

# ADVOCATING FOR LIBRARIES & LIBRARY STAFF: FUNDING & STAFFING

HOW LOCAL 1994 SECURED THE LARGEST THREE-YEAR INCREASE IN STAFFING AND FUNDING FOR THE PRINCE GEORGES' COUNTY MEMORIAL LIBRARY SYSTEM – EVER

## INTRODUCTION

For some Americans the word “union” sometimes conjures up images of burley guys in leather jackets with picket signs. Others might think of the sanitation workers of Memphis whose 1968 strike brought Martin Luther King to the Lorraine Motel where he was brought down by an assassin’s bullet. Neither image is “typical.”

A unit of library employees in Prince George’s County, Maryland is much closer to the contemporary concept of a union in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Formed in 2001 with the help of the Municipal and County Government Employees Organization (UFCW Local 1994 MCGEO), this group has taken on complex personnel and staffing issues through a combination of collective bargaining, labor-management cooperation, political and community action and has delivered results for the county’s career library employees and the library’s patrons.

Representing trained and educated professionals, such as librarians and circulation staff, adds yet another dimension to the representation model. Women or men who train for a career require respect not only for the personal sacrifices they make to earn their professional qualifications; they also want to see the institution they serve sustained. Librarians are invested in the belief that literacy and public access to information is a fundamental right of citizens.

*“Libraries must be willing and able to enter the arena of politics and compete for scarce public funding to meet today’s financial challenges.”*

— American Library Association

When, for whatever reason, top management in a library system fails to meet the funding challenge, library employees need to step up.

Enter Local 1994, the union, acting as an advocate **for** rights at work, **for** the principles that its members espouse and **for** the concept of public service.

## A CRISIS ENSUES

Four years after the union at PGCMLS was formed, PGCMLS faced a crisis. With library use rising in the county and a persistent budget problem pinching all county government operations, branches of the system were severely understaffed. The situation was causing stress

for the employees and cheating county residents of the levels of service that they had come to expect.

As they had since the union was organized in 2001, union staff and activists among the PGCMLS staff monitored the library system budget process for 2005 and found it to be deficient. A timid upper level management had requested a mere 9.5 positions, ignoring reports from the staff and other evidence that the system was bogging down.

*“We were astounded by the Library Director’s initial budget. And then the County Executive... his priorities were obviously not with the libraries.”*

—Steve Valentich, PGCMLS

Worse yet, the County Executive took that opening parry from PGCMLS and slashed it further, budgeting for a mere 2.5 new positions. The Executive’s plan represented a virtual “back of the hand” to a struggling system. These developments alarmed the staff and their union.

## THE UNION REACTS

Through its participation in a contractual labor-management committee the union had secured access to budget data and preliminary funding plans. Local 1994 shop stewards and an executive vice president who was also a PGCMLS employee worked with union staff to develop the proposed plan.

Through its ties with other political-savvy county residents and progressive political organizations, the union opened dialogue with key members of the Prince George’s County Council to spotlight the growing service gaps and the threats those gaps represented not on-

**FY 2006 – 23 Positions**

| Position <sup>1</sup>                 | Grade/Salary per position <sup>2</sup> | Cost of Benefits (per employee) <sup>3</sup> | Total=Salary + Estimated Benefits |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|-----------------------------------|
| Security Officers – 6                 | C / \$19,128.00                        | \$5,738.40                                   | \$149,198.40                      |
| Information Technology Technician – 3 | E / \$29,747.00                        | \$8,924.10                                   | \$116,013.30                      |
| Buildings and Groundskeeper – 4       | B / \$23,614.00                        | \$7,084.20                                   | \$122,792.80                      |
| Circulation Assistant – 5             | D / \$27,544.00                        | \$8,263.20                                   | \$179,036.00                      |
| Library Associate/Librarian I – 5     | H / \$37,473.00                        | \$11,241.90                                  | \$243,574.50                      |

<sup>1</sup> See attached list of classes and salary codes, along with the most recent salary scale.

<sup>2</sup> Presumed 2.5% cost of living adjustment (COLA).

<sup>3</sup> Cost to employer is estimated at an average of 30% per employee to include health care, social security, etc.

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*The Union submitted a detailed staffing plan to the County Council and the library administration.*

ly to union employees, but also to residents who depend upon the system. The union developed data from a survey of union members at various branches of PGCMLS and produced a solid rationale to argue for a much more substantial budget allocation. The union submitted this proposal to Prince George’s County Council member Tony Knotts, Chair of the Health, Education & Human Services Committee and Thomas Dernoga, (then) Chair of the County Council with a copy going to the PGCMLS Director.

Chairman Dernoga took the budget to the full council, pushing for full funding of the union's plan. Because of the robust lobbying by rank-and-file members of Local 1994, and with the coalition of council members' strong support, the Council funded almost all of the new proposed budget which added over \$660,000 to the budget for additional staffing. The Council also appropriated \$100,000 in the Sheriff's budget to fund three part-time Deputy Sheriffs for added security in the libraries during after-school hours. Funding for three more Deputy Sheriffs was added the following year for a total of six.

