

Twenty One

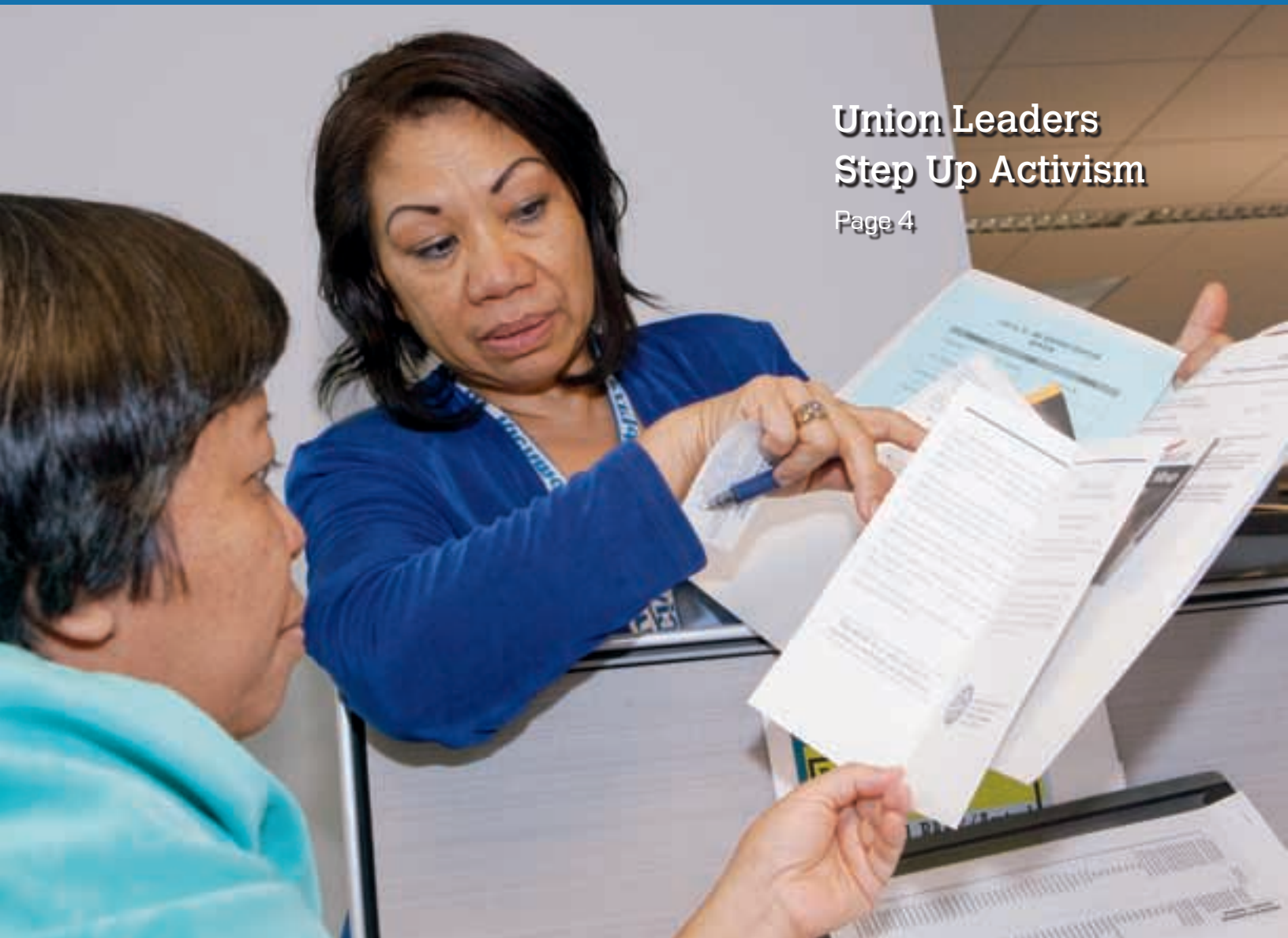
VOLUME 2, NUMBER 1

Quarterly Publication
of IFPTE LOCAL 21

FALL 2009

Union Leaders Step Up Activism

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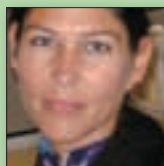


on the **INSIDE**



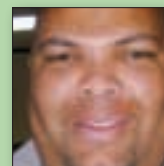
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by DEAN COATE
President

For more news, go to
www.ifpte21.org

ON THE COVER

Yolanda Skelton, Richmond chapter Treasurer, speaks to a colleague about the importance of union membership.



