Another new year is upon us and I’m looking to 2022 as a year of promise. While we’ve restarted in-person meetings and trainings, we’re still faced with the reality of having to deal with COVID-19. We’re still requiring masks and distancing in our offices and at our events, but that’s a small price to pay to be able to meet with people in-person and safely.

We’re having our LM trainings and Presidents meetings in person this year, but we’ve offered a virtual option for those who are still uncomfortable being around too many people due to the Omicron surge. It’s important for us to be sure all who require training receive it.

The virus did force us to cancel our second District 4 Rapid Response Conference that we’d been planning for early March. We couldn’t be sure that we’d be allowed to lobby the legislative offices in person and since that is the most important and educational part of the conference, we decided to wait and reschedule when we’re certain that we’ll have full access to our legislators. As soon as we have a new date set, we’ll get that information out to all our locals.

On a positive note, we’ll be expanding our District Health and Safety training significantly this year. Now that we have training centers at all of our Sub-District offices, training will take place every month from April to November at each office. This represents a more than tripling of our previous Health and Safety training schedule and it will make training available closer to where our members are. This is an ambitious project but we’re confident there will be sufficient interest to fill these classes.

Classes will include Hazard Mapping, Near Miss Investigation, Union Approach to Health and Safety, OSHA 10-Hour course, Incident Investigation, Industrial Process Safety Management and more. The schedule for the whole year has been sent to your local as well as instructions on how to register.

Health and Safety is the most important benefit we offer our members. Everyone wants to return home the same way they arrived at work. Statistics show that union workers are safer than workers who are not unionized. It is also generally accepted that the Steelworkers have the best Health and Safety program in the labor movement, and I believe District 4 has the best in the USW. With this new initiative, we’re working to make our program even better. The level of participation by our locals will determine the success or failure of this initiative, so please fill these classes and the results will be safer workplaces.

Finally, by now all locals should have received the Official Convention Call letters regarding the upcoming USW International Convention in August. You may remember that the 2020 convention had to be cancelled because of COVID-19 so it will have been five years between conventions. Please remember to get your paperwork in ahead of time and if you have any questions, please reach out to your Staff Representative or call your Sub-District office.

In closing, I’d like to take a moment to remember one of our members who recently passed away unexpectedly. Laura Jones was co-coordinator of our District 4 Next Gen program. More than that, she was a fierce union activist who was always there when the union called and she worked hard to help make our Next Gen program the success it is. Her energy and passion for the union was an inspiration and she’ll be missed. Please remember Laura and her family in your prayers.

Stay Safe,
Del
Greetings and Happy New Year from the Buffalo Sub-District. As we look on the past year and evaluate our progress, I am proud to say that while we had two strikes out of the Western New York area (at AL and Unifrax) due to membership solidarity and the work of the staff and various departments at the International headquarters, our members were able to return to work with fair contracts and job protection that didn’t exist in previous agreements. Additionally, we were able to negotiate many new agreements that did result in work stoppages, which were overwhelmingly approved by membership of the various local unions.

We would like to have been more successful last year in organizing, especially in bringing new members into the USW. I don’t see a change in this area until each and every member of our local unions realize that organizing sits squarely on their shoulders. We all know relatives and friends who work in unorganized facilities. We must communicate the advantages of being a member of a union to them and encourage them to meet with our organizing staff to create the leads necessary to grow our union. This isn’t going after strangers; this is talking to friends and family, and that should come easily to us. Where leads have been provided to our District Organizing Coordinator, Brigitte Womer, (joinUSW4.org) they have been followed up on and some have led to campaigns. I encourage one of our locals from the Buffalo office to make organizing a top priority in 2022. Each of our locals should have an organizing committee! With union density in your communities will come strength and power that you can use at the bargaining table.

I wish all of our members a safe and successful New Year! Additionally, I would like to thank the Buffalo Sub-District staff for all their hard work. In closing, I must repeat: In order to continue our success and improve in the future we must be “Organize, Organize and Organize!”

