

MAY-JUNE 2021

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

TO THE MEMBERS OF SEIU 721



Rest in Power SEIU 721 President Linda Dent

1952-2021

The First Woman and First Black President of Los Angeles' Largest Union Led Transformational Fights for Economic and Racial Justice and the \$15 Minimum Wage

LINDA DENT, a clerk in the Los Angeles County Tax Collector's Office who rose from a steward to become the first woman and first Black president of SEIU 721, has died at the age of 68 after battling pancreatic cancer.

Born in Louisiana and raised in Compton, Linda witnessed the pernicious effects of racism and dedicated her life to fighting for racial and economic justice for all. As a member of the bargaining team for LA County, President Dent pioneered the strategy of joining with community allies to push county government to adopt programs that helped a broad cross section of working-class and poor Angelenos, in addition to members of her union.

The alliances President Dent built ignited the Fight for \$15 campaign, sparking minimum wage increases first in LA County and the City of LA that culminated in a landmark statewide law that raised wages for 6.5 million Californians. She created the Compton Jobs Fair to help the formerly incarcerated find jobs with dignity, and pushed Mayor Garcetti and the City of Los Angeles to create the Targeted Local Hire program, a first-of-its-kind effort to set aside entry level city jobs for ex-offenders, homeless and other disadvantaged city residents, lifting nearly 2,000 city residents out of poverty.

"I have never met a leader more fiercely dedicated to making a difference in the lives of working people," said SEIU 721 Executive Director Bob Schoonover, who Dent succeeded as President of the local. "She was my sister, my ally and my friend for decades and words cannot convey how much I and everyone else in our movement will miss her."

Under SEIU 721's Constitution and Bylaws, President Dent will be succeeded by SEIU 721 Vice President David Green, who was first elected as the union's Treasurer in 2013. A Children's Social Worker and a 21-year veteran of the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, Green also serves as an elected member of the Los Angeles County Employee Retirement Association Board of Investments.

"I am personally devastated by Linda's passing and I promise to continue what she started inside our local," said Green at a Memorial Day conference call with the local's Executive Board. "Linda believed it was her job to listen to members and learn from them, to focus their power and to help them use it to make change," Green said.

Green said that President Dent believed organized Labor was the only force in American society working every day to close the widening gap between rich and poor and the strongest voice for racial and economic justice. She believed unions were the last line of defense protecting American democracy against a small group of ultra-rich, ultra-conservative political donors and big corporations who want to cut their own taxes at the expense of protections for ordinary workers.

"We've lost a lioness of Labor," said Green. "But we owe it to Linda to keep pushing."

Dent is survived by her husband Lee Dent, 3 children, and 7 grandchildren.

Information about her memorial service will be available at seiu721.org.

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Riverside County Members Receive Hard-Fought Raises

Despite all the differences and challenges we faced in bargaining, in 2019 we demonstrated that "When we fight, we win."

After a long bargaining process with the County, we reached a tentative agreement that honors the work we do, protects public services, and raises up Riverside!

Victories in that MOU included raising the ceiling and the floor, Health Subsidy increases, more time with our families, stronger protections, plus a rollback of takeaways!

This year, 2021, triggers two important benchmarks in our paychecks:

1. Employees who are at the maximum for the salary range of their classification as of April 8, 2021 will receive a one-time lump sum stipend of seven hundred and fifty dollars (\$750.00). The stipend will be paid two full pay periods after April 8, 2021.
2. Effective May 6, 2021, the maximum base salary of each salary range for classifications covered by this MOU shall be increased by two percent (2%).

Employees who have been at the maximum of their classification's salary range for one year or longer as of the beginning of the pay period in which the 2% increase to the maximum salary of the range is implemented will concurrently receive a 2%

increase to their salary in order to place them at the new maximum in the salary range. The employee's merit increase anniversary date will then be reset to the beginning of the pay period in which the increase to the maximum salary of the range is implemented.

Members entitled to the 2% increase or the \$750 lump sum will be able to see it on the June 2nd paycheck.



