PG&E reverses course: ‘front counters’ stay open

Only 9 of 84 locations will close

Business Manager Tom Dalzell signed a Letter Agreement with Pacific Gas and Electric on Feb. 14 that brings to a close a long-running dispute over the company’s plan to close 84 front counters at its local offices. Although Local 1245 was unsuccessful in its attempt to stop the front counter closures through the grievance process, there was continuing resistance to the plan from consumer groups and the CPUC’s Division of Ratepayer Advocates.

PG&E subsequently scaled back its plan, and will now close just nine front counters at local offices. The number of employees directly affected by the closures, once estimated at over 300, is now just eight.

“We are glad that PG&E’s front counter operations will continue providing valuable services to customers, and we are extremely pleased that the threat of employee displacements has been largely eliminated,” said Dalzell.

The nine local office front counters to be eliminated are: Alameda, Newman, Orland, Willits, Corcoran, Willow Creek.

Relief for retirees

Pacific Gas & Electric has agreed to earmark an additional $25 million to offset retiree medical costs.

The financial package was announced during a Feb. 13 meeting with the leaders of the five chapters of the IBEW Local 1245 Retirees Club, and incorporated into a letter agreement signed the same day by Business Manager Tom Dalzell.

“The company offer was a major milestone in the union’s on-going effort to gain relief for retirees from the crushing burden of medical premium costs,” said Dalzell.

Campaign by Local 1245 Retirees Club gets results

Medical premiums have absorbed an ever-growing portion of retiree pension checks in recent years, and sparked a growing sense of desperation among PG&E’s thousands of retirees. The Local 1245 Retirees Club publicized the problem throughout 2006 with a campaign that included letters to PG&E’s top officers, local newspapers, elected officials and state regulators.

But in the end, it was personal testimony by club leaders that moved the company to action, according to PG&E Senior Vice President Russ Jackson. During meetings in June and October, club leaders laid out in moving detail the hardships that retirees are experiencing as medical costs continue to rise.

PG&E agrees to additional $25 million to defray retiree medical premium costs

Continued on page 12

Agreement eases impact of clerical consolidation

Voluntary process reduces threat of displacements

Letter Agreement has reduced the threat of displacements in IBEW’s Clerical bargaining unit at Pacific Gas & Electric.

Letter Agreement 07-10, signed by Business Manager Tom Dalzell on Feb. 13, emphasizes voluntary measures to deal with the loss of Clerical positions that resulted from PG&E’s consolidation of Clerical work at newly-recreated Resource Management Centers.

“Possible displacements has been a cloud hanging over our Clerical members ever since PG&E decided to consolidate this work,” said Dalzell. “We

Continued on page 12
A Triumph of Perseverance

The week of Valentine’s Day was an extraordinary one at Local 1245. We reached agreement with PG&E on three longstanding issues, and each agreement represented a triumph of perseverance by our members and union.

Howard has been front and center in Local 1245 for as long as any of us can remember, 21 years as President and the last six as an Assistant Business Manager. In countless situations where anger might be expected, Howard has calmed waters, resolving anger for those special occasions when only forcefulness will do. In recent months, he has been at the forefront of a number of important initiatives with PG&E: rubber gloving, Transmission Department Linemen, weekend service units, long-line work, and possible improvements to GC per diem, to name a few. We don’t know how and possible improvements to GC per diem, to name a few. We don’t know how

Howard will be gone, but we will remember, 21 years as President and the health concerns. We don’t know how

received the news that Howard Stiefer, Vice President Russ Jackson on Feb. 13 at union headquarters in Vacaville, where leaders met with PG&E officers twice to arguments to management from their leadership and members made similar arguments to management from their point of view. At the same time, PG&E COO Bill Morrow launched a review of new business transactions using a business methodology known as Six Sigma. Three IBEW bargaining unit members were part of the Six Sigma team from the start, as were ESC members. (See page 12.) Their hard work over the month of January led to startling new data and innovative ideas, and called into question the company’s original plan for limiting local office involvement in new business work.

All of these factors converged and led to Letter Agreement 07-10, which favors voluntary severance and preserves the right-sizing calculations as new information is developed in Six Sigma and elsewhere. It is a temporary fix, but these days a year is a long time and getting this fix for 2007 is important progress.

Front Counters

Lastly, on February 15th we joined with PG&E and other parties in the CPUC rate case to announce a tentative agreement to close nine small front counter operations in local offices, leaving 75 offices open for business. As a result, eight or fewer employees will voluntarily sever or be placed in a nearby local office.

At stake in the company’s proposed closure of front counter operations were 375 bargaining unit jobs, not to mention PG&E’s presence in 84 communities. Local 1245 expressed its opinion about the wisdom of this proposal early, often, and to whoever in upper management we were talking with. Our members in the front counter operations took pen to paper and fingers to keyboard and continued on page 3.

