MEMBERS FIGHT FOR OUR UNION, OUR FUTURE AT 2019 IFT CONVENTION

Even before IFT President Dan Montgomery opened the 2019 IFT Convention on October 18, there was no doubt that members were ready to get to work!

Nearly 400 IFT delegates and guests gathered for three days to recognize our successes in the three years since the last convention, focus on the goals ahead, set union policy, and elect statewide officers. If you couldn’t attend and didn’t follow the action on social media, here are the highlights.

MORE CONVENTION HIGHLIGHTS ON PAGES 4-5.
We have the energy. We have the edge.

As I write this column, I honestly have to say that I have never felt more excited about our union and our members than I do right now. Everywhere I look in the IFT, I see our union in action. I can feel the power and energy, and it’s stronger than ever before.

I could feel it at the IFT Convention in October, when hundreds of delegates from locals statewide gathered to set the policies and direction of our union. Their commitment to the work ahead — including passing a Fair Tax constitutional amendment and ousting Trump and DeVos in 2020 — was inspiring. After thoughtful, thorough debate, the body passed important resolutions addressing everything from the need for diversity, equity, and inclusion in our unions to a commitment to support immigrant students to going green. (Read more about convention on pages 4-5.) It was crystal clear that IFT members are determined to fulfill our vision and create the future we all deserve.

I see that same commitment around the state in our local unions. At press times a year by the Illinois Federation of Teachers.

Teachers and staff in the Chicago Teachers Union (Local 1) won historic gains for schools and students by walking out for 11 days in October. The Grayslake Federation of Teachers (Local 504) hit the lines for a day in a successful fight for fair pay. The mid-managers at Triton College (who are members of the Cook County Teachers Union, Local 1600) were continuing to bargain with a stubborn administration after a one-day strike. And the Decatur Federation of Teaching Assistants (Local 4324) had walked out for three days in their ongoing struggle for affordable healthcare. Several other locals nearly walked out, but reached agreements after showing management they were strike-ready.

This commitment to our students, schools, and one another is what our union is all about! I wish you could have seen the solidarity when striking CTU teachers and paras came to Decatur! It was one of the most emotional and inspiring acts I have ever seen as a unionist.

It’s amazing to see the power generated when members come together to demand what is right and necessary for kids and ourselves. These actions are inspiring others throughout Illinois and the nation — solidarity is contagious.

Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg said, “Fight for the things that you care about, but do it in a way that will lead others to join you.” That’s exactly what our locals and members are doing.

I feel privileged to play a part in it. During the recent IFT Convention, I was honored to be reelected to lead this union for another three years. I thank you for the opportunity to continue the important work we’re doing.

We have the energy. We have the edge. Let’s get the job done in the only way we know how — together.

In gratitude and solidarity,

Dan Montgomery | IFT President
We are here for you CTU! declared Montgomery. “Wherever we have members in the struggle, we will be there. If Chicago kids are denied their basics rights, then every kid in every school district is denied theirs too. This isn’t just about Chicago,” he added. “From Kankakee to Peoria to Joliet to our rural districts, the need for adequate resources is a civil rights issue, not just a union issue.”

Montgomery also introduced a special order of business to honor former longtime CTU President and retiring IFT Executive Vice President Karen GJ Lewis, who attended to accept heartfelt gratitude from the IFT for her nearly 30 years of service. After delegates were shown a moving video highlighting her accomplishments, Lewis spoke to the standing-room-only crowd.

Other inspiring speakers included IFT Executive Vice President Stacy Davis Gates, U.S. Senator Dick Durbin, State Representative Mary Edly-Allen (Dist. 51), retiring Illinois AFL-CIO President Michael Carrigan, IEA President Kathi Griffin, and AFT President Randi Weingarten.

Now armed with inspiration and ideas from the 2019 IFT Convention, members and locals have headed back to work to continue building OUR UNION and strengthening OUR FUTURE.
Chicago Teachers Union wins historic agreement after 11-day strike

In a strike heard around the country, the Chicago Teachers Union (Local 1) reached a historic tentative contract agreement in October after 11 days on the picket lines. Using the collective voice of their 25,000 teacher and PSRP members, the union won a contract that includes major gains for their students and schools.

“The 103,000 members of the Illinois Federation of Teachers stand proudly with the Chicago Teachers Union,” IFT President Dan Montgomery said in a statement after the agreement was announced. “We thank you for your courage to fight for equity and justice in public education. Congratulations on winning a contract that honors the dignity and respect that students, teachers, and school staff deserve and helps to deliver to all the children of Chicago the education and services they need.”

