

The Voice Of Oklahoma's State Employees

The **ADVOCATE**



January 2007

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

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**Task Force Will
Review OPEA Bylaws
Page 5**

**OPEA At The Capitol
Page 7**

**Association Brings
State Employees In
From The Cold
Page 8**

Never A Finish Line

Page 4



MAKING A DIFFERENCE ...

New Members • The following people recently chose to get involved by joining the Oklahoma Public Employees Association.

Kesha Alix	John Eakle	Stephanie Jackson	Elia Mirhosseini	Peggy Stoltenberg
Alvin Alsop	April Ford	Jonathan Janos	Janet Moore	Paul Stoy
Hettie Anderson	James Ford	Kendra Kilgore	Lawanda Moore	Rachelle Sturdevant
Travis Ary	William Forehand	Naomi Kindred	Daryl Morgan	Sheena Suggs
Judy Barrett	Mildred Frederick	Ellen King	Bonnie Morris	Megan Thomas
Brandon Bartley	Denwa Fures	Laurita Kirksey	Rusty Muns	Anna Thompson
Vincent Beck	Elizabeth Gardenhire	James Lane	Marilyn Murphy	Ellen Totimeh
Judy Bell	Jimmie George	Lindsey Lawson	Gregory Myner	Elizabeth Van Brunt
Julia Bennett	Ashley Geres	Carla Ledford	Wendy Normandin	Cynthia Vick
Robin Bennett	Pamela Ghali	Ben Lehw	Marva Olney	Nathan Warden
Johnnie Blanket	Eric Giles	Austin Little	Lori Parker	Duwane Ware
Leticia Bollinger	Sarah Girard	John Locklear	Logan Phillips	Chloe Watson
Jeremy Briscoe	Randy Glancy	Nancy Locklear	Gloria Pollard	Dorothy Webb
Jesus Brito	Helen Goforth	Amanda Lomonaco	Kelley Pryor	Jane Wheeler
Paula Brooks	Jamie Good	Blake Long	Jimmy Pulliam	Lora Williams
Jennifer Brown	Janet Greene	Karl Lovert	Eric Reece	Lori Williams
Sara Brown	Eric Guthrie	Sheila Lowery	Charles Rosser	Steven Williams
Carl Cardwell	Lisa Haggard	Marcella Lowry	Josue Santiago	Susan Williamson
Jerry Carter	Miranda Hall	Serina Madden	Thomas Schmidt	Tisha Willson
James Caskey	Jill Hansen	Ruth Manning	Jo Ann Schoof	Donna Wimberley
Ismael Colmeniss	Kayla Harrell	Lorien Martinez	Connie Shaw	Hayley Wimsey
Travis Cope	Amanda Hatch	Lindel McCain	Charlotte Shrock	Clayton Woody
John Cottenglen	Kerryl Helton	Chad McDonald	Janet Slaten	Alicia Wright
Raphard Cox	Suzie Hemphill	Kimberly McFeeters	Linda Smith	Patricia Wyers
Gayle Crane	Jason Henrichs	Randel McKee	Brian Stanglin	Claire Zevnik-Cline
Casey Davis	Shonda Hicks	Cathy Mclean	Michael Stapleton	Susie Ziegler
Jeannett Duff	Sheila Huiatt	Ronni McQueen	David Stephens	Sandra Zoski
Amanda Dunlap	Mary Anne Jackson			

15-Year Anniversaries • These OPEA members reached their 15th anniversary with the Association during the past month.

Paula Anderson	Lhea Harris	Terri Metscher	Edward Smith
Haskell Baugh	Lisa Hughes	Jerry Nelson	Alva Summers
Cecil Burns	Jamie Johnston	Sammy O'Neal	Ty Todd
Don Cox	Patrick Kelley	Edythe Robinson	Melody Turpin
Jerry Dial	Phyllis Klein	Rhonda Rolf	Cherry Williams
Sharyn Ferre	Brenda London Smith	Jack Sanders	Mattie Williams
Kirk Goins	Tommy McDaniel		



IN THIS MONTH'S ADVOCATE ...

Making A Difference

A list of new OPEA members and those who have been with the Association for 15 years. **2**

We Must Seize The Moment

Moore Comments
By OPEA President Billy Moore . . . **4**

There Is No Finish Line

Frontlines
By OPEA Interim Executive Director Scott Barger **4**

OPEA Will Host DHS

Summit Feb. 3. **6**

Where In The World Is Opie? **8**

State Struggles To Compete For Experienced Employees **9**

Mediation Can Make Up For Lack Of Communication

Burden of Proof
By OPEA General Counsel Melinda Alizadeh-Fard **10**

Communication And Trust Are Critical To Our Success

By Justin Jones, Director of the Oklahoma Department of Corrections and an OPEA member **11**

ASPA Seeks Nominations For Administrator Of The Year **13**

OPEA's Legislative Program . . . **14**

Members Can Earn Cash During Recruitment Drive **15**

Dates To Remember **15**

Task Force Will Review OPEA Bylaws

A task force that will make recommendations concerning possible changes in OPEA's bylaws started its work at a Jan 6 meeting. **Page 5**

OPEA At The Capitol

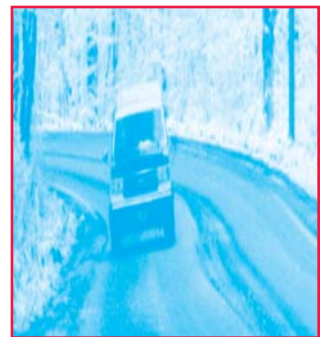
A pictorial look at OPEA's efforts to represent state employees at the state Capitol. **Page 7**

Association Brings State Employees In From The Cold

Thanks to the Oklahoma Public Employees Association, state policy that left state employees out in the cold during a recent snowstorm has been changed. **Page 8**

OPEA Visits Troubled Juvenile Facility

News coming out of the Lloyd E. Rader juvenile facility in Sand Springs has been far from good. In addition to other problems, the facility has been plagued by staffing issues. **Page 13**



The Advocate

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We Must Seize The Moment

As I have settled into my first term as OPEA president and have had the opportunity to meet and speak to members from all walks of life, there seems to be a common thread that unites their vision of our organization: optimism, opportunity and promise.