SYRACUSE JIM VALENTI, SUB-DISTRICT DIRECTOR

I hope everyone had a happy and healthy holiday season, and my best wishes for a happy New Year to all. On Dec. 9, 2021, we held our annual presidents meeting at the Sub-District office. There were 61 local union officers in attendance. A presentation was given by attorneys from Blitman and King on two developments of great concern: a new law legalizing marijuana here in New York, as well as the state paid sick leave law. I believe the presentation and the follow-up discussion with the leadership cleared up many questions as to application of the new laws in our places of employment, as well as the local union response to those employers who interpret these laws incorrectly. We will be offering, at our upcoming Sub-District LM educational conference, additional training by Blitman and King regarding these new state laws. The education conference will be held Feb. 9-11.

We are in the process of developing our 2022 Sub-District training schedule which will be distributed to attendees at our LM education conference. We have approximately 21 contracts to be negotiated in 2022. Many of the local unions that will be at the bargaining tables in 2022 attended negotiation and bargaining training that was part of our 2021 education program. We believe this training will assist our local union bargaining teams the knowledge and resources to successfully achieve a fair and equitable contract for our members. We will include in our 2022 training schedule negotiation and bargaining training for those units that have contract negotiations in 2023. Please take advantage of this training.

On a very sad note, I regret to inform our Syracuse Sub-District membership of the passing of one of our own, Laura Jones, a sister who was a member of USW local 1000 in Corting, N.Y. Laura was a fierce activist of the labor movement. (See Page 8 of this insert for more about Laura.)
We make a difference! Despite the many conditions that affect our ability to do the work that we do and the challenges to perform that work, we make a difference in the lives of our members and their families nevertheless. Constant changes in working conditions seem to keep us on our toes and OSHA and CDC guidelines seem more like moving targets, but that hasn’t changed our strong belief that our members deserve a safe and healthy workplace. Consider, if you will, one of the many struggles that we have faced: bargaining over the effects of COVID-19 and its variants. Omicron is the newest threat facing our communities, and we have risen to the call of essential industries from health care to pharmaceuticals and chemicals, to manufacturing and others. Even with manpower shortages we have worked overtime to meet the needs of the day! Recently, we started an initiative to visit many of our facilities throughout the District, starting with locations in the Edison Sub-District. Director Del Vitale and Assistant to the Director Dave Wasiura, along with myself, visited and met with a number of USW locals, including Local 4-417 members at Thermo-Fisher Scientific at their Bridgewater, N.J., site, which provides components for the COVID-19 vaccines and other chemicals for the scientific industry; Local 637 members at Okonite, which makes power cables, and Local 381 members at International Paper, which produces corrugated paperboard containers. It was great to meet with the union members who work at these facilities and to hear their thoughts and concerns. I look forward to other visits elsewhere, as much as they are permitted under the current public health situation. In closing, again allow me to share my deep appreciation to the working people, throughout our nation, and especially in District 4, Sub-District 7, which comprises the New York Metropolitan area, New Jersey, Delaware, and Puerto Rico.

Last year marked the 50th anniversary of the passage of the Occupational Safety and Health Act, which created the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). We thought we would take the time to recognize where we came from, what has been accomplished, and goals for the future. President Nixon signed the Occupational Safety and Health Act on Dec. 29, 1970, which was enacted on April 28, 1971. In its first half-century, OSHA helped transform America’s workplaces in ways that significantly reduced workplace fatalities, injuries, and illnesses. Learn more about the agency’s five decades of progress and its efforts to continue fulfilling the promise of the Occupational Safety and Health Act.

1970s: Established by the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, OSHA opens its doors on April 28, 1971. During its initial decade, OSHA issued the first standards for asbestos, lead, carcinogens, and cotton dust. The OSHA Training Institute, safety and health training grants, the On-Site Consultation Program, State Plans, and whistleblower protections for workplace safety are also established.

1980s: In a landmark decision, the U.S. Supreme Court affirms the Occupational Safety and Health Act, which created the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). We thought we would take the time to recognize where we came from, what has been accomplished, and goals for the future. President Nixon signed the Occupational Safety and Health Act on Dec. 29, 1970, which was enacted on April 28, 1971. In its first half-century, OSHA helped transform America’s workplaces in ways that significantly reduced workplace fatalities, injuries, and illnesses. Learn more about the agency’s five decades of progress and its efforts to continue fulfilling the promise of the Occupational Safety and Health Act.

