says the increase will prevent years of projected budget deficits, prevent staff layoffs and service cuts, and provide resources for additional leadership training at the local level.

Good work by locals, individuals rewarded
Scott County Local 2440 won the 2014 Mike Buesing Local Union Development Award. Through a series of escalating actions, members of this local fought off management’s attempts to eliminate general wage increases. The employer’s proposal would have made all pay raises arbitrary and left raises completely in the hands of supervisors.

Members’ actions in the workplace expanded into a show of force at a County Board meeting. More than 125 members and fee-payers showed up, demanding the general increase. County commissioners were so convinced that they backed the union. The result: A three-year contract with across-the-board raises each year – and a local more engaged and active than ever.

Cindy Yund, of Cambridge DHS Local 390, won the 2014 Jerry Wurf Organizing Award. Yund has made hundreds of house calls as a volunteer member organizer working on Council 5’s public-sector, private-sector, and child-care campaigns.

Dennis Frazier, of Arrowhead Region Local 66, won the 2014 Communications Award. Frazier was praised for his advocacy of raising the state’s minimum wage and other Council 5 issues.
Melissa Degidio, MnSCU Local 4001 at St. Paul College, takes part in a crowded state sector caucus.

Delegates from Department of Public Safety Local 3142 find a reason to celebrate.

Sharice McCain, University of Minnesota Clerical Workers Local 3800, sings the National Anthem.

Jackie Spanjers and Chad Purvis, both of Anoka DHS Local 1307, meet with other state employees.

Ashley Lokensgard, Met Council Local 668, and Mark Lawson, Lake Owatonna Residence Local 797, attend an East Metro delegate meeting.

Katherine Bartz, Rochester DOT Local 868, discusses what it takes to get members to become politically active.

During a breakout session, Jacqueline Poole, Hennepin County Human Services Local 34, discusses the extra challenges that women face economically.

Gov. Mark Dayton talks with John Oas, from Rochester DOT Local 868, while Janice Gasper, Anoka DHS Local 1307, Brian Bruckhoff, Mankato DOT Local 280; and Juan Sanchez, Owatonna DOT Local 106, wait in line.

See it for yourself

If you missed the convention (or want to share or relive highlights), we’ve got it covered. Videos include:

- Delegates pledging to fight for our union’s future.
- Warnings from Wisconsin AFSCME leader Boyd McCamish about life without collective bargaining.
- Speeches from Gov. Mark Dayton, AFSCME International president Lee Saunders, and others.
- Slideshows highlighting 10 years of Council 5 members in action, and paying tribute to outgoing vice president Clifford Poehler.

You can view all the videos on Council 5’s YouTube channel: Go to afscmemn.org, then scroll down the left column and click the YouTube icon.

Photos: For more than 150 pictures of your brothers and sisters in action, see Council 5’s Flickr site. Go to: www.flickr.com/photos/afscmemn; click “Albums,” then click “2014 Council 5 Convention.”

New board members elected

Delegates elected 10 new Executive Board members to serve two-year terms; re-elected president Judy Wahlberg and secretary Mary Falk; elected current treasurer Mike Lindholt as vice president; and elected current board member Nickson Nyankabaria as the new treasurer.

All four chair officers ran unopposed. Lindholt replaces Clifford Poehler, who is retiring.

The new Executive Board members:

- Melanie Castellano-Swanson, Local 2474, District 5 (East Metro)
- Sara Chamberlain, Local 390, State Sector
- Destiny Dusosky, Local 753, District 4 (Central)
- Eric Heese, Local 404, District 3 (South)
- John Hillyard, Local 600, State Sector
- Martin Hoerth, Local 844, K-12 Sector
- Anna Kotkan, Local 1988, State Sector
- Eric Matson, Local 2829, District 6 (West Metro)
- Sarah Maxwell, Local 9, District 6 (West Metro)
- Travis Ottum, Local 600, District 5 (East Metro)

Delegates also re-elected 28 board members. A complete list is on Page 2.
Minnesota rises above the tide

Victories by Gov. Mark Dayton, Sen. Al Franken, and Congressman Rick Nolan on Nov. 4 showed the rest of the country that bold champions of working families win elections. Minnesota bucked the red tide of corporate money that gave Republicans control of Congress and the governors’ offices in every other Midwestern state.