Improvements is a case study in the success of community organizing. A relatively few retired Local 1245 members started meeting some years ago, voicing their individual concerns about the dwindling buying power of PG&E pensions in light of ever-increasing medical premium increases. Individual concerns soon became a group concern, and anger and fear were channeled into a plan for action and change.

By last summer, there were regular meetings of five chapters of the Retirees Club, with ongoing support from Local 1245 staff. Ultimately several hundred retirees became actively involved, and Jack Hill, a retiree who served as a retiree representative on the 2002 and 2005 PG&E bargaining committees, was the driving force behind the movement.

In 2006, the retirees and Local 1245 leaders met with PG&E officers twice to discuss retiree problems and possible improvements. After some delay and then a forced selection of a contract term was made at the uppermost levels of PG&E management. Twenty-five proud and happy retirees signed my copy of the $25 million letter agreement that afternoon, determined to carry their success forward to build momentum for the 2008 general negotiations. (See page 6.)

Operating Clerical

At the same time, we reached agreement with PG&E on a second important issue—the reduction in forces of operating clerical employees in the local offices. In short, our agreement provides for voluntary severance in place of involuntary displacement, with the opportunity for voluntary severance extended to some physical bargaining unit clerks. This agreement, which was welcome news in dozens of tense local offices, was the result of a convergence of factors. Since consolidation of much operating clerical work into Resource Management Centers began last summer, Local 1245 has privately but urgently expressed to PG&E management its fear that cuts in the local offices were too deep and that the projected reduction by hundreds more would be a mistake. Many of our members made personal pleas on this point, writing to management with passion backed up by detailed facts; the letters that Liz Rounds wrote are a powerful example of persuasive writing from the rank and file. ESC leadership and members made similar arguments to management from their point of view.

One of the agreements reached was a triumph of perseverance by our members and union. The first of the agreements reached in 2006, the retirees and Local 1245 signed my copy of the $25 million letter agreement that afternoon, determined to carry their success forward to build momentum for the 2008 general negotiations. (See page 6.)
“Unprecedented”

The signing of the Letter of Agreement enhancing the Retirement Premium Offset Accounts (RPOA) of current retirees brings to an end one segment of a longer journey. I’m proud to have been part of the journey but I’m especially proud to have had the opportunity to work with such dedicated, principled retirees. Many months have passed and at times I wondered whether we would lose focus but just the opposite occurred. We continued to grow in numbers and chapters and our focus sharpened.

My thanks to Tom Dalzell and his staff for their efforts on behalf of retirees. I must also thank Russ Jackson and his team for taking our case to senior management, in effect, being our advocate. Now it’s time for retirees to take the next step. We need to take our case to the younger employees. We need to educate them about the rising cost of health care premiums and how they will be affected. If there is to be any significant change to the current system we will need their help. We must attend unit meetings on a regular basis in an all-out effort to educate and enlist the younger workers.

This type of effort inherently takes time to evolve. As retirees, we weighed our options and listened to those with experience in these matters, allowing the company time to do the homework required to come to a decision. This Letter of Agreement isn’t perfect for everyone but it does provide relief for all, especially the older retiree. This is an unprecedented agreement. It’s the result of our steadfast, professional, non-threatening course of action in presenting our case. As retirees, we have to make the same case to regular employees over the next 18-20 months. This effort is a reminder as to what unions are about, working for the greater good and looking to the future.

Proudly and fraternity yours,
George Murphy, Vacaville Chapter, Local 1245 Retirees Club

Superb effort

Editor’s note: The following e-mail was sent to the union negotiating committee at Sierra Pacific Power and is reprinted here with the author’s permission.

I would like to take this opportunity to personally express my appreciation for a superb effort in the long negotiation with the company. The sacrifice that each and every one of you made for the membership demonstrates the great character that you are made of. No matter the result of the upcoming vote, you as a committee have my utmost respect and admiration. Thank you!

In unity, Jim Purcel, Minden, NV

Kathy Maas (1945-2007)

Former Business Rep. Kathy Maas, who died last month, will be honored with a place on the Local 1245 Memorial Wall at union headquarters in Vacaville, by a unanimous vote of the Executive Board.

“She was a unionist’s unionist. She was fiercely devoted to the labor movement and to the members,” said Business Manager Tom Dalzell, who was serving as staff attorney when Maas was hired in 1990. “She excelled in every facet of being a union representative—with the members, with politics, with health and safety, with the central labor councils. Most people are lucky if they are masters in just a few of these areas—she was brilliant in all of them.”

