



# CT news

The voice of the Clerical-Technical Union  
of Michigan State University

PUBLISHED MONTHLY

2990 East Lake Lansing Road  
East Lansing, MI 48823-2281  
(517) 355-1903  
www.ctumsu.org  
ctu@ctumsu.org



Organized and  
independent  
since 1974!

## CTU Executive Board

### President:

Deb Bittner [Deb@ctumsu.org](mailto:Deb@ctumsu.org)

### Vice President:

Rosario Garcia [garciar@msu.edu](mailto:garciar@msu.edu)

### Treasurer:

Tracy Rich [Tracy@ctumsu.org](mailto:Tracy@ctumsu.org)

### Secretary:

Michelle Jenkins [jenki285@msu.edu](mailto:jenki285@msu.edu)

### Directors:

Carmen Elliott [caguirre@msu.edu](mailto:caguirre@msu.edu)

Janet Hershberger [jroe@msu.edu](mailto:jroe@msu.edu)

Andrea Parker [parker97@msu.edu](mailto:parker97@msu.edu)

Kristen Rule [meyerkr@msu.edu](mailto:meyerkr@msu.edu)

Jan Wallace [wallac12@msu.edu](mailto:wallac12@msu.edu)

Shirley VanDorp [vandorps@msu.edu](mailto:vandorps@msu.edu)

Jeremy Warmels [herrin59@msu.edu](mailto:herrin59@msu.edu)

## CTU Staff

### Contract Administrators

Greg Harris [Greg@ctumsu.org](mailto:Greg@ctumsu.org)

Sean Temple [Sean@ctumsu.org](mailto:Sean@ctumsu.org)

### Communications Specialist

Cherylee Finney [Cheryl@ctumsu.org](mailto:Cheryl@ctumsu.org)

### Financial Coordinator

Angelica Garcia [Angelica@ctumsu.org](mailto:Angelica@ctumsu.org)

### Organizational Coordinator

Tiffany Westendorf [Tiffany@ctumsu.org](mailto:Tiffany@ctumsu.org)

## Editorial Policy:

The CT News is the voice of our union. It is our vehicle for communicating, on a regular basis, the issues that confront us as workers. Through this newsletter we explain union policies, show how dues are spent, and explain the views and actions of the elected leadership for evaluation by the members.

The CT News is the voice of the membership. We welcome articles from members and stories about members.

While contributions are welcome, they should be constructive and contribute positively to the welfare of our union.

We will accept no attacks on any union leader or member. We will accept thoughtful discussion of all related issues in the letters section, and reserve the right to reply to those that seem to reflect a misunderstanding of the union and its policies.

Direct ideas, letters, questions and comments to Cherylee Finney.

# The PRO Act

The Protecting the Right to Organize Act was first passed by the U.S. House last year but is currently stalled in the Senate.

Workers—organized into unions—built the middle class in America and won higher wages, overtime pay, child labor laws, health care, safety regulations, . . . And we built an amazing economy.

But workers' rights have eroded under several decades of attacks. We can see the impact on the wages, benefits and the rights of the majority of workers. Workers are not getting a fair deal.

Now, as we build back after the pandemic, passage of the PRO Act can give us an opportunity to reset, update and



fix what's broken with our system when it comes to workers' rights.

Follow our website for more information on the Act and how you can take action to support its passage.

# CTclassifieds

## Services:

▼ **Experienced Sewing Service** (Alterations and original projects): I have been sewing professionally for 30 years and would love to help you out during this crazy pandemic while we all have time to think about what needs to get done around our homes. If you have pants that

need to be hemmed, curtains, or pillows that you want custom made, wedding and bridesmaid alterations, clothing alterations, I can do it for you. I am reasonably priced, and I love to sew. Please text me and let me know what kind of project you need done and then we can set up a time to safely talk or meet and figure out your project to be sewn. 517-648-5882, Monday–Friday, 9 to 5 p.m.

▼ **Quality Carpet and Upholstery Cleaners.** For a fresh and sanitized home, call us to help with your cleaning needs. We take every precaution to ensure your safety. Owner operated, free phone estimates. Call Quality Carpet and Upholstery Cleaners at 517-694-0497.