OPEA is poised to achieve some of the most consistent victories in the history of the organization. Our team is having unprecedented, positive meetings almost daily with Senate and House leaders of both parties, as well as with several officials in the executive branch. From what I hear, OPEA has attained a new level of respect at the Capitol, one that will most certainly pay off as we present our agenda to the Legislature.

But it has to be a team effort. We need active members. We need new members.

For OPEA to fulfill its members' dreams, we must all do three things: Recruit, lobby and stay informed.

Recruit ...

With the recent snow-day win, as well as other significant victories recently secured by this Association, there is no better time to bring new members into the fold. The leave this

Moore Comments

By Billy Moore
OPEA President

organization recovered for nonessential employees would pay more than a year's dues. When you think about it, the one third of state employees who belong to OPEA make working conditions more tol-

erable for the other two thirds. Those non-members who have benefited over the years from the diligent efforts of OPEA need to join the team, but they have to be asked first. Applications are available on the Internet or at the OPEA office. Keep them with you and don't be shy about passing them out.

I recently had the privilege of attending a recruitment function for new correctional officers. Sharing the excitement of these new members is a great joy. They are the future of this organization.

Lobby ...

Every component of our ambitious legislative agenda is achievable if we hammer home our message to our legislators. Our lobby team will be working around the clock to keep both the legislative and executive branches aware of what we need or don't need passed, but when it comes down to it, they are going to listen to their constituents, the people who elected them to office.

Can you pick up a phone? Send an e-mail? Visit the Capitol? Your efforts to let our

(Continued On Page 6)

There Is No Finish Line

2006 is over and so is the annual meeting of the state Equalization Board. There's \$276.9 million in new revenue for this year's state budget. And the race is on!



Let me explain.

Early in 2006, I made a decision to run my first half marathon. I had been putting in quite a few miles each week and wanted to step up my game.

Several attorneys I knew were running half marathons, and they were older than me, so what the heck!

I remember running with one of them at the St. Patrick's Day run at Lake Hefner. It was a nice five-miler but nothing compared to the 13 miles I was to face in April at the Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon. We were running and talking, me searching for insight into long-distance racing and

Frontlines

By Scott Barger
OPEA Interim Executive Director

he humoring me as we ran along.

"You need to remember that there is no finish line," he said. "What are you talking about?" I asked. "That's a horrible concept!"

He went on to explain to me, between mile two and mile three, what he had learned about long-distance running. This advice seems valuable to me as I look at OPEA in 2007.

He explained to me that long-distance running is not about suffering until you can stop, it is about pacing yourself and keeping going. He went on to say that time pressures and fear of failure drive the majority of our decisions and, without a finish line, the energy to stay motivated diminishes greatly. In fact, without a race looming in front of them, most runners would blow off their training completely. He finished by saying that if you want to run the long distances, you have to stay motivated to train, stay motivated to improve and continue to accept races that challenge your personal best.

The same thing applies with

(Continued On Page 6)

Task Force Will Review OPEA Bylaws

A task force that will make recommendations concerning possible changes in OPEA's bylaws started its work at a Jan. 6 meeting at the Association's office in Oklahoma City.

"The task force will be reviewing the bylaws with the goal of moving forward with the values of transparency and member involvement," Co-chair Mark Collum commented. "The agencies in which we all work must be transparent and responsive to the citizens. OPEA will reflect the same values we expect from state government."

Task force members, OPEA leaders and longtime members appointed by the Board of Directors, started by identifying issues that should be reviewed, including the composition of the Board and qualifications and terms for Board members; the role of the executive director; financial and audit procedures; and coalitions and affiliations with other groups. One of the most important questions the task force will tackle concerns the structure of OPEA, whether the Association's foundation will be geographically-based chapters or agency-based councils.

From its inception until 2003, OPEA's structure was based on geography. Local chapters were comprised of state employees from various agencies in the community. Chapters came together in district councils and elected Board members from among their membership.

Currently, the OPEA membership is divided into agency-specific councils that represent employees from across the state in a specific agency or group of smaller agencies. Members in a council elect Board members from within their agencies.

"With the chapter system, we were more in touch with local members from all agencies," said task force Co-chair Christie Biggs. "Understanding the issues across agency lines in geographical districts promoted harmony on the Board. In addition, the local structure was in place for grass-roots political involvement."

The task force was divided into three committees to review specific sections of the OPEA bylaws and issues raised by task

force members and other OPEA members. As co-chairs of the task force, Biggs, a Veterans Affairs employee, and Collum, of the Department of Human Services, will be members of all committees. Both also serve on the OPEA Board.

Board member and former President Dixie Jackson of the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services will chair the Membership Committee. Other members are retiree Carl Long and Past President Steve Paris, of the Oklahoma Council for the Advancement of Science and Technology.

