Saying goodbye and hello to people and places

By Aaron Besecker, VP/Mobilization

10.30.22 – It’s been an eventful last few months for the Guild, including having to say goodbye to colleagues in two departments because their work was outsourced.

Last month, we saw eight of 10 members in the Prepress Department leave The Buffalo News due to outsourcing. Their work is now being done by a company called Affinity and at a Lee Enterprises hub in the Midwest.

Additionally, customer service representatives in Inside Circulation began leaving in July, with all having exited their jobs at The News by early August. Their work is now being performed at a Lee hub in Tulsa, Okla.

The Guild came to an agreement in June that allowed for the outsourcing of most of the Prepress Department as part of a new two-year contract.

The outsourcing of the phone reps in Inside Circulation was allowed under the terms of a new Guild contract negotiated last year, and the company notified us in the spring of their intention to outsource that work.

We are sad to see our colleagues go and we wish them all the best.

New newsroom leadership

Employees in the Editorial Department got a new boss this summer. In late July, the company announced Sheila Rayam would become the eighth editor of The News – the first Black journalist and second woman to hold that position.

Rayam’s first day was Aug. 22. We welcome Sheila and look forward to having a good working relationship.

A new place to work

Guild members who worked in the office building at One News Plaza picked up and moved to some new digs in Larkinville earlier this month.

The company announced the move Sept. 19 and things moved quickly to get us out of the building at Washington and Scott and into Larkin at Exchange.

One more thing...

Stay tuned for information about the upcoming Guild holiday party.

Comings & Goings from The Buffalo News/Sun papers

Comings
Joseph Cooke/Editorial-Photo
Ryan O’Halloran/Editorial-Sports

Goings
Anisa Almadrahl/Inside Circ
Mary Bader-Bevilaqua/Prepress
Elaine Bain/Prepress
Linda Dockery/Inside Circ
Douglas Hannon/Inside Circ
André Hatton/Prepress
Roman Henry/Inside Circ
Amanda Jowsey/Inside Circ

Robert Kessel/Prepress
Alexis Koonec/Inside Circ
Ken Leshney/Prepress
Terry Lew/Editorial-Graphics
Patricia Lewandowski/Prepress
Julie Massari/Inside Circ
Hilary Osborn/Prepress
Mary Pasciak/Editorial
Helen Payne/Inside Circ
Margaret Riggen/Inside Circ
Deborah Schweinsburg/Inside Circ
Karen Schweinsburg/Inside Circ
Andrew Trudell/Inside Circ
Charity Vogel/Editorial

Next meeting

The Executive Committee will meet on Nov. 7. There are no general membership meetings scheduled the rest of the year.
Late-summer fun: From left, Chief Editorial Nightside Steward Mike Pesarchick, Vice President of Contract Enforcement Scott Scanlon, Karen Scanlon and designer Chris Fisher enjoy the food, weather and the company at our picnic on Sept. 10 at Como Lake Park in Lancaster. (Photo by Guild Secretary Steve Watson)

Grill master: As usual, Andrew Galameau delighted the tastebuds of picnic attendees. (Photo by Guild Secretary Steve Watson)
Get to Know: Seth Wallace, deputy news editor

By Aaron Besecker, VP/Mobilization

You’ve hopefully gotten a chance to meet or work with Seth Wallace, one of the new faces in the newsroom this year.

Wallace, who grew up in Geneseo and went to college at SUNY Fredonia, started at The Buffalo News in early March.

He spent six years working as a reporter and editor at the Palladium-Times in Oswego, where his coverage specialties included nuclear energy, education and crime.

Wallace also spent time as a political staffer, where he said he worked closely with unions “and came to greatly respect their contribution to our state and region.”

Wallace, a self-described “big history guy,” said “the rise of organized labor in the United States is one of my favorite periods.”

Q: What kind of duties does the deputy news editor at The Buffalo News handle?

A: We’re the intersection of the newsroom and the public. After a story is filed, the news editorial staff will make sure it fits Buffalo News house style, write/fit the headlines and cutlines to the specifications set by the page designers and keep an overview of what’s going in tomorrow’s paper so stories are moving at an even clip throughout the day and evening.

Q: What made you want to work as the deputy news editor at The Buffalo News?