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SEIU 721 Tri-Counties Regional Center Members Win Ability to Work From Home Longer

When the COVID-19 public health crisis hit, SEIU 721 flew into action to make sure members and their workplaces were safe. One of the first things we did for Tri-Counties Regional Center (TCRC) members was to advocate for the ability to work from home.

Even with many Californians getting vaccinated, and the state planning on opening the economy on June 15th, we are still making sure members are safe.

TCRC offered to allow vaccinated workers to work from home for 48 hours per month and wanted non-vaccinated workers to go back into the offices. This was unacceptable, and our member leader team immediately pushed back on this proposal. Members like Lisa Foster, Annie Betterly-Smith, Carlos Rodriguez and Blanca Zepeda (all four are Service Coordinators 2 w/Mast), held strong and we were able to dramatically increase work from home times.

All TCRC members who are not deemed essential will be able to work from home for 80 hours a month until August, after which time they will be able to work for 64 hours a month from home.

LA COUNTY MECHANICS ADVOCACY VICTORY



LA County Stationary Mechanics are celebrating a huge victory to correct a wage inequity. SEIU 721 has been meeting with the County about the pay inequity, which was created when Maintenance Laborers II took a demotion when transferring to a new class. Maintenance Laborers IIs will now receive a 16.8% wage increase once they transfer to Stationary Mechanic Apprentice I. Wins like these are what happen when we have a union looking out for us — that's the union difference!

GIG WORKERS RALLY AGAINST THE BROKEN PROMISES OF PROP 22

On May 25, rideshare and delivery drivers with advocacy groups Mobile Workers Alliance and We Drive Progress took to the streets in San Francisco and Los Angeles as part of a statewide day of action calling out wealthy gig companies like Uber, DoorDash, Instacart, and others for their failure to follow through on the promises of Prop 22.

This action comes on the heels of a recently-released statewide survey revealing that few current gig workers are actually eligible for the healthcare stipend promised by Prop 22. Of those surveyed, 86% find themselves ineligible for the healthcare stipend and 29% report having no health insurance at all.

Platforms such as Uber, Lyft, and Instacart have created barriers to accessing the healthcare stipend — barriers that are not mandated by Prop 22, the ballot measure gig companies spent a record-breaking \$220 million to pass last year. This has left tens of thousands of uninsured or working-poor drivers without the promised and heavily-publicized healthcare stipend that Californians voted for last November.

In order to amplify their voices, on May 25, gig workers moved from speaking out to turning out in the streets of San Francisco and Los Angeles.

In San Francisco, gig workers rallied outside of Uber's expensive new Mission Bay HQ. Drivers detailed how they've suffered assaults and car accidents while working, and incurred medical costs, while receiving little to no support from the gig companies they work for.

In Los Angeles, (featured in photos at right) gig workers caravanned and rallied outside of Uber's new hub in Historic Filipinotown. Drivers detailed the challenges they've faced in attempting to receive the promised Prop 22 healthcare stipend, with examples of the exorbitant medical bills they've accrued due to the lack of support from their employers.

Drivers in both cities called on gig companies to honor the promises of the Prop 22 campaign and automatically disburse health insurance stipends to all drivers who meet the minimum requirements for engaged time working.



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Los Angeles County Sanitation Leader Wins Huge Disciplinary Victory



An SEIU 721 leader in the LA County Sanitation District received a notice from the County Sanitation District proposing a five-days suspension for arguing with a coworker and refusing to provide information on a piece of equipment. Immediately a grievance was filed.

While serving the five day suspension, the member received a Notice of Intent to Terminate from the Sanitation District for the same charge. The member called the District and scheduled a Skelly Meeting as soon as possible. With input from SEIU 721's Advocacy Department, the member argued that the District cannot charge an employee twice for the same offense. Two weeks after the Skelly Meeting, the District responded with the decision not to terminate.

Leaders that take their roles seriously and recognize when management is not following disciplinary guidelines make our union strong. Congratulations to the County Sanitation Grievance Committee for overturning this termination and making sure our union brother kept his job.