Maas brought a wealth of experience to Local 1245 when she was hired in January 1990. Since 1985 she had worked as a mediator, and in 1987 began mediating labor disputes in the public sector in southern California.

In explaining why she accepted a job with Local 1245, Maas once said, “I am a labor person. I like representing working people.”

She was, indeed, a labor person. But calling Maas a “labor person” is a bit like calling Franklin Roosevelt a politician or Willie Mays a baseball player—it really doesn’t capture what she brought to the job. Maas wore her devotion to the cause of working people on her sleeve. Her facts and figures were always ready to hand, her arguments persuasive, her style engaging, and her sincerity never in doubt. It was a winning combination.

Before her work as a mediator, Maas worked as a teacher in the Richmond Unified School District, where she belonged to the Richmond Federation of Teachers Local 866. She also worked as an apprenticeship consultant, helping develop, promote and assist apprenticeship programs in the San Francisco Bay Area.

For a time she served as a senior apprenticeship consultant with the State of California Department of Labor.

At Local 1245, Maas’s assignments included PG&E San Jose, Belmont and Peninsula Skyline (including General Construction employees in those areas), PG&E Pipeline in Milpitas, City of Santa Clara, AC Transit, Western Cable TV, City of Berkeley, Asplundh Tree and Davey Tree. She went out on LTD in 2000.

Maas was married to Stan Smith, the Secretary-Treasurer of the San Francisco Building and Construction Trades Council, now retired, and spoke often to her colleagues about her six step-children.

A memorial service will be held March 18. Call the union hall for details. Donations in Kathy’s memory can be made to: Juvenile Diabetes Foundation, 49 Stevenson St., Suite 1200, San Francisco, CA 94105.

Triumph, from page 2

joined us in writing letters to management with the proven combination of deeply-felt conviction and factual back-up. We challenged one aspect of the proposed closure in arbitration, and in a mixed decision were able to limit the company to the current and historical level of 435 pay stations.

The settlement on this issue came about through the hard work of Marc Joseph, the attorney for CUE (California Utility Employees), the coalition through which Local 1245 is represented before the CPUC. PG&E’s presence in 75 communities is maintained, and 375 jobs are saved. Not bad in an era when the telephone company, also regulated by the CPUC, has entirely disappeared from California communities.

Because the settlement would allow the company to increase the number of pay stations, it will be sent out to affected clerical employees for ratification, an exercise in union democracy that will make us even stronger than our success in reaching the settlement.

It takes a lot of work by a lot of members to produce results like those the ones we achieved during Valentines Week. These accomplishments serve as a reminder that our best days are still ahead of us when we are united in purpose and action.

Local union elections

As reported in the January/February issue of the Utility Reporter, nominations for local union officers, Executive Board, and Advisory Council members will be accepted at unit meetings in March. The May issue of the Utility Reporter will feature biographies of candidates. A mail-ballot election will be conducted in June.

Merced Irrigation District Unit

Unit 1122, Merced Irrigation District, now meets at the Branding Iron, 640 W. 16th St., Merced. The unit schedule on the IBEW Local 1245 website has been updated to reflect this information.

Mike Grill, Business Rep.

New dispenser

Local 1245 has hired Kelly Dark as a dispenser for the union’s Outside Line Construction hiring hall.

Dark is no stranger to unions. She worked previously for United Public Employees of California in Redding. Her father, Steve Kerr, now retired, was a 32-year member of Local 1245, and her brother is a union electrician.

“We’re a union family,” says Dark. Welcome aboard, Kelly!

Get the latest news at
www.ibew1245.com

Got something to share with your fellow union members? Send letters to: Utility Reporter Letters, IBEW 1245, POB 2547, Vacaville, CA 95696. Please note that we cannot print personal attacks or letters dealing with union politics. Opinions expressed in “Letters” are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of IBEW Local 1245.

Kathy Maas

Kathy Maas (1945-2007)

Former Business Rep. Kathy Maas, who died last month, will be honored with a place on the Local 1245 Memorial Wall at union headquarters in Vacaville, by a unanimous vote of the Executive Board.

“She was a unionist’s unionist. She was fiercely devoted to the labor movement and to the members,” said Business Manager Tom Dalzell, who was serving as staff attorney when Maas was hired in 1990. “She excelled in every facet of being a union representative—with the members, with politics, with health and safety, with the central labor councils. Most people are lucky if they are masters in just a few of these areas—she was brilliant in all of them.”

Maas brought a wealth of experience to Local 1245 when she was hired in January 1990. Since 1985 she had worked as a mediator, and in 1987 began mediating labor disputes in the public sector in southern California.

In explaining why she accepted a job with Local 1245, Maas once said, “I am a labor person. I like representing working people.”

