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## Union Surprised & Disappointed Over Non-Profit Opportunities Unlimited Of Niagara's Failure To Take Advantage Of Offered \$300,000 To \$500,000 In Health Care Savings

### Even Though ARCEU/NYSUT Local 4265 Members Overwhelmingly Ratify A New Three-Year Contract, The Niagara County Non-Profit - Which Receives Funding From New York State, Failed To Move On The Health Care Savings Offer Facilitated By The Union

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Published Tuesday, September 16, 2014 12:00 pm  
by Tom Caspeblu/WNYLT Editor-Publisher

**(NIAGARA FALLS)** - With Only 11 No Votes, ARCEU (Association For Retarded Citizens Employees Union)/NYSUT (New York State United Teachers) Local 4265-Represented Workers at Opportunities Unlimited of Niagara Have Overwhelmingly Ratified a New Three-Year Contract, Union Representatives Tell WNYLaborToday.com.

The Recently-Ratified Agreement, Which Covers 300 Workers Employed by the Niagara County Non-Profit, Features a Number of Improvements, Including An Overall 8% Hourly Wage Hike in Year Two of the Deal and a Modest Signing Bonus for Both Full and Part Time Employees. The Union-Represented Workers Had Been Working Under an Expired Contract, Which Was Annually Extended in February. Agreement On the New Deal Was Reached in Late August.

However, Local 4265 President Nick Zawacki Tells *Your On-Line Labor Newspaper* That He Was Both "Surprised" and "Disappointed" Management at the Not-for-Profit Failed to Move On An Offer Facilitated by the Union That Provided Opportunities Unlimited of Niagara With Two Health Care Cost Savings Options - One at \$300,000 and Another at \$500,000, Especially in Light of the Organization Being Dependent On State Funding To Run its Operation.

"I Was Disappointed and Surprised," Zawacki Told WNYLaborToday.com Today (Tuesday, September 16th) of Opportunities Unlimited of Niagara's Decision to Decline the Options That Were Presented by Crown Benefits Group Incorporated, a Niagara Falls-Headquartered Health Care Consulting/Administrator That's Worked With a Variety of Labor Unions Across Western New York to Save Those Labor Organizations and Their Members Money.

"We Were Looking to Keep the Agency Fiscally Strong," Zawacki said. "Opportunities Unlimited of Niagara" Receives Operating Funding From New York State's OPWDD (Office for People With Developmental Disabilities) and (the Union) Felt These Offers Would Provide an "Incredible Amount" of Cost Savings When it Came to Health Care, Which Would Have Helped Not Only Fund the Agency, But Quite Possibly Provided its Hard-Working Employees With Larger Wage Increases. While I'm Trying to Understand Their Perspective, it Appeared (Management) Was Wary of Moving Away From a 'Experience Rated' Plan to a 'Community' Rated Plan."

But Even Though Opportunities Unlimited of Niagara Failed to Move Forward On Those Options, Zawacki and the ARCEU/NYSUT Local 4265 Negotiating Team Were Able to Get New Language Included in the New Contract That he said Will Now Force the Non-Profit's Management Back to the Table On a Yearly Basis to Review its Health Care Coverage Plan and if Need be, Seek More Cost-Effective Proposals From the Area's Providers.

Headquartered in Niagara Falls, Opportunities Unlimited of Niagara is the Niagara County Chapter of NYSARC, Incorporated (Formerly Known as the New York State Association for Retarded Children). It Operates Several Facilities and Offices Across the County, Including Lockport, North Tonawanda, Ransomville, Sanborn and Wheatfield.

For the Past 50 Years, the Largest Non-Profit Organization in Niagara County Has Provided Programs and Services to Those With Intellectual and Other Developmental Disabilities, Including Day Programming, Employment and Training, Residential Services, Service Coordination, Clinical Services, Youth, and Adult Recreation and Supportive Services to More Than 800 Families on an Annual Basis.

Opportunities Unlimited of Niagara's ARCEU/NYSUT-Represented Workers are Employed in a Variety of Positions Ranging From Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) to Mechanics, as Well as Med.Liaisons, Building Specialists, Employment Specialists, Dietary Aides, Leisure and Recreation Trainers, and as Physical Therapy Aides.

"With Just Eleven 'No' Votes, Our Membership is Obviously Happy With the New Deal," Zawacki Told WNYLaborToday.com. "I Wanted to 'Thank' ARCEU/NYSUT Local 4265's Negotiating Team for a Tremendous Job and Our Membership, Which Does Amazing Work Every Day for Those We Serve. When You Have This Kind of Result in an Economy Where it is Very Hard to Preserve and Create Jobs, it's a Good Thing."

Highlights of the Newly-Ratified Contract, According to Zawacki, Include:

**Wages:** Union-Represented Employees Will Receive a Signing Bonus in Year One. Full Time Employees Will Receive \$350. Part Time Workers Will Get \$150. In Year Two of the Agreement, Workers Will Receive Two Individual 4% Wage Increases, in January and Again in April. Year Three Features a Wage Reopener, Which is Dependent Upon Opportunities Unlimited of Niagara Receiving an Increase in State Funding.

**Health Insurance:** While Management Had Sought a 3% Increase in Their Union Employees' Health Care Coverage, the ARCEU/NYSUT Was Able to Negotiate Only a 1% Increase. Again, in Year Three of the Agreement, the Union and Management Will Sit Down to Reevaluate the Contribution, Based On Opportunities of Niagara Receiving An Increase in State Funding.

**Family Medical Leave:** The Union Was Able to Add New Language Which Extends the Present Three-Month Time Limit to Four. After the Four Months are Up, Management Would Then be Able to Post the Job Position if the Worker is Unable to Return to Work.

**Paid Time Off:** The Agency's Union-Represented Employees Will Now be Able to Sell Back Paid Time Off at Their Hourly Rate as Opposed to a Previously Agreed to Reduced Rate.

**NYSUT Benefit Trust:** Management Agreed to Allow Payroll Deductions for Workers Taking Advantage of the NYSUT Benefit Trust, Which Provides NYSUT Members With Reduced Offerings When it Comes to Auto, Life and Homeowners Insurance.

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Another Successful Negotiation of a Collective Bargaining Agreement By and Between Labor & Management - Congratulations!  
Posted by Dan Dooly on September 16, 2014 at 10:03 pm

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