When we fight, we win!

SEIU 721 Members Lead The Pack In Text Message Advocacy

On May 18, SEIU members across California joined a virtual PurpleText Party with US Representative Katie Porter to hold Congressional Republicans accountable for voting against working families. In one evening, SEIU members sent over 240,000 text messages to six targeted Congressional Districts.

SEIU members have sent a total of 3.7 million text messages to targeted members of Congress since the beginning of the Federal Governing Agenda

Campaign, fighting for a strong recovery that includes all working people.

One of the highest performing texters, SEIU 721 member Kristin Southall, works as a Library Assistant at Law Library Temecula.

"Engaging in politics as a union member is so important," said Southall. "Unions are about collective power, in bargaining and in politics. Sending thousands of text messages through PurpleText makes me feel like I am doing something tangible and making a difference."



US Representative Katie Porter



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★ MELLONIE FREEMAN ★

SEIU 721 SUPER STAR STEWARD COACH

For the past quarter of a century, Mellonie Freeman has worked as a steward with our union — and now, her decades of experience have culminated in her becoming a lead Steward Coach at SEIU 721 for the past two years.

"I originally got involved when another steward asked me to come along to meetings and see what the union was all about," Freeman recalled. "Management was not working with our members, the employees — and our union was trying to make that better. I still see that as my mission."

Freeman was working at the LA County Department of Children and Family Services, where she's been employed as a Children's Social Worker for the past 28 years.

"Being a steward, I was able to learn more about the union itself," Freeman explained. "A lot of people only know that you can call Member Connection and ask for help but you don't know everything about a union until you start doing things."

Freeman emphasized that the key to effectiveness is proper training.

"When you represent your members, you have to know your job," Freeman said. "If you don't know policies and procedures, management could be right and the member could be wrong — or maybe not. But you need to know. You've also got to figure out how to do your steward work and your regular work. To balance it, you have to know your job so that you know your boundaries — what work you can do fast and what might take more time."

Through steward development, Freeman has provided this training — which includes steward monitoring and mentoring. And as a Steward Coach, she has supplied more direct guidance to stewards of our union on a case-by-case basis, maintaining our union's strong focus on Representational Excellence.



STEWARD'S CORNER

Last June, we reported on the work we did to reestablish the Steward Training program in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this month's Steward's Corner, we are very happy to congratulate our newly certified shop stewards. Each new steward showed deep commitment to building our union, and learned new tools and techniques through the rigorous Steward Certification Training program.

Krystal Wilson	Donald Williams Jr.
Andrea Lewis	William Charles
Donald Kay	Robert Flores
Steven Harmening	Kristoffer Mendoza
La Coya Pugh	Tom Tran
Mary Theresa Thomas	Brittani Wesley
Salvador Venancio	Timothy Smith
Maria Wilcox Thomas	Mathew Sainz
Chermaine Fontenette	Lisa Hymes

If you are a newly recruited steward, or if you are veteran steward who wants to nurture and grow new stewards, there is no better time to join a training than now!

To register for Steward Trainings, visit <https://www.seiu721.org/calendar.php> to find a class and RSVP.

If you want help representing a member, call Member Connection at 877-721-4968.

A group of people, including healthcare workers in scrubs and officials in suits, are standing on a stage outdoors. They are releasing white doves into the air. The background features a large wooden wall with various decorative elements, including a circular mirror and a bird sculpture. The scene is set against a backdrop of lush green trees and a clear blue sky. The event is taking place at LAC-USC, as indicated by the text.

SEIU 721 Celebrates National Nurses Week and Honors Fallen Heroes

In May, SEIU 721 Health and RN divisions celebrated National Nurses Week and Healthcare Workers Week by highlighting the courageous efforts and sacrifices of our members throughout the pandemic. SEIU 721 Health and RN members have been on the frontlines of COVID-19 response since the beginning, with too many making the ultimate sacrifice while battling this once-in-a-lifetime global health crisis.

