

The Voice Of Oklahoma's State Employees

The **ADVOCATE**



January 2009

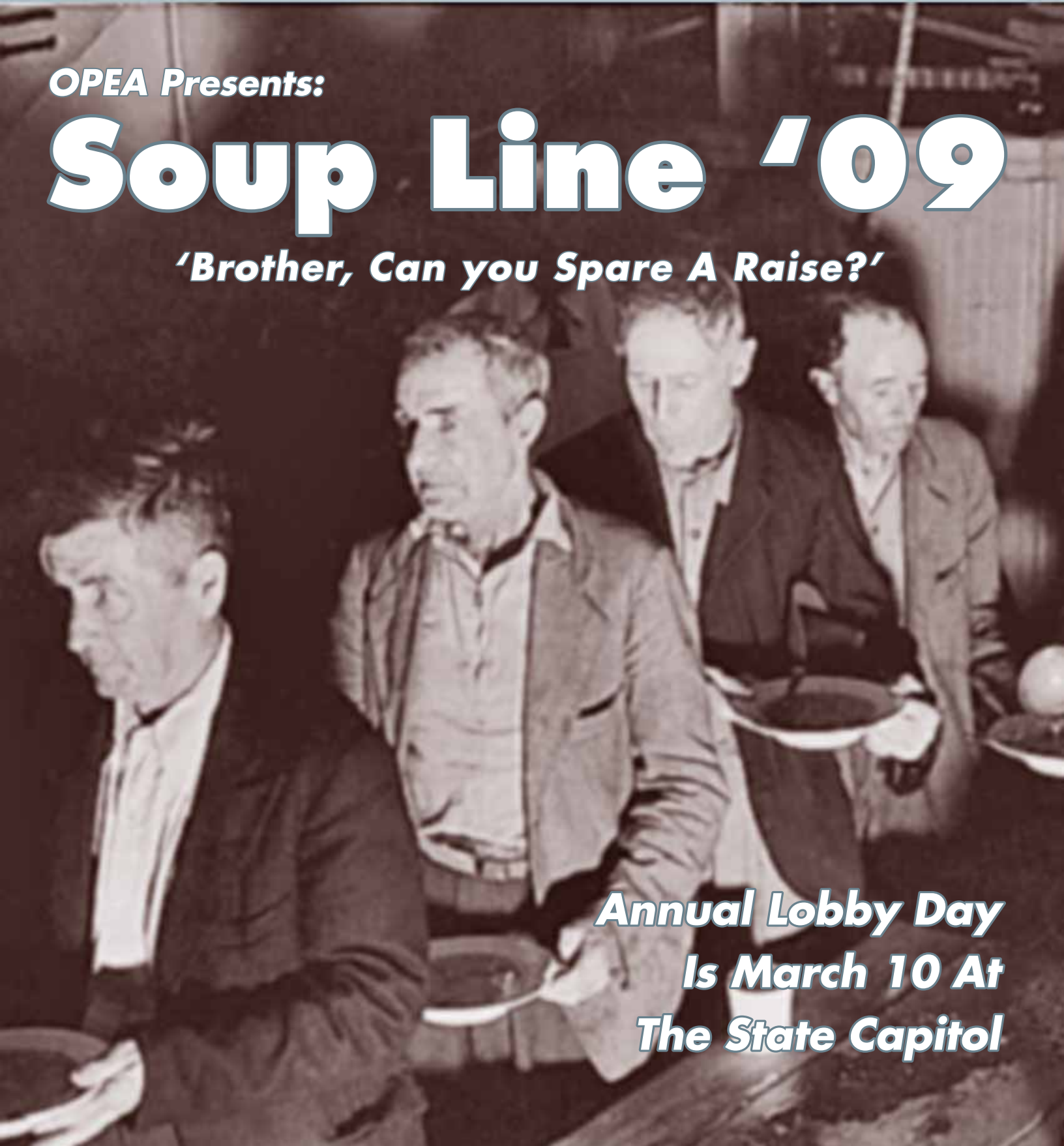
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Volume 30, No. 1

OPEA Presents:

Soup Line '09

'Brother, Can you Spare A Raise?'



***Annual Lobby Day
Is March 10 At
The State Capitol***



MAKING A DIFFERENCE ...

New Members • The following people recently chose to get involved by joining the Oklahoma Public Employees Association.