She was, indeed, a labor person. But calling Maas a “labor person” is a bit like calling Franklin Roosevelt a politician or Willie Mays a baseball player—it really doesn’t capture what she brought to the job. Maas wore her devotion to the cause of working people on her sleeve. Her facts and figures were always ready to hand, her arguments persuasive, her style engaging, and her sincerity never in doubt. It was a winning combination.

Before her work as a mediator, Maas worked as a teacher in the Richmond Unified School District, where she belonged to the Richmond Federation of Teachers Local 866. She also worked as an apprenticeship consultant, helping develop, promote and assist apprenticeship programs in the San Francisco Bay Area.

For a time she served as a senior apprenticeship consultant with the State of California Department of Labor.

At Local 1245, Maas’s assignments included PG&E San Jose, Belmont and Peninsula Skyline (including General Construction employees in those areas), PG&E Pipeline in Milpitas, City of Santa Clara, AC Transit, Western Cable TV, City of Berkeley, Asplundh Tree and Davey Tree. She went out on LTD in 2000.

Maas was married to Stan Smith, the Secretary-Treasurer of the San Francisco Building and Construction Trades Council, now retired, and spoke often to her colleagues about her six step-children.

A memorial service will be held March 18. Call the union hall for details. Donations in Kathy’s memory can be made to: Juvenile Diabetes Foundation, 49 Stevenson St., Suite 1200, San Francisco, CA 94105.

Thank you PG&E

Editor’s note: The following letter was sent by a Washington resident hit by the December power outage. Her letter, originally received at PG&E’s Eureka office, is reprinted here.

Dear Guys of PG&E line crews who came to Olympia and restored our power last week:

Thank You!

You’re now known in our area as “Those marvelous guys from PG&E.” We know it was a dangerous job and we appreciate all your efforts!

No shower has ever felt hotter than my Christmas shower! Our little motorhome got a problem between the

continued on page 15
New pact at City of Roseville

Local 1245 members at the City of Roseville on Jan. 23 ratified a four-year agreement that improves wages significantly.

The package, ratified by nearly three-quarters of those voting, provides a general wage increase of 5% in the first year, 5% in the second year, 5% in the third year, and a split wage increase in the fourth year of 3% in January and 3% in July.

Negotiations consisted of 11 “meet and confer” sessions, with Business Rep. Jack Osburn heading the union bargaining committee. Business Manager Tom Dalzell participated in the last session where the final agreement was hammered out. Also attending was Business Rep. Patrick Waite who, according to Osburn, “applied his talents creating a spreadsheet and verifying the cost of this over-five-million-dollar settlement.”

In addition to the general wage increases, the agreement provides the following equity increases:

- 2.5% for up to five designated Electric Department staff to obtain and maintain crane certification.
- 2.5% in Environmental Utilities Department for up to six designated staff in Water Distribution and Waste Collection to obtain and maintain a Class A driver’s license.
- Increased certification pay from 2% maximum to a 4% maximum for Senior and Worker II employees in Environmental Utilities, Water Distribution and Wastewater Collection for an increased combination of certifications.

New PERS Option

The agreement also adopted an “optional beneficiary death benefit” under the PERS retirement plan. Under the old agreement, a surviving spouse was entitled to receive only the contributions that the employee made to PERS. The new optional death benefit is a monthly allowance equal to the amount the member would have received if he/she had retired from service on the date of death and elected “optional settlement 2”, the highest monthly allowance a member can leave a spouse or domestic partner.

The City decided to extend the new PERS option negotiated by Local 1245 to miscellaneous city employees outside the bargaining unit, demonstrating how the bargaining power of unions helps lift all boats.

Other provisions of the agreement clarified meal language, codified a sick leave/wellness self-back program, clarified application of uniform provisions, and improved the style of safety glasses. The life insurance buy-up option is to be available and conditioned if a total of 25% of all city employees participate, Osburn said.

The agreement also added an appendix with 12-hour shift language, added an exclusive recognition provision, and extended the voluntary health buy-out program from Dec. 31, 2006 until the expiration date of Nov. 24, 2007 for current participants.


Five-year pact at Port of Oakland

Local 1245 members last month ratified a new five-year agreement with the Port of Oakland.

The pact provides a wage increase of 3% in 2007, retroactive to Nov. 1, 2006. Wages will be increased 4% effective Jan. 1, 2008, 3% in 2009 and 4% in 2010. In 2011, wage hikes will be pegged to the Consumer Price Index, with a floor of 3% and a cap of 5%.

Other provisions negotiated by the union include:

- Improvements in the meal allowance and show allowance.
- A 3% premium for anyone required to have a Class A driver’s license.
- Significant improvements in “performance evaluation procedures.”

Negotiating for the union were Don Cuthbertson, Bill Morrison, Robert Shiner, Patricia Seals, and Business Rep. Lynne Morel.