▼ **Skills assessment software:** Make an appointment with your union (355-1903) to access the same skills assessment software used for HR's skills evaluations. Free and in an isolated location.

▼ **CTU Conference Room:** Available free to members (with deposit). For non-members, \$25/hour (plus deposit). We can discuss safety precautions necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Contact the CTU office at 355-1903 for questions, reservations, etc.

▼ **Advertise** to your colleagues in the *CT News*. Send the ad copy to [Cheryl@ctumsu.org](mailto:Cheryl@ctumsu.org). See the guidelines at [www.ctumsu.org/news/ct-classifieds](http://www.ctumsu.org/news/ct-classifieds).

## Membership Meetings

The schedule for the remainder of 2021: Tuesday, April 27; Thursday, July 15; and Wednesday, October 27. Meetings start at 5:20 p.m., but socializing starts at 5 p.m. so check in early. COVID-19 developments do not allow us to formalize a location for meetings and may necessitate scheduling changes. Membership Meetings are for making decisions about the Union, asking questions and receiving updates about Union activities.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Executive Board Meetings

Board meetings are regularly held twice a month on first and third Tuesdays, but changes in dates and times may occur. Call about attending.

**Members welcome!**

## Bargain continued from p. 1

together, our health care MOU covers the general wages and health care benefits of MSU support staff employees represented by organized labor—over 6,000 workers.

### Our unique process

Just a reminder that the eight campus unions covered by the health care MOU work together to bargain health care and wages with our employer. A unique aspect of the MSU process is that after negotiations we work in partnership with management through a Joint Health Care Committee (JHCC) to explore and make decisions affecting health care. In this manner, we bring the power and interests of both the purchaser (management) and the consumer (workers through their respective unions) of health care to the table.

And we made it even more unique by agreeing to tie our general pay increases to our ability to keep health care costs low. This means employees have a vested interest in managing the costs of high quality health care. It also shows just how savvy we have all become as health care consumers—because this process works! Health care costs are down and raises went up for the third straight year.

In this round of negotiations the unions will strive, as always, to protect our benefits while exploring ways they might be expanded. Understanding that our raises are also on the line, the unions will be looking for ways to incorporate efficiencies and other cost-saving elements into the contract.

But it isn't always so easy to just show the facts and expect status quo. Considering the impact of the pandemic on our University community, we expect to hear a lot about "shared sacrifice." We are pre-

## Did you hear that MSU workers don't pay for their health care?

### Don't believe it!

MSU support staff employees have bargained a unique way to pay for rising health care costs. Our process puts raises on the line to give us greater control over the quality of our benefits and the cost of our coverage. And it decreases total health care costs for the University. We introduced this win-win approach in 2002!



pared to discuss, in detail, the sacrifices of MSU's support staff workers over the past year and show, again, how we all benefit by this joint process.

### How did we get here?

How have campus workers kept such good health care insurance and benefits without being forced into paying huge portions of our premiums, copays, and other costs? [Sandra Cox]

How has MSU, year after year, experienced health care cost increases far below those of other major employers both nation- and statewide?

Some of us remember how we did it, and it wasn't easy. So permit me a little background review. As the price of health care soared in the 1980s, the University followed the lead of most major employers and attempted to transfer costs to employees. At that time, MSU unions were bargaining health care insurance and raises individually, making it easier for the employer to try to push concessions. Recognizing that initially small transfers of costs to employees would almost certainly grow, and heeding that old labor slogan of "strength in numbers," the unions started working together in order to have a unified message and greater influence in this area.

In the late 1980s, union leaders were educating themselves on the complicated health care and insurance scene and investigating options. When labor proposed a plan to switch insurance car-

riers in the early 1990s, it was met with opposition by some MSU administrators. But others in the administration listened and that one proposal saved the University \$21 million. A few years later, the parties agreed to another insurance modification that saved an additional \$17 million.