Dorothy Abel	Tobey Donaldson	Doyle Horstekoetter	Robert Parks
William Alexander	LaQuitta Dorsey	Frank Horton	Carlene Pearce
Mary Allen	Barbara Doyle	Linda Howard	Joyce Phillips
Donald Anderson	Modena Duncan	Norma Howard	Junee Purcell
Marvin Backhaus	Eldena East	Annie Jones	Rex Purdy
Elizabeth Bailey	Hilda Elgaze	C.R. Jordan	Ben Robinson
Richard Bailey	C. Kathleen Filson	Patsy King	Charles Rogers
Sheryl Bates	Edith Francis	Sharon Lear	John Roper
Edith Burns	Billye Frazier	Barbara Long	Ivan Shouse
Ed Burr	Lawrence Fulgenzi	Carl Lytle	Frank Stormer
Billie Campbell	Anne Gaines	Lorraine Mach	Cynthia Trammel
Frank Carvajal	William Gideon	Melvin "Gale" Maxwell	Larry Truelove
Tom Case	Donna Gilmore	Anna McCoy	Minnie Turnbow
Kenneth Chandler	Deborah Gilmour	Joe McDuffy	Edward Walters
Timothy Cole	D. Jeanne Griener	Barbara McGuffin	Lois Webb
Tempest Compton	Alice Griffith	Roberta Miller	Fran Welch
Floyd Courtney	Lilly Hadley	Ronald Miller	Flora Williams
Brada Cowan	Gertrud Haffner	Jerry Mitchell	Patsy Wood
Charles Crosier	Reba Hiebert	Bill Murley	Billie Wright
S. B. Davis	Christine Hill	Myrle O'Dell	

15-Year Anniversaries • These OPEA members reached their 15th anniversary with the Association during the past month.

Deborah Almanza-Hardzog	Dennis Groom	Daniel Melton
Charlotte Arden	Elvis Hall	Judson Meyer
Mitchell Arteberry	Mitchell Haynes	John Mozingo
Betty Bershinsky	Jonathan Herlan	Laura Newton
Rudy Brockelsby	Norene Hopcus	Donna Perry
Karen Brooks	Bret Jeffries	Richard Powell
Shirley Brooks	Nathaniel Jones	Ron Smith
David Burke	Helen Klein	Sharon Thur
Mary Cartwright	William Lambert	Charley Tipps
Sharlet Rena Evans	Barbara Lee	Lisa Watts
John Gappa	Hattie Marsh	Pamela Williams



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Recruitment Drive Draws Large Turnout At ODOT

Nearly 200 people crowded into the Oklahoma Department of Transportation's central office in Oklahoma City recently for an OPEA pizza lunch and membership recruitment drive.

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Board Members Take Office

A new president and seven new members were sworn in for terms on the OPEA Board of Directors at a Jan. 10 meeting in Oklahoma City.

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The Advocate

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There's Strength In Numbers

I was driving to Oklahoma City on a cold, windy day in early January, thinking about the upcoming Board meeting and taking the oath of office as OPEA president. It was a Saturday and the rest of the world was sleeping while I was on the road.

The President's Pen

By Connie Stockton
OPEA President



I began thinking about our Association and how proud I am to represent each and every member throughout the state. It's definitely a labor of love and a responsibility I take very seriously.

Public service is not for everyone; we obviously don't do it to get rich. We all have different reasons, but I believe the underlying common goal with all of us is that we love our home state and want to make it the best it can be. Public service is not an easy job and one made even more difficult in troubled times.

Our country is facing serious problems right now, and the economic downturn is affecting us right here at home. Oklahoma is facing serious budgetary problems, and the legislative session hasn't even started yet.

We are indeed facing difficult times, but now our legislators know exactly what state employees have been facing for years: trying to make ends meet and not knowing exactly how we are going to do it.

It has been well over three years since state employees have received a pay raise. We cannot survive much longer without additional compensation. The cost of our health benefits continues to rise and that is taking another chunk

out of our paycheck each month.

So what can we do? You've all heard the old phrase, "There's strength in numbers." OPEA needs numbers and lots of them. We have seen a significant growth in new members the past couple of years, but there is still a long way to go. The state employs about 37,000 workers; OPEA represents a little more than 10,000 of those. Every state employee needs to know what OPEA is, what we do and how they can benefit from joining the Association.

If OPEA represented every state worker, we could own the state of Oklahoma – or we could at least get our elected officials to hear our voice and recognize that we have legitimate concerns about our public service.

As your president, I urge each of you to talk to your co-workers and share with them the value of being an OPEA member. If every one of us gains just one new member this year, we will double the size of our organization. And our friends at the Capitol will have to listen to what we have to say.

Finally, I want to thank each of you for your continued support of OPEA, and I promise to uphold my pledge to serve as your president.

A United Voice Is A Strong Voice

I hope everyone had a safe and fun holiday season. We are entering into the 2009 legislative session with optimism and hope that state employees will be a priority this year.

Frontlines

By Sterling Zearley
OPEA Executive Director



I know there is concern with the downturn in the nation's economy and the potential downturn in Oklahoma's economy. During this uncertain time, we must not give up or waiver in our commitment to educate and lobby for state employee rights and compensation.