The Membership Committee will review Board procedures; the prohibition against union affiliation; the strike policy; membership categories; the voting rights of members; the authority and membership of the Board of Directors; quorum and proxy voting at Board meetings; Board committees; the term of office for the president; the scope of the Executive Committee; rules and voting rights at the Delegate Assembly; special meetings; meeting notices; implementation, interpretation and procedures for amending the bylaws; and the clause in non-profit bylaws that allows the remaining parts to stand if one section is determined to be invalid.

Bob Zapffe of the Department of Corrections will chair the Business Committee, which also includes Dana Webb of the Oklahoma State and Education Employees Group Insurance Board and Stanley Greene of the Department of Transportation.

The Business Committee will review dues; audits; contracts; and the role and responsibilities of the executive director.

The Organization Committee will be chaired by Sterling Zearley of the Department of Tourism and Recreation and will include Richard Deatherage of the Tax Commission, Betty Weber of the Department of Health and retiree

and past President Glenn Hightower. The Organization Committee will review council organization; council vs.

Right: Betty Weber, Christie Biggs and Mark Collum discuss issues at the Jan. 6 meeting on OPEA's bylaws. Below: Participants at the meeting included Trish Frazier, OPEA; Sterling Zearley, OTRD; Richard Deatherage, OTC; Melinda Alizadeh-Fard, OPEA; Steve Paris, OCAST; Scott Barger, OPEA interim executive director; Bob Zaffe, DOC; Christi Biggs, DVA; Mark Collum, DHS; Betty Weber, OSDH; and retiree Glenn Hightower.



chapter structure; the duties of the councils or chapters; local organization; chapters; local agencies working together; and grass-roots structure.

Committees will work through mid-March, and the task force will meet again March 24, compiling recommendations for the Board of Directors by April 21. The recommendations are expected to be approved by the Board by June 8 and submitted to the membership by July 1. Members will vote on the recommendations at the OPEA Delegate Assembly Aug. 19.

The task force is seeking input from the membership. To submit comments, contact Trish Frazier at the OPEA office at (405) 524-6764, (800) 880-6732 or trishf@opea.org. OPEA's bylaws are on the OPEA Web site at www.opea.org, in the "members only" section.

OPEA Will Host DHS Summit Feb. 3

The Oklahoma Public Employees Association Field Operations Summit will give Department of Human Services employees the opportunity to tell state leaders about the challenges they face serving the people of Oklahoma.

The Summit is scheduled for Feb. 3, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., at the OPEA office at 13 N.E. 28th St. in Oklahoma City. Following the Summit, the Association will prepare a report and recommendations that will be submitted to DHS Director

Howard Hendrick and legislators.

To make ends meet when the state was short on funds at the beginning of this decade, state agencies were forced to keep vacant positions open. As Oklahomans struggled through the recession, they relied heavily on services provided by DHS Field Operations. Even though the number of traditional welfare cases has decreased, meeting the needs of the working poor by supplementing their income with food stamps, Medicaid and child care has been a great challenge for Family

Support workers. In addition, according to OPEA Policy and Agency Relations Director Trish Frazier, increasing caseloads in DHS Field Operations are demanding more time and energy from already overburdened workers.

Those who want to attend the OPEA Field Operations Summit should contact Nancy Hughes at the OPEA office at (800) 880-6732, (405) 524-6764 or nancyh@opea.org. If you have any questions, contact Trish Frazier at trish@opea.org.

Frontlines ...

Continued From Page 4

OPEA. I have found that it doesn't matter to many state employees (except maybe those die-hard OPEA members) what we've done in the past. It simply doesn't matter to them how many miles we've put in or how many races OPEA has won. Many state employees want to know, "What are you going to do for me now?" Simply put, there is no finish line for OPEA.

I understand what they are saying because I am a former state employee. I simply don't agree with them. It's like claiming to be a runner and never having entered a race. You really don't have the perspective to judge OPEA's performance because you don't know the sacrifice it takes to win.

I have found that non-OPEA members are some of the most vocal state employees of all when they experience injustice. Ironically, they call OPEA and complain and expect us to wave a magic wand over the situation, even though they are not paying dues.

For instance, during the recent snow-day closings, I received 23 e-mails in a two-hour time span. These employees were complaining that having to take leave time was unfair. I absolutely agree, but, as I looked them up on the database, I was surprised and disappointed to learn that only three of them were actually members. Three out of 23. My response probably should have been, "You want OPEA to do what for you? If you really want to help yourself, you and many other state employees will join this organization."

I didn't respond that way, but I wonder sometimes if OPEA could ever cross the finish line fast enough for them. I hope so and I hope that OPEA has proven yet again that we are a solid, proactive organization and most certainly worthy of their investment. We are your way to get in the race.

Now the gun for the 2007 legislative session is about to go off. I hope you will read this and decide that it's time for you to get back in the race for a brighter future for state employees, or, if you are already running with us, to encourage a co-worker run alongside.

With nearly \$300 million available, the fastest will certainly get the prize. Let's make sure it's OPEA that crosses the finish line first.

Moore Comments ...

Continued From Page 4

legislative leaders know that you are a hard-working state employee and that you wholeheartedly support the OPEA Platform will pay off in spades.

Our regularly scheduled Lobby Day will be announced soon, but sometimes we need an emergency, last-minute effort to get one of our measures through the legislative process. Plan to attend and participate.

Keep Informed ...

OPEA staff members make it a priority to keep our Web site (www.opea.org) current, sometimes with hourly updates, to keep our membership abreast of news about the organization and state government. I suggest you make our Web site your home page so that you have the information you need to keep up on the latest developments that affect your workplace and pocketbook.

