

The Guild Leader

Tuesday, May 29, 2012

Brockton Merger Goes to Member Vote

The executive boards of the Providence Newspaper Guild and the Brockton Newspaper Guild have come to terms on a merger agreement that will be submitted to both unions' memberships in June.

Members of the Providence Newspaper Guild will vote on the merger agreement and some by-law changes to implement it. Balloting will be from noon to 6 p.m. on June 13 at the Guild office, starting with a membership meeting.

If approved by both locals, Brockton will become a unit of the Providence Newspaper Guild, just like the Worcester and RISN (Pawtucket Times and Woonsocket Call) units are now.

We'll hand out copies of the agreement and the by-law changes this week. We'll also have Guild office hours every Wednesday at lunch for any members who want to come in and ask questions.

The proposal is pretty much what we've reported before. Brockton will phase in dues increases to bring their rate up to ours. They'll become a unit of our local, managing their own internal affairs, but with financial control residing with the overall local's executive board.

It's also contingent on an audit of the Brockton books.

The by-laws changes will reorganize our local's executive board. Currently it's made up of the four officers (president, vice president, secretary and treasurer) and seven members elected at-large by all the members at all of our papers. We're asking you to change that.

The new board would have the four top officers still elected at-large, but the seven regular board members will be allotted amongst the units. Providence would get four of the seven, because it's the biggest unit; Worcester, Pawtucket/Woonsocket and Brockton would get one each. If no one from a unit wants to run for its seat, that slot would be open to anyone from any other unit to run for on an at-large basis.

This was a major issue for Brockton. They are an active union and wanted to be sure they had a voice in the overall local's governance.

The by-laws would reduce from seven to five the number of members in each unit's Unit Council, the board that governs union affairs at each paper.

The seven member level was set when we had more than 500 members here. We're less than half that now. Brockton has about 62 members, so seven would be more than 10 percent of the membership. They already have a five-member board.

Brockton wants the merger because they are a smaller local that has suffered losses like we all have. They have no paid staff and the bureaucratic work of government filings, union filings and bookkeeping has become a burden for their volunteer officers. They'll benefit from our paid staff and the support of a bigger local.

We'll get an infusion of new members, and more dues income. Buyouts and layoffs have reduced membership at our current units to where things have started to get tight. We've cut back on expenses to keep pace with revenues and are in no danger of going bankrupt, but it's a trend we'd like to change.

Financially, Brockton is self-sufficient. It's been able to cover its own expenses while still accumulating modest surpluses. There are no increased costs foreseen by the merger, except for more work for the staff. We don't see the need to add new positions.

Betsy Regan, our administrator, is a former officer of the Brockton Guild. She knows the players, both on the union and management side there, so we don't have to worry about a learning curve.

Besides handing out the paperwork, there will be other newsletters between now and June 13. If you have questions, talk to a unit council or board member, post on the listserve, or come to one of the Wednesday lunch sessions.