State employees provide unique and quality services to the citizens of the state of Oklahoma. I for one am proud to have served the citizens of the state for 23 years and am humbled and proud to serve state employees in my capaci-

ty at OPEA.

OPEA has proposed some great legislation, detailed in this issue of *The Advocate*, for the upcoming legislative session. We will address compensation, longevity, retirement and other

state employee issues. We need to unite as a group and stay the course to pass this legislation in this session.

We need a strong voice to promote our legislative agenda items at the Capitol and to the citizens of this great state. I am calling on every OPEA member to sign up just one new member this year. If each of you responds to my request, our membership will double, and OPEA will be 20,000 members strong.

Lobby Day, scheduled for March 10, will be very important this year, and OPEA needs you to get involved and encourage other state employees to do the same. Look for additional updates soon.

Soup Line '09 ... Brother Can You Spare A Raise?

OPEA Lobby Day Set For March 10

Like much of the private sector, state employees have been facing serious financial problems in recent months and years. Those financial problems are even more serious because public employees are some of the lowest-paid workers in the state.

Lobby Day this year will drive home that point to our state lawmakers, as OPEA presents "Soup Line '09" on Tuesday, March 10, at the state Capitol in Oklahoma City.

"Every state worker needs to make plans to be at Lobby Day this year," said OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley. "We are reaching crisis proportions in public service, with some of our state workers receiving food stamps. That's why we believe the 'soup line' theme will really help us make our point that state employees can't go on much longer."

"Lobby Day: Soup Line '09" will begin at 9 a.m. with registration in the second floor rotunda. OPEA members and state workers can visit with their legislators until 11 a.m., and the Soup Line Rally will be held on the Capitol's south steps at 11:30 a.m. Following the rally, OPEA will provide free soup and crackers to everyone in attendance.

"We keep hearing about how much less money our legislators have to work with this year," Zearley said. "Now they know exactly what state employees face each month, trying to stretch that dollar a bit farther. But we have gone as far as we can, and now is the time to get us out of the soup line."



Oklahoma Faces Tight Budget Year

With the national economy headed into recession, states are facing serious budget issues. Oklahoma is not immune from these problems, with legislators looking at a \$310 million, or 4.5-percent, shortfall in funds to appropriate during the upcoming session.

"The governor has announced Oklahoma is faring better than most states and job cuts or furloughs are not being considered," said OPEA Policy and Research Director Trish Frazier. "Unlike 2003, when the Rainy Day Fund had only \$72 million, the state has more than \$600 million in its savings account."

Several state agencies have asked for additional funds to make ends meet because of escalating costs and additional services required to help citizens in

these trying times. The Department of Human Services and Department of Corrections have requested funding for more employees and the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services needs \$24 million to continue current service levels.

OPEA's compensation bills both contain \$2,000 across-the-board raises that will cost the state approximately

\$90 million. However, by conservative estimates, the state is spending \$85 million a year on turnover costs.

"It's raining on state employees now," said Frazier. "Having lost more than \$3,000 from our paychecks since 2000 and even more with January increases in insurance costs, we cannot wait another year. We must be prepared to let legislators know this is our year."

First Bill Of Session Targets State Employee Pay

The first bill to be assigned a number in the House of Representatives for the 2009 legislative session carried symbolic weight and political heft for the Oklahoma Public Employees Association and state employees.

Rep. John Wright, R-Tulsa, filed House Bill 1027, the Oklahoma State Employee Recruitment and Retention Act, which would create the Competitive Market Pay Revolving Fund and the Pay for Performance Revolving Fund.

The Competitive Market Pay Revolving Fund

(Continued On Page 6)

OPEA's 2009 Legislation

A list of legislation requested by OPEA for the 2009 session follows. Bill numbers were not available at press time, but they will be posted on the OPEA Web site by the time the session opens Feb. 2.

Compensation

State employee salaries - OPEA is proposing two separate approaches to compensation; both provide a \$2,000 pay increase in 2009.

✦ **Market/task force** - *Sen. Jim Reynolds* - This legislation includes the recommendations of the Governor's Task Force to move state employees to market pay in four years. The first step is a \$2,000 across-the-board pay raise, effective July 1, 2009, to reduce turnover in the first year. The bill requires that all state classifications be surveyed by the 2010 session and a plan be implemented to bring all state classifications to market in the next three years.

✦ **Turnover Reduction Act** - *Rep. Randy Terrill* - This legislation provides for a \$2,000 across-the-board pay increase for all state employees, effective July 1, 2009, with an additional 2.5 percent each year until the cost of state employee turnover has been reduced to \$40 million per year.