Truckee-Donner offer rejected

Local 1245 members soundly rejected a contract package offered by Truckee-Donner Public Utility District.

The vote, counted Feb. 1, was 8 for and 38 against.

Pact with Wood Group extended

Members of IBEW Local 1245 employed at the Morro Bay and Moss Landing power plants ratified a contract extension with Wood Group Power Operations West.

The mail-ballot vote, tallied on Feb. 1, approves an extension of the current labor agreement until Aug. 1, with a 3.5% wage increase applied Jan. 1 for the calendar year 2007.

Members ratify Sierra pact

Local 1245 members ratified Sierra Pacific Power’s last contract offer by a sizeable margin in a mail ballot counted on Feb. 28.

The Local 1245 bargaining committee had remained neutral on the package, opting to let the members decide whether the gains outweighed the losses. Members have been working without wage increases since the expiration of the old agreement at the end of 2005.

The new agreement provides an immediate 8% wage increase, as well as 4% increases in January 2008 and January 2009, except for those employees subject to a wage freeze as described below.

The agreement also provides that most journey electric classifications will receive a 2.5% equity increase immediately and .75% equity increases in January 2008 and January 2009.

A wage freeze and lump sum wage bonuses will apply to several Clerical, Meter Reading, and Buildings and Grounds employees.

The agreement establishes Hiring Hall provisions for Customer Service Representatives, with a ceiling on the percentage of CSR positions that can be filled through the Hiring Hall.

There will be a mandatory buy-down of post-retirement medical benefits for employees hired after Jan. 1, 1998 who have less than 75 points (age + years of service). This provision is voluntary for employees with greater than 75 points. There will be an increase in post-retirement medical for employees hired after Jan. 1, 1998.

The agreement also changes the PPO Medical Plan from a 10% to 20% copay.

Wage hikes at City of Willits

Wages will go up 4%, paid retroactively to July 1, 2006, under a wage-opener agreement negotiated by Local 1245 at the City of Willits.

Bargaining for the wage opener began in May of 2006.

Negotiating for the union were J.C. England, Joe Mondo and Business Rep. Rich Cowart.
Howard Stiefer will be off work for several weeks for medical treatment.

An Assistant Business Manager for IBEW Local 1245 since 2001, Stiefer is known to many as the local union’s longest-serving president. He was appointed to the post in 1980, and the membership kept him in that position through seven elections. When then-Business Manager Perry Zimmerman brought Stiefer on board as a senior member of his administrative staff in 2001, Stiefer had served as president of Local 1245 for 21 years—three times longer than any other person ever to hold that office.

Friends are welcome to offer their greetings and support to Howard. Cards and letters should be sent to: Howard Stiefer, IBEW Local 1245, P.O. Box 2547, Vacaville, CA 95696. Or you can contact Howard directly by e-mail at hjs8@ibew1245.com.

Howard Stiefer reporting at last July’s Advisory Council meeting in Reno.

Make Your Taxes Less Taxing

Feeling taxed? As a union member, you don’t have to worry about the high cost of preparing taxes online. The Union Plus Online Tax Service costs less than half of similar services from H&R Block® and Quicken®—and it’s just as easy to use. Simply answer some questions, fill in your numbers, and the program does the rest.

Log on to make tax preparation a snap

www.unionplus.org/taxes

Available 24/7

Union Privilege selected Dennis G. Jenkins, CPA to provide this service. The firm uses a program developed by CCH Inc., the leading provider of computer software for tax professionals.
Retirees, continued from page 1.

“We heard you,” said Jackson at the Feb. 13 meeting, thanking the club leaders for their “patience and professionalism.”

Zimmerman’s Key Role

Dalzell lauded former Business Manager Perry Zimmerman for his role in facilitating the agreement with the company. Zimmerman prioritized the retiree issue during his five years as Business Manager and has continued as an outspoken advocate for retirees following his own retirement last August.

At the October meeting, retirees picked Zimmerman to help coordinate the activities of the five chapters, along with Jack Hill, acting president of the San Jose Chapter of the Retirees Club, and Gordon Borges, who organized an extremely active chapter in Merced last year.

The financial assistance, structured to help both bargaining unit and non-bargaining unit retirees, will come in the form of a new Retirement Premium Offset Account, modeled on a similar account bargained in 2002. Jackson estimated that about 70% of the benefit would go to bargaining unit retirees.

The new RPOA will provide $1650 for every IBEW retiree who retired after 1993 with 25 or more years of service. The RPOA for post-1993 retirees with 10 to 25 years of service will provide $9.16 per month of service between 10 years and 25 years of service.