Minnesota unions ran their biggest midterm electoral program ever – and it made a difference. AFSCME members alone put in more than 1,000 shifts on the phone or knocking on doors to get out the vote. There weren’t enough of us to overcome the outside money and negative advertising in 10 House districts in Greater Minnesota. That makes it harder to move initiatives such as fixing transportation. But our efforts won all but one competitive House district in the Twin Cities suburbs and every statewide office. We know that Gov. Dayton and a pro-worker Senate will protect our right to bargain collectively for a better life.

Executive director Eliot Seide says, “We’re living proof that when union members vote, working families win.”

Joining the fight to end inequity

“Equal protection under the law is not an idea; it is a foundation and cornerstone of American democracy,” the founder of the Moral Mondays movement told 250 union members and others at a march through downtown Minneapolis. “These are not just policy issues,” the Rev. William Barber II said. “These are not just left vs. right debates. These are not conservative vs. liberal discussions. These are the centerpieces of our deepest traditions of faith, our values, our sense of morality, and the very soul of our democracy.”

Barber was in Minneapolis to challenge a state that has some of the worst gaps in the nation in education, employment, and economic opportunity for people of color.

Turning transportation into a priority

Council 5 members and retirees teamed with Move MN partners to collect more than 2,800 signatures at the State Fair, urging legislators to fix transportation funding in 2015.

As part of the Move MN coalition, AFSCME is promoting balanced, long-term investments in roads, bridges, transit, and bike and pedestrian facilities. That kind of commitment will protect our jobs at MnDOT, Met Council, and state and local governments; provide dedicated, sustainable revenue for transportation projects; and make sure Minnesota has the infrastructure to support a future with more jobs and a high quality of life.

AFSCME members gather around Local 915’s Mike Keapproth to help celebrate his award for outstanding volunteer work.

Keapproth was honored for his leadership of Council 5’s Veterans Initiative. In its first six years, the Initiative raised more than $100,000. The money improves facilities and services at Minnesota’s state-run Veterans Homes in Fergus Falls, Hastings, Luverne, Minneapolis, and Silver Bay. The donations pay for equipment and programs that the homes cannot afford in their own budgets.

11 members elected to AFL-CIO General Board

Eleven Council 5 members were elected to the Minnesota AFL-CIO’s 46-member General Board during the state labor federation’s convention in St. Paul. In addition, Council 5 executive director Eliot Seide and retired Local 66 president Alan Netland were appointed to the 23-member Executive Board.

Scholarships build toward the future

The deadline to apply for AFSCME’s Family Scholarship is Dec. 31. The renewable, $2,000 scholarships are for current high-school seniors who graduate in 2015. For application details and full eligibility requirements, go to www.afscme.org/family.

Council 5 announces winners: Congratulations to these winners of annual Council 5 scholarships:

• Elena Bisoc, of Minneapolis Veterans Home Local 144, Robert Norberg Scholarship. She is attending St. Paul College.
• Jessica Vitalis, of MnSCU Local 4001, Robert Norberg Scholarship. She is attending Century College.
• Callista DePauw, Richard Patterson Scholarship. Callista is the daughter of Catherine Rinaldo, of Hennepin County Human Services Local 34. Callista attends the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.
• Kelly Jean Running, Clarence J. Moss Scholarship. Kelly is the daughter of Robert Running, of City of Maplewood Local 2725. Kelly attends the University of Minnesota.

Crash kills Local 1574 president

Michael Dolney – a Council 5 Executive Board member, president of Brainerd DHS Local 1574, and General Board member of the Minnesota AFL-CIO – was killed Oct. 25 when a pickup truck hit his motorcycle on Highway 10 near his home in Randall. Dolney was 45.

Elyse Ward, of MnSCU Local 3998, joins the Minneapolis march against inequity.

“The reality is, the costs are too high if we don’t address systemic racism and poverty,” he said. “It costs us our integrity as a nation. It costs us our soul as a nation.”

Barber said, “These are not just left vs. right debates. These are not conservative vs. liberal discussions. These are the centerpieces of our deepest traditions of faith, our values, our sense of morality, and the very soul of our democracy.”

Barber was in Minneapolis to challenge a state that has some of the worst gaps in the nation in education, employment, and economic opportunity for people of color.

Lynn Page, of Bemidji DOT Local 637, talks with fairgoers about the need for reliable transportation funding.

Working in Minnesota Life Bridge feels like a nonstop expedition. Local 390’s Jesse Gillespie says, “Every day is an incredibly unstable, uncharted environment.”