In a moving speech at LAC-USC, SEIU Local 721 Secretary Lillian Cabral shared condolences for the County employees that passed away from COVID-19 in the past year. The event concluded with the release of doves in honor of these fallen heroes.

LA County Heroes Dese

UNION MEMBERS TESTIFY: "WE ARE THE SAFETY NET"

The Board of Supervisors heard directly from our union at their May 18 meeting. We reminded them how our essential work has kept LA County operational, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.



"Everybody's life was turned upside down because of the pandemic. But expectations of our jobs as social workers did not go down. We had to get the job done — no matter the cost to us. That meant tons of travel and finding creative ways to do our jobs. Our clients feared exposure. In-person visits could be potentially deadly. Social workers had to be resourceful, and imaginative, to build clients' trust. We did this even though there was not always access to protective equipment."

Geetha Amuthasakaran
Children's Social Worker, DCFS



"At one point, 167 of our hospital's 220 beds were filled with COVID patients. Our team worked overtime to place recovering patients in homes, hotels, short-term shelters and other recuperative care facilities so we could maintain hospital capacity. In the middle of all this, my family and I contracted COVID. While I was quarantined, I kept working. I pressed on, no matter what."

Cynthia Magdaleno
Medical Case Worker,
Olive View-UCLA Medical Center

"We watched our peers die and have lived in fear that we were going to die or infect our families. There have been more than 262 COVID-19-related deaths of LA County healthcare workers and first responders. Some DPH Nurses were mandated to work overtime, in offices, in health facilities, in skilled nursing and long-term care facilities. We stepped up to do what it takes to bring us out of the pandemic."

Markeitha Harris
Public Health Nurse, DCFS



"Social distancing created a massive problem in my line of work. People need human connection to develop a truly therapeutic relationship. That connection helps us gain trust and consistency with a person whose life is fragile and lacking human connection. But social distancing increases the feeling of isolation and despair. For people suffering — especially those turning to drugs and alcohol to cope — treating them becomes an even bigger challenge."

Lawrence Reyes
Senior Community Worker,
Department of Mental Health



Heroes Pay For All



UNITY ACTIONS SHOW UNION POWER

We flexed our Union muscle to show we're serious about securing Heroes' Pay For All (and more) in this year's contract, holding one Unity Action after another throughout LA County's 4,753-square-mile service area. LA County members understand: To get a strong contract, we need to show that we're #UnionStrong! Those of us in healthcare know how vital our work has been throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. But, make no mistake, members in all sectors know our work is essential. We turned out in big numbers at numerous Unity Actions to prove it... and we're just getting started!



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★ SANDRA BELTRAN ★

HONORED BY THE LA DODGERS

On Thursday, May 20th, Olive View Medical Center Registered Nurse and long-time Dodgers fan Sandra Beltran was recognized by the Los Angeles Dodgers as a "Champion in The Community." She was celebrated for her tireless work in the Emergency Department throughout the winter 2020 COVID-19 surge.



Los Angeles LGBT Center GETTING READY FOR NEGOTIATIONS:

The Los Angeles LGBT Center has a newly-elected bargaining team! The center has been supporting LGBT individuals and families since 1969 and SEIU 721 members are proud of the services they provide, especially during this pandemic. These members of the LGBT Center bargaining team have pledged to represent their colleagues as we work to negotiate a strong contract that respects and protects workers!



LGBT Center bargaining team (left to right) are Mylo Hagen; Javier Barraza; Katie Templeton; Alejandra Vega; Samantha Christie; Marissa Marqusee.

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NATIONAL PUBLIC WORKS WEEK 2021

May 16th through May 22nd was designated as Public Works Week throughout the United States. This year marks the 61st annual National Public Works Week sponsored by the American Public Works Association.

SEIU 721 members in the public works sector work around the

clock to keep our communities and streets from falling apart.

We thank them for all of the critical work that they do in transportation, water supply, water treatment and solid waste systems, public buildings, and other essential structures and facilities.