ANJALI ASRANI

Pari Khosraviani, Personal and Professional Development Chair of the Santa Clara Valley Water District Engineers Society chapter participates in a leadership development training.

Activism is the Key to a Strong Union

Many of us didn't set out to be represented by a union. A lot of Local 21 members just ended up in a job where there was already a union to represent them.

It might surprise you to learn that the group with the highest level of union membership in the US is not the trades, nursing, or even police and fire. That distinction is held by schoolteachers, 68% of whom belong to unions. The topic of school is very appropriate because of the lessons we adults can learn from schoolchildren.

Most children don't choose to go to school either, but were born into a society that deems education necessary and important. Accepting this, most students try to get what they can out of their school years by participating eagerly in academics, playing sports, getting involved

When Local 21 members are visible and enthusiastic, the Union becomes much stronger and we end up helping ourselves, along with the Union as a whole.

in student government, or participating in social activities with their classmates.

Don't coast: Get something out of your union membership Similarly, Local 21 members can either try to get something out of being in a union, or they can coast along without any noticeable effort, paying their dues and leaving union activities to others.

If members want to make the most of their membership in a union, there are abundant opportunities in leadership, organization, politics, and many other areas where they can learn new skills, develop their capabilities, and use their knowledge and talents to assist coworkers, help the

union, and improve their work environments.

Teachers perennially stress the importance of school spirit. Likewise, the importance of union spirit in forging a strong and united workplace cannot be overstated.

When Local 21 members are visible and enthusiastic, the Union becomes much stronger and we end up helping ourselves, along with the Union as a whole.

I am ending this column with a school cheer, since an active membership with a strong union spirit is by far the most powerful bargaining weapon in our arsenal... "Go 21!"

Twenty One

is published quarterly by

PROFESSIONAL & TECHNICAL ENGINEERS LOCAL 21, IFPTE | AFL-CIO

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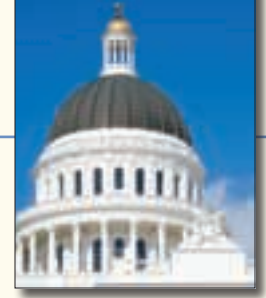
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by BARRY BROAD, SHANE GUSMAN
LEGISLATIVE ADVOCATES, Broad & Gusman, LLP

Beleaguered Legislature Brings Out Need for Reforms

The 2009 legislative session ended with a whimper instead of a bang. Most of the legislation drafted was vetoed, never saw the light of day, or was too scaled back to ever be effective. Despite high priority, little was done to resolve issues of energy, education, prison overcrowding, and water.

Add to this an imploding economy and three bitter budget battles in less than a year. It's easy to understand why our electorate is angry and advocating changes ranging from a constitutional convention and part-time legislature, to reducing the two-thirds requirement to approve the state budget, raise revenue, and put tax measures before the voters.

There are also "reform" battles taking place outside the initiative process. Last December, the Governor formed the Commission on the 21st Century Economy to look at the state's revenue sources and identify recommendations for stabilizing our revenue stream.

The Commission's primary proposal, the Business Net Receipts Tax (BNRT), is comparable to value-added taxes in Europe and Michigan. If fully implemented, businesses operating in California would pay a 4% tax on revenue with some deductions for capital investments, contrac-

tors, and possibly health expenditures, replacing the corporate tax. However, BNRT creates a standard where employee salaries are non-deductible, but payments to independent contractors are, encouraging contracting out. It would also tax services like childcare, further shifting the tax burden from corporations to the middle class.