Pushing to keep staff safe

More than two dozen members of Local 390 and other DHS locals crammed into a conference room on the old METO campus in Cambridge, challenging administrators of the Minnesota Life Bridge program to care as much about the well-being of staff as they care about the well-being of patients.

The members work in group homes. They care for residents with, in DHS’ own words, “developmental disabilities who exhibit severe behaviors that represent a risk to public safety.” AFSCME members described life-threatening incidents in which residents tried to stab one with a butcher knife or grabbed the wheel of a van in freeway traffic. Yet administrators’ default reaction, staff say, is to question what they – not the resident – did wrong.

Minnesota Life Bridge needs to ramp up its front-line staff, safety support, and real-world training, AFSCME members told deputy commissioner Anne Barry and others. “We just don’t feel like they’re committed to keeping us safe,” says Local 390’s David Ruth. “It’s not just a Minnesota Life Bridge issue. This is a statewide issue.”

SCHOLARSHIP

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CRASH KILLS

Local 1574 president

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Probation officers gain strength by uniting with AFSCME

Probation officers in Dakota County already had a union. That wasn't enough. So they voted overwhelmingly this summer to affiliate their independent union with AFSCME.

They hope that, by working arm in arm with Human Services Local 306 and Library Local 693, they can improve the situation for all county workers. “We’re hoping to find our collective strength,” says Brad VanderVegt, an adult probation officer. Combined, the three AFSCME locals represent almost half the county workforce.

Probation officers formed the Dakota County Community Corrections Association in 2007. This year, it became obvious it was time to do more, says Kaaren Hensrud, who works in the juvenile unit.

Over the past few years, more and more pay became based on performance reviews, she says. The county’s health-insurance benefit began eroding. The county reorganized job classifications and assignments, which uprooted a lot of workers. “It felt like the employees really had no control or input or anything,” Hensrud says.

Plus, contract negotiations were going nowhere. “There were other bargaining units out there working hard for their members, and we weren’t connected,” says Dan Finley, an assistant probation officer at the juvenile lock-up. “We were really an island unto ourselves. We lacked the resources and the size that, in the larger context, a broader affiliation could bring us.”

Probation officers formed the Dakota County Community Corrections Local 450. The final decision to affiliate was relatively smooth and seamless, Hensrud says. Members built a general consensus through a lot of one-on-one discussion. When members voted in June, there was a huge turnout, and 89 percent chose AFSCME. The final vote: 97-12.

Since affiliating, probation officers have realized two other advantages of joining AFSCME. One is the expertise and training available through Council 5.

“Probation officers are the only county employees who work directly with the public,” says VanderVegt. “When you’re going up against a manager where you haven’t felt as strong as you wanted to, training is important,” Hensrud says.

The second advantage is being part of a union that is politically active and savvy. “Some of the new commissioner candidates were seeking endorsements from us,” VanderVegt says.

“And therein lies the power. They weren’t seeking endorsements when we were just the association.”

Welcome to AFSCME

Group home workers at Stepping Stones in the Duluth area

Members of Dakota County Community Corrections, who formed Local 450

Total members organized in Council 5 in 2014

80 percent of workers voted to join AFSCME. The final vote: 94-22.

Now, as they prepare to negotiate their first contract, Jakowski says: “I never expected us to be here. But this is the right thing to do. It’s right for current employees, and it’s right for everyone following us.”

Probation officers gained strength by uniting with AFSCME

Probation officers gained strength by uniting with AFSCME in an overwhelming election victory.

The new members work at 16 group homes in the Duluth area and at a day program in Hermantown. The workers provide residential and support services for adults with traumatic brain injury or mental illness. “Basically, we try to provide them the most normal life possible given the circumstances,” says John Pietz, a crisis float who helped lead the union drive.

Many of Stepping Stones’ residents come from secure state sites such as Anoka Metro Regional Treatment Center. Council 5 represents hundreds of workers at such state facilities, but workers at Stepping Stones are the first members in private group homes in Minnesota.

Pay dead-ends quickly Pietz and his friend and co-worker, Cody Jakowski, hope a union can help transform what are now demanding but low-paying, dead-end jobs. “That is a big thing,” Pietz says. “Because we do have a pretty cool job. We get to help people.”

Most of their co-workers are in their 20s. They’re trying to pay their way through college or starting families – and finding it impossible to make ends meet, Pietz says.

High turnover ultimately hurts residents, they say, because it replaces consistency with instability. “We’re not working with machines,” Jakowski says. “We’re working with people who don’t have the ability to adapt, to build trust, the way you would.” Upheaval in homes makes it harder for residents to move toward independent living, he says.

