PEF Div. 194

/spärk/ The Spark

A quarterly newsletter

Summer-Fall Issue 2024
A. Noble, ed.

Convention Recap

Aaron Noble

PEF's 46th Annual Convention was held September 15-18, 2024, at the OnCenter in Syracuse. During three days of plenary sessions, workshops, and luncheon meetings, the more than 550 delegates discussed the current state of our union's finances, the PEF legislative agendas 2024-2025, and considered 16 proposed resolutions.

This year, the Convention theme was "Moving Together," in the pursuit of better working conditions, social justice, and having the ability to advance the rights and wellbeing of every member, according to PEF Vice President and Convention Chair Darlene Williams.

Among the adopted resolutions was Resolution 1, which calls for increased efforts to combat Antisemitism and Islamophobia in New York State and beyond. A proposed resolution to increase dues was defeated. Member dues will remain at 0.9% of the member's salary.

For a full summary of the 2024 PEF Convention, see *The Communicator*'s online Convention issue at https://communicator.pef.org/issue/volume-42-no-7/moving-together-delegates-take-on-top-union-priorities-and-policies-at-46th-annual-pef-convention/.



Summer Outing

Carlos Garcia

On August 9, nearly 150 members/family members/friends (130 members) came together in the face of an incoming major storm for the Division's annual summer outing. The event was held at Birch Hill in Schodack, New York, and a good time was had by all. Most attendees stayed for several hours to enjoy seeing colleagues, making new friends, eating delicious food, playing games and dancing to a DJ. If you missed this one, please join us for our next Division-wide celebration at our winter holiday party. (*Photos courtesy A. Noble and A. Seppa-Hodgkins*)





Convention Photo

Surya Narayana Murthy Vemparalla

The Division 194 delegation during General Sessions at the PEF Convention in Syracuse.



New Member Orientations

Carlos Garcia

New member orientation sessions were held in May, July, and October. These were opportunities for PEF Division 194 to provide information to new members regarding our union.

If you are a new member but have not attended a PEF orientation, please look for an email from Council Leader Carlos Garcia on your SED email.

Fall 2024 Membership Meetings

Vincent Commisso

The first Fall 2024 membership meeting was held Monday, October 28, 2024, in the Student Center at the Office of Cultural Education in Albany to address issues specific to that program area and engage membership with PEF leadership.

Additional membership meetings are scheduled for members at the Education Building and Education Building Annex on December 4, 2024 and for members at the Department's Wolf Road Location in Albany on December 9, 2024.

Additional information will be sent via email to all Division 194 members.

For members in satellite offices, please reach out to the Council at PEFDivision194Communications@gmail.com if you would like to arrange for a fall update from Council Leadership.

Your New Division 194 Council

Division 194 has recruited for stewards over the past six months, and we now have 22 stewards out of 23 available seats representing our nearly 1,200 members. Each steward serves at-large which means that you can approach any of the stewards for assistance with union issues. If they do not have the answer, they will direct you to the right resource.

Eric Andrus*

Vincent Commisso

Sean “Mickey” Dobbin

Lysa Drzymala*

James Folts

Ashleigh Fraley*

Satish Frazer

Carlos Garcia

Elizabeth Karalak

Tor Loney*

Elyse Loughlin

Pamela Modzel

Laura Montgomery

Elaine Morris*

Aaron Noble

Michael Nucci

Aisha Peterson

Michael Puspurs*

Aubrey Seppa-Hodgkins

Lisa Serafini-Alonso*

Dr. Ved Shravah

Jane Turo*

Surya Narayana Murthy Vemparalla

*** Denotes newly elected stewards**



New Council Leadership

The new Division 194 Council voted for leadership for the next two years. The results are as follows:

Carlos Garcia, Council Leader

Aaron Noble, Assistant Council Leader

Sean “Mickey” Dobbin, Treasurer

Elyse Loughlin, Secretary

Get Involved!

Have previous union experience? Want to get involved? If you are wondering how to be more involved with PEF, please get in touch! We are always looking for members ready to take that next step in engaging with the union and advocating for their colleagues. Email any questions to: PEFDivision194Communications@gmail.com.



Division 194 Committees

Our Division has several opportunities for members to be involved in Division activities. The committees/chairs are listed below and if you are interested in serving on a committee, please feel free to reach out directly to the Committee chair.

- Membership — Vincent Commisso
- Communications — Aaron Noble
- Health and Safety — Vincent Commisso
- Political Action — Ved Shravah
- Budget — Sean “Mickey” Dobbin
- Audit — Carlos Garcia
- Social — Aubrey Seppa-Hodgkins
- Technology — Tor Loney
- Performance Evaluation — Carlos Garcia
- Grievance — Ved Shravah
- Office Renovation — Laura Montgomery

Email any questions to: PEFDivision194Communications@gmail.com.

Division Communications

Aaron Noble

The Division 194 Council will be ramping up efforts to improve communications directly with you, our members. In addition to emails and text messages to you through PEF’s Organizing Department, Division 194 will be working to update and upgrade its website, PEF194.org.

We will also be working to better utilize our social media feeds to keep members apprised of upcoming Division 194 activities and calls to action.

Find us on Facebook at PEF Division 194, Instagram @pefdiv194, and on X (formerly Twitter) @PEFDIV194.