For individuals who retired prior to 1994 with 25 or more years of service, the RPOA will be $3300. For those with 10 to 25 years of service, the RPOA will be $18.33 per month of service between 10 years and 25 years of service. The new RPOA, which can only be used after an individual has completely depleted the original RPOA, will be used to reduce 25% of the individual’s required monthly medical premium contribution.

Business Manager Tom Dalzell credited the Retiree Club leaders for their persistence in pressing for financial relief throughout 2006. “This is 25 million bucks,” Dalzell told the retirees following the meeting with PG&E. “That’s the equivalent of 4% of the company’s payroll moving across the table because of you.”

Not a Permanent Solution

Both the company and the union acknowledged that the new RPOA was not a permanent solution to the deepening crisis in health care costs. The IBEW has long advocated for some sort of national action on health care. PG&E has also become interested in “state and national solutions” to the health insurance problem, according to Jackson.

Retiree leaders attending the Feb. 13 meeting clearly understood that the new financial assistance offered by PG&E was just a first step in a longer journey. They discussed the need to continue strengthening the Retirees Club by building attendance at their chapter meetings, and reported recent expressions of interest in starting new chapters in Lake County, Red Bluff, and Fresno.

“Our work is really just beginning,” noted George Murphey, a member of the Vacaville Chapter.

In the near future, Retiree Club leaders plan to send a letter to all known Retirees attending the historic Feb. 13 meeting with PG&E autographed the Letter Agreement that provides $25 million in additional funding for the Retiree Premium Offset Account.

Retirees Club

Meeting Schedule

East Bay Chapter: 2nd Thursday each month, 10 a.m., IBEW Local 595, 6250 Village Parkway, Dublin, CA

San Jose Chapter: 1st Thursday each month, 10 a.m. at IBEW Local 332, 2125 Canoas Garden, San Jose, CA.

Vacaville/Sacramento Chapter: 2nd Wednesday each month, 10 a.m. at IBEW Local 1245, 30 Orange Tree Circle, Vacaville, CA.

Santa Rosa Chapter: 1st Tuesday each month, 10 a.m. at IBEW Local 551, 2525 Cleveland Ave., Suite B, Santa Rosa.

Merced Chapter: 1st Tuesday each month, 10 a.m., Merced Senior Community, 755 W. 15th Street, Merced.

Retirees must keep up momentum

By Ken Rawles

The Feb. 13 agreement to increase the Retiree Premium Offset Account is a historical and monumental accomplishment for the local union and IBEW 1245 retirees.

Remember, 2008 negotiations are coming up next year! Keep up the momentum!

Thank you Local 1245 Business Manager Tom Dalzell, and PG&E Senior Vice President Russ Jackson. This is the start of a 2-year process of educating our younger workers as to the need to be persistent in talks with PG&E over the pension and medical benefits. We will need to attend the unit meetings throughout the system to explain the work to be done, and use “just one on one” discussions with the younger workers.

I want to also encourage retirees to help start new clubs in your area. We now have 5 clubs: San Jose, Dublin, Vacaville, Santa Rosa and Merced. There is talk of Reno, Fresno and upper valley clubs getting ready to form.

Let’s make sure we continue our efforts, and increase our strength. Remember that we have strength in our numbers—only if we are unified through our Local 1245.

Ken Rawles is Unit Recorder for the Santa Rosa Chapter of the IBEW Local 1245 Retirees Club.
many large employers have increased the retiree share of premium payments.

The new Letter Agreement on Retiree Premium Offset Accounts comes at a time when just $36 a year, entitles retirees to:

- A voice in the on-going campaign to improve pensions and health coverage through Union Plus.
- Access to a credit union.
- A variety of discounted products and services through Union Plus.
- Access to dental plan.
- A life insurance policy of $1,000 ($500 for a member’s spouse).
- A subscription to the Utility Reporter.

Source: Kaiser/Hewitt 2006 Survey on Retiree Health Benefits, December 2006

Offered an Account-Based Retiree Health Plan (such as HSA or HRA) Based on responses from private-sector firms with 1,000 or more employees offering retiree health benefits.

The new Letter Agreement on Retiree Premium Offset Accounts comes at a time when many large employers have increased the retiree share of premium payments.

New RPOA Benefit

Effective July 1, 2007, the Company will enhance the Retiree Premium Offset Accounts (RPOA) of retirees who retired before 2007 and who are eligible to receive retiree medical as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Retirement</th>
<th>Years of Service</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-1994</td>
<td>25 or More</td>
<td>$3,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-1994</td>
<td>10 to 25</td>
<td>$18.33 per Month of Service Between 10 Years and 25 Years of Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-1993</td>
<td>25 or More</td>
<td>$1,650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-1993</td>
<td>10 to 25</td>
<td>$9.16 per Month of Service Between 10 Years and 25 Years of Service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

New RPOA Benefit

Retirees will be able to use this new RPOA allotment to reduce 25% of their required monthly premium contributions.