Look for your copy of *The Advocate* and OPEA's electronic bulletins as well. And it wouldn't hurt to keep up with current events on your own.

This is a new day at OPEA – a perfect opportunity for you to recommit yourself to the cause. After all, it is for your health and well-being that OPEA was created in the first place.

OPEA AT THE CAPITOL



Above: OPEA Interim Executive Director Scott Barger discusses state employee issues with House Democratic Caucus Chair Danny Morgan.



Above: Lt. Gov. Jari Askins talks with OPEA Policy and Agency Relations Director Trish Frazier, Interim Executive Director Scott Barger and lobbyist Jimmy Durant. Left: Barger speaks with State Treasurer Scott Meacham and Acting State Finance Director Tony Hutchinson.



Right: OPEA Interim Executive Director Scott Barger, right, meets with Speaker of the House Lance Cargill.



Thanks, OPEA

OPEA members voiced their opinion about the Association's successful efforts to change the state's inclement weather policy in countless e-mails and phone calls. Here are some samples.

"We appreciate the hard work and victory. Please thank everyone for this effort."
• *Iva*

"Many thanks for the efforts of OPEA – for standing up (again) for the state employees. OPEA member for 26 years!
• *Julia*

"Thank you for everything you did in getting the snow-day relief. You are wonderful. Also, knowing how hard you worked on that issue, you deserve a great hug from the whole state."
• *Kristi*

"This is a great achievement and now I am proud to be called an OPEA member."
• *George*

"As a new employee, I was impressed with the way OPEA went to bat to change snow days to administrative leave. You've earned my support."
• *Edward*

"Congratulations. This is why I joined a couple of years ago."
• *Barry*

"Thank you very much. I knew OPEA would be on top of things for us."
• *Sharita*

"Scott, thank you so much for your efforts in getting our leave back! I had no earthly idea OPEA was so instrumental in that. I figured Gov. Henry did it all on his own! Thanks again!"
• *Nancy*

"Woo Hoo"
• *Valerie*

"You may be one of my new best friends! Thank you so much for all you do for those who pay the dues and those who don't, too."
• *Diana*

Association Brings State Employees In From The Cold

Thanks to the Oklahoma Public Employees Association, state policy that left state employees out in the cold during a recent snowstorm has been changed.

The Office of Personnel Management released revisions to the state's inclement weather policy Jan. 8. OPEA requested action from the governor's office after state employees were forced to take annual or sick leave when their offices were shut down by a snowstorm Nov. 30 and Dec. 1.

In an executive order, Gov. Brad Henry gave employees administrative leave for the two days. He also directed OPM to revise the inclement weather rule so that employees whose offices are closed are provided administrative leave in the future, and essential employees who are forced to work will be compensated for braving the weather to ensure that critical state services are maintained. The new emergency rule, which went into effect immediately, provides paid

administrative leave for employees who are not required for providing basic minimum services. Employees who are deemed essential will receive administrative leave to be taken at another time, on a "straight-time" basis. No provisions were made for employees who are not scheduled to work when offices are closed by inclement weather.

"OPEA has sent a letter to Gov. Henry requesting that the rule be applied retroactively and essential employees who worked during the recent snowstorm receive two days of administrative leave," said

OPEA Interim Executive Director Scott Barger. "In all of our communications with state leaders, the Association has advocated for both essential and nonessential employees. While we are disappointed that essential employees have not yet received compensation for their dedication during the recent snowstorm, we are pleased that this issue has finally been resolved for all state employees in the future."

"We are pleased that this issue has finally been resolved for all state employees in the future."

– OPEA Interim Executive Director Scott Barger

Where In The World Is Opie?

Search and rescue operations are currently underway for "Opie," OPEA's beloved turtle mascot.

Not seen in public for quite some time, Opie was named several years ago by Audrey J. Taylor of Idabel in a statewide contest. The turtle was selected as the Association mascot because it's the only animal that has to stick its neck out to make progress, an action emulated by OPEA members.

Any sightings of this great representative of OPEA should be reported to Bud Elder at bude@opea.org.



State Struggles To Compete For Experienced Employees

As the baby boom generation approaches retirement age, private and public employers are facing a serious challenge. All employers, including federal, state and local governments, must be prepared as this group of 77 million Americans leaves the work force.

State agencies must compete with other government jurisdictions and with the private sector for experienced, qualified employees. Unfortunately, because it offers lower-than-average compensation, the state often cannot find workers to fill critical positions.

Market Pay

The Oklahoma Office of Personnel Management conducts an annual survey to compare state employee pay with the salaries of workers in the private sector and other government jurisdictions performing similar jobs.

	State Employee Pay	Consumer Price Index
2000	.. \$30,000 \$30,000
2001	.. \$30,000 \$30,630
2002	.. \$30,000 \$31,273
2003	.. \$30,000 \$31,899
2004	.. \$30,000 \$32,919
2005	.. \$32,100 \$34,335
2006	.. \$33,705 \$34,781
2007 ?? \$35,651

Based on an annual compounding of the CPI. The 2007 rate is 2.5 percent, or an average of the previous six years.

According to OPM's FY 2007 Compensation Report, the compensation for state employees trailed the market by an average of 11.9 percent in July 2006. The October pay raise narrowed the gap, but the economy is strong and other employers also have provided pay increases.

Since FY 2000, the pay for state employees

has averaged 14.4 percent below market. The gap was closed to 9 percent in FY 2002, following the \$2,000 pay raise in FY 2001. However, between FY 2001 and FY 2005, state employees were forced to endure more than four years without a pay increase.

