

Reflections

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Bonadonna Senior retiring as RRJB manager after long labor career

Gary Bonadonna Sr., who has led the Rochester Regional Joint Board (RRJB) since 1994, is retiring October 1 after a labor career spanning 43 years. He will continue to work part-time as a consultant to the Board. *(See related stories throughout this issue.)*

He will be succeeded as Joint Board manager by his son, Gary Jr., who has been assistant manager since 2013. *(See this page for a story about Gary Jr.'s career.)* As he reflected back on his career, Bonadonna Sr. cited several accomplishments he is most proud of:

"I am definitely proud of being able to negotiate more than 30 years of job security for our Local 14-A members at Xerox. I'm proud, too, that our Joint Board membership is substantially larger than when I started as manager 22 years ago — despite downsizing of Xerox and the closing of J.J. Pietrafessa clothing in Syracuse, Kleen Brite chemicals in Rochester and Brockport, and BerzOmatic

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Gary Bonadonna Sr.



Gary Bonadonna Jr.

Bonadonna Jr. will become Joint Board manager; commits union to organizing

Gary Bonadonna Jr., will become the Joint Board's new manager on October 1. He will succeed his father, Gary Sr., who is retiring. The senior Bonadonna will continue to work part-time as a consultant to the Board. *(See this page for a story about Gary Sr.'s career.)* The new manager expressed confidence in taking on the challenges inherent in the top union job.

"During my career at the Joint Board, I've been fortunate to have worked in every aspect of the organization — as an organizer, political director, business representative, and assistant manager.

"I've had the opportunity to represent members in different geographic regions of the Joint Board — Albany, the Southern Tier, and Rochester.

"And, I've served on the executive committee of the Sidney Hillman Health Center board of

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Bonadonna Sr. retiring as RRJB manager

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propane torches in Medina.

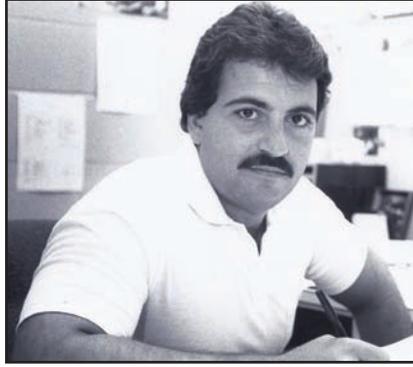
"I'm very proud at the significant, and virtually ongoing improvements that have been made in the many benefits our Hillman Health Center members have. When I started as manager, some of our retirees were taking a half a dose of their prescriptions at a time because they couldn't afford the cost to take the full prescription. Thankfully, that is definitely no longer the case." (See Page 6 for more about the Hillman benefit expansion and other accomplishments.)

"I'm very pleased at the dramatic rejuvenation of our political involvement. Today, we are a force to be reckoned with. Gary Jr. is directly responsible for most of that, and, so, I know we will continue to be that force for years to come.

"I am also happy that I have been able to fix the many problems with our headquarters building that had been neglected over the years. I want our members to walk in here and be proud of the building they helped to build — and for it to be a place our members can truly be proud of."

The retiring manager said two things topped his list of "Best Things About The Job." "I liked having the responsibility of making decisions, even very tough ones. There is something about being able to make decisions that I have always been comfortable with. The other thing I always enjoyed is meeting and talking with our members. It gave me a chance to find out how they felt and what they would like to see — before I had to make any decisions."

Bonadonna Senior faced a number of challenges during his 22 years as manager. Two are at the top of his list —



As a Local 14-A shop rep, Bonadonna Sr. played a key role in fostering employee involvement at Xerox.

mergers and shop closings. There were two major mergers at the international level, with the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) and with the Hotel and Restaurant Employees (HERE). "There were challenges in merging the cultures of the different unions. In the case of the ILGU, we were successful.

"But, HERE was a whole other story. That merger was so disastrous that our Joint Board and many others broke away to form our present day Workers United (WU). After the split, HERE viciously came after us, trying to hurt us financially. WU was being sued and, and so was I personally. It was a very difficult time.

"Tough in a different way was when shops closed, places I've already mentioned like Pietrafessa, Kleen Brite, and BerzOmatic. People who lost their jobs were my friends and long-time union members. These plant closings really eat away at you, and you always wonder if there was something else you could have done that could have changed the outcome."