Longevity - *Rep. Lisa Billy* - This legislation would double the state's longevity program and provide cost-of-living increases in the future. State employees do not receive step raises but are provided approximately \$100 per year in longevity pay, which has not been increased since 1988.

Retirement

Cost-of-living adjustment - *Sen. Debbe Leftwich* - This legislation would provide a 4-percent annual cost-of-living adjustment for retirees in the Oklahoma Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS), effective July 1, 2009, and a 2 percent COLA each year thereafter.

SoonerSave - *Rep. Scott Martin* - This legislation would increase the SoonerSave match from \$25 to \$50.

Military credit - *Sen. Steve Russell* - This legislation would add the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq to those for which veterans can receive credit toward retirement.

Overtime - *Rep. Mike Christian* - This legislation would

include overtime in the compensation counted toward retirement.

Sick leave conversion - *Sen. John Sparks* - This legislation would increase by another three months the amount of sick leave that can be converted for retirement credit.

Personnel

State employee political rights - *Rep. Mike Brown* - This legislation would allow state employees to run for partisan political office on their own time.

Salary adjustment equity - *Rep. Mike Brown* - This legislation would require state agencies to certify to the Office of Personnel Management that an equity-based salary adjustment is not discriminatory to other employees in the classification.

Unclassified grievance - *Rep. Anastasia Pittman* - This legislation would require state agencies to provide unclassified employees with a grievance process.

Unclassified severance - *Sen. Don Barrington* - This legislation would require state agencies to pay severance packages to unclassified employees who lose their jobs due to reorganization or budgetary constraints.

Agency Legislation

OESC funding - *Rep. Mike Jackson • Sen. Kenneth Corn* - This legislation would divert a small percentage of unemployment taxes to an administrative fund to maintain critical services at the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission (OESC).

DOC retirement - *Sen. Kenneth Corn* - This legislation would provide a 20-year retirement for all corrections employees.

Private prison transparency - *Rep. Mike Shelton* - This legislation, which mirrors a bill that is being proposed at the federal level, would require private prisons to be more accountable for state funds.

State Employee Pay (Continued From Page 5)

would receive appropriations of at least 1 percent of the total state agencies' payroll budgets. Agencies would be allowed to give pay raises equaling 1 percent of their payroll budget in positions where recruiting and retention are a problem.

The Pay for Performance Fund would also be seeded with 1 percent of the total state agencies' payroll budgets

but would be used for pay raises for state employees who meet or exceed standards on their evaluation. The 3-percent pay raise included in the bill would be effective in January 2010.

"OPEA is excited the first bill produced in the House of Representatives is aimed at state employee pay," said OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley. "OPEA has worked for the last

couple of years to get the Legislature to designate funds for state employee pay raises, and this is the first step. While we believe state employees need a pay raise effective in July 2009, we are happy Rep. Wright has put together this proposal. We are looking forward to working with him and the House leadership to make sure state employees receive a pay raise this year."

OPEA On The Air

Oklahomans throughout the state will have the opportunity to see the Oklahoma Public Employees Association on television and on the World Wide Web when a new 30-second commercial airs in February and March.

"I am very excited about getting OPEA on the air," said Director of Communications Mark Beutler. "It's been one of my goals to show Oklahomans who we are and what we do. Hopefully, that will also translate into new members."

The commercial is titled "Working for You" and shows a variety of state employees on the job, including those from the Department of Transportation, the Department of Corrections and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

"This commercial should make all Oklahomans aware of our state's valuable workforce – people who dedicate their lives to public service, making this a great place to live and work," Beutler said.

Commercials will be broadcast both in the Oklahoma City and Tulsa markets and statewide on public access channels. "Working for You" will air in Oklahoma City on KFOR-TV Channel 4 and in Tulsa on KJRH-TV Channel 2. It will also be available online at the OPEA Web site and on YouTube.

Recruitment Video Now Available

A new video detailing the Association's illustrious history is now online and is also being taken on the road throughout Oklahoma.

"I am getting tremendous response to this video everywhere I go," said OPEA Membership Representative Brandon Watkins. "Not only is it informative about OPEA's early days, but it is also very



entertaining and really incites people to take a stand and join the Association."

The video features former OPEA Executive Director Pat Hall, who describes the early days of trying to get state workers to join the new organization.

"I used to stand outside some of the state agencies in a coat and tie and try to hand a brochure to people about OPEA. It got to the point where I thought the finger meant 'hello' because state employees were so scared of OPEA. It was before electric windows, and you've never seen somebody roll that window up so fast when somebody was trying to get them to join a labor organization," Hall said

OPEA was first organized in 1975, and the incorporation certification came through on Nov. 22 of that year. Longtime OPEA Board member Dixie Jackson and her late husband Art were part of the original founding group.

