Strike, Organize, Vote, Win!

After going on strike earlier this summer, not-yet-union nursing home workers at SKLD in Bloomfield Hills have voted to join together in a union, winning a voice on their job and the power to negotiate safer staffing and greater resources to ensure quality care for every resident.

Following the toughest years in their lives, as COVID exacerbated long standing issues of short staffing, low pay and lack of accountability, workers at the Bloomfield Hills facility were determined to win change. LPN LaVelle Lyght, Sr. explained, “We took this step to join together in a union because we care deeply about our patients and residents. Being able to bring our workplace challenges to the table and having our voices truly heard and respected by management will make such a difference in our day to day lives.”

The victory was hard-fought. Like their fellow workers in Starbucks, Amazon and elsewhere, SKLD workers faced an uphill battle with management, who fought hard to oppose the union. While workers came together to organize their union, management cut the hours of many workers leading the fight for their union and held mandatory anti-union meetings. Despite months of non stop union-busting, the workers emerged victorious with a 25-21 vote in favor of unionizing.

The SKLD Bloomfield Hills workers, which includes certified nursing assistants, licensed practical nurses and support staff, will become members of SEIU Healthcare Michigan.
In a close election, sometimes all you need is a small advantage to make a difference. For state house candidate Donavan McKinney, it was the outpouring of support from volunteers from organizations like SEIU.

Following redistricting in 2021, McKinney’s Detroit district was combined with a large section of Macomb County. Though McKinney was up against two tough primary opponents, he was determined to win this time. In this solidly Democratic district, whoever won the primary would ultimately end up being the representative in Lansing come November.

“These races don’t get a lot of attention nor resources, so when volunteers come out and support and participate, it means that much more,” says McKinney, “You have the most impact on the state and local levels. They make decisions that can make or break you as a family or individual.”

Over the course of two weeks, 18 staff and union members from Local 1 and Healthcare Michigan volunteered for Donavan McKinney’s campaign by knocking on doors and phone banking. Healthcare Michigan leader Chaunte Jones recalls the impact she made on McKinney’s campaign.

“I think we made a big impact. In one of my conversations, I spoke to a neighbor who didn’t know Donavan. As a result of our conversation, she researched and eventually voted for him.”

For McKinney, it was clear that SEIU was an important part of his election campaign.

“SEIU was the sole union that drove this political campaign. We got other endorsements, but they don’t matter if you don’t bring people out. It’s dollars and doors and interacting with the community. You need union members that believe in the vision. Our SEIU members came out on our behalf and we were so grateful.”

With the toughest part of the election over, McKinney is now thinking about priorities that he would like to see legislated once he takes office. These include overturning Right to Work, reforming excessive overtime and mandation, upping the pay for healthcare workers, and improving the right to organize. He plans to continue showing up for SEIU events, rallies and campaigns as they happen.
For Chaunte Jones, the experience left an impact on her. “More SEIU members should get involved. It’s a great experience for members that don’t know anything about politics or what to do as far as voting. As MPO members, we had to do background research on candidates, and see who we wanted to vote for.”

The Committee On Political Education (COPE) is how SEIU Funds all our candidate work for elections.

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HONORING MARY NELSON

SEIU HONORS MARY’S 47 YEARS OF SERVICE AS A NURSING HOME WORKER AND ORGANIZER

MARY NELSON’S LEGACY

Mary Nelson has been part of SEIU since 1975 when she started as a housekeeper and did her first strike that lasted 3 months. As a result of the strike, workers received a 25-cent increase. Mary follows a lineage of nursing home workers in her family. Mary’s mother was also an SEIU member and steward for workers on the boulevard for 44 years, and her grandmother was also a SEIU HCMI member and nursing home worker.
We will approach our contract negotiations in the coming months and over the next year as ‘Nursing Home Rising 2.0’ – a continuation of our coordinated bargaining campaign of 2020.

What does this mean? We will work to establish higher standards of pay and benefits for all nursing home workers across the state. We will position ourselves as the advocates for our residents and assuring that they receive quality care.

This time we will focus company by company based on the principles: **Same Union, Same Employer, Same Contract.**

Here is what it looks like concretely:

- **Villa** – We are starting negotiations at St. Joseph’s, Father Murray and Imperial at the same table. Our goal is to win the same contract and to improve pay for all workers in all job titles. In 2023, we want to bring all 8 Villa homes to the same bargaining table.

- **MediLodge** – We plan on negotiating nursing homes in Midland, Cass City and Grand Haven at a single table to raise standards and create a universal contract.

- **Orchard** – We started negotiations at Orchard at Redford to improve the contract and increase pay. This should be the basis for future negotiations at Orchards at Southgate and Northwest Detroit.

- **Mission Point** – We continue to negotiate each Mission Point facility into the Master Agreements.

- **Nexcare** – We will begin negotiations at LakePointe in November in order to raise the pay of housekeeping, dietary and laundry workers as well as long term CENAs. The goal is to make the LakePointe contract the basis for all other Nexcare negotiations.

- **Ciena** – We will do whatever it takes to make Ciena respect workers and their union. We will bargain at 7 different tables but with one plan and one goal to improve the pay and benefits of every Ciena workers.

- **County Homes** – We plan on strengthening our Union in every County facility with stronger membership, improved contracts and a more visible union presence

- **Pioneer, Optalis, and Patel-owned nursing homes** – We will coordinate our negotiations in each of these chains so they meet the standards of all nursing home workers in the Detroit metro area and are not left behind.

It is important that stewards and members in each nursing home step up to make sure that we are all prepared to do what it takes to win the respect and pay that every nursing home worker deserves.