Example 1:

I retired in 1993. I had 26 years of service when I retired. I will receive a new RPOA increase of $3,300.

I am a member of the Kaiser Medicare Advantage plan and cover myself and spouse. My monthly contribution without the new RPOA is $386.36.

Using my new RPOA, my contribution will be reduced by $96.59. ($386.36 X 25%) My new contribution will be $289.77.

Example 2:

I retired in 1997. I had 25 years of service when I retired.

I will receive a new RPOA increase of $1,650.

I am a member of the Network Access plan and only cover myself. My monthly contribution without the new RPOA is $282.09.

Using my new RPOA, my contribution will be reduced by $70.52. ($282.09 X 25%) My new contribution will be $211.57.

Example 3:

I retired in 1985. I had 20 years of service.

I am in Health Net Seniority Plus. I cover myself and spouse.

I will receive a new RPOA of $2,200. I worked 2/3’s of the years necessary to receive the full $3,300 RPOA.

My monthly contribution without the new RPOA is $173.06.

Using my new RPOA, my contribution will be reduced by $43.27. ($173.06 X 25%) My new contribution will be $129.79.

Administrative Processes Being Considered

- Retirees who have any money remaining from their initial 50% offset account allotment, deemed 50% RPOA, will be required to deplete this allotment before using their 25% account allotment, deemed 25% RPOA.
- Retirees cannot use money from their 50% RPOA and 25% RPOA in the same month. For example, a retiree who only has $8 left in his 50% RPOA will only be able to reduce his required contribution by $8 for the run-out month. He must pay the full excess contribution during that month.
- Retirees who use up their 50% RPOA during a plan year and have a 25% RPOA will automatically begin their 25% RPOA the following month. They cannot cancel RPOA during a plan year.
- The 25% and 50% RPOAs will show up as separate amounts on the retiree pension remittance.
- During Open Enrollment, retirees will only have a “yes/no” choice in using RPOA. They will not be able to choose “50% RPOA” or “25% RPOA.”
- The Company will send impacted retirees a letter in late May (dates to be determined) informing them of their specific allotment and usage process. If a retiree has depleted his 50% RPOA so is currently not using RPOA, he may call the HR Service Center to initiate his 25% RPOA.
- The underlying retiree eligibility rules and allocation practices will mirror those used for determining the existing 50% RPOA eligibility and amounts, e.g. spouses can inherit RPOA.

Percentage of Large Private-Sector Employers That Made Changes to Retiree Health Benefits Between 2005 and 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit Type</th>
<th>2005 Percentage</th>
<th>2006 Percentage</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased Retiree Contributions</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost-Sharing Requirements</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-Pocket Limits</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terminated All Subsidized Benefits</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offered An Account-Based Health Plan</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kaiser/Hewitt 2006 Survey on Retiree Health Benefits, December 2006

1 Based on responses from private-sector firms with 1,000 or more employees offering retiree health benefits.
The room goes black just as you’re sitting down to help the kids with their evening homework. Some minutes or hours later, power races back into all your appliances, lighting up your life. You can see again.

There are many roads to darkness. But the journey back to light is well-charted terrain, navigated by an esoteric group of specialists schooled in the illuminating arts. They work in large bunker-like rooms, surrounded by huge wall maps displaying the electric circuits that prop up our civilization. The maps, stretching from floor to ceiling and studded with colored pins, are a snap shot of the electric distribution system. The maps, stretched from floor to ceiling and studded with colored pins, are a slice of the electric system, a $50 insulator fails.

System Operators are the IBEW members entrusted by Pacific Gas and Electric with the responsibility of getting it right, which means restoring power as soon as possible without getting someone injured or killed. System Operators play for high stakes, every day. There is no room for false data or false steps. When operators tackle trouble, they need the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. With their wall maps they get something pretty close to it.

Now PG&E wants to take the wall maps away.

Let’s start over. The room goes black just as you’re sitting down to help the kids with their evening homework. Almost everything that you thought was essential to your existence is suddenly inoperable. Something’s gone wrong. Here are some of the ways that things go wrong:

- Despite the laws against it, some drunken citizen driving home from the bar decides a power pole would make a great hood ornament.
- Despite the odds against it, California gets blasted by a “hundred year storm.”
- Despite aggressive state regulations for the inspection and maintenance of the electric system, a $50 insulator fails.

Some reports an outage. A PG&E Troubleman speeds to the area to make a visual inspection. Maybe it’s that drunk driver, married to a power pole—with an electric line draped over the top of the car. Is the line live?