"There are times that I just kind of think, 'My gosh. How did this all happen?'" Jackson said. "And it certainly didn't happen because of one or two people. It happened because state employees at the grass-roots level believed in the need to have some kind of organization that represents them. Now, nearly 35 years later, that's the heart of what OPEA does every day."

The video also features OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley, who was an OPEA member for more than 20 years before assuming his current duties.

"We need to educate new state employees that longevity and health benefits are not just something that was always here; those are things we had to fight for as an Association," Zearley commented. "Those benefits could be taken away or reduced during one legislative session. So we have to keep fighting for our rights and protect the benefits we currently have."

"My goal is to have all 34,000 state employees as members because, as effective as we are now with just 10,000, think what we could do with 34,000. We could actually own the state of Oklahoma," Zearley concluded.

You can see OPEA's new video online at www.OPEA.org.



"It happened because state employees at the grass-roots level believed in the need to have some kind of organization that represents them."

• OPEA Board Member Dixie Jackson

Association Educates Legislators About OESC's Financial Issues

The Oklahoma Employment Security Commission is facing a serious financial challenge that could cost the agency 200 jobs and drastically reduce the level of services provided by OESC if lawmakers fail to take action during the upcoming legislative session. The Oklahoma Public Employees Association is determined to do something about the situation.

OPEA members at OESC are working with agency administrators to educate legislators about the agency's funding crisis by holding meetings across the state. Before the first month of the upcoming legislative session is over at the end of February, OPEA, in conjunction with OESC, will hold approximately 12 meetings in OESC offices, including legislative tours of the statewide call centers in Oklahoma City and Tulsa.

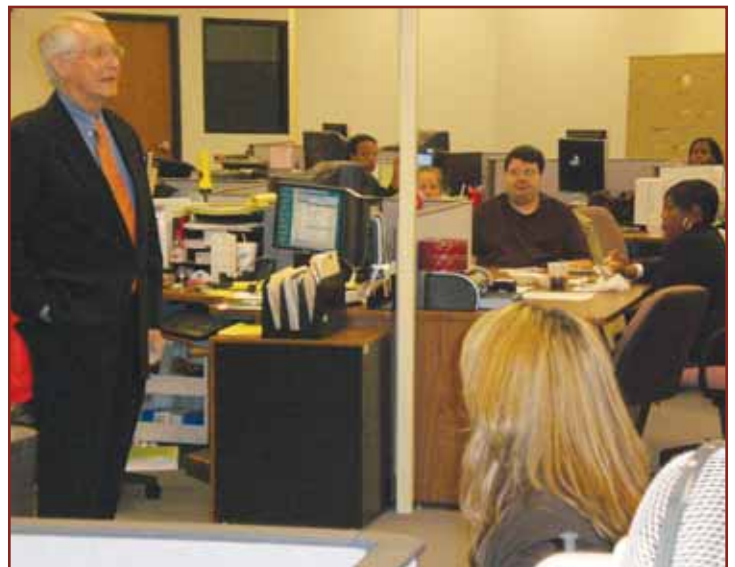
“Employees have been sitting down with legislators and telling them in small groups at pizza meetings of the important services that would be lost if the agency does not receive additional funding.”

• OPEA Board Member Harold Wright

“Employees have been sitting down with legislators and telling them in small groups at pizza meetings of the important services that would be lost if the agency does not receive additional funding,” said OPEA Board member Harold Wright, who works in the agency call center in Tulsa.

OESC's call centers already are dealing with increases in calls for unemployment claims, and, as a result, Oklahoma's citizens are spending more time on hold. Wait times have soared from an average of two minutes to more than 17 minutes, and the wait on Mondays can be several hours.

Annual federal funding grants for unemployment insurance and employment services have decreased from \$32 million in 1982 to \$25 million in 2008. When inflation is considered, the fund is almost \$50 million short of 1982 levels. Without state funding, OESC has been surviving on sporadic federal Reed Act distributions. Oklahoma received \$81 million in Reed Act funds in 2002, which will be depleted dur-



OESC Executive Director Jon Brock, left, speaks to workers at the Oklahoma City call center.

ing the 2010 calendar year. Currently, there are no discussions of a Reed Act disbursement at the federal level.

Without a new funding source, OESC could lose almost a third of its workforce. To maintain services at the current level, which is not keeping up with demand, the agency would need \$12 million in funding each year.

During the upcoming legislative session, Reps. Weldon Watson and Mike Jackson are sponsoring HB 1029. The legislation would create an OESC administrative fund, which would receive 6 percent of the unemployment taxes paid by employers. OESC would be allowed to use these funds to help pay the agency's administrative costs.