St. Louis County is filled with group homes like Stepping Stones, Pietz says. That makes it even more important to improve wages and working conditions in ways that turn the jobs into careers.

Trusted leaders Jakowski and Pietz learned about AFSCME – and the advantages of a union job – through former co-worker Aaron Allen, who now is a member of DHS Local 1092 in Moose Lake.

In leading the campaign at Stepping Stones, the duo had one key edge: As crisis staff, they regularly defuse situations at all 16 houses. Co-workers know them, see them in action, and trust them. So, when they stressed keeping the union drive secret, co-workers listened. “Not a peep,” Jakowski says.

By the time workers filed for the election, 70 percent had signed union cards. But management hadn’t caught a whiff of what was going on.

Company president Stephanie Erickson scrambled to convince workers they were all “a big family.” But not everything was so kumbaya. In private, management shunned Jakowski and Pietz. Then, in a final attempt to undermine the election, management tried to reclassify the two of them and 13 co-workers as supervisors. That would have pulled them out of the bargaining unit.

The move did st all the election. But in a ruling from the National Labor Relations Board, the company went 0 for 15. When the election finally took place in September, management lost again: More than 1,065 workers voted in favor of AFSCME. The final vote: 97-12.

Someone to be reckoned with Since affiliating, probation officers have realized two other advantages of joining AFSCME. One is the expertise and training available through Council 5.

“The second advantage is being part of a union that is politically active and savvy,” VanderVegt says.

Made for each other Finley compared notes with a friend, Tim Blaze, of AFSCME Local 8 in community corrections in Ramsey County. Other members explored other affiliation options. The possibility of “strength in numbers, power in unity” certainly favored AFSCME. But so did the union’s culture. “We were looking for another boss,” VanderVegt says. “We were looking for a partner.”

In the end, Finley says, “AFSCME just fit us better. There was a vision of the future and how to get there, and it just made sense.”

The final decision to affiliate was relatively smooth and seamless, Hensrud says. Members built a general consensus through a lot of one-on-one discussion. When members voted in June, there was a huge turnout, and 89 percent chose AFSCME. The final vote: 97-12.

Probation officers gain strength by uniting with AFSCME
Kidney donor gives a piece of her heart, too

Local 9’s Kim Johnson just had to disagree. She was about to donate a kidney, so was spending a whole day meeting with surgeons at the University of Minnesota Medical Center–Fairview. “They keep telling you: ‘You’re getting nothing from this,’” Johnson says. “They pound it into your head.” After all, selling a kidney is illegal in the United States.

But Johnson told the surgeons: “You’re wrong. I am getting something from this: I’m giving somebody a chance to live.”

So, on Oct. 17 – after more than a month of delays – Johnson donated her left kidney to Joanie Kocher, who is a friend of her roommate. From Day One, the transplant seemed to be a complete success.

“It’s a good feeling – it’s fantastic,” says Johnson, the vice president of Local 9 and a 28-year Minneapolis employee in the water department. “The kidney is a rock star. Joanie started producing urine right away. They said they’d never seen a kidney work so quickly.”

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After Johnson met Kocher in April, she decided to try to help. She went through six weeks of tests and interviews. The process finally verified that Johnson not only was a medical match to donate a kidney, but could handle the logistical and mental challenges as well. “I called her and said, ‘You want a piece of me?’” Johnson says.

Making it all possible

In Johnson’s case, she was not the only AFSCME member involved. Local 1164 members such as Tiffany West are also mobilizing workers’ families.

Johnson first fill out an application, which screens their physical and psychological health. West and a nurse coordinator personally process all applications. They handle the correspondence, lab results, logistics, and hand-holding that can make a transplant successful.

Often, West says, donors apply with the hope of donating to a specific person. In Johnson’s case, that worked.

If donors are not a medical match, West then works with them about entering the “paired exchange” program. That national registry improves the chances of finding matches for the donors and recipients alike.

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Members, locals come through for those in need

Local 1164’s Tiffany West handles much of the record-keeping in the donor process.

Medical Center’s Transplant Center, Local 1164 members such as Tiffany West are part of a team that guides applicants through the process of donating a kidney, liver, or other organ. Living donors now account for about half the 200 kidney transplants that the center does each year.

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allow the food shelf to continue buying milk even after a state subsidy ran out this fall, and to offset a decline in meat donations from grocers. PowerPack is a joint program of the Centennial Community Food Shelf and Centennial School District.