A: As a journalism student at SUNY Fredonia, The Buffalo News was the capo di tutti capi of journalism outlets. After spending the past decade working in politics and journalism in Central New York, I wanted to take a stab at a higher career level and, as a lifelong upstater, there is no higher level than this paper. Thankfully, I was fortunate enough to be brought on board.

Q: What were a few of the stories you worked on when you were a reporter that were your favorites?

A: Anything related to nuclear power, a particular favorite of mine. Specifically: It looked for a while like one of Oswego County’s nuclear reactors was going to go offline and cut about 500 local jobs. We covered that news, and the eventual deal struck between the state and energy company, then I toured the facility while the uranium refueling was happening and got to look into the core with the cap off and everything, it was great.

Did you know there’s a site in the New Mexico desert that holds all the U.S. military’s hazardous nuclear waste? And that it’s designed to far outlast humanity but since plutonium never goes away, we have figure out how to “warn the future about this stuff”? Now you know! Currently recruiting for a road trip out there. They keep denying my requests but I dare them to turn me away at the gate every day for a month.

Q: You mentioned you worked as a political staffer. Would you tell us more about that?

A: Fresh out of college, I was lucky to serve as a junior staffer (read: gopher, fetch and carry, etc) for several NYS politicians – twice for the State Senate, once in the Assembly. Before my son was born, I thought that might be a potential career path but peripatetic campaign operative life is not super conducive for being a good dad.

Q: What does it mean to you to be a member of a union?

A: Joining the Buffalo Newspaper Guild was an extremely attractive component of this job and certainly played a role in my application and pursuit. My father was active in his union growing up so I was exposed
Poverty doesn’t negate generosity: Lessons from this year’s Kids Day

By Sandy Tan, President

I was selling the Kids Day edition of The Buffalo News at the Jefferson Avenue Tops store when I witnessed it. A woman heading toward the grocery store stopped in the middle of the parking lot and called out to her friend, “I don’t think I can do this.”

This year, selling Kids Day papers was like no other, despite some similarities. As usual, newsroom staff from top editors to Guild reporters volunteered to participate in an effort to bring Kids Day papers to some of the poorest residents of the city.

Even though we know we won’t raise a ton of money selling on the East Side, Kids Day captains who belong to the Buffalo Newspaper Guild believe those residents deserve access to the fundraising effort in support of Children’s Hospital. So for decades, we hawked the paper in sun, rain, heat and frigid temperatures at the intersection East Ferry Street and Jefferson Avenue.

After a two-year hiatus due to Covid-19, The Buffalo News was once again selling Kids Day papers to support both Oishei Children’s Hospital and Cradle Beach Camp, which serves underprivileged and special needs youth.

But this time, all fundraising was taking place on Sept. 17 at Tops grocery stores.

I signed our newsroom up to sell at the Jefferson Avenue Tops store because it was only a couple of blocks from the intersection where we normally sold Kids Day and because our journalists had been so involved in helping to tell the tragic stories and aftermath from May 14, when a racist gunman killed 10 Black people and injured three others at that location.

After learning that another community Kids Day team captain dropped the Niagara Street Tops location on the Lower West Side just two days before the Saturday fundraiser, we agreed to pick up that location, too. We split our 18 volunteers, who worked in one-hour shifts, between the two stores.

What followed was proof that big hearts and generous spirits come from all walks of life. Despite picking up two Tops locations serving some of the city’s poorest residents, donations still poured in.

At both locations, most of our volunteers ignored the “suggested donation” pitch of $5 and just told everyone we would accept contributions of any amount. Donations grew steadily as the morning wore on. Many handed volunteers a dollar bill. Some also took the time to make some conversation.

One woman handed over a single and regretfully told a volunteer she was too poor to contribute more. Another scraped out all the change from the bottom of her purse because that was the cash she had. Some handed over much larger bills without blinking. Many walked in saying they didn’t have the cash to spare yet but followed through on their promises to buy a Kids Day paper on the way out.

In my case, one man hesitated, then he reached into his pocket and handed me 50 cents.

Another woman told me she really wanted to donate but showed me that all she had on her was her ID and her food stamps card. I gave her a copy of the paper and told her not to worry about it. But at checkout, she withdrew cash from her public benefit card, then handed me $2 before she left.

Similarly, another young woman gave me a few bills as she was leaving and looked wistfully at the front page where it featured both the Children’s Hospital and Cradle Beach logos.