As a result of these successes, the University agreed in 1994 to recognize the Coalition as the organization through which individual unions would bargain health care, and the parties formally recognized the JHCC. Plan design modifications in our first joint contract resulted in \$12 million in savings.

Through that daunting, complicated path, labor forged a common-interest partnership with the University that exists to this day. Together, through the JHCC, we examine and discuss options twice a month. When we meet with insurance companies and benefit providers, we work as a team. MSU employees now have a seat at the table in deciding our own priorities and have become a valuable partner and tool in managing health care costs. It has been a win-win arrangement that greatly curtails increases in the costs. At the same time, it has allowed us to avoid the draconian benefit cuts and cost shifting (especially premium sharing) experienced by other workers.

And that \$50 million we saved? First, these were not one-time savings. They were yearly savings, and therefore, grow much more significant with every passing

Health care *continued on p. 6*





# Board actions

July 2020 through December 2020

**B**oard meetings are regularly scheduled twice a month, on first and third Tuesdays, and members are welcome to attend. The CTU constitution requires the executive Board to meet at least once a month. Because of the pandemic, meetings are being held via zoom and members who wish to attend are asked to contact the office to make arrangements.

This article includes Board actions that took place July 2020 through December 2020. All expenditure decisions are included, but the list does not represent meetings in their entirety. Members can receive copies of complete minutes through the mail or email by contacting the CTU office at 517-355-1903.

## July 21

Welcomed new Contract Administrator Greg Harris to his first Executive Board meeting.

Voted to transfer \$15,000 from the undesignated savings account to checking.

Agreed to donate \$100 to the Capitol City FOP Lodge #143 fundraiser.

Voted to pay Dominion \$1,323.75 for a customer-focused payroll service based in Grand Rapids, switching from an out-of-state service responsible for several problems with our Michigan taxes.

Received Labor Relations update on classifications and work with the Coalition of Labor Organizations at MSU (CLO).

Received vice president's report that Union Representative (UR) Angel Toth will fill in the vacant position on the UR Coordinating Committee until it can be filled through election in January.

Received president's report on test use of CTU facilities in the pandemic.

Received Board member Shirley Vandorp's offer to represent CTU on MSU's MLK Committee.

Discussed Membership Meeting to be held in the parking lot this evening.

Received report on the President's Advisory Committee on Disability Issues (PACDI) from CTU's representative, Stephen Stofflet.

Received report on Women's Advisory Committee for Support Staff forum from a Board member who attended.

Received report on Board member Stacey Patton's resignation due to leaving the University.

## August 18

Received president's report: updates on the CLO and the Joint Health Care Committee (JHCC), 2021 raise projections, candidate forums for the MSU Chief Diversity Officer, and the COVID-19 Reopening Campus Task Force.

Received vice president's report on union training and UR district reorganization. [Danielle McCravey]

Discussed the reopening of the building for use by members and the public.

Discussed the need to examine and possibly update the Constitution.

Discussed October elections.

## August 28 (email discussion and vote)

Agreed to purchase fifteen \$10 tickets to the Capital Area United Way (CAUW) Women United "virtual" lunch.

## September 1

Voted to send up to 10 individuals to the Labor Education Programs (LEP) class, Diversity and the Labor Movement,

at a cost of \$25 per person per session or \$100 for all five sessions. [Note: Eight people attended the five-session series.]

Received president's report, which included a discussion of the MSU Board of Trustees candidates.

Received vice president's report on new process for onboarding URs.

Discussed upcoming CTU election.

Canceled November 3 Board meeting because it is U.S. Election Day.

## September 15

Voted to purchase up to five \$20 bowls from the Greater Lansing Food Bank "Empty Bowls" fundraiser to be used as give-aways for membership meetings and raffles.

Changed our Dinner Table sponsorship of the Tri-County Office on Aging fundraiser to a \$500 general donation. Because of the pandemic, the dinner was canceled.

Approved UR district reorganization.

## October 6

Donated \$250 to support a family for the holidays through the Student Parents On a Mission program, which works out of the MSU Student Resource Center, pending approval of funds transfer.

