

A Letter from the Vice President – July 30th 2008

You know, rumors can be a funny thing. I've heard many of them floating around these past few weeks, most notably revolving around contract negotiations with the Sheriff. Is there anyone out there that hasn't heard the 5-on, 2-off or 12-hour shifts rumors? If there is, you're probably in the minority.

The reality is we, the E-Board of the Local 550, want to keep you as informed as we can. You shouldn't have to guess, and that is a primary reason why we plan to release a regular posting on this Local 550 website. So, let's start with the hottest of topics right now: our new contract.

The way the process works is this: the Local E-Board elects 3 members to negotiate a new contract with the Sheriff. Generally, the Sheriff does not personally sit in the room for these negotiations; he sends forward his own negotiating team to advance his interests. When negotiations begin, one person from each side is usually nominated as being the spokesperson for their party at the table.

Two-major issues discussed during negotiations are wage-increases and language. Language constitutes the wording in the collective bargaining agreement (or cba) and is oftentimes a very important topic of negotiations. Both parties will usually come to a binding agreement to not discuss any ongoing issues of negotiation before they can be officially presented to the entire Local 550, in written form, for ratification. For this reason, you can be all but guaranteed that if you hear a rumor regarding a specific item of negotiation, it's false.

In the near future, we will be asking members on this website to give us their opinion on what they consider to be a fair and reasonable contract. And just so we're clear, we've heard you all loud and clearly; pay is and must be *the* top priority. Negotiations with the Sheriff will reflect that and it is my personal opinion that Local 550 members can and should expect a substantial increase in pay, as promised by the Sheriff some 3+ years ago, in the days to come.

In closing, I think we can all recognize that we're one of the least-desired counties in corrections to work for, and for a number of reasons. An extraordinarily dangerous work environment, an ever-continuing increase in responsibilities and being one of the lowest-paid counties in the entire state are some particulars as to why we are seeing droves of officers hand in their letters of resignation for what they consider to be bigger and better pastures. In a highly touted and supposedly improved accredited jail, that should not be the case.

How serious the Sheriff considers these issues at hand will remain to be seen. What is a sure thing is this: we will not accept less than what we are worth, monetarily or safety-wise. To us, this is not a political game; the safety of the public whom we are paid to serve is at risk. We ask for, no, we demand more from an Administration that has asked so very much from us. Bearing this in mind we move forward, in strength and solidarity, to secure the contract that every Local 550 member expects and deserves.

Fraternally Yours,

Warren Lohnes, Jr.
V.P., Local 550