“I used to go to Cradle Beach,” she told me.

A man at the Niagara Street Tops told another volunteer, “Children’s Hospital saved my life.”

We realized a number of our city donors were direct or second-hand beneficiaries of the life-giving and life-enhancing services provided by both Children’s Hospital and Cradle Beach. They gave. And gave.

After collecting all the cash from all volunteers that morning, I looked over all the stacks of cash. I felt like a crime lord.

Altogether, we raised nearly $1,000. Slightly more than a fourth of that came from the Jefferson Avenue Tops. That may seem low compared with what affluent suburban locations raked in, but for our team, it was impressive.

I had been prepared for a few patrons at the Jefferson Avenue Tops to question why we were raising money at a site that had been visited by evil just four months earlier. Perhaps, I thought, they might even be offended. But the opposite was true. Many were surprised and happy to be asked to contribute to a good cause.

Not everyone donated, of course, but no one was unkind. One young mother was delighted to be given a copy of the paper at no charge and see the milk coupon on the front.

Another store patron at the Niagara Street location, which is frequented by a large Puerto Rican population, shook his head and conveyed that he didn’t speak English (something to adjust for next year).

Finally, there was that woman standing in the Jefferson Avenue Tops parking lot in the late morning. She wasn’t thinking about donating to any cause. She was just stuck in a bad place, literally and figuratively.

“I don’t think I can do this,” she called out to her companion, who ignored the statement and just kept walking toward the entrance, probably having heard this more than once on the way over. “It’s my first time.”

So I walked out to her and put a hand on her shoulder. “You can do this,” I told her. “It’s actually a very nice store inside.”
She told me she recalled images from the horrific live stream of the shooting. But then she took a few steps forward with me.

“You will be fine,” I assured her.

We kept walking. Then I dropped my hand and watched her complete her journey on her own.

Meeting Minutes

Executive Committee Meeting Minutes: July 25, 2022

President Sandra Tan called the executive committee meeting to order by Zoom at 5:03 p.m. Monday, July 25, 2022.

Tan announced Jason Kremblas and Rick Wiorocki have joined the executive committee as the new District Manager co-stewards. Prior to their appointments, Tan said, DMs were not represented on the executive committee.

Motion/Second/Carried Scanlon/Besecker to approve the June 6 executive committee meeting minutes.

M/S/C Besecker/McAndrew to approve the June 8 general membership meeting minutes.

Grievance Report

Vice President Contract Administration Scott Scanlon said the Guild has raised a concern about a photo taken by News Staff Reporter (and Guild vice president of mobilization) Aaron Besecker that ran with a Besecker story on the cover of the City and Region section on June 29. With few exceptions, photos taken by staff reporters aren’t allowed to run in the print paper. Scanlon said he asked Deputy Managing Editor Margaret Kenny how this happened and was waiting for a response.

He said the Guild might have a vacation-related grievance in Editorial. It involves a member who was told she couldn’t use her accrued vacation time after six months on the job. Guild Administrative Officer Kim Leiser was working on getting this resolved.

And Scanlon said the Guild might have to file a grievance over the practice of management performing Guild work in the early mornings in the Circulation Department.

Mobilization Report

Besecker said there are a lot of messages and flyers going out to members and there’s a new collection of messengers to help deliver them. He said a new edition of the Frontier Reporter will come out in about a week, and it will have a new feature: Get to Know a Guild Member. The first profile subject is new Editorial member Elizabeth Licata.

The Guild launched its new text alert system. Besecker said 52 members have opted in to the messages, compared to the 140 or so who receive Guild emails. There were 48 members who had agreed to receive text messages when Besecker sent out the first Guild text and, he said, 16 of the 48 clicked on the link in the text. That’s better than the standard open rate for Guild emails, he said.

In mid-July, the Guild sent a letter to Sen. Chuck Schumer expressing support for a proposed payroll tax credit that’s meant to benefit news organizations and their employees.

President’s Report

Tan noted the IRS took the unusual step of increasing the mileage reimbursement rate halfway through the year. As of July 1, the rate rose from 58.5 cents per mile to 62.5 cents per mile.

Leiser said she’s making sure everyone who previously turned in a mileage expense form for any period after July 1 receives the proper reimbursement.

Tan said she expects an announcement on a new executive editor for The Buffalo News as soon as this week.