Bonadonna Sr.'s career began in 1973 when he went to work at Xerox as a Local 14-A member. By 1978, he was elected shop chairman for workers in the company's components assembly plant in

Webster. He subsequently was re-elected unopposed to that post for three more terms. That was the beginning of ever increasing union responsibilities. In 1980, he was elected to the executive board of Local 14-A and also an RRJB delegate. Three years later, he was elected a delegate to the Rochester & Vicinity AFL-CIO Labor Council and was re-elected continuously to numerous terms after that.

Bonadonna Sr. was a member of the Local 14-A negotiating committee for four contracts while working at Xerox — and served as the union's chief negotiator for six more contracts after becoming the RRJB manager, including the most recent contract in 2014. One of his most important roles was helping to guide and foster the joint union-company Quality of Work Life (QWL) process that began at Xerox in 1980. He played key roles in that process both while he was at Xerox, and later when he became an RRJB executive.

In 1990, he left Xerox to become a business agent for the RRJB, then becoming its fifth manager in 1994 as well as an international vice president of UNITE (now Workers United). That year he also became president of the Sidney Hillman Health Center and a member of its Board. He has served in a number of important posts, including the board of directors of the Amalgamated Bank and on its Audit Committee; the board of directors of the Amalgamated Life Insurance Company and chairman of its Compensation Committee; and the board of directors of the Workers United National Retirement Fund.

Bonadonna Sr. and his wife, Carol, live in Penfield, as does Gary Jr. In addition to their son, the Bonadonnas have a daughter, Kimberly, a speech pathologist who lives in Webster. ■

Bonadonna Jr. will become Joint Board manager; commits union to organizing

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directors.

"All of those experiences have given me a firm grasp of our operations — and a wealth of ideas to ensure a successful future for our Joint Board, and for the Hillman Center and the fantastic benefits we offer eligible members and retirees.

"Because of those experiences, I am looking forward with confidence in taking on my new role as Joint Board manager.

"I'm proud — very proud — to be leading a union that has developed historic partnerships with our employers; that has fought constantly to bring higher and higher standards of living to our members; and that has long promoted social justice throughout our Upstate New York jurisdiction.

"Those great things are the reality for our Joint Board members across Upstate New York. Our power in collective bargaining has enabled countless members to send their kids to college, to own a house, own a car, and retire comfortably."

"That is in stark contrast to the lives of so many unorganized workers within our jurisdiction who have none of these things that flow from the power of collective bargaining.

"That is why it is very clear to me that our union's primary mission has to be to help workers in Upstate New York organize and reap the benefits collective bargaining brings.

"You and I know that this will not be easy. I strongly believe that workers should have a fundamental right to form a union without threats or intimidation.

"But we know in today's world



Dana Keaton photo

Gary Bonadonna Jr., right, was named assistant Joint Board manager in 2013. Looking on during an announcement of the promotion were his father, Gary Bonadonna Sr., left, and Workers United president emeritus Bruce Raynor.

that there are many forces arrayed against both unions and those who seek to organize.

"Despite those challenges, I am committed — and I commit our Joint Board — to bringing the power and benefits we enjoy to unorganized workers across Upstate New York.

"If you will also commit to that effort, then there will be no limit to what we can achieve."

The new Joint Board manager is heavily involved in the Rochester-area community. He was recently unanimously elected executive vice president of the Rochester and Genesee Valley Area Labor Federation and is on the executive board of the Rochester Labor Council.

He also serves on a number of boards, including those of Excellus Rochester Regional Advisory, American Heart Association-Rochester Region, Rochester Economic Development Corporation (REDCO), Sidney Hillman Health Center, and Rochester Regional Joint

Board Fund for the Future.

In addition, he serves on the Chatman Scholarship Selection Committee and on the United Way Community Services Committee.

Bonadonna Jr.'s career with the RRJB began in 2004 as an organizer. Two years later, he became the Joint Board's political coordinator.

In 2007, in recognition of the central role politics plays in much of the RRJB's work, Bonadonna Jr.'s job was upgraded to political director. He took on added responsibilities as a business agent in 2010 and as assistant RRJB manager in 2013.

He is a graduate of the prestigious Union Leadership Institute, based at Cornell University, and earned a Bachelor of Arts in both Political Science and English from the State University of New York at Buffalo. ■



Gov. Andrew Cuomo

“ Gov. Andrew Cuomo said: Gary Bonadonna Sr. is a respected voice in the labor movement who has successfully championed workers’ rights for decades.

“From negotiating higher wages to supporting better workplace conditions, he has brought home hard-earned victories for his members and fought tirelessly to improve the quality of life for working men and women in Rochester.