The Unemployment Trust Fund, which would normally receive all unemployment taxes, has a healthy balance and has grown from \$608 million in 2005 to its current level of \$856 million. Diverting a small percentage of the unemployment tax would not affect the state's ability to pay claims, nor would it require the state to raise taxes on state employers.

In 35 states, employment services do not rely entirely on federal funds but



State Sen. Patrick Anderson, right, addresses OESC workers in Enid.

(Continued On Page 9)

OPEA Welcomes New Membership Representative

The Oklahoma Public Employees Association welcomes Rick Allen as its newest staff member. Allen, a native of Lexington, Okla., joined OPEA Dec. 1 as a membership representative. In an exclusive interview with OPEA Director of Communications Mark Beutler, Allen shared his thoughts on state employment, his long career as a corrections professional and his goals for his work at OPEA.

MB: Tell us about your background.

RA: I grew up and went to school in my hometown of Lexington. I joined the U.S. Army in 1972 and was honorably discharged in 1975. After that I studied criminal justice and went to work for the Oklahoma Department of Corrections. After 25 years in service and numerous transfers to different facilities, I retired Nov. 30.

MB: What prompted you to join the OPEA team?

RA: I joined the OPEA team to fight for my fellow co-workers. After 25 years of watching state employees being undervalued, I wanted to join the Association that fights for state employees and plays by the rules. OPEA does that and more. I have gained a great respect for this organization and its goal to achieve a quality work environment for all state employees.

MB: You were on the Board of the Oklahoma Corrections Professionals. Why did you leave?

RA: Under the circumstances, I don't want to say much about the issue. I don't want to get distracted from my objective of why I came to OPEA. But I will say this: "Say what you mean and mean what you say." You must play by a certain set of rules in life no matter what you do. OCP, in my opinion, was not doing that. So I felt I either had to go against my own beliefs or not participate. I felt I had no other choice but to

resign my position there because of the actions of several individuals.

MB: What are your thoughts on the current lawsuit against the three founding individuals?

RA: Part of my duties at OPEA is to protect sensitive information we receive from our members. Those three individuals named in the lawsuit allegedly betrayed that trust, and that's why the lawsuit was filed, to recover that confidential information that belongs to OPEA. I hope all my peers in corrections realize this lawsuit is not about OCP; it's about the ex-OPEA employee and two ex-OPEA Board members who allegedly started OCP with information that didn't belong to them. I was an elected OCP Board member, and I wish the argument about it being about OCP would stop.

MB: What are your goals in your position at OPEA, and what do you hope to accomplish?

RA: Right now I want to get all state employees focused on the issues at hand. The Department of Corrections lost a lot of bargaining power last year with their audit, due to their inner turmoil. OPEA cannot be distracted for a second year in a row. Distraction will cost state employees money, whether it is in pay raises or benefits. I cannot and absolutely will not be drawn into anything that is not beneficial for OPEA members. My loyalties are to the state employee.



Rick Allen

Financial Issues (Continued From Page 8)

provide appropriations or earmark a percentage of unemployment taxes for the state agency.

"In these challenging times, the state must have services that help workers make ends meet when they lose their jobs," said Wright. "OPEA is working with the agency to pass legislation to ensure that critical services will be available when citizens need them."

Legislators participating in the OESC tours include Sens. Patrick Anderson and Constance Johnson and Reps. John Carey, Mike Christian, George Faught, Tad Jones, Mark McCullough, Al McAffrey, Anastasia Pittman, Randy Terrill and Weldon Watson.



OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley, Rep. Anastasia Pittman and Sen. Constance Johnson talk with workers during a recent pizza lunch at OESC in Northeast Oklahoma City.

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Working For You!

Recruitment Drive Draws Large Turnout At ODOT

Nearly 200 people crowded into the Oklahoma Department of Transportation's central office in Oklahoma City recently for an OPEA pizza lunch and membership recruitment drive.

"We had a tremendous turnout," said OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley. "It was especially nice to be at ODOT, since they were part of the original group who helped form OPEA back in the 1970s."



Al McAffrey

District 88 State Rep. Al McAffrey was on hand to address the crowd, as was OPEA Board member Rita Heath from ODOT's Division 8 in Tulsa.

"As a state representative, I want to tell you what will get my attention," McAffrey said.

"If I was to look out at the Capitol and see all 34,000 state employees who were OPEA members, I'm going to sit up and pay attention to what you have to say and what you want. So will the governor. Ten thousand OPEA members are great, but 34,000 would definitely get our attention at the Capitol. That's why it's so important for each of you as

state employees to get active and join OPEA," he added.

OPEA's new historical and membership video was part of the presentation, and Director of Communications Mark Beutler talked about the benefits of being a member.