As many are aware, Tan said, The News was printed for a time in Rochester and, briefly, in Cleveland because of issues with our presses. News and Lee Enterprises management have not been forthcoming as to the reason behind the press problem. There is concern, though nothing’s been confirmed, that the press problem stemmed from a ransomware attack, Tan said.

Tan said The News is making its first diversity fellowship hire. It’s a chance for The News to hire non-traditional journalists, people who have talent and potential, and bring new perspectives to the newsroom, but who don’t necessarily have the experience to get hired here otherwise. It was a compromise the Guild reached with The News. The fellows are hired for a two-year probationary period. The first hire is Editorial member Joseph Cooke, a photographer.

Tan said the Guild is hearing discussions about The News moving in the coming months to another location in Buffalo. Tan said she wants employees consulted on what we want and need in a new work space before the move moves too far along without our input. Some changes that would come with a move would have to be collectively bargained, she said.

Editorial delegate Mike McAndrew said he wants to make sure there’s enough room in any new space for all Guild members to work in the building. Tan agreed and added it’s important to have clear separation of advertising and newsroom spaces.

Tan said she’s looking to get substantive training for new Guild leaders. She said there are some opportunities for this in-depth training coming up in October and she wants to hear from anyone interested in taking part.

Old Business

Tan asked Leiser to give an update on Prepress bargaining. Leiser said members of the unit voted 8-1 n June 26 to ratify a tentative agreement with The News.

The agreement includes raises for some members, for as long as they remain with the company; signing bonuses; and enhanced severance.

Leiser then gave an update on the photographers’ buyout. There was an issue with four of the five photographers who had taken buyouts and gotten their payments right away because it made them ineligible for unemployment benefits. The company worked with the Guild to find a solution to this issue, Leiser said, and gave the photographers the chance to return the buyout payment in order to retain their unemployment eligibility.

Leiser said two of the four photographers chose to do this. A fifth photographer, who had already extended his buyout date to August, has done so again, now until October.

Besecker gave an update on the push to change the company’s 401K language to allow employees to start putting money into a 401K account sooner than the one year they now have to wait.

Lee Vice President of Human Resources and Legal Astrid Garcia told Besecker in June that the company would agree to this request. Besecker said he’s waiting for the start date on the revised policy.

Employees now will be able to start investing in a 401K account after one month of employment, he said, though the company match won’t kick in for a year. Leiser said Lee attorneys have to rewrite the plan documents to reflect this change.

Tan asked for an update on outsourcing of News departments. Leiser said customer service call takers already have started
leaving. Aug. 7 is their final day, although some of them are taking jobs with Lee.

Leiser said there’s no official end date for Prepress employees whose jobs are being outsourced but she expects the change to take effect by the beginning of September.

New Business
The executive committee approved Tan’s suggestion that we hold a summer picnic again and asked Officers Alva Hill, DM co-steward Rick Wiorkowski, Typographical nightside steward Mark Hanover, ABC steward Steve Watson, Officer Kim Leiser, Editorial nightside steward Mike Pesarchick, Vice President Contract Administration Scott Scanlon, Vice President Mobilization Aaron Besecker, Editorial delegate Mark Sommer, Administrative Officer Kim Leiser, Editorial nightside steward Mike Pesarchick, and other columnists and changing up its mix of puzzles, syndication and printing costs.

The News is dividing up the remaining classified ad work between a couple of places, Tan said.

Real estate, employment and automotive classified ads, which the Guild had joint jurisdiction over, will be done by Amplified Buffalo employees. There are no jurisdictional issues there, Tan said.

All other classified ads will be handled out of a hub in Iowa, Tan said, raising a potential grievance that she will talk about more later.

Tan said it’s her understanding that an announcement on a move from our offices at One News Plaza could be coming soon.

Tan noted the changes coming to the comics, puzzles and columnists pages of the paper, as announced earlier in the day by Editor Sheila Rayam in a note to the newsroom. The News is getting rid of a number of daily and Sunday comics, advice and other columnists and changing up its mix of puzzles, bringing our offerings in line with what other Lee papers offer. The number of pages in the City and Region section also will shrink. It’s an attempt, Tan said, by Lee to save money on syndication and printing costs.