Your Council at Work

Aaron Noble

Division 194 Executive Board Member Sean “Mickey” Dobbin listens on during the New York State Education Department luncheon at the 46th Annual PEF Convention in Syracuse. The working lunch brings together all PEF Divisions representing NYSED members to discuss common areas of concern and strategize collaboration.



Division 194 Treasurer's Report

Sean "Mickey" Dobbin

The financial health of Division 194 remains strong, enabling us to put your dues payments to work for **you!**

Your dues contributions have allowed Division 194 to host the summer gathering at Birch Hill in Schodack, as well as subsidize summer at regional offices across the state. The Division will also be hosting a winter gathering in the New Year subsidized by your member dues. Stay tuned for further information on dates and location. In addition, Division 194 joined with CSEA and the SED Employees Association to sponsor a bus trip to see the New York Yankees at Yankee Stadium in June.

The Division Council has approved purchase of PPE for members at the Cultural Education Center impacted by the construction noise at that location.

Division 194 also provides a $150 stipend for each division delegate to the annual PEF Convention, which was held in Syracuse in September.

We are also able to provide lunch for new SED employees in PEF represented titles as part of a new hire orientation. This allows Division leadership to provide information to new employees about the benefits of belonging to PEF! Lunches will also be provided to members who attend one of our fall membership meetings.

The 2025 Graduation Award Program is open. If you have a child graduating in 2024-2025, your student is eligible for a $200 award. This is not a scholarship, and there is no requirement for them to receive it. Please be sure to apply for this program by contacting your Division 194 Treasurer.

Division 194 is also pleased to provide defensive driving class reimbursement to all members up to $25, as well as textbook reimbursement for members working towards their degree(s) for up to $75 per semester.

If members would like more detailed information about Division finances, would like to suggest potential charities, or want more information on the graduation award or other reimbursement programs offered by Division 194, please contact our treasurer at mickeydobbin@gmail.com.

More Photographs from the Summer Outing

Aubrey Seppa-Hodgkin





Photo from the New York Yankees Bus Trip

Carlos Garcia



Health and Safety Updates

Vincent Commisso

PEF State Health and Safety Chair Beth Karalak and Local Health and Safety (Albany) Chair Vincent Commisso continue their efforts to keep NYSED accountable to our members and provide a safe and healthy worksite for all employees. The Local Health and Safety Committee ("H/S Committee") meets quarterly and works with CSEA to bring workplace health and safety concerns to SED management. The H/S Committee covers SED employees in the Education Building (EB), the EB Annex (EBA), the Cultural Education Center (CEC), the New York State Records Center (SRC) at the Harriman State Office Campus in Albany, and the SED offices on Wolf Road as well as other, less-frequented worksites where SED employees find themselves.

The more that members communicate with the H/S Committee, the better-positioned we are to advocate for members. While we address individual or unique concerns, we also look for patterns of problems to make the case for systemic solutions. For example, the CEC has been the site of ongoing renovation and construction work for the past year. This work has been very disruptive to staff and only through steady and escalating pressure via the H/S Committee and your stewards was SED pushed to begin factoring in the impact of that work on staff. SED Management has begun sharing the schedule of work and addressing the noise and smells from the construction to improve the situation. The H/S Committee has been able to positively intervene at other worksites as well.

To better ensure your health and safety and that of your coworkers while on the job, we need YOUR HELP. Please report any concerns about safety issues at work to the appropriate facility management, security and your stewards, and the Local Health and Safety Committee. You can contact the Health and Safety Committee directly by emailing PEFDivision194Communications@gmail.com.

IF YOU **SEE** SOMETHING, **SAY** SOMETHING!

New York State Vision Plan: Visionworks Online Provider

PEF Communications

PEF has been notified by the State of a new enhancement to the NYS Vision Plan- Davis Vision. As a member of the NYS Vision Plan, you are now able to order glasses and contact lenses online through the Visionworks retailer: https://www.visionworks.com/.

For assistance or more information, please contact Davis Vision at: (888) 588-4823.

Anthem Blue Cross Dental Plan

PEF Communications

New York State's new dental plan with Anthem Blue Cross went into effect October 1, 2024.

PEF Headquarters wants to hear from you about how it's working. Please send your experiences to Communicator@pef.org so that they can provide that information to your fellow members and feedback to both Anthem and the Office of Employee Relations. Please be as specific as you can, recommending dentists in your region, and sharing your experiences. PEF has said that they will not use your name..

PEF Region 8 Members: Volunteers Needed!

PEF Communications

The Capital District Area Labor Federation is helping coordinate the largest-ever, single-day food distribution in our area on the Saturday before Thanksgiving, Nov. 23. Their ambitious goal is to provide enough turkeys and other food to feed 30,000 or more people on that day.

PEF has donated $7,000 to the cause, but we also need volunteers. **If you can help distribute food on Nov. 23, we need you on the PEF Team from 8 a.m. until 2 p.m. at Hudson Valley Community College, Lot F, 80 Vandenburgh Ave., Troy, N.Y. 12180.** You don't have to work all six hours; any time you can spare would be greatly appreciated! Please use this link to RSVP.

Thank you in advance for your compassion and generosity. At its core, the union movement is a social justice movement and feeding those who need it helps build a better world.

In Solidarity,

Wayne Spence
PEF President

Joe Donahue
PEF Secretary-Treasurer

Danielle Bridger
PEF Region 8 Coordinator

"From the tiniest spark may burst forth a mighty flame." ~ Dante Alighieri