A major cause for reforms sought by local governments has been the state's theft of local government dollars in the last few budget cycles to fill the state's budget gap and partially offset massive cuts to education, mental health, services for seniors and abused children. In the latest round, billions of property tax and redevelopment monies were diverted to the state. There was also an attempt to steal gas taxes that fund transportation programs. While these were called "loans" to the state, there was little done to mitigate the immediate impact on local coffers and programs.

It is likely these local dollars will be in jeopardy for several years to come, mostly because our economy is improving slower than other states, and economists project large deficits for the foreseeable future. Additionally, Republican legislators are completely unwilling to even consider modest increases in taxes. As a result,

local governments are pursuing options to protect their funds. Lawsuits have been filed and initiatives are on the horizon to take away the state's ability to raid local funds. Preliminary polling indicates the public may be sympathetic as they experience more services disappearing at the local levels.

A federal panel has been evaluating California's prison system and its dangerous overcrowding problem, and ordered the state to reduce its prison population by 40,000, resulting in our Legislature approving a set of ineffective reforms. It's likely the Feds could order a direct release of prisoners, which will impact local public safety systems by overwhelming county jails, as well as probation and drug treatment programs.

One ray of light that emerged from this legislative session was the successful bipartisan effort to restore cuts to the Healthy Families program, which provides health insurance to children in need. The July budget had cut coverage for 700,000 kids, devastating families and health service providers.

Hopefully, our leaders in Sacramento can take a cue from this success and make headway on some of the other issues plaguing our state.

Local 21 Delegates Help Steer Course of International Union

Nineteen delegates from our local Union attended IFPTE's 56th convention in Las Vegas, Nevada from August 9-13, 2009. Union delegates from across Canada and the United States convened to elect officers, hold committee meetings, and pass important policy resolutions.

Some of the resolutions adopted urge lawmakers to pass the Employee Free Choice Act and protect the pension plans

of all workers. Delegates elected officers to lead the International Union over the next three years, including Ron Dicks, San Francisco Housing Inspectors chapter member, who was re-elected as Western Area Vice President.

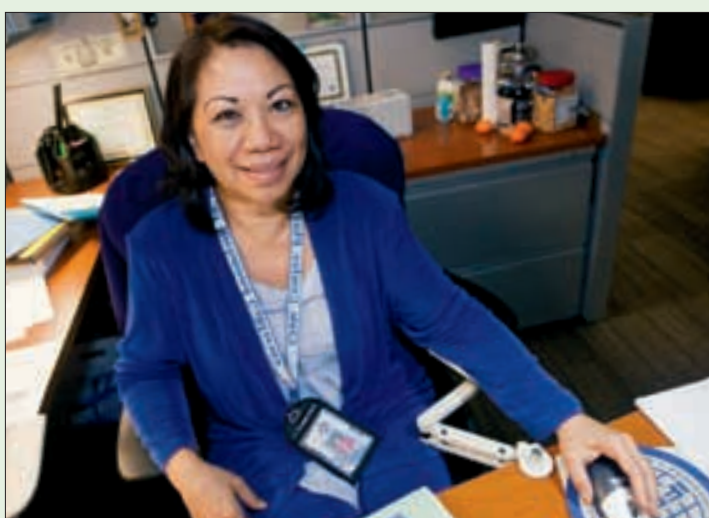
In addition to making important decisions, delegates participated in workshops on numerous topics including labor history, grievance handling, and engaging young members. IFPTE will hold its next convention in 2012.

BACKGROUND PHOTO BY RON DICKS

New Crop of Leaders Step Up to Strengthen Union,

Does the Union have an important role to play during the economic crisis? The common answer of some of Local 21's newest activists: Yes – now more than ever!

by IRV MUCHNICK, Bay Area Freelance Writer



MINDY PINES

Yolanda Skelton has taken a leadership role in her chapter since 2007, when she joined the Union.

By day, Yolanda Skelton is a Senior Accountant at the City of Richmond. She is one of the key people responsible for analyzing funds and ensuring municipal expenditures are within budget.