Returning to the potential move, Tan said the Guild sent a letter to Publisher Tom Wiley and Lee executives detailing what its members were looking for in a new space. Garcia acknowledged the letter with a brief note. Leiser noted the company only is obligated to provide a safe work place and parking to Guild members per our contract.

A question was raised about the fate of The News’ extensive print archives. Guild officers say they understand The News has a plan to bring them over in any move but they don’t have specifics.

Executive Committee Meeting Minutes: Sept. 12, 2022
President Sandra Tan called the executive committee meeting to order by Zoom at 5:02 p.m. Monday, Sept. 12, 2022.

Motion/Second/Carrried Harrington/Besecker to approve the July 25 executive committee meeting minutes.

President’s Report
Tan said she recently met with Astrid Garcia, Lee’s vice president of human resources and legal, and Tammy Barnes-Turnbull, The News’ vice president of human resources and labor relations, and the pair announced some changes are coming to the health insurance plan covering News employees including Guild members. News employees now are covered by Highmark BlueCross BlueShield. News employees beginning next year will be covered through Wellmark BlueCross BlueShield, a plan based out of Iowa.

Lee Enterprises is consolidating all its insurance coverage at its newspapers under this one plan, Tan said she was told. Tan said the executives emphasized there will be no change in coverages as part of the changeover.

In addition, Tan said, it’s possible dental insurance will switch over to a plan called Ameritas.

Because of the change to Wellmark, the start of the open enrollment period this fall will be delayed, Tan said, and the issuance of new health and dental insurance cards could be delayed as well.

Tan said The News is changing its payroll processing system to the Dayforce software platform. It’s an update that should make it easier for employees to keep track of their hours and how many vacation or float days they’ve used, she said. It’s not yet clear whether employees will be responsible for entering their own hours in the system.

One immediate change is that pay day will switch to Fridays, a delay of three days from the current situation. This will begin with the first pay day of the new year, a week when, as Guild Administrator Kim Leiser noted, our paychecks are delayed two days as a matter of practice.

Tan also pointed out a change the Guild prodded The News to make, allowing new employees to begin to contribute to a 401K account 30 days after starting with the company, will take effect by Jan. 1.

Tan also said The News and Lee have canceled The News’ contract with Media Sales Plus. The Guild had negotiated an agreement to outsource the work done by the classified advertising department to Media Sales Plus but, Tan recalled, had warned the company this change wouldn’t end up working out financially.

The News, she said, has belatedly reached the same conclusion.

The News will add one Guild employee because of this change who will handled third-party ads.

M/S/C Sommer/McAndrew to approve spending up to $1,000 on the picnic.

McAndrew suggested holding an event for Editorial interns before they start leaving at the end of their internships. Other members agreed with the idea and McAndrew said he would arrange to hold the happy hour at a bar/restaurant near The News that could put out a spread of food for us.

M/S/C McAndrew/Scanlon to spend $250 on the event.

Leiser then suggested inviting members of Inside Circulation who are leaving The News as well.

M/S/C Leiser/McAndrew to spend an extra $250 on the happy hour.

The Guild set up a financial planning session with Level Financial Advisors on Aug. 3 for members whose jobs are being outsourced, Tan said. The executive committee needed to approve spending money on 1-on-1, hour-long financial planning sessions for up to 16 Guild members.

M/S/C Scanlon/McAndrew to approve paying for the sessions at the same hourly rate the Guild has paid for this service in the past.

And M/S/C Sommer/McAndrew to pay $200, the same amount as last year, to make a contribution to the E.J. Mays Scholarship Fund Golf Tournament.

The executive committee will next meet at 5 p.m. Monday Sept. 12 with a general membership meeting set for Sept. 14.

Tan adjourned the meeting at 6:14 p.m.

Attendance: President Sandy Tan, Secretary Steve Watson, Vice President Contract Administration Scott Scanlon, Vice President Mobilization Aaron Besecker, Editorial delegate Mike Harrington, Editorial delegate Mark Sommer, Administrative Officer Kim Leiser, Editorial nightside steward Mike Pesarchick, Editorial delegate Jon Harris, Editorial delegate Mike McAndrew, Inside Circulation steward Melissa Burrowes, Editorial delegate David Robinson, District Manager co-steward Jason Kremblas.

Excused: Editorial delegate Rachel Lenzi, Treasurer/Typographical nightside steward Hilary Osborn.

