



# The Flame

Lighting the Way for Quality Health Care

October 30, 2008

*Campaign by nurses raises public awareness about importance of nurse-to-patient ratios*

## Fatima UNAP breaks new ground on staffing



Linda McDonald, RN  
President

When Fatima Hospital UNAP members began preparing for contract negotiations this spring,

they were determined to address the chronic staffing problems that had plagued the Hospital. But they also knew they would be in for a tough battle.

In recent years, Fatima management had failed to respond to hundreds of "Unsafe Staffing Forms" that had been filed by Fatima nurses. In addition, Fatima had failed to even staff to the levels that they had reported to the RI Department of Health.

**For the first time ever, Fatima nurses will be able to enforce their Hospital's staffing plans.**

After a four-month contract campaign -- which included picketing at the Hospital and at the Diocesan headquarters, as well as extensive leafleting in the community, radio ads, mass mailings, and frequent media coverage -- the nurses succeeded in winning unprecedented

contract language.

For the first time ever, Fatima nurses will be able to enforce the Hospital's staffing plans by filing grievances and, if necessary, going to a neutral arbitrator.

In addition, the Local also won major gains on economics. Members' pay rates will increase by at least 15% over the next three years. The Local also negotiated increases in the evening and night shift differentials, on-call pay, tuition reimbursement and educational assistance, the dental benefit and the prescription drug benefit. Improvements were also made to contract language involving discipline, bereavement leave, and floating.

### Fighting for safe staffing at Fatima



Fatima Hospital UNAP members took to the streets to promote their campaign for safe RN-to-patient ratios

## Kent Hospital RNs vote to join the UNAP

Registered Nurses at Kent Hospital voted on October 23 by a count of 290 to 214 to join the UNAP, the largest health care union in Rhode Island. It was the largest union organizing victory in Rhode Island since RI Hospital nurses and techs voted to join the UNAP in 1993.

Deborah Almeida, a 27-year Kent Hospital nurse, expressed jubilation at the results of the election. "In recent years, Kent has become like a big business and staff morale has been low. But, now, by being organized, we have a tremendous opportunity to improve conditions for nurses and for patients."

Diane Ardito, an Emergency Room nurse who has worked at Kent for the past two years, said, "Until now, nurses' concerns about poor  
*(cont. on page 3)*





### New contract at VNS of Greater RI

Members of the Visiting Nurse Service of Greater RI ratified a new one-year agreement earlier this month. The contract provides for a 4% pay increase and several changes to the employee medical benefit that includes decreased rates for those employees who enroll in the family plan.

### Difficult times for State-employed nurses

Members of the UNAP State-employed nurses are working hard to survive in the

#### Who is the UNAP?

The UNAP represents over 5,000 nurses, therapists, technologists, support staff and others who work at:

Copley Hospital (VT)  
Fatima Hospital  
Greater Rhode Island VNS  
Health Care & Rehabilitation Services of SE Vermont

Homestead Group  
Kent Hospital  
Landmark Medical Center  
Memorial Hospital  
Putnam School District (CT)  
Rehabilitation Hospital of RI  
Retreat Healthcare (VT)  
Rhode Island Hospital  
RI Community Living & Support Services  
RI Dept of Human Services  
RI Veterans' Home  
URI, CCRI, RIC Health Services  
Westerly Hospital  
Youth Services (VT)  
Zambarano Hospital

most difficult of times. Repeated State budget deficits, combined with an incompetent and hostile Governor, have made the labor relations environment the most difficult in memory. The steady anti-employee drum beat coming out of the Governor's office has poisoned the work environment, causing a mass exodus of employees

who have opted to retire rather than run the risk of further cuts. Local leaders look forward to a change in the Governor's office and a return to a more positive and constructive labor relations atmosphere.

### Homestead members fight for new contract

Employees of The Homestead Group recently voted down a contract. Drastic cuts in State funding pressed the employer to seek one-year reductions to pension and paid time off. The Union's negotiating team plans to return to the bargaining table shortly.

### Safety Is top priority at Brattleboro Retreat

The Union at the Brattleboro Retreat is the first UNAP Local to have successfully negotiated staffing ratios for all in-patient units. The ratios have been in effect for a number of years now. Over time, the ratios have been improved and modified to take into account the changing nature of the patient census. In addition to making improvements to the staffing ratios with patient safety as the primary concern, a series of meetings have been taking place with the administration to address other subjects around safety.