Paycheck Erosion

Because of the lack of consistent pay increases, the average state employee making \$30,000 in 2000 has since lost 6.5 percent, or \$1,946, in purchasing power from his or her paycheck. Table 1 compares average state employee pay since 2000 with the Consumer Price Index.

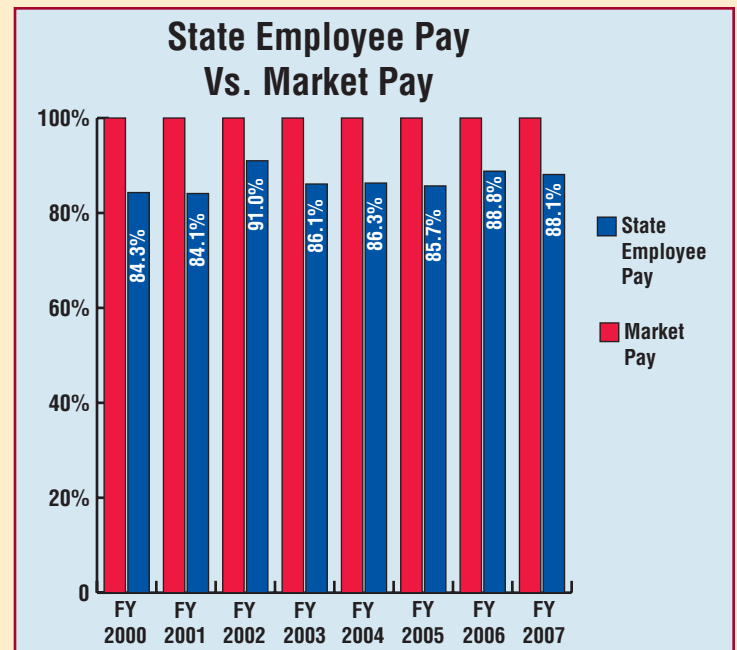
An Aging Work Force

Oklahoma state government is facing a crisis in recruitment and retention as the work force ages. Currently, the average age of Oklahoma state government employees is 45 years. Without competitive pay to recruit new workers and a plan of continuous improvement for retention, state agencies will not be able to fill their ranks with qualified workers to serve the people of Oklahoma.

According to the Office of Personnel Management, much of the state work force is approaching retirement eligibility. In three years, 22 percent of the work force will be eligible for retirement, a figure that will rise to 31 percent in five years. Without competitive pay and a plan to continually improve state employee compensation, the state cannot recruit and retain a sufficient work force to replace the generation of employees preparing to leave state service.

Turnover

With pay so far below market, staffing shortages and record numbers of employees eligible to retire, Oklahoma state agencies suffer from high turnover. Since it takes an estimated two years for an employee to gain the expertise to do most jobs well, the citizens of our great state are deprived of the experienced work force necessary to deliver quality services. The Oklahoma Office of Personnel Management estimates that turnover costs state government \$80 million a year.



Mediation Can Make Up For A Lack Of Communication

“What we’ve got here is failure to communicate.”

That famous line from the 1967 movie “Cool Hand Luke” summarizes one of the most common reasons for misunderstandings and is one of the primary reasons mediation is so successful.



State employees who are classified have access to the full gamut of services provided by the Merit Protection Commission. One service provided by the MPC, voluntary mediation, is also available to unclassified employees.

What is mediation?

Mediation is a voluntary, non-binding, informal settlement conference at which the parties to a dispute – and often their

Burden Of Proof By Melinda Alizadeh-Fard OPEA General Counsel

representatives, acting in an advisory role – and a neutral mediator negotiate a settlement both parties can live with. Both sides must agree to participate, hence the term voluntary mediation,

which isn’t the same as the grievance or appeals processes set forth in the MPC rules.

The MPC’s Voluntary Mediation Program helps resolve employment-related conflicts and disputes. Participants are not required to have filed a grievance or appeal, and going through VMP does not extend the filing deadlines for those processes. However, voluntary mediation often takes place during the course of a grievance or appeal, and the time limits are suspended during the voluntary mediation process to give the parties an opportunity to resolve the dispute in a less formal and more confidential setting.

Participating in the Voluntary Mediation Program gives employees the chance to work

(Continued On Page 12)

Did you know that Oklahoma Public Employees could save up to \$327.96 or more a year on auto insurance?



You may already know that Oklahoma Public Employees can get a special group discount on auto insurance through Liberty Mutual’s Group Savings Plus® program.* But did you know that Group Savings Plus offers many other discounts on both auto and home insurance? In fact, you could save up to \$327.96 or more a year on auto insurance alone.** And you could save even more by insuring your home as well.

To learn more about all the valuable savings and benefits available through Group Savings Plus, call today.

Call **1-800-225-8281** for the Liberty Mutual office nearest you or visit www.libertymutual.com/lm/oepa.

*Discounts and credits are available where state laws and regulations allow, and may vary by state. Certain discounts apply to specific coverages only. To the extent permitted by law, applicants are individually underwritten; not all applicants may qualify. **Figure based on a March 2006 sample of auto policyholder savings when comparing their former premium with those of Liberty Mutual’s group auto and home program. Individual premiums and savings will vary. Coverage provided and underwritten by Liberty Mutual Insurance Company and its affiliates, 175 Berkeley Street, Boston, MA. A consumer report from a consumer reporting agency and/or a motor vehicle report, on all drivers listed on your policy, may be obtained where state laws and regulations allow. ©2006 Liberty Mutual Insurance Company. All Rights Reserved.