By evening, she is a critical part of a Local 21 team analyzing the City's budget to develop solutions to minimize cuts to jobs and services amidst a \$10 million budget deficit and impending layoffs. Skelton and others create spreadsheets and formulate proposals to ease the pain of furloughs, job cuts, and increased workloads, and to take advantage of a window of opportunity pushed for by the Union to postpone personnel cuts until

the Union and City can work together and find a better way to make necessary cuts.

During the national economic meltdown, which severely cut into jobs in Richmond as it did elsewhere, Skelton became the chapter's Treasurer. In months, she racked up a chapter record of personally recruiting at least eight new Union members.

Skelton is just one example of what makes Local 21 tick: a new enthusiastic core of activists. In hard times, our members realize that the issues the Union is tackling are ones that serve our members, as well as the public. Those who step up to the plate in leadership roles help keep us fresh in our vigi-

lance on behalf of members' rights and interests.

She does it the classic way. "I like to organize by taking people out to lunch. First I listen, then I talk." For Skelton, interpersonal skills are as natural as breathing.

A common asset of Local 21 leaders is their communication skills and dedication to improve the Union and the communities they serve. They are aware no one can wave a magic wand and make the national recession and local budget crunch go away overnight, so they take action to enforce standards in their workplaces and the level of accountability to the public, all while keeping reliable and transparent information flowing throughout their memberships. By staying visible and accessible, they model that we're all in this together.

Delivering "a level of comfort"

Zach Seal has been a community activist in Oakland through a Gold Coast neighborhood group he formed in 2005. Last year he was hired by Oakland's Community and Economic Development Agency to attract and retain local business.

The transition was so seamless that Seal immediately took on the responsibil-

ity of Political Action Coordinator (PAC) for the Oakland Administrative and Professionals chapter of Local 21. "Acting as the PAC allows me to tap my passion for activism in ways that benefit the union and the work we do to improve our city," he said. His work contributed to the successful conclusion of one of the most grueling bargaining cycles in memory, where Local 21 spent 16 months fighting for a fair contract.

"From the beginning," Seal said, "I knew my most effective role would be as a liaison between the negotiating team and my co-workers. Though the description sounds simple, it isn't. "A lot of folks have questions about the status of negotiations, but don't know whom to ask. People know my cubicle is a place to get authoritative answers on rumors that float around."

Colleagues credit Seal with bringing energy and realism to his work. There is consensus that the financial crisis and the City's budget shortfall can't be ducked. Cuts are necessary, but collective bargaining helps ensure those cuts get executed logically and equitably—for municipal workers and for the community they serve.

"When compromises were being made, people had a level of comfort knowing their issues were being brought aggressively to the negotiating table, even if those issues weren't completely resolved," Seal observed. "Everything we wanted didn't happen in this round, but the ground-

Community

work was laid, and maybe we'll get our remaining issues resolved in the next contract."

In San Francisco, Norma Nelson, a member of the Administrative Analyst Chapter since 2005, followed in the footsteps of a brother who is an officer in the United Auto Workers. A seed for her deeper involvement was planted during a visit to Las Vegas, when she attended a rally for Barack Obama and took note of his broad support in organized labor.

Nelson said, "I looked closely at how to improve my chapter. If what you want is a more vigorous union, then you have to take the initiative to get involved."

In 2008 she became an alternate Delegate and learned of a San Francisco-based committee the Union was forming to fight the abuse of contracting out. As it turns out, Nelson's day-to-day work at the Port of San Francisco involves administering outside contracts, making her perfectly suited for the committee.

"This is where my work for the City comes together with my work for the Union," Nelson said. "Public agencies need to be able to use contracts, especially in emergencies or for highly specialized niches, but this is also an area that can be abused when there isn't accountability, quality control, and fairness." Her work in the committee is building the foundation to make our Union and San Francisco better.

In the committee, Nelson helps enforce the standards

in our memorandum of understanding with the City to preserve in-house work. When things go awry—as the Union believes happened with the Parks and Recreation Department's design service contract for Palega Playground in the Portola district—experts like Nelson carry our message to managers.

Similarly, in the San Francisco Court Professionals Chapter, Vice President Orin Johnson has brought his personal skills to bear on a new level of union commitment.