“I congratulate Gary on a well-deserved retirement and wish him all the best in the future.

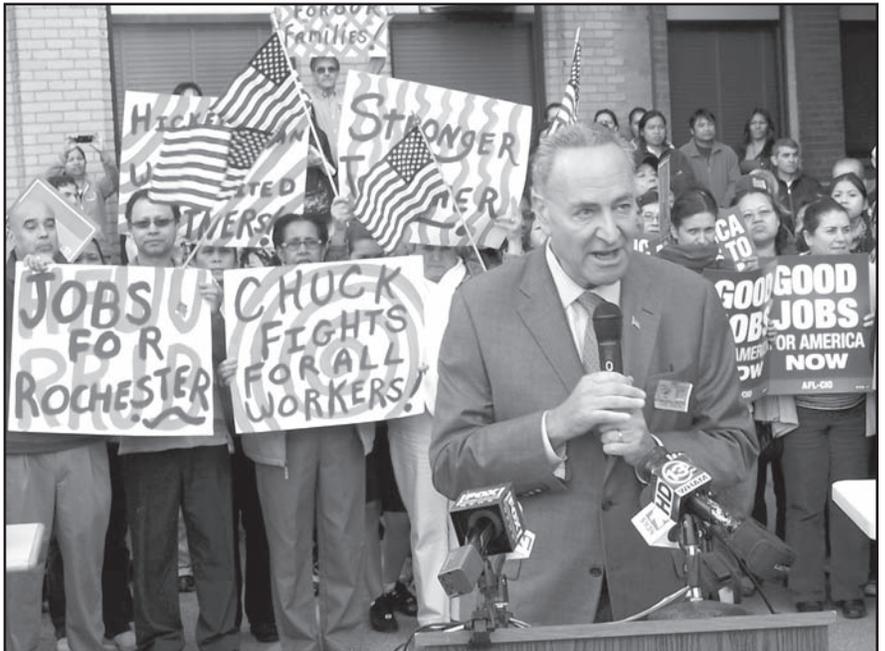
“I know his son, Gary Bonadonna Jr., will carry on his legacy of leadership, dedication and service to the hardworking people of our state.”

**More praise
and photos
on next page**

RRJB’s labor allies praise retiring and new manager

Some of the Joint Board’s staunchest labor allies reacted with praise for both Gary Bonadonna Sr., who is retiring, and for his son, Gary Jr., who is becoming the new manager.

That included comments from Governor Andrew Cuomo, U.S. Senator Charles Schumer, Congresswoman Louise Slaughter, and Rochester Area Labor Federation (ALF) president Dan Maloney. Here is a look at what they had to say. ■



Dana Keaton photo

Sen. Charles Schumer at a Joint Board rally several years ago at Hickey Freeman as part of the effort that helped save the storied plant.

“ Sen. Charles Schumer emphasized, “I congratulate Gary Bonadonna Sr. for his decades of service to Rochester’s labor community and the state of New York. I’ve long known Gary as a fighter for strong, good paying jobs, and economic justice — a passion that I got to see firsthand in our fight to keep Hickey Freeman open in Rochester.

“Gary has served his brothers and sisters in labor with determination and skill. His work and example will continue to propel the union forward.”

The Senator added, “Gary Bonadonna Jr. is a next generation leader that I’ve come to appreciate as a strong advocate for Rochester’s working families. I know he will bring his years of experience and knowledge to his new position, and I looking forward to partnering with him for years to come.”

“ Rochester Area Labor Federation president Dan Maloney cited the senior Bonadonna as “an icon in the labor movement. Gary Sr. is highly regarded in union leadership and political circles in our region. His focus on job creation and workplace justice has served both his membership and our community well.

“It is with deep gratitude that we in the labor community wish him the best in all his future endeavors. We know brother Bonadonna can move into this new phase of life with the knowledge that he fought the good fight for the betterment of working people in our region — and enjoy the contentment of a job well done.

“His son will have the honor of following in his father’s tradition of service as the new manager of the Rochester Regional Joint Board. Gary Jr. is a natural fit to continue pushing a pro-labor agenda for his membership and our community.

“It is great to have a relatively young union leader who has a solid grasp of the challenges working people face each day, along with the drive and knowledge to find creative solutions to fix problems.



Photo courtesy of Amorette Shaw

Dan Maloney

“That is why it was my pleasure to recently nominate Gary as executive vice president of the Rochester & Genesee Valley Area Labor Federation, AFL-CIO. And, that is why he was elected by unanimous vote of our Executive Board.