Communication And Trust Are Critical To Our Success

By Justin Jones, Director
Oklahoma Department of
Corrections and an OPEA Member

I recently viewed an editorial cartoon where the boss walks up to the



DOC Director Justin Jones

employee and asks, "Why aren't you working?" The employee replies, "Because I didn't see you coming!" There's a

mistrust on both sides in this cartoon.

So why do we need to talk about trust? Do we need affirmation that we are operating at a high level of trust? Or is trust similar to communication in that we can't communicate enough and therefore we can't trust enough. I believe we have a great amount of trust in this department, but we should never become complacent on this topic. I think we should focus on the definition of trust that describes the word as, "the reliance on another." Gandhi is quoted as having said, "Among the most essential qualities of the human spirit are to trust oneself and build trust with others." Many believe that trust advances one interaction at a time. Trust advancement is critical in an organization's continued success, whether it is one interaction at a time or one issue at a time.

Without truth, there can be no trust. That is why it is critical that communi-

cations and interactions internally and external to the department be open and honest. I have previously written about the need for the department to be transparent in that everyone needs to see the complexity of our business and understand all we do is for the mission. Honest answers with staff and stakeholders can't be surpassed. Honesty, which is the foundation of truth, must be one of our most precious values.

Truth and honesty, like care and concern, are always in the eyes of the beholder. I have often heard that someone will trust until proven otherwise. In our business, that one-strike-and-you're-out mentality could lead to no one trusting anyone. Again, communication is inseparable from the quality of trust and truth. Leaders and managers of this department must trust that with the proper training and work skills, employees will make the right decisions, follow

policy and, in general, do the right thing. Also the converse: for the department to improve and be more successful in all endeavors to include gaining much-needed resources and salary increases, employees need to trust the leadership. Trust is a two-way street that is destined for success.

An African proverb goes something like this, "If you want to travel fast, travel alone. If you want to travel far, travel together."

Sure, we can say we are one team for a safe Oklahoma, but without teamwork based upon mutual trust, this just remains an unattained slogan. Our

department has teamwork based upon trust, evidenced by doing more with less and continuing to provide quality services to the great state of Oklahoma despite adversity and continued overcrowding.

A leader who has no followers is only taking a walk. Employees trust leaders when they understand the direction and feel the leader cares and weighs the employees' needs, interests and concerns when decisions are rendered. A trusted leader gives strength, raises

"A leader who has no followers is only taking a walk. Employees trust leaders when they understand the direction and feel the leader cares and weighs the employees' needs, interests and concerns when decisions are rendered."

expectations, instills faith and confidence and provides assurance to the department. Leaders trusting their

employees provide exactly the same environment. This is not to say there will not be disagreements or misunderstandings or differences on how certain situations should be addressed. These are all common daily issues in any business environment that shouldn't diminish one's ability to trust.

Trust starts with honesty and is enhanced with improved communications. I encourage you to maintain the highest standard of trust in the department by always trying to improve communications and bringing truth to all of your communications, whether it is with employees, the public or offenders. Nothing will ever beat honest answers, no matter who we are speaking with.

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OPEA Membership Director Dean Balmer discussed issues with employees of the Department of Human Services at a Jan. 10 meeting in Oklahoma City.

Burden Of Proof ...

Continued From Page 10

with a trained mediator who can help them communicate with the employer, supervisor or co-worker with whom there is a conflict or dispute. In voluntary mediation, you create your own agreement, with the help of the mediator.

During the mediation, both sides have the opportunity to speak their mind. Being able to openly communicate with each other, with the assistance of a neutral party acting as a facilitator, helps participants understand the other person's point of view. If all goes well, you might be able to reach agreement with the other person and resolve the problem.

What kind of disputes can be mediated?

The MPC Voluntary Mediation Program can help you mediate any employment-related dispute. Voluntary mediation can help you resolve a problem that developed last week or one that has been building up over many years.

If you have questions or would like more information about the Voluntary Mediation Program, contact the MPC at (405) 525-9144.



OPEA Members Only

may call the OPEA office for ...

Legal Advocacy Program:

Melinda Alizadeh-Fard, General Counsel

Agency Information:

Trish Frazier, Policy and Agency Relations Director

Grievance Assistance:

Melinda Alizadeh-Fard, General Counsel

Political Action:

Scott Barger, Interim Executive Director

Communications Information:

Bud Elder, Communications Director

Legislation Information:

Nancy Hughes, Executive Assistant

Schedule A Meeting:

Dean Balmer (Eastern half of Oklahoma)

Felix Linden (Western half of Oklahoma)

General Information And Questions:

Raeshoun Jakes, Administrative Assistant

Joining OPEA:

Nancy Hughes or Raeshoun Jakes

OPEA Local Number:

(405) 524-6764

Toll-Free In Oklahoma:

(800) 880-OPEA (6732)

OPEA Web Address:

www.opea.org

Mailing Address:

13 N.E. 28th St.
Oklahoma City, OK 73105

OPEA Visits Troubled Juvenile Facility

News coming out of the Lloyd E. Rader juvenile facility in Sand Springs has been far from good. Assaults and violent attacks have more than doubled in the past three years, a federal lawsuit has been filed and less than glowing editorials have appeared in both *The Daily Oklahoman* and *The Tulsa World*. The facility has been plagued by staffing issues.

It was in this environment that OPEA Interim Executive Director Scott Barger and staff found themselves when they attended a recent tour and summit with Robert Christian, executive director of the Office of Juvenile Affairs, Reps. Pam Peterson and Jabar Shumate, Sen. Nancy Riley and others.