**FY 2007 – 15 Positions**

| Position                              | Grade/Salary per position | Cost of Benefits (per employee) | Total=Salary + Estimated Benefits |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Security Officers – 3                 | C / \$19,702.00           | \$5,910.60                      | \$76,837.80                       |
| Information Technology Technician – 1 | E / \$30,639.00           | \$9191.70                       | \$39,830.70                       |
| Central Maintenance Mechanic – 1      | E / \$30,639.00           | \$9191.70                       | \$39,830.70                       |
| Administrative Aides – 2              | E / \$30,639.00           | \$9191.70                       | \$79,661.40                       |
| Circulation Assistant – 4             | D / \$28,370.00           | \$8,511.00                      | \$147,524.00                      |
| Library Associate/Librarian I – 4     | H / \$38,597.00           | \$11,579.10                     | \$200,704.40                      |
| <b>Grand Total:</b>                   |                           |                                 | <b>\$584,389.00</b>               |

**FY 2008 – 10 Positions**

| Position                              | Grade/Salary per position | Cost of Benefits (per employee) | Total=Salary + Estimated Benefits |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Security Officers – 2                 | C / \$20,293.00           | \$6,087.90                      | \$52,761.80                       |
| Information Technology Technician – 1 | E / \$31,558.00           | \$9,467.40                      | \$41,025.40                       |
| Buildings and Groundskeeper – 2       | B / \$25,031.00           | \$7,509.30                      | \$65,080.60                       |
| Administrative Aide – 1               | E / \$31,558.00           | \$9,647.40                      | \$41,025.40                       |
| Circulation Assistant – 2             | D / \$29,221.00           | \$8,766.30                      | \$75,974.60                       |
| Library Associate/Librarian I – 2     | H / \$39,755.00           | \$11,926.50                     | \$103,363.00                      |
| <b>Grand Total:</b>                   |                           |                                 | <b>\$379,230.80</b>               |

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*The Union also submitted staffing plans for FY2007 and FY2008.*

Although the union did not get all that it wanted for the proposed three-year staffing plan, the efforts resulted in an overall staffing increase that was unprecedented. Council Chairman Dernoga commended the union and its members for their lobbying efforts. He pointed out that the union and its membership helped “educate the Council on the library system and its issues.”

**FOLLOW-UP ISSUES LINGERED**

Despite the more generous budget allocation, the County Council told the union that it cannot dictate to the library how the funds are actually spent. Months later, top management at the library was still ignoring some of the pleas of the staff – **pleas for protection on the job.**

In the initial staffing plan, the union asked for contract security guards at the various branches where students gathered after-school. Crowds of unruly teenagers were disrupting the library. Some of the incidents were not only disruptive, but also criminal. Staff reported incidences of vandalism, loud arguments, large fights in parking lots adjacent to libraries and

other threatening behaviors toward vulnerable library staff and patrons by some of the teenagers.

Library management failed to report these incidents to Local 1994 as required under their collective bargaining agreement. In addition, the library system was dragging its feet in assigning the budgeted part-time deputies to the branches.

After the union learned of these incidents from its shop stewards, Local 1994 President Gino Renne demanded an immediate meeting with the PGCMLS Director, the president of the County Council and a Sheriff's Department representative to work on resolving the issues.

As a result of the meeting, many of the branches now have the security necessary to protect the library staff. Certainly, issues still arise, but since the union stewards and the union members know the power they wield as advocates, they can address them quickly and favorably.

## CONCLUSION

There are many forces that drive budget proposals. It's difficult to pin down all the reasons the top management of the library system was so conservative in its initial budget proposal. However, one reason is clear: **They don't challenge the system. Boards of Trustees are political appointees and tend to defer to those who appointed them.**

Why did the County Executive choose to cut so much of the funding when he brought the proposal to the County Council? Again, the answer is not so clear.

What is clear is that without the union's involvement, the system would have been set on a downward spiral long before the onset of a national recession made public service budgeting a much more complex problem.

Local 1994 always seeks input from library staff, management, and other key entities to evaluate and make improvements in the lives of library employees. The success of the PGCMLS staffing plan reflects a healthy collaboration with stakeholders, education of the political leadership about the important role of libraries as an extension of the education system, and most of all, the empowerment of organized employees as advocates of library funding and services.

*"I laud your efforts in working with a coalition of County Council Members to successfully advocate for an increase in library staff during FY2006, FY2007, and FY2008. Due to your efforts, our library system experienced the largest increase ever in staff during a three-year period in our county. Your union's successful efforts in securing Deputy Sheriff coverage in six county libraries to assist with security has made a world of difference in the quality of the library experience for our patrons as well as our employees."*

*— Councilman Thomas Dernoga, Prince George's County Council*