Received Labor Relations update on CLO activities, classification grievances, and an invitation to Deb Bittner as the CLO president to serve on the MSU Police Chief Search Committee.

Received vice president's report on union training.

Discussed upcoming candidate forums to be held over zoom.

Discussed upcoming Special Membership Meeting where members will decide whether to transfer funds from the Designated to Undesignated (operations) Fund.

Received report from the union representative to PACDI that the MSU president attended their most recent meeting.

## October 13-15 (email discussion and vote)

Agreed to purchase up to four tickets to attend the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame virtual induction at \$40 each. [Note: only one \$40 ticket was purchased.]

**Decisions continued on next page**

# Decisions continued from previous page

## October 20

Donated \$100 to the Capital Area United Way's Labor Organizations drive.

Donated \$50 to the Greater Lansing Food Bank "Building Hope" campaign.

Donated \$100 to the Labor and Employment Relations Association to help sustain the organization while events cannot be held.

Renewed Society for Human Resources Management \$219 yearly membership.

Received president's report that MSU has started discussions on extending the temporary furlough agreement.

Received report that members voted to transfer \$85,897.77 from the Designated to Undesignated (operations) Fund at the Special Membership Meeting.

Received report on the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame virtual ceremony.

Received report from our representative to MSU's MLK Committee.

## November 5 (email discussion and vote)

Agreed to donate \$250 to the annual Old Newsboys Association's spoof journal fundraiser to provide shoes and boots to local children.

## November 13 (email discussion and vote)

Agreed to present the tentative furlough extension Memorandum of Understanding to the membership for a vote and to recommend ratification.

Agreed to recommend an extension of the "dues waiver" to the membership for a vote so that furloughed members can continue their "member in good standing" status until they are no longer on furlough.

## November 17

Witnessed the president administer the oath of office to newly re-elected Vice President Rosie Garcia and newly elected Director Jeremy Warmels.

Receive investment report from CTU Financial Advisor Luke Terry of Rehmann Financial.

Received president's report on building conditions: the awning is seriously rusted.

Set Membership Meetings for 2021. [Monique Blackmer]

Established Board committees.

## December 1

Received update on CTU's conversion to a new phone system: \$410 per line plus labor for MSU to do the conversion.

Received president's update on CLO, JHCC, MSU Police Chief Search Committee, and union presidents' virtual dinner with MSU President Samuel Stanley.

## December 15

Received president's report: a member raffle for calendars and other items was quite popular; union presidents met with the MSU president.

Discussed upcoming Board retreat to review and update, if needed, Board policies.

Agreed to donate \$100 to the Lansing Firefighters Union Local #421 in lieu of purchasing an ad in their annual program. Their charity basketball game was canceled due to COVID-19.

Voted to send up to 10 people to the CAUW Community Services classes at \$10 per person.



# January Membership Meeting

**C** TU members held our first Zoom membership meeting on January 26, 2021. Sixty-seven members attended.

We began the meeting with a discussion about options we can investigate that would allow us to vote and operate democratically using Zoom or other electronic conferencing platforms at future meetings.

Treasurer Tracy Rich presented our financial picture as of October 2020. She said that the 2021 budget is being prepared and should be ready to present at the April 27 Membership Meeting along with the Audit for 2020.

President Deb Bittner presented CTU's traditional philosophy and approach to making community charitable donations.

"We make donations to remind people that unions are a part of the community and that we invest in the community," she said. "Labor provides a lot of the volunteer muscle in the community, and CTU is proud to be a part of that. Individual union members make a difference by volunteering time and money. But unions sometimes get a bad rap as self-centered and greedy."

"And donations are practical," she added. "Members and their families sometimes need these community resources. It is up to us to help make sure they are there when we need them."

Contract Administrator Sean Temple  
*Meeting continued on p. 7*

# Furloughs continued from p. 1

furloughs gives units more flexibility to handle temporary work disruptions and financial problems.

The extension of temporary unpaid furloughs also benefits CTs by extending

health care coverage and other benefits. Temporary furloughs, rather than permanent layoffs, also provide for CTs to return to jobs lost before the pandemic.