"While Rader has been in the news of late, OPEA has been aware of these problems for some time," said Barger. "Some of these issues go back to 2004, when a near riot left 17 people hurt, including 10 staff members."

After touring living units, dining areas, classrooms and other facilities, the group met to discuss ideas, budgets, staffing and other concerns for the center.

"While programs and facilities can be debatable, most all of the problems at the Rader facility can be solved with adequate salary and market pay," Barger said. "It's a well trained, well-rested, well-paid staff that will bring Rader up to the standards necessary for it to function."

In the meeting, Barger and Christian agreed on the staffing issues facing the facility.

"I have told director Christian that his concerns are our concerns with

regard to staffing," Barger said. "We have said it again and again: It is an overwhelming challenge to compete for a work force against casinos and convenience stores that are paying near or above what a beginning state worker makes at Rader. Because of this situation, our members working at the facility are shouldering tremendous burdens."

Barger also mentioned the crushing turnover rate at the center.

"I tell people at every opportunity that turnover costs the state about \$80 million per year," Barger said. "That's enough to give these same workers an 8-percent pay raise in order to retain their experience and expertise."

After the meeting with legislators and Rader administrators, Barger and OPEA Membership Director Dean Balmer met with OPEA members at the facility to hear their concerns and offer them motivation to stay the course and fight with OPEA.

"While there was an ice storm outside, it was hotter than blazes in that meeting room," Barger said. "Our members know that we have a daunting challenge during this year's legislative session, specifically with the issues of dependent insurance, pay raises and the normal diligence we have to give to make sure that state employee rights and their pocket-book issues are covered."

"We also discussed the Association's recent snow-day victory," Barger added. "This has been one of the best recruitment tools we've ever used. We even picked up new members at Rader because of our effort to give days back, both to



Above: OPEA Interim Executive Director Scott Barger addresses OPEA members at the L.E. Rader Center. Below: Barger, with his back to the camera, talks with OJA Executive Director Robert Christian, Sen. Nancy Riley and Reps. Pam Peterson and Jabar Shumate.



our essential and nonessential employees."

Another idea that is beginning to pop up in meetings across the state, according to Barger, is the resurgence of basing OPEA's structure on chapters rather than on agency-based councils.

"There seems to be a growing desire by our membership to start having chapters again," Barger said. "It's interesting that we've heard this from several of our elected officials and our membership as well. There's no secret that our grass-roots organization, of which we have been very proud over the years, has waned. The bylaws task force is currently reviewing this situation."

According to Barger, OPEA is committed to the success of the Lloyd Rader Center and its employees.

"There is always a battle at a facility such as Rader," he said, "but we are more than up to the task."

ASPA Seeks Nominations For Administrator Of The Year Honors

Nominations are now being accepted for the 2007 Administrator of the Year Award, which recognizes a public administrator whose career exhibits the highest standards of excellence, dedication and accomplishment. The award is sponsored by the Oklahoma Chapter of the American Society for Public Administration.

Nominees, employees of any level of government, non-profit organizations or educational institutions, are judged on leadership qualities, professional and ethical standards, superior record of achievement and strong commitment to public service. The deadline for nominations is March 16, and the

award will be presented at a luncheon in Oklahoma City in May. Last year's Administrator of the Year was Zach D. Taylor, executive director of the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments.

For a nomination form or more information, visit www.libarts.ucok.edu/political/organizations/aspa/index.html or contact Brett Sharp at (405) 974-5526 or bsharp@ucok.edu.

The American Society for Public Administration, founded in 1939, is a nationwide, non-profit educational and professional organization with chapters in every state and a membership of more than 10,000.

OPEA's 2007 Legislative Program

'Fighting For Change'

For more than 30 years, the Oklahoma Public Employees Association has been at the Capitol, fighting for state employees and their families. This year, the Association has established an aggressive Legislative Program to provide better compensation and benefits for state employees and retirees and to improve the state government work environment.

The first part of this decade was difficult for state employees and the people they serve. Oklahoma, like all states, suffered from revenue shortfalls, forcing state employees to go years without pay raises. In addition, state agencies were forced to leave positions vacant to deal with the financial crisis. State employees continued to serve in the bad times, at great sacrifice to themselves and their families.

"OPEA is fighting for change," OPEA Interim Executive Director Scott Barger commented. "State employees have been on the job during tough times. It's time for those who deliver state services to receive fair compensation for their dedication."

Compensation

The governor and the Legislature should make state employee pay a priority over the next four years by taking the following action:

- An across-the-board pay increase of \$2,500, effective July 1, 2007, to restore lost purchasing power and begin closing the compensation gap between state employees and the market.
- The Compensation Review Board should be directed to study a comprehensive pay plan for state government and make recommendations to the 2008 Legislature.

OPEA's compensation recommendations restore the lost purchasing power of state employee paychecks and begin to close the gap in compensation between state government and the market.

Retirement

- OPERS retirees should be provided a 2 percent cost-of-living adjustment (COLA), effective July 1, 2007.

State leaders have traditionally granted OPERS retirees an average of 4 percent in additional benefits in even-numbered years. This causes a hardship for

retirees, whose costs continue to climb. In addition, because of the way COLAs are provided, new retirees sometimes must wait three years to receive an increase in benefits.

A 2-percent annual COLA would provide retirees with additional funds to help make ends meet and would not affect the unfunded liability of the system. OPERS' actuarial assumptions have a 2-percent annual COLA built into funding calculations.

- The Legislature should appropriate funds from General Revenue to help OPERS retirees pay health insurance premiums.

