The ONA Resurrection

By: Richard Botterill
ONA/PPMC Executive and Negotiation Committee Chair

To say the least, 2020 was a challenging year and one that will go down in history. On a national level, much like this year, 2020 started with an impeachment. This was rapidly followed by the advent of the COVID-19 virus and its worldwide spread and devastation. For those on the West Coast, there were fires that ravaged most of Washington, Oregon, and California.

Closer to home and pertinent to all of us as nurses in the Providence Health System in Oregon, 2020 also brought forth a resurgence of our union – the Oregon Nurses Association (ONA) – both at the regional/Oregon level as well as within Providence Portland Medical Center (PPMC).

In the past, I have heard from many nurses asking what they are getting for their membership dues, and at times I have asked myself the same question. Today, I am pleased to say that I no longer ask that question due to the changes and activity on the part of ONA. In the past year, we have seen more activity and organizing than in the past ten years that I have been involved with our union. Now more than ever, our ONA representatives today stand with the nurses of Providence to support our strategies and objectives.

In February 2020, ONA welcomed Sarah Laslett as the new executive director. Sarah has worked in the labor movement for more than 20 years, most recently as faculty at the University of Oregon in the Labor Education and Research Center (LERC). Sarah is very much a "union aware" leader and much of the changes we are seeing in our union are a direct result of Sarah’s leadership. I anticipate more good things to come as we move into the future.

Also, during the early part of the year, we saw the arrival of Gabriel Erbs as an organizer with ONA dedicated to providing support for Providence. Gabe comes with several years of organizing experience and initiated the continuing “Protect People not Profits” campaign in September of last year. Gabe has also been active in partnering with Jobs With Justice to organize activities around the greater Portland area, as well as facilitating the card campaign associated with Protect People not Profits.

In March we saw the advent of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) – a document that would function as an addendum to our contract - that we have been attempting to negotiate and agree upon with Providence that would bring basic COVID-19 care for all Providence nurses across Oregon.

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In December of last year, we published the COVID-19 Bill of Rights (which can be found on the ONA notice boards around all of the Providence hospitals in Oregon), that consolidates the MOU into a one-page document. Since that time, nurse stewards have been gathering commitment cards from nurses at all of the Providence Oregon hospitals that are signed in support of the bill of rights.

During August of last year, we saw a restructuring and re-energizing of the ONA/PPMC Executive Committee with several new members, including a new chair (myself) and vice-chair (Kim Martin) that was made “official” in December with the most recent election. A full list of ONA/PPMC Executive Committee members can be found on the first page of this newsletter.

Late in the summer, we welcomed Christine Hauck as our new ONA Labor Representative. Christine also brings many years of labor and union experience to Providence and dove right into the challenges presented at PPMC.

Finally, during the fall of last year, ONA also saw a restructuring of its management structure in the areas of labor and organizing. That restructuring continues as new leaders are being interviewed and brought in to focus on the development and support of our union across the state.

The other major change in the past year is the growth in our union steward structure at PPMC. At the beginning of 2020, we had approximately 27 union stewards. As of the last count, we have around 90 stewards across PPMC who have stepped up to support and work for their union siblings at our hospital. We have monthly steward meetings where we can exchange information and updates on what has occurred and what we should be planning for. This growth has also been fostered by the increase in ONA’s steward training sessions, now scheduled for every month.

Recently, we have seen radio slots, articles in the Willamette Week and the Oregonian (the latter picked up by the Associated Press and reprinted in newspapers in various states around the nation), and several highly visible TV news segments supporting Providence and PPMC nurses.

All of the above media events were facilitated and coordinated by ONA’s Interim Director of Communications, Kevin Mealy.

The most recent action we coordinated was our Care-A-Van, which exceeded expectations with an estimated 120 cars and 200 participants – not just nurses but also members of the labor movement and community members from across the city who all turned out to support the nurses of Providence as we strive for basic protections and care as outlined in the ONA COVID-19 Bill of Rights.

Today, while we have arrived at several small developments with the MOU, discussions continue to achieve agreement on our basic requests. Your ONA/PPMC Executive Committee welcomes your feedback and input. We are always ready to answer your questions! The exchange of information is critical to a successful union.

In the meantime, we are planning on more actions! Take care, stay safe and thank you for all the work you all do to support and care for our community.

In solidarity,

Richard Botterill
PPMC Executive and Negotiation Committee Chair

VIRTUAL NURSE LOBBY WEEK
Feb. 22-26, 2021

Join hundreds of nurses and nursing students for Virtual Nurse Lobby Week, Feb. 22-26.
This is your opportunity to change Oregon’s health policies, improve nurse staffing, raise patient care standards and more by meeting with legislators to advocate for innovative health care solutions.
This year, you will have multiple opportunities to advocate for your profession and patients, including:
• Virtual Legislative Meetings
• Video Testimonials
• Online Letter Submission

Learn more and register for Nurse Lobby Week and Membership Meetings at: www.OregonRN.org