Absent: Sun Newspapers steward Francesca Bond, Typographical nightside steward Mark Hanover, ABC steward Alva Hill, DM co-steward Rick Wiorakowski.
Vice President of Mobilization Aaron Besecker said he’s looking for people to profile for the Frontier Reporter. Particularly newer hires and people outside the newsroom. Recommendations are welcome.

He gave an update on how the Guild’s text-messaging system is working. He said 48 members have opted in to receive text messages, most from Editorial, compared to 116 members on our email list.

Besecker said he’s sent four texts so far, with a click rate on the messages ranging from 10% to 40% of recipients. He encouraged members who haven’t yet opted in to the messages to do so.

Besecker then brought up a website, Alden is Bad News, and a related domain name, that was designed on Squarespace. The national Guild paid the initial $216 fee for the website. There’s a $252 renewal fee coming due soon. Keeping the domain alone would cost $20. The site was created at the height of our concerns about Alden Capital taking over Lee but it was never published and made publicly accessible. The consensus of the discussion at the meeting was not to renew the site.

Grievance Report

Vice President of Contract Administration Scott Scanlon recapped some ongoing issues.

First, he said he had sent a letter in July to newsroom managers regarding a photo taken by Besecker that had appeared in print, a violation of the contract. Scanlon said he had informed a Guild member on The News’ design team had inadvertently selected that image for publication. Scanlon said Deputy Managing Editor Margaret Kenny Giancola sent out a reminder note to people involved in print production.

Second, Scanlon sent an Aug. 22 email to newsroom managers again raise concerns about gambling content in the Sports feed on our website. Lee-produced content about sports betting, including pieces that appear little more than thinly disguised advertorials, is mixed in with our own sports coverage. Kenny Giancola told Scanlon there’s little The News can do beside flagging the most egregious examples to corporate. Scanlon said he thought the situation had improved since he sent his letter.

An extended discussion then broke out, with Editorial delegate Mike Harrington, a sports reporter, raising concerns that Lee and The News are inserting advertorial copy that is meant to look like editorial content into our Sports feed. Leiser said Lee is required to label as advertorial content anything that could look like a news article. Following further discussion on the issue, the committee directed Scanlon to send a note of objection to Garcia.

Third, Scanlon returned to a topic that’s come up at previous committee meetings: when new employees can take vacation days they’ve earned.

The News argues, according to Scanlon, that if an employee wants to take a week’s vacation after six months on the job, that employee is drawing down on their future vacation time and only would be entitled to one week, and not two weeks, of vacation in the employee’s second year.

The News’ contention is that employees are not entitled to a week of vacation for their first year, Tan said, but this has been unevenly enforced among recent hires.

Scanlon said the contract language is clear. Leiser said some of the issue dates back to 2015, when The News switched to Circulation, of managers performing union work. Scanlon said outsourcing of some work and changes in work hours are at the root of the problem because it’s created windows of time when there are no Guild members working.

M/S/C McAndrew/Wiorkowski to file a grievance if this problem can’t be resolved before the next executive committee meeting.

Sixth, this is a problem that connects back to The News and Lee dropping Media Sales Plus.

Tan said there wasn’t a contractual issue with Lee assigning employment, real estate and automotive classified ads to Amplified Buffalo. That previously was shared work, she said.

The problem is with death and legal notice ads now going to a Lee hub in Munster, Ind. Per the agreement the Guild reached with The News when this work was outsourced to Media Sales Plus, it must be outsourced to a true third party.

Lee and The News are arguing the language in this contract provision only mentions a third party distinct from The News and then-owner Berkshire Hathaway. Because this provision doesn’t refer to Lee, specifically, the company can move the work to its Indiana hub.

Leiser said the Guild’s position is that because the entire contract applies to BH, and any successor companies, that’s true for this provision as well.

This prompted a lengthy discussion, with agreement that we have a strong case for a grievance.

M/S/C Besecker/Harrington to file a grievance if needed.

Old Business

Tan noted that the upcoming Sunday would be the final day of work for eight of the 10 members of the Prepress unit. Tan said she planned to go down to the department Friday afternoon to say goodbye to them and to wish them well.

Secretary Steve Watson recapped how the picnic went on Sept. 10 at Como Lake Park. Several dozen Guild members, and guests, attended and enjoyed spectacular weather, fun activities and great food, highlighted by grill master Andrew Galarneau’s chicken souvlaki. It was a smaller turnout than last year, perhaps because it came after Labor Day instead of in August.

