President's Message: January 2020

Lisa Conley
Local 212 President

I had the privilege of being present when my nephew’s wife, a native of Taiwan, became a U.S. citizen on January 9. During the ceremony, the presiding judge spoke of his great-great-grandparents’ experience emigrating from Europe and their subsequent struggle to build a life here in Wisconsin. He shared examples of his ancestors’ hard-work, sacrifices, set-backs and triumphs, emphasizing how they always looked forward and never gave up. They wanted the lives of their children and later generations to be better than what they had experienced thus far in theirs.

I, of course, drifted into thoughts of my MATC students, many of whom are immigrants or children of immigrants. While reflecting on student stories of perseverance and triumph, I was brought back to attention when the judge unfolded and held up a large and somewhat tattered paper—the naturalization document of one of his great-great-grandparents that he always brought to citizenship ceremonies over which he presided.

The judge then shared that he couldn’t help but wonder what this ancestor, someone who toiled from dawn until dusk farming a small plot of land in order to support his family, would think seeing his descendant up there in black robes ushering in a new wave of U.S. citizens. The judge then gave the best tribute possible, acknowledging that he owed who he is and what he has to the foundation built by his great-great-grandfather and all those coming before him.

At the very same moment, the union emblem on the back of the jacket of a man sitting in the gallery caught my eye. This caused my thoughts to connect to those who won Local 212’s first contract by sacrificing pay, family stability and even their health while on strike for 40 days in 1968-1969. Like the judge, current Local 212 members stand on the shoulders of those who came before us—those who fought to win a voice at work, fair treatment, professional status and family-supporting pay and benefits via the strike, as well as all those who have fought to preserve and expand upon those things ever since.

Unfortunately, Guided Pathways-related negative experiences and the MATC District Board’s recent compensation study decision remind us that the fight for those rights continues today.

Toward the end of his presentation, the judge asked the newly minted U.S. citizens to visualize one of their descendants sitting in his place wearing a black robe and presiding over a ceremony congratulating people just like them. He urged the new citizens to never forget that their descendants would be in that position thanks to the strong foundation they had built and left behind.

Similarly, as union members it is incumbent upon us to acknowledge and protect the strong foundation left to us by earlier union activists. It is up to us to “stick with our union” during these trying times, to remain united and vigilant, to share our time and talents and to support each other in calling out injustices, demanding a voice at work.

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Local 212 Has a Jolly Holiday Party at Best Place

AFT-Wisconsin PSRP Vice President and Local 212 Solidarity Chair Nyia Sallee came off the AFT-Wisconsin Convention to organize a wonderful holiday party.

Sallee offers this message for the new year: "Uniting to protect, ensure, and preserve education opportunities while strengthening the brotherhood/sisterhood of our union is one of the goals of the AFT-Wisconsin Convention. Seeing history before your eyes is an honor and privilege that surpasses reading about it. However, if you don’t know AFT-Wisconsin’s union history, please take time to trace our union roots. Always thinking about the needs of others is the foundation of past board officials and our current board officials. To know that we’re a selfless union ensures the fight for unions will continue. In 2020, remember the reason for the union. It’s not about me or you but about us."

Local 212 members, other colleagues, family and friends have fun at Best Place at the Historic Pabst Brewery; state senator and candidate for Milwaukee County Executive Chris Larson stops by. Photos: Kevin Mulvenna
MATC Becomes ‘Open Range,’ Eliminates Salary Schedule

Michael Stock
Newsletter Editor

Lisa Conley fires up faculty and paraprofessionals at a luncheon on Coordination Day January 17. Photo: Michael Stock

Local 212 Executive VP Kevin Mulvena, with a bullhorn, encourages members who gathered downtown outside of the MATC District Board meeting December 17.

On the evening of December 17, the MATC District Board voted to replace the step-and-class system and cut pay for part-time faculty hired in the future.

New part-time faculty will earn 84 instead of 102.4 hours per three-credit course.

Employees watched the entire meeting streamed live in the auditorium, some filtering in between classes, but the crowd swelled during the half hour of public comment.

Richard Cohn, part-time faculty in ESL and Local 212 VP for Part-Time Faculty, appealed to the board to consider that “...whether or not an instructor is full or part-time, students expect and deserve the best” and pointed out that regardless of higher hourly wages, new part-time faculty would have to serve MATC’s students with less compensation for prep.

Local 212 leadership have said they anticipated this result.

