

District 11
REPORTER

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Quarantined Birthday Surprise

Chief Tony Nygaard of the Biwabik Township Fire Department in Northern Minnesota received a phone call from a grandmother asking if they could help to make her granddaughter Ellie's birthday extra special. Josh Olson, a Steelworker who is the Assistant Fire Chief and a 20-year member of the department, and his wife, Tiffany, were more than happy to help out! The group planned with Yvonne, Ellie's grandmother, and Ellie's



parents Noah and Tanya Hines for a special surprise. The department purchased a special gift for Ellie and showed up on her special day with lights flashing! Her family was there waiting with signs and flowers for Ellie as well.

Josh Olson is a Heavy Equipment Operator at U.S. Steel, Minntac, and a member of USW Local Union 1938. His wife, Tiffany Olson, is the Sr. Administrative Assistant for District 11 in Eveleth, Minn., and a member of USW Local Union 3657.



Local 6860 Retiree Bob Flynn Puts Skills to Work Fighting Pandemic

Robert "Bob" Flynn retired from United Taconite in 2013 with 39 years of service as a USW member there.

He spent his first few years on retirement enjoying home life but later decided "with his wife's encouragement" to get a part time job at L&M Supply in Hibbing, Minn. Flynn has been there for three years now and really enjoys being around all the people.

He also purchased a 3D printer about three years ago and has made a few modifications to it to better suit his needs. Currently, if he can build it on Auto-Cad, he can make it on the printer.

During the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Flynn is working with Makers-Unite from Colorado to create ventilator splitters and Project C.U.R.E., which decides where the ventilator splitters he makes, will be sent.

Many of his splitters have been going to a Chicago hospital, but he also makes bands for the cloth masks that he has been sharing with firefighters, customers at L&M, friends, family and anyone making their own cloth masks.

He has made them available locally at the Fairview Range Medical Center in Hibbing, Minn. where we represent the Licensed Practical Nurses who are members of Local 9349. He has been contacted by large companies, like Mayo Clinic Health Care Systems in Eau Claire, Wisc., to send more of the bands.

It takes him six hours to produce five bands, and his printer has been running for three weeks straight.

USW Local 6860 is very proud to have a retiree helping with the current crisis in ways like this.



USW REPORTER



SERVICE to UNION and COMMUNITY *A Lifelong Pursuit for Local 9460's Adam Ritscher*

Throughout the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, USW Local 9460 Vice President Adam Ritscher has been using Facebook and other networks to reach out to friends and neighbors and offer help.

No matter how small or large the request is, he will do his best to deliver, and when it comes to serving others, his record started long before the current crisis.

"Between the union and community, there are countless examples of Adam's selfless dedication to help those less fortunate than he is," said Local 9460 President Deanna Hughes. "His activism was an inspiration to others prior to the pandemic, and he will no doubt continue working on behalf of others when it is over."

Ritscher took his first union job in 1996 as a member of the United Mineworkers union in Milwaukee Harbor during construction of North America's largest multi-bin cement storage silo.



Before starting work at Essentia Health in Duluth as an Environmental Service Technician in July 2005, he also spent time as a member of the UFCW and as an organizer for UNITE HERE, helping hotel workers fight for fair wages and working conditions.

Ritscher began serving members of Local 9460 as a steward in 2012. He held the position of trustee from 2012 until 2017. He has been vice president since 2017 and served as interim president from December 2018 until October 2019. He has worked on organizing campaigns for the USW, serves on the Local 9460 organizing committee and chairs its Workers' Aid Committee, which coordinates an annual holiday "Giving Tree" outside the Duluth Labor Temple to distribute winter hats, gloves, mittens and scarves to needy families.

"His activism was an inspiration to others prior to the pandemic, and he will no doubt continue working on behalf of others when it is over."

Local 9460 Recording Secretary Jackie Leibel was not surprised to see his Solidarity House and Solidarity Food Shelf featured in a local news broadcast which profiled the small charity that began in 2012 when Ritscher decided to lend a helping hand to homeless strangers who found refuge on his unlocked porch.

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In the last issue, my report focused on the ambitious schedule of town hall style meetings planned throughout District 11 to talk about political issues and the ways that elections can impact our negotiations.

We were able to hold four meetings before we had to cancel the remaining ones due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. My intent is that once we can safely hold large group meetings again, we will reschedule the ones that were cancelled to continue those important conversations.

Each of us has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic still wreaking havoc across the country and in the workplaces we represent. There have been many employers that have worked with our staff and local unions to make sure everyone has access to necessary personal protective equipment at work.

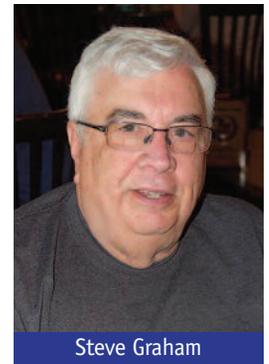
There are many examples of wonderful ways our union brothers and sisters are stepping up to help in every facet of their communities.

At the same time, I find it extremely distressing that healthcare workers we represent have had to rely on outside donations for masks, gloves, gowns and other safety equipment to be safe at work. There is simply no excuse for employers who value profits more than the safety of their workers.