[Alyssa Bedaine]

## Health care

continued from p. 3

year. Second, the “savings” were nowhere to be found a few years later when the University once again claimed financial distress and argued that employees needed to bear a huge share of that burden by assuming significant health insurance costs going forward.

And not surprising, our overwhelming success in lowering the cost of health care did not result in big raises when the University saw more prosperous times.

This dynamic caused the unions to propose a new strategy to show our commitment to this relationship and process. We bargained to tie our raises to increases in the cost of health care. We agreed with the “total compensation” idea and built it into a health care matrix.

### Employees do assume a financial burden

We formalized that wage/benefit relationship in our 2002-2006 MOU that linked wages to increases in the cost of health care. The arrangement allowed the University greater predictability in budgeting and also gave workers some control. By controlling costs through good health care management on the part of employees, coupled with the efforts of the JHCC to introduce innovations and cost-saving measures, we could experience higher raises.

Bottom line, employers look at “total compensation,” which includes the cost of both wages and benefits, of which health care is the most financially significant. We understand that increases in the cost of health care have an inhibiting impact on pay raises.

On the other hand, we took the risk of lower raises if health care costs were unexpectedly high. With this process, we agreed to pay a portion of our health care in a way that insured high quality health care without premium sharing or exorbitant copays. Every year that our raise fell below the maximum allowed under the MOU was a year that we paid directly for health care. And because our raises are cumulative, it was not a one-time payment.

## Our Health Care Bargaining Partners

The CTU sits with seven other campus unions in bargaining health care and wages. The members of our team are:

- ▼ Administrative Professional Association (APA), MEA NEA
- ▼ Administrative Professional Supervisors Association (APSA)
- ▼ AFSCME Local 1585
- ▼ Clerical-Technical Union of MSU
- ▼ IUOE Local 324
- ▼ IATSE Local 274
- ▼ Police Officers Association of Michigan (Non-Supervisory)
- ▼ Spartan Skilled Trades Union (SSTU)

Let me emphasize: **It is a myth that MSU’s union represented employees do not pay their fair share for health care.** Or that we have “free” health care. We work hard at the process, take risks, and know the consequences. But make no mistake, we do pay for health care.

### It works!

There are many new leaders at the University, including a new president, many new administrators, and even a new Employee Relations director who are not familiar with our history and successes. It will be our job to help them understand that you can’t just take the easy road and shift the financial burden to the people who do the work. At MSU, we have found a better, more cost effective way.

A better way to explain it is that the unions’ partnership with the University has saved more money than if MSU had followed the example of other large employers and shifted costs directly to employees. Our efforts have worked, not through heavy-handed demands and labor unrest, but through a just, equal partnership with the employer whereby we explore options, examine details, compare plans, and hold insurers and benefit providers to account. Just look at the recent market. In the last three years MSU’s overall health care costs have increased less than 1% per employee. Compare that to the 3.5% to 6% increase

Co-chief negotiators representing the unions at the bargaining table are APSA President Joe Garza and MEA UniServ Director Shannon Alston.

The Graduate Employees Union and the Union of Non-Tenured Faculty at MSU bargain their health care and wages individually.

“These are difficult times and we don’t expect negotiations to be easy,” said Deb Bittner, president of both the CTU and the Coalition of Labor Organizations at MSU. “But by working together, the unions are able to pool our resources. We have a strong and knowledgeable team.”

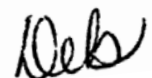
for other large plans nationwide.

Another bonus is that the healthcare partnership between MSU and the CLO translates to shared loyalty to MSU. Employees are appreciative of the benefits and work to keep them. We also understand the impact of benefits on MSU’s finances, and we work hard to make MSU successful every day. It is truly a partnership in every way.

To that end, we were happy to see MSU President Samuel Stanley’s appreciative comments about employees sharing in the MSU community’s sacrifices. We know that MSU has budget concerns brought on by the COVID pandemic. We also know that it is not fair, nor is it the time, to place additional economic burdens on the staff who have experienced many hardships and sacrifices over the past year. Certainly, it isn’t the time to abandon the processes that have kept MSU the great employer that it is. Now is the time to come together and keep working hard.