In 2007, Johnson joined the court as an instructional designer. This discipline requires an understanding of how to communicate effectively and help others set and meet collective goals. When Local 21 joined a broader labor coalition to tackle the difficult issue of furloughs, colleagues say he proved a perfect addition to the team.

"As I started attending Union meetings, I could see a lot of people were nervous and not used to making their voices heard," Johnson recalled. "When there was new information, I was in a good position to help interpret that information for others."

With respect to furloughs, Johnson did his homework, using his organizational background to develop alternative models and bring to the surface issues that might otherwise have remained buried. There are numerous ways to structure furloughs. Management originally wanted workers to give back 12 days

this fiscal year, but Local 21 made a persuasive case that the "sweet spot" for maximizing savings and minimizing disruption was 10 days.

In with the new

While others have built and strengthened aspects of our Union, Luis Ortiz led members of the Engineers Society (ES) at the Santa Clara Valley Water District to affiliate with Local 21.

While the district is a rare example of a local public agency that has been able to avoid layoffs, employees have had a number of other challenges related to working conditions and pay.

A group of ES members knew their best course was to transition from an employee organization to a full fledged Union, and Ortiz devoted himself to helping his bargaining unit through the process. "I knew it was in our best interest," he said. "Instead of reacting to one problem at a time, we're fitting everything together." The chapter can now focus its energy in a way that produces real results for employees, and for the millions of South Bay residents who rely on their work for safe, clean water.

Ortiz worked with past ES Presidents and officers to help relay how their relationship with the District had evolved into a classic labor-management environment, and why that required a strong and broad-based organization like Local 21 to help them speak up for their interests. He played

the roles of organizer, strategist, and advocate, in order to achieve the ultimate goal of a stronger and better work place.

"Now we have a level playing field and can establish our presence with management," Ortiz said. "We're in the early stages of this new relationship, and it has some rough spots. The management of the district is getting used to dealing with us."

Local 21 members have diverse jobs and workday challenges. But an ever-rejuvenated network of determined activists is our shared vital center. It is through their leadership, dedication and sacrifice, that we as a Union



Luis Ortiz helped his colleagues at the Santa Clara Valley Water District make the decision to affiliate with Local 21.

and as Bay Area residents benefit from their dedication to building resources and respect for public sector employees and their work.

Public Defender Chapter Organizes to Save Attorneys from Layoff

This summer, when the Alameda County Board of Supervisors slashed \$1.4 million in salary and benefits for 14 attorneys in the Public Defenders Office, it forced the department to take steps toward turning away at least 10,200 defendants over the next year because of a lack of staff available to provide indigent defendants an adequate defense.

If the Public Defender's chapter hadn't organized a campaign to halt the cuts, the reduction would have represented almost 14% of attorneys on staff and marked the first time in the department's 82-year history where it would have declared an inability to provide adequate legal defense to many clients.

Regardless of staffing levels and the ability of the Public Defender's Office to provide an attorney, all indigent defendants have a constitutional right to representation. The County is obligated to pay for their defense with public funds if the Public Defender is unable to provide an adequate defense for any reason.

Because of the chapter's vigilant advocacy, the County agreed to restore most of the eliminated positions, ensuring that public sector work is not contracted out to private attorneys, and the public receives a greater level of accountability.

"We educated the County about what we do," said Public Defenders chapter President Bob Mertens. "We handle a huge number of cases in a cost efficient manner. The County thought it would



Kathy Ryals



Bob Mertens

save money by laying off attorneys, but we showed them it would cost far more to have someone else do the job of those Public Defenders."

Multifaceted advocacy approach used

Using a multifaceted approach to advocate for the restoration of staffing levels, the chapter mobilized the public to contact their representative on the Board of Supervisors, called attention to the importance of adequate funding and staffing levels in the press, and independently lobbied individual Supervisors.

"The PD's office is already grossly under funded in comparison to the District Attorney. We defend the same people they prosecute, but with far fewer resources. Cutting 14% of our staff would have made it impossible to provide thousands of defendants with the quality of representation they deserve," said Kathy Ryals, chapter steering committee member.