"I was an ODOT'er for seven years," Beutler said. "During that time no one from OPEA came to talk to us or recruit us as members. And what is so ironic is that it was ODOT employees who helped found OPEA in 1975. But it's a new day for OPEA. I hope each of you will take a look at what we have to offer state employees and make the decision to join today."

A number of ODOT employees became the newest members of OPEA, including Carol Fasol of Oklahoma City.

"It's time we all become proactive and start making things happen," Fasol said. "You've convinced me, and I'm going to make my voice heard. I hope I can encourage my co-workers to do the same."

OPEA is hitting the road this year,



Rep. Al McAffrey spoke to OPEA members and potential members at a recent pizza lunch at the Oklahoma Department of Transportation's central office in Oklahoma City.

getting the message out to all state employees about the perks of being a member.

"I have been to a number of ODOT divisions in the past few months, and it was very rewarding to have a turnout like this at the central office," said OPEA Membership Representative Brandon Watkins. "I see ODOT employees as being leaders at initiating change and hope to see a positive ODOT representation at OPEA."

To set up an OPEA pizza lunch in your office, call OPEA headquarters at (405) 524-6764.

Break Room Offers New Sound For New Year

OPEA's podcast, "The Break Room," is entering into its second year with a fresh new sound.

"We looked at what we did in the first year, decided what worked well and what didn't and came up with a new approach," said OPEA Deputy Director Scott Barger.

"One of the biggest changes listeners will notice is the length," Barger said. "We thought a half-hour might be a bit long for some people, especially if they are listening at work. We are condensing the show to roughly 15 min-



utes but still plan to keep the in-depth questions and answers that have worked for us in the past.

"We already have a number of shows 'in the can' and guests on tap for future podcasts," he said.

"In addition to our Web site, 'The Break Room' can also be found on iTunes.

"As always, we welcome any comments our listeners may have and hope they continue to enjoy this unique service OPEA offers its members," Barger concluded.

Upcoming Enrollment Dates:
Spring March 15 - April 15
Back To School July 15 - August 15
Holiday November 15 - December 15



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Association Discusses 20-Year Retirement For Corrections Employees With OPERS, OLERS

Correctional leaders and staff of the Oklahoma Public Employees Association have launched the process of establishing a 20-year retirement for all correctional employees by meeting with representatives of the Oklahoma Law Enforcement Retirement System and the Oklahoma Public Employees Retirement System.

OPEA Board members Mike Rogers and Carrie Croy met with OLERS Executive Director Ginger Poplin and Board President Roy Rogers, as well as OPERS Executive Director Tom Spencer to discuss a 20-year retirement for all Department of Corrections employees. OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley, Policy and Agency Relations Director Trish Frazier and Deputy Director Scott Barger attended the meetings.

Under state law, it would take two years to enact a change in the retirement systems. After legislation was passed, the Legislative Services Bureau would conduct an actuarial study to determine the cost of the change. During the following session, legislators would provide funding for the program.

A law enforcement retirement for all DOC employees would require expansion of the program at OPERS. Spencer told the group that this has been considered in the past for other members of the OPERS system, including emergency medical technicians and district attorney investigators.

According to Spencer, adding all DOC staff to the current OPERS hazardous duty plan would require additional funding. The total cost would depend upon the details of the plan.

OLERS is concerned about adding nearly 4,500 employees to a system that currently has only a half-dozen employees and about whether the non-uniformed staff would meet the definition of a law enforcement officer, based on state and federal law.



OPEA Board members Carrie Croy, right, and Mike Rogers, second from right, met with representatives of OLERS recently.

“This is an issue that our correctional employees want fixed,” said Zearley. “OPEA is leading the effort to find a solution to this very complex issue and reward all the employees who work in a hazardous environment every day.”

“The job of a corrections worker has never been more stressful or more dangerous,” he added. “Assaults are up, case-loads for probation and parole officers are outrageous and Pardon and Parole has been left completely out of the discussions. You have employees working side-by-side with offenders, one with a 20-year retirement and one without. This disparity cannot be allowed to continue, and our efforts will go toward a solution.”

Sen. Kenneth Corn has agreed to author the 20-year retirement legislation.



Above: OPEA Board member Carrie Croy makes a point, as Membership Representative Rick Allen, Board member Mike Rogers and OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley look on. Right: OPERS General Counsel Joe Fox and Executive Director Tom Spencer listen to her presentation.



New President, Board Members Take Office

A new president and seven new members were sworn in for terms on the OPEA Board of Directors at a Jan. 10 meeting in Oklahoma City.

President Connie Stockton received the oath of office from Vice Chair Ken Burrow, then gave the oath to seven new members of the Board: Harold Wright, Lewis Logan, Wally Ogunoiki, Mike Rogers, Susan Adams, Tom Dunning and Carol Miller.