“Gary hit the ground running and already has started to rebuild our labor-religion coalition that was dormant for years. He brings a fresh perspective and new energy to our Area Labor Federation. We found in brother Gary Bonadonna Jr. a labor leader who has the pedigree and resume to help our movement today, tomorrow, and hopefully for many years to come. ”

Dana Keaton photo



“ Congresswoman Slaughter remarks reflect years of work — and friendship with — the senior Bonadonna: “I’ve worked side by side with Gary Senior for many years to protect jobs and help local manufacturers like Hickey Freeman compete on the world’s stage.

“He’s become a true ally and a great friend. As he begins this next chapter, I want to thank Gary for his tireless efforts in standing up for our workers and helping grow jobs across Rochester.” ”

Congresswoman Slaughter

Bonadonna Senior's legacy: a better union, better lives for RRJB members

If there is one thing retiring Joint Board manager Gary Bonadonna Sr. can look back on after 22 years as leader of the union and the Sidney Hillman Health Center, it is this: an amazing string of accomplishments and improvements to the union, the Health Center and to the lives of his members.

A complete list of those achievements would fill a book, but here are just some of them:

- Numerous upgrades to the headquarters building including replacing a long-leaking skylight; installing a handicap chairlift and a wheel chair elevator; a complete replacement of the nearly 50-year-old roof; repaving the parking lot; several expansions and upgrades of the pharmacy space; upgrades to the optical department, as well as upgrades to the Retirees Lounge; major upgrades over the years to the computer and phone systems, including a massive one initiated last year; and just this year, the first renovation of bathrooms since the building opened in 1967.
- There have been more improvements to the Sidney Hillman Health Center benefits during Bonadonna Senior's tenure than we have space to list, but here are some of the most significant:
 - Reduction after reduction in prescription drug costs, with the cost today at \$4 or less for many drugs
 - Introduction of free breast, colon and other cancer screenings
 - Extension of Hillman drug and optical benefits to dependent children up to age 26
 - Introduction of Saturday morning appointments
- Introduction of free basic podiatry services for retirees
- Introduction of free counseling help by Jewish Family Services
- Change of the Hillman glasses benefit from the exact date every two years to the same month every two years; expansion of frame choices and reintroduction of American-made frames
- Introduction of free after-hours urgent care at several Rochester and area locations
- Appointment of a political director and substantially beefing up political action in recognition of the impact political decisions have on the Joint Board and members
- Virtually ongoing organizing efforts throughout the Joint Board's jurisdiction that have succeeded in organizing workers at the Tioga and Vernon Downs racinos, Albany-area hotels, and Ithaca health care workers, among others
- Overseeing the merger into the Joint Board of thousands of members, including those working in health care, industrial laundries, tanneries, bedding manufacturing, restaurants, telecommunications and call centers, plastic recyclers, and a manufacturer of weather-stripping parts for the automotive and home improvement industries
- Countless successful contract negotiations that brought improvement after improvement for members
- Creation of an emergency response team at the headquarters
- Creation of a *Hall of Fame* to honor members who go "above and beyond" in their help to the Joint Board
- The hiring of a professional information technology manager to meet the union and Hillman Center's burgeoning data and phone needs — and oversee the development and launch of the Joint Board's web site; the addition later of a programmer to help keep up with increasing information and data demands
- A complete overhaul of the Chatman Scholarship program which had limited scholarships to Cornell University; with the revamp, up to 10 annual scholarships are available to eligible members' children to any 2- or 4- year college level program; the change was an immediate success from the start
- More than doubling the size of *Reflections* from 12 pages to 28, and occasionally more; adding within the paper the logo, *The Union At Work*, to help members easily pinpoint specifically what the union does for them; introduced highlights from collective bargaining agreements from around the country to help members see labor trends in various industries; and in an important move, adding Spanish translations of the highlights from major stories in each issue
- The naming of a liaison to the retirees' club to help boost membership at a time when it was declining and to help with other needs of the club and its members. (See Page 8 for a story about Bonadonna Senior's commitment to retirees.)

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Recollections about retiring manger Bonadonna Sr. and that famous charisma

Many people know retiring Joint Board manager Gary Bonadonna Sr. — after all, he is charismatic, and that alone draws people to him.

But two retired Joint Board staff members know him as well as any, and better than most because of their common ties to Local 14-A and because they worked for him.

