

MERC HAPPENINGS

Personnel changes at the Bureau of Employment Relations/MERC

MERC CHAIR DERDARIAN REAPPOINTED BY GOVERNOR TO 3-YEAR TERM

Christine A. Derdarian was re-appointed Chair of the Michigan Employment Relations Commission on July 14, 2009. She was initially appointed Chair of the Commission on October 8, 2006.

Prior to her retirement from state service in 2002, Chair Derdarian supervised the labor section of the Michigan Attorney General's office. In this capacity, she managed a cadre of attorneys working in the area of labor law enforcement, including issues related to MERC, labor relations, wage claims, and disability concerns. During her 28 years at the AG's office, she provided expertise as a cabinet member to two attorneys general.

Besides her familiarity with labor matters, MERC Chair Derdarian has extensive experience in matters related to administrative law and governmental issues. Her background includes service as the Chief Legal Counsel to the transition team for Governor-Elect Granholm and as Special Legal Counsel to the Governor on the reorganization of State's largest department -- the Michigan Department of (Energy), Labor and Economic Growth -- the department that houses MERC and the Bureau of Employment Relations.

Presently, Ms. Derdarian is in private practice specializing in government relations, professional licensing, negotiations, and corporate matters.

MERC Chair Derdarian's appointment expires on June 30, 2012. Her fellow MERC Commissioners are Nino Green and Eugene Lumberg, whose terms expire June 30, 2010 and June 30, 2011, respectively.

FRED VOCINO JOINS LANSING MEDIATION STAFF

In October, Fred Vocino joined the Lansing staff of the Bureau of Employment Relations, as a labor mediator. Fred will service MERC's constituents in the Grand Rapids area and the western side of our state, filling the position that has been vacant for more than one year.

Fred has a unique background in the health care arena, having served as a Labor Relations Representative for the Michigan Nurses Association since 1991. In this capacity, he conducted labor negotiations at numerous health care facilities and provided ongoing contract administration services at those locations, including serving as chief advocate in labor arbitration proceedings. Prior to working with the MNA, he served in various local union officer capacities, including president, with the United Auto Workers Local 2071 at Wayne State University. Besides his experience in health care, Fred brings a wealth of experience handling collaborative bargaining relationships - experience that will be invaluable in this challenging economic climate.

Fred earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Wayne State, where he took classes in the Alternative Dispute Settlement and the Industrial and Organizational Science programs.

SIDNEY MCBRIDE HIRED IN ELECTIONS OFFICER/ADMINISTRATIVE LAW CAPACITIES

In August, MERC welcomed Sidney McBride to its Detroit office staff replacing Elections Officer, Robert Strassberg, who recently accepted a promotion to a labor mediator position. Sidney works in the dual function of elections officer/administrative law specialist; in the latter capacity, he assists with the management of the Commission's docket.

Sidney came to state service with a solid foundation of nearly twenty years with the Wayne County Circuit Court. He was well prepared for his shift in his public service career, as his background offers related experience, including reviewing and advising on court programs and policies for improved operations, and interpreting collective bargaining agreements. His experience included participating in labor contract negotiations, grievances, arbitrations, and mediations, as well as in various employment-related matters.

Sidney has a law degree from Wayne State University, where he graduated in the top third of his class and earned honors recognitions in two of his three-year law school career. He received his BS Degree with distinction in Psychology, also from Wayne State.

SALLY HUSKINS HIRED TO FILL LEGAL SECRETARY VACANCY

Sally Huskins has been hired at the Bureau of Employment Relations to fill a vacancy in the legal secretary arena. Sally comes to the Bureau with a wealth of legal secretarial experience behind her. She worked previously at the Detroit law firm of Kerr, Russell & Weber and, also, in sunny Los Angeles at the law firms of Gelfand & Glaser, as well as at Manatt, Phelps & Phillips. Sally's experience as an event coordinator will be invaluable to our office; while in California, she worked as an Executive Assistant/Event

Coordinator for Biometrics International, Inc. She previously worked with State government, primarily for the Michigan Attorney General's office.

Sally is ably providing assistance to the Bureau's staff attorney, Lynn Morison.

OTHER MERC HAPPENINGS

MSU Library Seeks Old and Current Collective Bargaining Agreements for its Collection

You may not be aware that the Labor and Industrial Relations (LIR) Library at Michigan State University collects and posts many expired and current collective bargaining agreements on its web-site located at <http://www.lib.msu.edu/coll/main/lir/> Where possible, the contracts are linked to related Act 312 awards and Fact Finding recommendations that have also been posted. Michigan State's Head LIR librarian, Laura Leavitt, continues to solicit your former and current labor contracts for posting and for their collection. Please assist to embellish this invaluable resource by sending her an electronic version of any collective bargaining agreements you might have at Leavitt9@msu.edu. Laura, who is an excellent resource librarian, will gladly assist you in navigating the web site or in locating a needed labor contract or other document.

MERC Continues to Seek "True Neutrals" or Persons with Labor Union Backgrounds for its Panels of Neutrals

MERC continues to actively solicit applications for its panels of neutrals (Act 312, Fact Finding, and Grievance Arbitration) from persons with labor union backgrounds or from those who indeed meet the definition of a true neutral. If you meet this criterion, please contact Bureau Director Ruthanne Okun, at okunr@michigan.gov or (313) 456-3519. At this time, the rate paid to our neutrals is \$650 per day.

MERC Continues to Seek Support for its Proposed Open Meetings Act Amendment

You may not be aware that, under Michigan's Open Meetings Act (OMA), MCL 15.261, et seq., all MERC case-related action must be taken at an open meeting. Because the Commission is considered to be a "public body" under the OMA, it is subject to the law's requirement that its business must be conducted at an open meeting that has been properly noticed. Thus, when two members of the three-member Commission want to discuss the merits of a pending case, their discussions must take place in an open meeting convened in accordance with OMA requirements.

To correct an apparent oversight by the original drafters of the statute, the Commission has proposed an amendment to the OMA to include MERC in the listed agencies that are

exempt from that law “when deliberating the merits of a case.” That amendment has received only limited legislative consideration, and it appears that it may not move forward without citizen input and support. We continue to encourage your support of the amendment and welcome any comments you might have concerning it. Again, please submit them to Bureau Director Ruthanne Okun at okunr@michigan.gov, and we will ensure that your comments are forwarded to our department’s legislative affairs office and/or to the legislation’s sponsors.

MERC Plans Act 312 Arbitrator/Fact Finder Training

Please pencil into your calendars, planners, Palm Pilots, Blackberries, etc., the date of **Friday, April 16, 2009 for MERC’s Act 312 Arbitrator/Fact Finder training and refresher course**. The event will take place at the Inn at St. John’s in Plymouth, and we expect to invite a limited number of advocates/representatives at a minimal cost. Watch for more information after the first of the year, including an agenda and list of esteemed presenters.

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