New Business

The Guild is looking for new members for the finance committee as it gets ready to prepare its 2022-23 for the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1. Leiser gave a quick overview of the 2021-22 budget as the final weeks of the current fiscal year approached.

ABC steward Alva Hill will take over as treasurer from Hilary Osborn, who is among the Prepress employees leaving the paper. A new Guild member in Editorial, photographer Libby March, has agreed to serve on the finance committee.

Tan said the Guild plans to send at least a couple of people to training hosted by the Guild chapter in Albany at the end of October, with more to come on that at the next executive committee meeting.
The Guild will hold a pair of general membership meetings on Wednesday Sept. 14; 12:30 p.m., in person in the old fifth floor cafeteria, and 5:30 p.m., via Zoom.
The executive committee will next meet at 5 p.m. Monday, Oct. 10.
Tan adjourned the meeting at 7:18 p.m.

Attendance: President Sandy Tan, Secretary Steve Watson, Vice President Contract Administration Scott Scanlon, Vice President Mobilization Aaron Beseecker, Editorial delegate Mike Harrington, Editorial delegate Mark Sommer, Administrative Officer Kim Leiser, Editorial delegate Jon Harris, Editorial delegate Mike McAndrew. Inside Circulation steward Melissa Burrowes, Editorial delegate David Robinson, Typographical nightside steward Mark Hanover, District Manager co-steward Rich Wiorkowski, ABC steward Alva Hill.

Excused: Editorial delegate Rachel Lenzi, Treasurer/Typographical nightside steward Hilary Osborn, Editorial nightside steward Mike Pesarchick.

Absent: Sun Newspapers steward Francesca Bond, District Manager co-steward Jason Kremblas.

Local Meeting Minutes: Sept. 14, 2022

President Sandy Tan called the meeting to order at 12:04 p.m. Wednesday Sept. 14, 2022, in the former cafeteria of the News building with several dozen members in attendance in person.
Tan began by saying she would try to keep the meeting as brief as possible given the amount of material that needed to be covered.

Starting on the social front, Tan noted the Labor Day Parade was canceled because of heavy rain but the Guild did hold its summer picnic the following weekend. A few dozen members and guests attended at Como Lake Park. She thanked chef extraordinaire Andrew Galarneau for his work with the meal. Among the guests were the Stewards who didn’t attend the picnic. She thanked chef extraordinaire Andrew Galarneau for his work with the meal. And she encouraged anyone who missed the picnic to attend the Guild holiday party later this year. More details to come.

Looking forward to the upcoming election for Guild officers, Tan said she welcomed nominations for all positions including president, secretary, treasurer and the vice-presidential jobs. She said the Guild provides both in-person and online training for those who want to get more involved in union affairs.

Tan said the Guild is preparing for the start of its new fiscal year, which begins Oct. 1, and is preparing its new annual budget. The Guild is looking for members to serve on its finance committee. She said people don’t need to be “a math whiz” to serve on the committee.

Tan noted, since the last general membership meeting, The News has outsourced all of its customer service representatives. That work is all performed by Lee Enterprises, she said. Tan said she heard the customer-service system was changed. All other classified ad work will be transferred to a 401K plan. Now, new employees can do this after 30 days, which is in line with industry standards and other Lee papers, and then The News will contribute money into the employee’s account after a year.

Tan announced The News is canceling its contract with Media Sales Plus. The News entered into that contract after the Guild agreed about five years ago to the company's proposal to outsource its classified advertising department, she said. The Guild had warned taking this step would be a disaster for The News and the company belatedly agrees. Going forward, employees will work directly with Amplified Buffalo, which previously did the lion’s share of that work, Tan said. That doesn’t raise a jurisdictional issue.

Third-party ads, such as a garage sale or the death of a pet, will be reimagined as display ads and this work will be handled by a new Guild member who likely will work remotely, she said. The News has hired several former guild members to assist Administrative Officer Kim Leiser, who does the heavy lifting with the budget, in a limited capacity.

Tan noted, since the last general membership meeting, The News has outsourced all of its customer service representatives. That work is all performed by Lee Enterprises, she said. Tan said she heard the customer-service system was overwhelmed by phone calls yesterday, the day the public learned about the changes to the comics, puzzle and columnist lineup in The News. Some callers had wait times of an hour or more to talk to a live person, she said, even though The News and Lee said they were prepared for the onslaught.