### Copley Hospital UNAP negotiates ban on mandatory overtime

Copley Hospital UNAP members negotiated a three-year agreement this past spring. The highlight of the agreement is a ban on mandatory overtime. The agreement also provides ground breaking rights providing RN participation in Hospital decisions regarding the purchase

of new technologies. A job-sharing provision was also added to the contract.

### Westerly Unions -- back to the future

There are now eight arbitrations pending at the Westerly Hospital - more than all of the arbitrations combined over the entire history of both Locals! The sudden spike in arbitration cases is due to inflexibility in the Hospital administration and their heavy-handed approach to employee discipline. Neither local union will allow a change in tone from the administration to push around members or decrease rights previously negotiated into their respective contracts. A large number of arbitrations are more common in newly-organized unions when an administration has a hard time adjusting to the fact they no longer decide things on their own and have the final say.

### Northern RI UNAP faces challenges at Landmark and Rehab Hospital of RI

Facing mounting financial losses, Landmark Medical Center petitioned the Superior Court in Providence for protection under a Special Mastership this past June. Under this arrangement, the Court has appointed a Special Master to 1) stabilize the Hospital financially, 2) work to turn the Hospital around, and 3) otherwise oversee the day-to-day operations of the Hospital. In effect, the Special Master is functioning as the hospital CEO.

The contract between the Local and Landmark is in effect until September 30, 2009, and the Local is doing all that

### Improving patient safety and quality...

## It's not just a management thing!

In recent years, hospitals have been under pressure to improve their quality of patient care. Patient satisfaction scores, outcome measures, and medical errors have all become public information in an effort to motivate hospitals to improve patient care.

In response, hospital administrators have issued a flurry of new policies, procedures and requirements. But these same administrators rarely enlist the participation of union leaders and members who are uniquely qualified to offer insights that will improve patient care -- and who have the trust of their co-workers to make real changes.

The UNAP is committed to recruiting and developing member activists who share our goal of making unionized health care facilities the best facilities -- for health care workers and for patients.



it can to make sure that the Hospital's obligations under the contract are met. In addition, the Local has been meeting with the Special Master regularly to stress the importance of honoring the contract and to make sure that Landmark comes out of this process as a full service hospital.

Since the Hospital came under the control of the Special Master, negotiations at the Rehab Hospital of RI (which is owned by Landmark) have been suspended.

However, that contract has been extended [it originally expired on June 30, 2008] and remains in full force and effect.

Negotiations on behalf of 100 new members at Landmark, who came into the Local under a neutrality agreement recently, have also been suspended. The Local will be approaching the Special Master to discuss resuming negotiations at both facilities.

#### **Memorial Hospital UNAP under vibrant new leadership**

Local 5082 has come under new leadership. Last spring, the Local bid farewell to long-time Local President Bill George, RN, who retired recently, and elected Rita Brennan, RN as the new Local President.

With a new, invigorated executive board, the Local has been holding membership meetings, unit/floor/department meetings, rep meetings and board meetings preparing for bargaining next summer.

In the summer of 2006, Local 5082 took on Memorial Hospital management over the issue of mandatory overtime and, as a result, put the issue front and center in the 2007 legislative session. Of course, we all know how that worked out: we now have a new law that prohibits mandatory overtime. 2009 can't come soon enough.

#### **Lean, mean, and green at RI Hospital**

**Lean:** Like most individuals and businesses, RI Hospital is doing some belt-tightening in response to the current financial crisis. Fortunately, Lifespan's CEO recently reported that RI Hospital continues to be in good financial shape over all.

**Mean:** Last year, RI Hospital unilaterally eliminated United HealthCare as one of our two health insurance options. But the good news is that an arbitrator recently

## **Kent RNs Join UNAP** *(continued from page 1)*

staffing have fallen on deaf ears. With the backing of the UNAP, we will have a stronger voice, and we will be heard." Ardito added, "We can make Kent so much better."

Nurses began their organizing efforts nearly a year ago, after concerns about safe staffing, fair compensation, fair treatment, and job security fears arising from the hospital's pending takeover by Lifespan motivated nurses to contact the UNAP.