Each Workers Memorial Day, we remember those who have died from occupational injuries and illnesses and renew our commitment to improve occupational health and safety in every industry and workplace.

As of this writing, hundreds of union members throughout North America have died from Coronavirus, many of them Steelworkers. Bruce Plumb from USW Local 105 in Davenport, Iowa, is one such example, and we owe it to him and too many others to do everything we can to help everyone stay safe on the job.

I'm also saddened to report that Steve Graham, a long-time labor activist and USW leader in the Kansas City area, passed away on March 31, 2020 after becoming infected with the Coronavirus. Steve served the members of USW Local 12561 in many capacities, ending with his leadership as local union President before his retirement. Like other local union leaders, he always put the interest of the membership ahead of his own. I know we hear that description often, and I was fortunate enough to experience it first hand during many rounds of negotiations with him.



Steve Graham

SERVICE to UNION and COMMUNITY *A Lifelong Pursuit for Local 9460's Adam Ritscher*

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"Adam is an incredibly kind and giving person, so even if the need is beyond his ability, he will find a way to make it happen," Leibel said. "Instead of locking the door, Adam stocked the porch with items he collected through donations and purchased himself for the people in need."

Ritscher's large, enclosed front porch in Superior, Wisc., is filled with toiletries, books, blankets and food, and in the backyard, he provides a community garden, where anyone who needs its vegetables and herbs is welcome to them.

He has been an outspoken advocate on behalf of affordable and safe housing for everyone and belongs to the Homeless Persons Bill of Rights Coalition, seeking to ensure basic human rights are afforded to our least fortunate neighbors.

Ritscher played a key role in successful campaigns to hold Essentia Health accountable for tearing down low-income housing during an expansion and against the city of Duluth for removing public benches in response to local business complaints about homeless men and women sleeping on them.



Workers Memorial Day

Each year on Workers Memorial Day, April 28, we remember those who died from occupational fatalities. Over the past year, 29 individuals died while performing duties at bargaining units represented by the USW throughout North America. In District 11, on Nov. 5, 2019, Kenny Mattson, a member of Local 6115, died while working at ArcelorMittal's Minorca Mine.

This year, in observance of Workers Memorial Day, the Southwestern Wyoming Central Labor Council asked local unions to contribute to the Food Bank of Sweetwater County to help those who have been affected by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

"This year, we are reminding everyone to focus on staying safe at work," said USW Staff Representative Monte Morlock, who serves as president of the labor council. "We also ask that they remember all the people who have lost their jobs during this unprecedented shutdown of our economy and donate to the local food bank."



“We are essential, not expendable!”

The year 2020 will be remembered for the Coronavirus, but more importantly, bringing to the headlines of newspapers and television the important work that frontline workers perform each day, using the new phrase “essential worker.”

In USW District 11, we represent over 5,000 essential workers in the health care field. These members are working on the front lines of this pandemic—taking care of patients and residents in our hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, assisted living and DD facilities.

One of the main concerns that health care workers face on a national level is lack of proper personal protective equipment (PPE) due to the limited supplies available in our country. Because of the nature of their work,

these health care workers are directly exposed to COVID-19 at a higher rate and larger scale than essential workers in any other sector.

Local 9460 President Deanna Hughes recently voiced the concerns of her membership and all health care workers amid this crisis.

“We are essential, not expendable!” she said. “Our union, USW, has always fiercely advocated for better safety standards and regulations as a top priority.”

“We will never allow worker’s safety to take a back seat, especially in the midst of a pandemic.”

Our union understood that we needed to stand in solidarity with these workers to help get the personal protective equipment that they so vitally need. On March 21, 2020, President Tom Conway lead the initiative to have all local unions help by donating any PPE to local organizations in need.

This call was answered LOUDLY on the Iron Range of Minnesota and in other states throughout District 11.

We want to thank the following companies for their generous donations of N-95 and surgical masks, hand sanitizer, safety glasses and Tyvek suits: Lakehead Constructors,



Donation from WestRock (USW Local 264) Chad Longpre Shepersky. He is the Financial Secretary for LU 9349. He is a Certified Nursing Assistant at St. Francis Guardian Angels Nursing Home in Hibbing, MN. He is in the picture with Director of Nursing Bobbi Radaich.

U.S. Steel Minntac, Jamar Company, Conwed Plastics, WestRock, Flint Hills Refinery, Genesis Alkali and Arconic Davenport Works.

All hard-working health care workers, union members and other essential workers have a right to the PPE supplies needed to keep themselves safe during this deadly pandemic.

This is why we are calling on Congress to use the Defense Production Act through administrative action or through federal legislation by passing Senate Bill 3568 and House Bill 6390, the Medical Supply Chain Emergency Act of 2020.

Our union, along with 50 other organizations, signed on to a letter urging Congress to pass this legislation to ensure that health care workers are the top priority to receive the PPE that the CDC recommends be worn by all healthcare personnel during this pandemic.

We thank and recognize all of the health care workers for their courage and dedication during these challenging times. Special thanks, once again, to all the businesses for their generous PPE donations.



Donation from Flint Hills Refinery USW Local 662. Gayle Amundson, Local 9349, Unit President at Chisholm Health Center a nursing home in Chisholm, MN. Gayle is a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN).