As Coach Izzo likes to say, “Keep going with the one who brought you to the dance.” It will be our job to keep reminding those around us of that and the historical strides that got us here.

Thanks for reading this and thanks for your support for this uniquely MSU process.



## Surviving the pandemic

# Tell us your story!

*How did we do it? How did you do it? Send us your story about life in the pandemic.*

A year has passed, and we finally see the possibility of a gradual turn toward “normal.” Masks and distancing remain necessary, but we are getting our vaccines and the future looks brighter. The University appears to be moving toward “business as usual” as students make plans to live and study at MSU in the Fall.

In some ways we can mark this past year by our losses—loss of control over large parts of our lives, loss of time and opportunities, financial losses. We were unable to visit with people who were dear to us. For many of us, watching the struggles of friends and family members was the hardest. Some of us lost loved ones.

We experienced furloughs, reduced hours, the loss of precious time off that we had accrued.

Some CTs were required to report to the workplace, often risking their own health and that of their families.

Others were told to work at home where some had to juggle work with household demands, including child and family care as schools and other community institutions closed their doors.



We were all impacted in different ways, and we cannot overlook our hardships and sacrifices, or that of our coworkers.

Probably, there also were some bright spots. [Suzanne Kroll]

As we rearranged our schedules and approaches, some of us probably experienced renewed connections and watched our families grow closer and stronger.

It wasn't always easy, but we learned to make the technology work for us. Many of us became much more familiar with Zoom and Teams.

Some of us thrived while working at home. In fact, we may have convinced a couple of recalcitrant managers that we could be just as responsible and just as (sometimes more) productive when we were able to concentrate on the tasks at hand without some of the usual workplace distractions.

We are asking you to look back over the year and share your experience with other members. We want to publish a variety of stories in an article. For example, did you depend on some of the provisions of the American Rescue

Plan? Did you to take another job while on furlough? How did your family fare?

Your story may be included anonymously, if you wish, but we will need to confirm your identity before publishing anything. Send your stories to [Cheryl@ctumsu.org](mailto:Cheryl@ctumsu.org).

### Meeting continued from p. 5

urged CTs to contact the union immediately if approached about accepting a part-time position. The union can help CTs understand their rights and sort through options.

Discussion turned to the preparation for health care negotiations and other union activities and projects.

**Door prize winners:** Melinda Kochenderfer won the \$100 quorum prize. Mark Roosien won \$50. Stephanie Benoit Hurth, Angie Kimmel, Lynn Lievens, Andrea McCulloh, Heather Proctor, Holly Purves, Jalen Smith, Arthur Villafranca, and JoAnn Villareal won CTU and MSU promotional items.



**CTU OF MSU**  
**2990 E. LAKE LANSING ROAD**  
**EAST LANSING, MI 48823-6219**

**CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED**

## *CT*calendar

**April 20, May 4.** Executive Board meetings. Meetings are being held via Zoom. Contact the office at 517-355-1903 if you wish to observe a meeting or address the Board.

**May 5–May 26, Wednesdays.** Self compassion course with Instructor and Emotional Wellness Consultant Lisa Laughman, Noon–1 p.m. Free. More information on courses and registration is available at [Health4U.msu.edu](https://Health4U.msu.edu).

**Always available.** ElevateU. Feeling frustrated, stressed, overwhelmed? Check out MSU's Staying Engaged and Motivated courses (access through EBS). To *talk* to someone about frustrations, stress, and other issues, visit <https://health4u.msu.edu> for information about making an appointment.



### **Spring Membership Meeting**

**Tuesday, April 27**  
**5:20 p.m.**

**Zoom meeting** — watch for email notification with link

#### **Agenda includes:**

- ▼ Vote on transfer of funds from the Designated to Undesignated (operations) Fund
- ▼ Presentation of the 2021 Budget
- ▼ Presentation of 2020 Audit
- ▼ Our discussion of union business will include an update on health care negotiations
- ▼ Door prizes