1990s: OSHA issues the Process Safety Management standard and provides new and stronger protections for workers from falls, bloodborne pathogens, toxic substances, and working in confined spaces, longshoring and marine terminals, and laboratories. Workers begin to receive safety and health training through the first OSHA Education Centers, and the agency expands collaboration with employers through its Strategic Partnership Program.

2000s: OSHA staff worked beside their federal, state, and local partners to protect the safety and health of the recovery workers after the unprecedented challenges America’s workers faced following the 9/11 terrorist attacks and Hurricane Katrina. Workplace safety continues to improve through new standards to protect construction workers in steel erection and prevent exposure to hexavalent chromium.

2010s: OSHA helps protect workers performing response and cleanup activities in the aftermath of the catastrophic Deepwater Horizon explosion and oil spill. The agency issues standards for silica dust, cranes, confined spaces, and the classification and labeling of work-related chemicals. To address the number one cause of worker fatalities in the construction industry, OSHA launches the fall prevention campaign. And in 2020, OSHA launches a historic response to protect workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2020 and Beyond: The new decade began with a challenge unlike any other faced by the American workforce as the coronavirus pandemic impacted workplace safety and health in unprecedented ways. OSHA acted quickly to protect the nation’s workers through outreach and education efforts, ensuring compliance with agency standards, and collaborations with federal, state, and local authorities. The agency continues to work tirelessly to address the demands of this evolving health crisis. Even with the dramatic improvements to workplace safety over the last five decades - and now with the nation responding to a global pandemic - OSHA's mission is as important as ever. Please join OSHA in making a renewed commitment to keeping workers safe and healthy - it's every worker’s right.
Members of District 4 in Puerto Rico recently took part in a three-day organizing training seminar, where they learned to have one-on-one conversations about their union, identify potential union supporters, work an organizing campaign, how to map the workplace and much, much more. Each participant was full of energy and eager to learn. Our District currently has an organizing plan underway in Puerto Rico that involves multiple locations and sectors across the island.

With some of our best activists, leaders and organizers from Puerto Rico leading the charge, the future of the USW on the island couldn’t be in better hands!

**District 4 Organizing Training**

Recently, members of the District 4 in Puerto Rico participated in a seminar of organization for three (3) days where they discussed for the first time the map of the workplace and much, much more. Each participant was full of energy and eager to learn.

Our District currently has an organizing plan underway in Puerto Rico that involves multiple locations and sectors across the island.

With some of our best activists, leaders and organizers from Puerto Rico leading the charge, the future of the USW on the island couldn’t be in better hands!
NEXT GENERATION

It is with great sadness that we inform you that our sister, Laura Jones, was called home on Dec. 21, 2021.

Laura became a member of the USW in 2010 at local 1000 in Corning, N.Y. By 2014, Laura was involved with her local union through WOS and greatly assisted in getting the local union Next Gen program up and running, as well as served on her local’s executive board.

Laura became the Next Gen coordinator of her local before moving on to be a regional Next Gen coordinator and her work in this role would lead to her being appointed by the District Director in 2020 as the District Next Generation co-coordinator.

Laura was a fierce activist of the labor movement, served on her area labor council, was showcased in a photo portrait at the Rockwell Museum in Corning, N.Y., and became a familiar face at many labor events. Laura was honored as District 4’s Syracuse Sub-District “Activist of the Year” in 2018.

Laura later went on to step up her activism once again and showed an interest in organizing, eventually leading her to accept a position in the International Union Organizing Department in 2021.

Laura was a wife, a mother of three, and a friend to so many of us. Her contagious laugh and kindness were welcome to all who had the pleasure of meeting her. Our deepest condolences go out to Laura’s husband Greg Jones, her children and her extended family during this most difficult time.

Laura will be greatly missed by so many. Until we meet again our sister.