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NEGOTIATIONS ARE HEATING UP AT OCCIDENTAL COLLEGE

Negotiations are underway at Occidental College for a wage reopener, and job title reclassifications for Resident and Visiting faculty. Last year, Occidental faculty members ratified a Tentative Agreement that addressed all non-economic issues. Now we are fighting for increased job security for full-time teaching staff with more secure renewal appointments for senior faculty. Stay tuned for more developments.



Occidental Bargaining Team (left to right): Jeff Miller, Associate Professor, Mathematics; Melinda Houston, Associate Professor, Kinesiology; Erica Preston-Roedder, Assistant Professor, Philosophy; Corey Davis, Assistant Professor, Public Health.

Otis Part-Time Faculty Win Landmark Contract

OCCIDENTAL
COLLEGE
OF
ART
AND
DESIGN

New
Contract!



SEIU 721 members at Otis College of Art and Design have ratified a new contract with a 100% YES vote! This 2020-2023 contract contains substantial raises, including a 47% boost over three years for Lecturers who teach Studio Courses. The agreement also establishes longer appointment terms, new benefits and additional new compensation for faculty. Congratulations to Otis members who stood united to secure this outstanding contract. Together we win!

AB 650 HEROES PAY FOR HEALTHCARE WORKERS!

SEIU 721 Clinics members are joining in the fight for Assembly Bill 650, the Healthcare Worker Recognition and Retention Act. The bill would provide bonuses to healthcare workers who have been on the frontlines during the pandemic and help increase retention rates. Gloria Bridget, a Substance Use Counselor at HealthRIGHT360 in Pomona, spoke at a rally in support of the bill. "The fear we feel on the frontlines worrying if we're next to contract COVID-19 is very, very real," she said. "AB650 would go a long way to boost morale and show that our work and sacrifices are truly appreciated."



Working With LA DWP to Keep Families Safe During This Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed just how badly essential workers without union representation, and their families, can fare when they lack a strong voice to speak out against dangerous working conditions.

That's why it's powerful to know that SEIU 721, in conjunction with the LA Department of Water and Power (DWP) and the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), is working to provide DWP employees with paid time off to accompany their children to get vaccinated. Under the current vaccination rules, parents must be present with their child for the vaccine to be administered.

This is a triple win for working parents, LAUSD, and DWP. Only when as many people as possible are inoculated against COVID-19 can we proceed to a post-pandemic life.



Remembering Our Sister Linda Dent

People unfamiliar with the Labor movement are often surprised when union members call each other “brother” and “sister.” As organizers, we’re taught from the get-go to think of our union as a family. This is because at the turn of the 19th century when workers regularly faced horrific abuse with little or no power to protect themselves, the pioneers of the Labor movement knew the only way to drive change was collective action. When a worker was fired unfairly, organizers needed to convince the entire workforce to walk off the job to shut down production. They taught workers to see themselves as a family that needed to care for and look out for one another.

Some people think the custom is silly and outdated, and I definitely see how our language must change as the concept of gender and identity evolves in our society, but the motive behind it is to create power for ordinary people.

In the Labor movement Linda Dent was my sister. My parents immigrated from Mexico, and I grew up in Watts and the barrio of El Monte, while Linda was born in Louisiana and raised in Compton, but in our union we were family.

Looking through the photos of years of street actions, marathon bargaining sessions, painful losses and incredible triumphs, I am devastated beyond words. Linda was our conscience and our soul — a living saint with the mouth of a sailor — dedicated to lifting up our community. She was a force of nature — bending the arc of history toward justice by her sheer will.

We’re all hurting, but you know what Linda would tell us to do. She would tell us to get up, stop crying and get back to work — with a few strategically placed curse words for good measure.

While she publicly radiated power, Linda fiercely protected her family’s privacy. She soldiered through her illness to create an orderly transition. Linda worked hard to prepare David Green as her successor because she trusted him to carry on the fights that matter.

So let’s take today to say goodbye to Linda, brothers and sisters. Tomorrow, we honor her by continuing her fight.

Gilda Valdez, Chief of Staff

Gilda Valdez