They are Jeannie Reitz, who was a business agent for Local 14-A members at Xerox and Local 231 workers at Xerox cafeterias; and Paul Leuzzi, a 14-A general shop chairman and later the Joint Board liaison to the WRO retirees club. And, the late business rep Marie Rodgers knew first-hand all about Gary's charismatic effects. Here are their recollections:

Jeannie Reitz

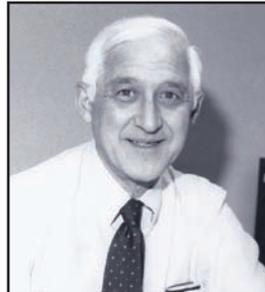
"Gary was undoubtedly the best boss I ever worked for. He fought hard for the union members time after time. I remember that at one point some members of the Sidney Hillman Health Center board were talking about cutting some of the benefits. Gary fought very hard to keep those benefits for members — and he won.

"He was tough, but fair — and supportive of the staff who worked for him. He always expected us to represent our members at the highest level of service. He was not afraid to make the hard decisions, but he made it a point to explain why he had made those decisions.

"He is a remarkable man with great charisma — and he is



Reitz



Leuzzi



Rodgers

widely respected by many, many people. I have always admired Gary for all those reasons — and many more as well. I can sum up my feelings about Gary quite simply: I love him!"

Paul Leuzzi

"He was a very good manager — right up there with an earlier manager, Les Calder.

"Gary was a very considerate person to work for. He would listen to all the ideas his staff had about an issue. Then he would make his decision and carefully explain why he made it.

"He was always open to ideas people had, but was never afraid to make a decision, no matter how tough.

"He also was always ready to take care of his staff people — but equally as ready to fight for the membership and do the best job he could of taking care of them."

Marie Rodgers

Charisma. It's a word that comes up repeatedly in people's comments about Gary Sr.

While a lot of examples could be cited, the effects of his charisma were perhaps best captured by the late Marie Rodgers.

She brought her Rochester Telephone Workers Association (RTWA) members into the Joint Board in 2003 and became the Board's business agent for them.

Gary's charisma played a major role in that decision, as she described in a *Reflections* interview at the time:

"We (the RTWA) have been independent well over 50 years, and we always had a good relationship with management when the company was still locally owned and operated as Frontier.

"The relationship now with Citizens is not the same. Now we're dealing with a national company, and we need the strength a national union, and the personal relationship we'll have with Gary and the Joint Board," Rodgers said.

In that interview, Rodgers stressed that while she and RTWA leaders investigated other unions to merge with, the decision clearly came down to the Joint Board — because of a meeting with Bonadonna.

Rodgers noted, "We looked into other unions, but when I sat down with Gary, I knew within 15 minutes that this was the union we wanted to be a part of. You knew immediately that you could trust him, that he was a man of his word."

Kazaam!

In that moment, Rodgers joined the countless others who have experienced Gary's charisma up close and personal. ■

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Just one decision showed Gary Bonadonna Senior's commitment to the union's retirees

In today's society, many corporations and businesses mostly ignore their retirees — or worse.

Not so with retiring Joint Board manager Gary Bonadonna Sr. He demonstrated his commitment to the union's retirees while less than a year in the top job.

In 1995, he appointed Paul Leuzzi as a liaison to the retirees' club to help spur growth in the organization, which had been dwindling, and to oversee the needs of both the club and its members.

In making the appointment, Bonadonna told his staff in unscripted, spontaneous remarks: "Our retirees are the ones who made this union what it is today.

"We would not have this great union if it weren't for them, and what they did to build this organization. This is a way we can give something back to those who have done so much for us. I have great respect for them."



Paul Leuzzi

Beautiful sentiments, for sure — but Bonadonna soon backed them up with an action that showed just how seriously he meant them.

Leuzzi noticed at the retirees' meetings that some members would have pizzas to eat and others didn't. A little investigation revealed what was going on: members had to order and pay for the pizzas a month in

advance — and some retirees were on such tight incomes they simply couldn't afford a pizza.

When Leuzzi explained the situation to Bonadonna, the manager's reaction was swift and decisive: "We're going to fix that! From now on, the Joint Board is going to buy enough pizza and donuts for **every-one**. No one is going to go hungry because they can't afford to eat at the meetings!" ■

Senior's legacy

(Continued from Page 6)

● Bonadonna Sr. played a key role in fostering employee involvement (EI) while a 14-A shop rep at Xerox and continued that support when he became a Joint Board business rep for those members. Later, as the Joint Board manager, he also helped foster EI at a number of companies in Rochester, Buffalo, Syracuse and Utica where our union members worked, including Hickey Freeman. ■