Early on, the County acknowledged its obligation to meet and confer with the Union over workloads, and con-

ceded that it could not contract out any work before bargaining with the Union. Despite this, the County attempted to go ahead and contract out the work prior to bargaining with Local 21.

The Union acted quickly and threatened to file an Unfair Practice Charge with the Public Employment Relations Board over the County's refusal to meet and confer before hiring private attorneys, even after it acknowledged its obligation to bargain. Chapter leaders further argued that the County can only lay off employees when there is a lack of funds or a lack of work. In this case, there was no lack of work, and the County was willing to pay private attorneys double what it would cost to employ the Public Defender attorneys being laid off.

In August, the County finally halted all efforts to contract out the Public Defender work, and agreed to restore 11 of the 14 positions.

"As one of the attorneys whose position was saved, I was impressed with how quickly our Union responded," noted chapter steering committee member Kathleen Guneratne. "The Union empowered rank and file attorneys like me to approach political decision makers on an equal footing. The Union attorney acted quickly in preparing the Unfair Practice Charge and collecting affidavits from us. In the end, through concerted efforts, we prevented a proposed layoff plan that would have greatly hurt our clients."

New Contra Costa Chapter Revs Up for Elections and Bargaining

Following a year-an-a-half long struggle to unionize, our sisters and brothers in Contra Costa County are officially a Local 21 chapter! Leaders were formally welcomed to the Union at our Delegate Assembly on October 3.

Recently, the group overwhelmingly voted to approve their chapter bylaws via a mail ballot election that was overseen by Election Committee members

Susan Cohen, Pat Corum, and John Hurlbut on September 9.

They are holding their first officer elections. Ballots were mailed to all Contra Costa members in mid-September, and must be received by October 15 to be counted. A Candidate's Night was held at last month's general membership meeting where members had the opportunity to hear from candidates and get to know their future chapter officers.

Prior to elections, the chapter had a few contract negotiation sessions with the County where ground rules were reached. Further negotiations in late October are pending the election of officers and bargaining team members.

For more information on the chapter's bylaws, officer elections, and other Contra Costa County happenings, visit www.ifpte21.org/ccs.shtml.

Learn to Reduce Stress at Confidential Union Workshops

Local 21 members know what it's like to deal with stress on a daily basis. The declining economy has forced us to adjust to layoffs and furloughs, watch our home equity and investments dwindle, and struggle to make ends meet.

This increase in stress comes on top of the pressures we already feel from our demanding jobs, and affects us in all aspects of our lives — our anxieties, relationships, and sometimes even in depression and our sense of self-worth.

This summer the Union began hosting monthly stress reduction workshops through the Membership Assistance Program, a service that offers free confidential counseling, consulting, and referral services to all members. The workshops, conducted by Kitty Costello, MA, MFT, and Richard Epstein, PhD, MFT, provide effective and practical tools for reducing and managing stress and anxiety.

Workshops take place at noon every third Monday of the month at the San Francisco Public Library, Sycip Family

Conference Room, 4th floor, 100 Larkin St., and every second Monday of the month at the Alameda County Law Library, 125 12th St. in Oakland.

Next month's workshops will take place on Monday, November 9 in Oakland, and November 16 in San Francisco.

All Local 21 members are welcome, RSVPs are not required. For more information about this and other Work Life Support Services, contact the Union office at 415.864.2100.

Five Simple Ways To Reduce Stress

by Kitty Costello, MA, MFT

1 *Breathe.*

Turn off the body's alarm system and turn on the healing, restorative part of the nervous system with deep, slow, belly breathing. Deep, relaxed breathing increases the nourishment to our cells, organs, and brain on the inbreath and releases tension and toxins on the outbreath. Whether taking a break or engaged in activity, bathe your whole being with calming, energizing breath.

2 *Come into the present moment.*

Take every opportunity to build your awareness "muscles" by tuning into your experience in the moment. Bring attention to how you actually are just now; your body, your thoughts, your mood. The more aware we are of our present state, the more engaged and appreciative we can be with pleasant experiences, and the more we can notice discomforts early and intervene to de-escalate stress. The simple act of stepping back to acknowledge, "I'm having a hard time," can bring much relief.