The previous week, Local 212 had held a meeting for part-time faculty to share information about the prevailing step-and-class system, Local 212’s recommendation and the compensation study’s recommendations that were before the board. Attendees also had a forum to share their views.

Lisa Conley, Local 212 President, told the room of part-time faculty and some of their full-time colleagues, “There’s nothing wrong with a professional looking for respect.”

“Healthy and supported” faculty can invest more time into being a better teacher, she said.

Local 212 leadership kicked off the spring semester with Town Hall events across campuses open to all bargaining units, criticizing an abundance of unanswered questions in the wake of the board’s choice and requesting that all Local 212 members give as much of their “time and talents” as possible toward building a legacy at MATC. Contact the Local 212 office to find out how to get involved.

Workers’ Rights to Go the Way of the Dinosaur at MPM?

Milwaukee Public Museum employees, retirees, museum members and trade union allies picket on Saturday, January 18, the first day of Milwaukee Museum Week. In contract negotiations, AFSCME Local 526 is fighting for “livable wages” and “fair raises” and to prevent onerous healthcare costs. Speakers included county supervisor and Local 212 member Steven Shea and state senator and candidate for Milwaukee County Executive Chris Larson. Photo: Michael Stock
Honoring MLK

Union activists honored the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at Milwaukee events, like UAW Local 469’s celebration on January 11 at Laborers’ Local 113 Hall and the Justice Program and March on January 20 sponsored by St. Francis of Assisi Parish, Peace Action WI, Voces de la Frontera and others. Local 212 members Brian Verdin and Jim Carpenter joined the march. Carpenter addresses the crowd gathered at King’s statue (below). Photo: Sue Ruggles

Help MATC Students with Financial Hardship

The second annual FAST Fund gala and silent auction is on Friday, February 21 at Flores Hall, catered by Antigua. Last year, the fund helped 157 students stay enrolled so that they could graduate. This year, we have already helped 146. You can support this work by attending the auction and bidding on this year’s excellent items. Get your tickets now.

Questions? Call the FAST fund office (414) 765-0910 x 14.

Letter to the Editor

I wanted to personally say thanks to Michael Rosen for his article “Students Shouldn’t Have to Wait for Their Money” (October 2019) regarding financial aid disbursements. This is a timely topic for our family that will continue to have a negative impact on us.

As a single mom, all four of my children have had to use financial aid to fund their education. My youngest son started at MATC for the first time this fall, and I was shocked to learn the disbursement timeline. Not only does October seem unreasonable, but it was not the full award. The remaining half was issued November 8 or even longer if you did not have direct deposit. The same will happen in the spring semester, with the first disbursement on March 6 [all grants and the first half of loans] and the second on April 3 [the remaining half of loans]. Simply because of the delay of the financial aid, I have to lend him money from my savings. While we are fortunate that I regularly save for the summer months, it puts an unnecessary stress on our finances.

We also know, first hand, that other schools do not have such delays. My other son attends UW-La Crosse, and his financial aid is dispersed on the first day of each semester with the balance deposited into his account within two to three days. In addition, my two daughters attended other universities with similar timelines.

Thank you, again, for bringing this issue to light in the newsletter.

-Kelly J. Monroe, Instructor, Funeral Service Department

In Memoriam

Local 212 is fortunate to have known Elliott Schnackenberg and Mike Milliren, who have passed away recently.

Schnackenberg was a veteran of the 1968-1969 strike that won union recognition for Local 212.

Schnackenberg was member Sue Ruggles’s favorite instructor when she was a student at MATC; he was on the hiring committee for the job that launched Ruggles’s photography career, and he defended her when the administration tried to eliminate her position. A great teacher and mentor, he encouraged students every step of the way.

Milliren served on the Local 212 Executive Board. He was always a steadying influence and provided dependable leadership on the budget and bylaws.

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and adherence to true best practices and protecting future workers’ best interests, including those related to pay and benefits. In doing so, we grow a strong and vibrant organization and provide a solid foundation upon which those coming after us can build better futures for Local 212 members and their families and also the students and communities that we serve.

This all boils down to the fact that, like democracy, union membership is not a spectator sport. Therefore, my question for Local 212’s current members is: Are you in for the work before us, and, if so, what are you willing to do to strengthen and grow our union and to protect the long-held workplace rights we value and deserve?

Stay in the Loop

Check your email for 212 Tuesdays.

Text @ftlo to B1010 for notifications.

newslettereditor@local212.org