"I am extremely proud to serve as your president," Stockton said. "I look forward to leading OPEA forward in a new direction and accomplishing great things for our state employees."



Left: OPEA President Connie Stockton receives the oath of office from Vice Chair Ken Burrow. Above: OPEA officers who were sworn in Jan. 10 included, left to right, Connie Stockton, Harold Wright, Lewis Logan, Wally Ogunoiki, Mike Rogers, Susan Adams, Tom Dunning and Carol Miller.

Did you know that Oklahoma Public Employees could save up to \$327.96 or more a year on auto insurance?



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*Discounts and credits are available where state laws and regulations allow, and may vary by state. Certain discounts apply to specific coverages only. To the extent permitted by law, applicants are individually underwritten; not all applicants may qualify. **Figure based on a March 2006 sample of auto policyholder savings when comparing their former premiums with those of Liberty Mutual's group auto and home program. Individual premiums and savings will vary. Coverage provided and underwritten by Liberty Mutual Insurance Company and its affiliates, 175 Berkeley Street, Boston, MA. A consumer report from a consumer reporting agency and/or a motor vehicle report, on all drivers listed on your policy, may be obtained where state laws and regulations allow. ©2006 Liberty Mutual Insurance Company. All Rights Reserved.

Non-Members Won't Have Access To Web Site After Feb. 9

OPEA members and non-members alike have been able to access the Association's entire Web site since it was redesigned nearly two years ago, but that situation is about to change.

Numerous focus groups have told the OPEA leadership that access to accurate and timely information is more important to OPEA members than services such as grievance assistance, insurance advice and resolving agency issues.

For the past two years, members and non-members have enjoyed reading information about issues important to state employees – free of charge. Meanwhile, OPEA staff and leaders have heard that the number one reason many state employees do not join OPEA is that they get the same services members receive. The OPEA Board of Directors has decided that beginning Feb. 9, non-members



who visit the OPEA Web site will be able to read only a synopsis of information but will no longer be able to access entire articles and information available to dues-paying members.

Beginning Feb. 9, members will be asked to log in when they visit the Web site, using their first and last name as one word when they do so for the first time. Members will be able to change their password after they log in. Those who experience problems accessing the Web site should contact the OPEA office at (405) 524-6764 and speak with Nancy Hughes or Rachelle Johnson.

State employees will have full access to the OPEA Web site only as long as they are OPEA members.

OPEA is the only organization that represents the interests of state employees. The Association will continue to provide and enhance services that are a real and useful benefit of OPEA membership.

Don't Miss This!

OPEA's Break Room Podcast

Upcoming Interviews:
Lt. Gov. Jari Askins
State Rep. Al McAffrey



www.OPEA.org • Click on Podcast

Who Are You Going To Call?

OPEA members only may call the OPEA office for:

Executive Director: Sterling Zearley



Legal Advocacy Program • Grievance Assistance:
Clyde McLendon



Agency Information: Trish Frazier, Policy and Agency Relations Director



Political Action: Scott Barger, Deputy Director



Communications/Media Information: Mark Beutler, Director of Communications



Legislative Issues: Dennis Adkins, Lobbyist



Legislation Information: Nancy Hughes, Executive Assistant



Schedule A Meeting: Rick Allen, Membership Representative • Southwest Oklahoma



Schedule A Meeting: Brandon Watkins, Membership Representative • Northwest Oklahoma



Schedule A Meeting: Reba Robinson, Membership Representative • Northeast Oklahoma



General Information: Rachelle Johnson, Administrative Assistant

Joining OPEA: Nancy Hughes or Rachelle Johnson

(405) 524-6764 • (800) 880-OPEA (6732)

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Please return to: OPEA, 13 N.E. 28th St., Oklahoma City, Okla. 73105 or visit www.opea.org.



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Home Phone () _____ Work Phone () _____

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Agency _____ Work Location _____ Position _____

Work Location Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Work Fax Number () _____ Who introduced you to OPEA? _____

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I hereby authorize the state of Oklahoma to deduct from my pay the amount checked below required to purchase dues in the Oklahoma Public Employees Association, subject to my right to revoke this order by written notice to my employer.

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OPEA's standard dues are \$15 per month. Annual dues: state employees - \$180; retirees - \$60; associates - \$20; corporate affiliates - \$300. Contributions or gifts to OPEA are not deductible as charitable contributions for federal income tax purposes. However, dues payments are deductible as a miscellaneous itemized deduction. Dues include your annual subscription to *The Advocate* (a \$4 value). Your \$15 monthly dues payment includes a \$2.25 contribution to OPEAPAC. I do not want \$2.25 per month of my dues to go to OPEAPAC.

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