3 *Take your time.*

When you're feeling pressured and hurried, slow down and focus on what you are actually doing. Paradoxically, slowing down allows us to be more efficient and accurate. We make clearer, wiser choices about how we're using our time and energy. When we extend this kindness to ourselves, we will be more patient with others.

4 *Practice relaxation daily.*

Take time away from life's stressors. Shut the door, turn off the phone, and practice deep, slow breathing or other relaxation techniques. Let the muscles in your belly and throughout your body soften. Allow yourself to release into the support of the chair and the earth beneath you. You will not only decrease stress, but with practice, you will increase your inner joy, harmony, and sense of well-being.

5 *Speak up.*

If you are feeling coerced or unhappy, find a way to talk things out. This might mean explaining your point of view, gently asserting your wishes or confiding in a friend who can empathize. Affirm what you love and appreciate about the people around you. Don't forget to tell yourself what you love and appreciate about you!

SF Architects Member Inspires Youth Development through Summer Design Program



COURTESY OF ROMMEL TAYLOR

Rommel Taylor's work includes public housing, single-family homes, and public design.

Every summer the California College of the Arts (CCA) hosts a Young Artist Studio Program (YASP) for 11 to 13-year-olds to learn studio arts from photography and animation, to furniture design and painting.

The program provides youth the opportunity to explore creative careers under the guidance of professionals like Local 21 San Francisco Municipal Architects chapter member Rommel Taylor.

Though an Architectural Assistant I at the San Francisco Department of Public Works Bureau of Architecture for only two years, Taylor has been melding his dedication to art, architecture, and youth enrichment for much longer. Four years ago he returned to his alma mater, CCA, to teach the Summer architecture studio in the YASP. He also volunteers his time to engage youth in architectural design and neighborhood planning in San Francisco and Oakland.

Recently he helped 4th and 5th graders at Malcom X Academy with design for a development project in the Bayview/Hunter's Point Neighborhood.

YASP participants learn life drawing and three other areas of art for two weeks. Taylor teaches architectural scale and model making, after which each student designs their own dream home, complete with floor plan, elevation, and an architectural model.

"The goal is to convey fundamental skills and show them how architects work and think about design and space," said Taylor. "It's amazing to watch them pick it up and run with it." Students get to visit an architecture office and connect their newfound training to a professional environment.

"After joining Local 21, I learned that the Union is here to help me excel in my profession." Taylor continued, "Teaching is the same: exposing youth to different opportunities and being available to help them explore career paths."

Taylor is also Treasurer of the San Francisco chapter of the National Organization of Minority Architects which seeks to build cultural diversity in the field. Together with others from SFNOMA, he is developing an architecture



COURTESY OF ROMMEL TAYLOR

Students in Taylor's studio learn about design, space, and career paths.

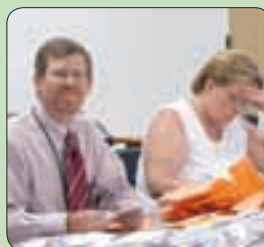
program for minority youth, expected to launch next year.

For information about SFNOMA and ways to get involved in its youth camp, visit www.sfnoma.net or e-mail rtaylor@sfnoma.net.

around 21

Around 21 highlights Local 21 members' activities in and around the Bay Area. Send your union-related photos and captions to anjali@ifpte21.org.

photos, from left, by SUBHA VARADARAJAN, PAT PATTERSON, ANJALI ASRANI, and BILL LEE



Oakland member Cathy Purcell relaxes at the Alameda County Labor Council's Labor Day Picnic. Contra Costa Election Committee members John Hurlbut and Pat Corum count ballots following their chapter's vote to adopt bylaws. San Francisco Municipal Planners chapter member Michael Smith participates in stewards training. Tie Feng, Santa Clara County Engineers & Architects Association member, and Ananth Prasad, South Bay VP, attend the 2nd annual South Bay chapters BBQ at Hellyer Park in San Jose.