Since 1988, the cost of retirees' Medicare supplemental insurance premiums has increased by 228 percent, while the health insurance subsidy has increased by only 30 percent. OPEA recommends that state leaders utilize funds from General Revenue to help retirees with the burden of this increasing expense.

Personnel

- Unclassified employees should be provided rights and severance benefits when there is a reduction-in-force, including the process outlined in Title 74, Chapter 27A, Section 840-2.27 of

the Oklahoma Statutes.

Clean-up legislation passed in 2003 inadvertently removed all rights and severance benefits for unclassified employees during a reduction-in-force. OPEA believes all state employees should have rights to an orderly process and severance benefits when their jobs are eliminated.

Other

- Funds generated by state parks or lodges through land sales, fees or drilling for oil and gas should be reinvested in the state park system.
- Retirees who have left the state health insurance program should be allowed to opt-in when they become eligible for Medicare.
- All state employees should be returned to the retirement Rule of 80.
- State employees who have retired from the military and opt out of the state health insurance plan should receive a benefit allowance to purchase health, life, dental and disability insurance.
- The state should refund the excess contributions of retirees who left state service prior to July 1, 1998.
- The state should conduct a study to bring pay for medical and nursing classifications to 95 percent of the market.

Members Can Earn Cash During Recruitment Drive

OPEA will kick off its first recruitment drive of the year Feb. 1, giving members an opportunity to strengthen their Association and at the same time put some cash in their pocket.

The goal of the Cash Out Recruitment Drive, which will run through May 31, is to add 500 new members to the OPEA's rolls. Recruiters will receive \$5 for every new member they sign up, a reward that will increase to \$10 after they have signed up 10 new members. When the recruitment drive comes to a close, members will have a

chance to win additional cash. The top three recruiters will claim cash prizes starting at \$300.

Each new application must have the recruiter's name in the referral box. OPEA will keep a running tab of new members and their recruiters, and this information will be on the OPEA Web site at www.opea.org.

New members must remain with OPEA for at least 60 days for their recruiter to be eligible for cash rewards. Recruiters can sign up new members online, by mail or fax or by hand-deliv-



ering applications to any OPEA Board member or staff member.

"Don't gamble on your future," OPEA Interim Executive Director Scott Barger said. "While OPEA is fighting for change at the Capitol, you can be putting change in your pocket."

Dates To Remember

(All dates are tentative and subject to change.)

February 2007

- 5 Legislative session begins • OPEA Board meeting (OPEA office).
- 19 Presidents' Day • OPEA closed • Legislature is in session.
- 22 Deadline for legislation to emerge from committee.

March 2007

- 15 Deadline for legislation to emerge from originating house.
- 17 OPEA Board meeting • OPEA office.

April 2007

- TBD OPEA Lobby Day • Active and Retirees • Tentative.
- 9 Agency Director Breakfast and Leader Lobby Day • OPEA Board meeting • afternoon.
- 26 Deadline for legislation to pass the opposite house.

May 2007

- 7-13 Public Service Recognition Week.
- 12 Board meeting • OPEA Office.
- 25 Legislative session ends.
- 28 Memorial Day holiday • OPEA office closed.

June 2007

- 9 Board meeting • McAlester.

July 2007

- 4 4th of July • OPEA office closed.
- 14 Board meeting • Tulsa.

August 2007

- 19 Reserved for OPEA Annual Business Meeting • Bylaws if necessary.

September 2007

- 3 Labor Day holiday • OPEA office closed.
- 22 Board meeting • Enid.

October 2007

- 20 Board meeting • Norman.

November 2007

- 12 Veterans Day holiday • OPEA office closed.
- 16-17 OPEA Board retreat/meeting • First tentative date.
- 22-23 Thanksgiving Day holiday • OPEA office closed.

December 2007

- 14-15 Board retreat/meeting • Second tentative date.
- 24-25 Christmas holiday • OPEA office closed.

Cash Out With OPEA!

Put money in your pocket by helping OPEA recruit 500 new members during your Association's Cash Out Recruitment Drive.

You'll get \$5 for every new member you sign up, increasing to \$10 after your first 10 recruits.

You can win an additional prize of up to \$300.



Oklahoma Public Employees Association

13 N.E. 28th St. • Oklahoma City, Okla. 73105 • (405) 524-6764 • www.opea.org

Oklahoma Public Employees Association Membership Application

Please return to: OPEA, 13 N.E. 28th St., Oklahoma City, Okla. 73105 or visit www.opea.org.



First Name _____ Last Name _____
 Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Home Phone () _____ Work Phone () _____
 Home E-mail _____ Work E-mail _____
 Agency _____ Work Location _____ Position _____
 Work Location Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Work Fax Number () _____ Who introduced you to OPEA? _____

Payroll Deduction Authorization

I hereby authorize the state of Oklahoma to deduct from my pay the amount checked below required to purchase dues in the Oklahoma Public Employees Association, subject to my right to revoke this order by written notice to my employer.

Dues Options:

\$15 \$15 _____ + _____ (Members may choose to pay more to help the Association further its goals.)

Signature _____ SS# _____ - _____ Birth Date _____
 OPEA's standard dues are \$15 per month. Annual dues: state employees - \$180; retirees - \$60; associates - \$20; corporate affiliates - \$300. Contributions or gifts to OPEA are not deductible as charitable contributions for federal income tax purposes. However, dues payments are deductible as a miscellaneous itemized deduction. Dues include your annual subscription to *The Advocate* (a \$4 value). Your \$15 monthly dues payment includes a \$2.25 contribution to OSEAPAC.

I do not want \$2.25 per month of my dues to go to OSEAPAC.

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