The News’ announcement about the change said Lee is standardizing its comics, puzzle and columnist mix across its papers. What this means, Tan said, is Lee is slashing the number of comic strips, saving money on syndication and printing costs. For example, instead of two pages of comics on weekdays, there is half a page now. The columnists who won’t be in the paper anymore include Miss Manners, Dear Abby, Carolyn Hax, the God Squad, the People’s Pharmacy and Michelle Singletary. Ask Amy was added, as was Today in History. Also, we’ll run the Tribune’s horoscopes. Tan urged anyone who gets a complaint from a member of the public to pass it along to News management.

Regarding a pending move from One News Plaza, Tan said she had some news to share with members but she stressed that the information was strictly off the record and must stay within the company.

Tan then provided the update. She ended by saying she was sorry that, whenever a move happens, eight of the 10 members of the Prepress department won’t be moving with us because the Neenah, Wis., plant is closing. This was the first time in two weeks of vacation after each of the first two years of employment. Some of the problem, Scanlon said, traces back to previous guilds that the information was strictly off the record and must stay within the company.

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to a change agreed to in 2016 that shifted all employees onto a calendar-year track from an anniversary-date track for purposes of standardizing vacation days. The other grievance stems from how float days are accrued. The News argues that float days are accrued in three-month increments over the course of the first calendar year of employment. The Guild maintains, Scanlon said, that employees who work for at least three months in their first calendar year of employment are entitled to five float days.

Scanlon said he also corresponded with management in August to raise concerns about unlabeled sports betting ads being sprinkled into our Sports news feed. Each piece of content looked like a story but it was an ad, Scanlon said. He said News managers have told him there’s nothing the company can do locally beside flagging examples of the problem to Lee higher-ups. Scanlon is going to write another note and CC top Lee human resources officials to let them know this is a violation of the contract. There are also some Draft Kings promos that look like ads but maybe aren’t labeled as well as they should be, Scanlon said. He said some of the sports reporters are particularly concerned that this content is what readers first see when visiting The News’ site. Scanlon noted a further complicating factor is that Lee Enterprises owns Front Page Bets and has two employees dedicated to writing about sports betting, and their work gets sprinkled into our Sports news feed.

**Mobilization Report**

Vice President of Mobilization Aaron Besecker wasn’t able to attend the meeting so Tan filled in for him. Besecker had said at Monday’s executive committee meeting that more members need to sign up to receive text-message alerts from the Guild. Tan said it’s important for members to opt in for this, to open the messages they do get and to click on any links that are in those messages. The Guild won’t overwhelm members with messages, Tan said, but we do provide important updates especially now that The News isn’t sharing as much information under Lee’s ownership. Tan also relayed that Besecker is looking to profile a different Guild member each quarter in the Frontier Reporter so she urged people to recommend a worthwhile profile subject.

With that, Tan finished her presentation, expressing amazement that she had wrapped up the business of the meeting within half an hour. She then took questions.

When the subject of the comics changes came up, Tan noted that Lee Enterprises has said it may be able to apply some of the money saved to adding journalism jobs. That’s what the company said, anyway, she observed.

Another question came up about the outsourcing of the design department in Editorial. Tan said the company hasn’t provided the 120 days’ notice it is required to give to begin that process. Therefore, she and Leiser said, any outsourcing of jobs would not happen before the end of the year.

Asked about hiring in the newsroom, Tan said there are several openings because of recent departures. She said she has heard The News is closest in hiring a new Albany bureau chief. She did mention Liku Gao has been hired back as a full-time page designer for us.

There was also discussion of how many pages the City & Region section would have once the comics, puzzle and columnist changes take effect.

There also was discussion of the prospect that The News would raise newsstand prices next month.

And some attendees wondered, given declining print subscription numbers for The News, how many digital-only subscriptions The News has. Tan said she doesn’t know. When another member asked how much The News’ subscription rate has risen under Lee compared to under Berkshire Hathaway, Tan encouraged him to research that information.

After encouraging members to eat up the leftover pizza slices, Tan adjourned the meeting at 12:41 p.m.

A similar meeting was held via Zoom later in the afternoon.