UNAP President, Linda McDonald, RN, commented, "This tremendous victory is a credit to the courage and commitment of the Kent nurses. All Rhode Islanders are the winners in this election because empowered nurses are the most effective advocates that a patient can have."

With the addition of the 600 Kent Hospital RNs, the UNAP now represents over 5,000 Registered Nurses, Licensed Practical Nurses, Respiratory Therapists, Radiologic Technologists, and other health care professionals who work at hospitals and other health facilities throughout Rhode Island.



Kent Hospital RNs celebrate their victory immediately after the vote count.

ruled that the Hospital had no right to eliminate a health plan without the agreement of the Union. As a result of this decision, UNAP members will once again be offered United HealthCare at the same price as Blue Cross.

**Green:** Last year, the UNAP challenged the Hospital to begin a recycling program and other "green" initiatives at the Hospital. The UNAP/RIH Health Care Education Trust even ran a CEU program that addressed potential hospital cost savings that can result from environmentally responsible purchases and practices. We are pleased that the Hospital has responded positively and now has a very active Green Team.

#### **Putnam school nurses take contract dispute to mediation**

The school nurses in Putnam, Connecticut, who are represented by UNAP, Local 5202, attempted to negotiate a new contract this past summer. The contract expired on June 30. They have decided, however, to take advantage of State mediation, given the fact that

management's proposals are so unreasonable and call for enormous cuts in, for example, medical insurance benefits. The expired contract remains in full force and effect under Connecticut law. Mediation commences in the first week of December.

#### **Negotiations continue at Youth Services**

UNAP, Local 5050, which represents members at Youth Services Inc., in Brattleboro, Vermont, continues negotiations for a second contract. Their first contract expired on September 30. The parties have agreed to extend the contract, which, as a result, remains in full force and effect until a new agreement is reached. The Local hopes to improve upon the gains they made in their first contract.

#### **Fatima UNAP wins new staffing language**

After a four-month contract campaign, Fatima nurses won unprecedented new contract language that requires the hospital to staff to the levels that they report to the RI Department of Health. *(see front page for details).*

## UNAP endorsements (Rhode Island)

Each election year, the UNAP issues endorsements of candidates who support the goals and objectives of the UNAP. Endorsements are based on consideration of the candidate's track record, interview, questionnaire, electability, support by allied organizations, and support for important health care and labor issues.

### House of Representatives

District 2	David Segal*^
District 3	Edith Ajello*^
District 7	Joanne Giannini*
District 11	Grace Diaz*
District 12	Joe Almeida*^
District 13	John Carnevale^
District 17	Robert Jacquard*
District 18	Art Handy*
District 19	Joe McNamara*
District 20	Al Gemma*^
District 21	Eileen Naughton*
District 22	Frank Ferri*
District 28	Scott Guthrie
District 33	Donald Lally*
District 36	Donna Walsh*
District 46	Mary Ann Shallcross-Smith*
District 51	Chris Fierro^
District 63	Roberto DaSilva
District 69	Ray Gallison*
District 72	Amy Rice*

\* incumbent

^ unopposed

### Senate

District 2	Juan Pichardo*
District 4	Dominick Ruggerio*
District 6	Harold Metts*
District 7	Frank Ciccone*
District 11	Charles Levesque*
District 13	Teresa Paiva-Weed*
District 21	Sal Lombardi
District 22	John Tassoni*
District 23	Paul Fogarty*
District 26	Bea Lanzi*
District 28	Josh Miller*
District 31	Erin Lynch



### UNAP legislative goals and priorities

The UNAP sends all candidates for the Rhode Island General Assembly a questionnaire that highlights important health care and labor issues, including the following:

#### Defend the Hospital Conversion Act

This important law provides for a thorough review by the Department of Health (DOH) and Attorney General of the impact that a hospital sale or merger would have on the public. Some hospitals have called for eliminating or weakening the review process.

#### Strengthen hospital staffing laws

RI law currently requires hospitals to report their staffing plans to DOH each year, but the law gives no authority to DOH to evaluate or enforce these staffing plans. UNAP believes that we need stronger laws to ensure safe RN-to-patient staffing levels.

#### Expand the mandatory overtime ban

The current protections for hospital RNs and CNAs should be expanded to cover other types of health care workers and facilities.

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Other UNAP legislative priorities include universal health care, progressive tax reform, and protection of State employee rights.