The IFT’s largest local was forced to the picket lines after nearly 11 months of difficult negotiations failed to produce an agreement that provided the resources students need. Teachers and staff in the nation’s third-largest school district were fighting for better conditions in their public schools, including more nurses, social workers, counselors, and other frontline staff and smaller class sizes, filthy school buildings, and special education neglect are unacceptable for our children."

“As a CPS parent and an educator, I am extremely proud of what our members have accomplished, together, over the past 11 days,” CTU Vice President and IFT Executive Vice President Stacy Davis Gates said. “We have bargained for the common good and put forth an agenda that prioritizes our students and their families.”

“It wasn’t simply a fight to mitigate the damage of austerity; it was a fight to create the conditions that both students and educators need,” AFT President Randi Weingarten said. “This strike, like so many other fights to fund our future, is about building the political will to strengthen our public schools so all kids have their shot at success.”

It contains numerous key gains, including:

- Enforceable class size limits for the first time in CPS
- Nurses and social workers in every school
- Increase of wraparound services for students
- A pathway to return librarians to schools
- A solution for thousands of homeless students that establishes community liaisons to assist those students and their families

As a result, the teaching assistants (TAs) had no choice but to go on strike for three days in October. Though strong on the picket lines, they ultimately decided to return to their classrooms for their students’ well-being. They assist special education students in Decatur and in the Macon-Platt Special Education District who rely on them to get through their school day.

Since the TAs returned to work, the board has played games rather than work on a resolution, taking away their access to health insurance and life insurance, and even shutting down access to the teaching assistants’ flex spending account (which is their own money). We stand with our members in DFTA as they continue their fight for a fair contract with affordable health insurance options.

Strike wave hits Illinois

Across the state, IFT locals are taking a stand for the education their students deserve and for respect for their profession. Here are the battles our members were fighting as this issue of Union Link went to press:

DECATUR FEDERATION OF TEACHING ASSISTANTS
(DFTA, LOCAL 4324)

They have become a familiar sight in Decatur, the blue and white signs that read: “We support teaching assistants.” Homes, businesses, and cars displaying this sentiment are a source of strength for DFTA President Paula Busboom, who has been with her 275 members on the front lines of a fight with the Decatur Board of Education for affordable health insurance. The board’s final proposal would increase health insurance costs for family plans by 247 percent (64 percent for single plans), and they refuse to negotiate.

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GRAYSLAKE TEACHERS AND SUPPORT STAFF COUNCILS OF THE LAKE COUNTY FEDERATION OF TEACHERS (LCFT, LOCAL 504)

The Grayslake councils of teachers and staff hit the picket lines for one day in early November after nine months of bargaining. In 2017, the unions and board agreed to reopen their four-year contract midway to set the last two years of raises based on the district’s financial condition. Though their finances improved, the board’s salary offer did not. The unions’ walkout quickly convinced the board that the teachers and staff were prepared to stand strong, and they won the increases they deserved!

TRITON MID-MANAGERS CHAPTER OF COOK COUNTY COLLEGE TEACHERS UNION (CCCTU, LOCAL 1600)

Mid-managers at Triton College in River Grove have been fighting for a fair contract since March.

While administrator salaries have increased 14-20 percent, mid-managers are being asked to work an additional 16 hours for a 4 percent raise, and without standard backpay.

Kay Frey, president of the Mid-Managers Chapter and 32-year Triton employee, can’t remember a time when the unit has gone on strike. But in October, the chapter voted to do just that. Since then, they’ve been picketing and passing out flyers, and had a successful one-day strike on November 6.

SETTLED AT THE LAST SECOND

Some of our locals were recently pushed to take a strike vote but were able to reach agreements in the final hour, including:

- Blue Ridge Federation (Local 3350)
- Governors State University and Northern Illinois
- University Faculty chapters of University Professionals of Illinois (Local 4100)
- Evergreen Park Council of the Southwest Suburban Federation of Teachers (Local 943)
- DeKalb Classroom Teachers Association (Local 4328)
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NEW! Groups

 Members of the Old Town School of Folk Music entertained delegates and guests with a selection of labor songs during the IFT Convention.

REGIONAL UNION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE
January 25 | Peoria, IL
REGIONAL UNION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE
March 21 | Fairview Heights, IL
UNION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE WORKSITE LEADER TRAINING
April 25-26 | Westmont, IL
GREAT LAKES UNION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE
June 22-26 | Delavan, WI
SAVE THE DATE FOR THE 2020 IFT PSRP CONFERENCE
October 23-24

INSIDE unionlink

We have the energy. We have the edge. IFT members are determined to fulfill our vision and create the future we all deserve.

I see what you are doing. A heartfelt “Thank You” to recognize and appreciate what PSRPs mean to families.

CTU starts a strike wave across Illinois. Across the state, IFT locals are taking a stand for the education their students deserve and for respect for their profession.