Field conditions sometimes dictate that, in the interests of safety, the circuit needs to be de-energized immediately. But which circuit? Can you re-route power around one small area, minimizing the outage, or do you have to take down a larger chunk of the system?

These are the kinds of decisions faced every day by the System Operator, sometimes called Distribution Operator, or simply DO. When there is a problem reported on a circuit, you’ll find DO’s jumping to their feet, studying the map, refreshing their memories about pre-existing conditions in the area—conditions that may dictate what they can or cannot do.

Distribution Supervisor John Herbner has seen his share of outages. With 35 years at PG&E, 34 of them in the IBEW, five as a System Operator, Herbner knows that a successful response sometimes requires rapid, informed decisions by the DO’s. Are computer maps up to the challenge?

“If field conditions dictated a circuit needed to be de-energized immediately, I feel a DO could make that decision more expeditiously with the help of the current wall maps,” he says.

Is all change good? Advertisers are convinced that people are always ready for something “new and improved.” PG&E is apparently convinced there’s a new and improved way of mapping the electric distribution system. Under a plan now in the works, the company’s 182 System Operators will be consolidat-ed into four centers—three distribution centers in Concord, Auburn and Fresno, and a transmission center in Vacaville. There will be no wall maps in the new facilities.

“They don’t have room for them,” lamented Mike Davis, a DO in Edenvale who also happens to be president of the union.

But couldn’t the new facilities be constructed to accommodate the wall maps?

“They’re hellbent on projection maps,” he shrugs.

Projection maps don’t live on walls. They live in computers. But why should that be a problem? Aren’t lots of things on computer screens these days? Doesn’t that mean that everything should be?

Take PG&E’s Outage Information System, OIS is a simulated wall map that is displayed on a computer monitor.

“You can zoom out and see all the circuits but you can’t see any detail,” says Terre Wortman, another Edenvale DO. “When you zoom in to get detail, you lose the big picture.”

“On a computer you have to keep dragging the next page up—you can’t put everything on one screen,” says PG&E Troublemaker David “Chewy” Guillen.

Guillen, a 16-year IBEW member, gazes around the Edenvale operations room, where wall maps depict the electric grid in Silicon Valley. “The maps are good to look at. If a switch is not working out in the field and it’s ‘pinned’ on the

“The comfort level of having these maps in here for field personnel is unmeasurable.”

—John Herbner, Distribution Supervisor, Edenvale

System Operators see the Big Picture
...and they want to keep it.

Map Flap

Story and Photos by Eric Wolfe

System Operator Louis Lo checks the network using wall maps at the San Francisco operations center.

System Operator Ryan Thompson is an Apprentice System Operator in Edenvale.

Scott Forman, foreground, is an Assistant System Operator in San Francisco.
map. They use computers all the time. Which may explain some of the unease they feel about eliminating wall maps.

“We have various pieces of software we use,” says Kelton Crawford, DO’s use a program called ILIS, for example, to obtain switch log numbers. “You can’t do the work if you can’t identify the switches,” he explains.

When ILIS goes down, DO’s have to make up numbers, in effect creating a local numbering system from scratch. Hardly a model of efficiency, but it only becomes an issue when software fails.

“Situation normal” to an operator is a system that’s functioning in a state of dynamic equilibrium, delivering power to where it’s needed. When something malfunctions, an operator’s instinct is to get the system back to a state of grace, defined in our age as “lights on.” System Operators are conservative by nature. It’s an occupational bias.

IBEW members can be almost fanatic in their commitment to service reliability. Just trying to get a lineman to go home during a storm when the neighborhood he’s working in is still dark. It practically takes a court order.

The operations room is the temple of service reliability, and System Operators are perhaps the most devout practitioners of the faith. In a very real sense they view the grid as their universe. They feel protective toward the system they operate, and are naturally alert to anything that threatens it.

Wall maps are the visible representation of that universe, the primary means by which operators stay in touch—with that universe. Waylett, the Hayward DO, wants to make sure you’re clear on this concept: “The wall maps are our bible.” It’s a metaphor that keeps popping up, as it did when Norman Harris came into the Edenvale operations room one day last month to check something on the map.

“With electronic maps you’re not going to be able to see where you’ve come from and where you’re going. With a wall map you can see everything.”

–Jerry Waylett, System Operator, Hayward

System Operators aren’t computer phobic. They use computers all the time.

“With electronic maps you’re not going to have anything to back them up, people are going to be in the dark a long time.”

–Rann Ryles, System Operator, Hayward

“In a storm, if the electronic maps malfunction and we don’t have anything to back them up, people are going to be in the dark a long time.”

–Rann Ryles, System Operator, Hayward

Understanding the big picture, it turns out, matters.

“Bring up one map (on a computer), I have no idea what kind of abnormal situations there might be somewhere else,” says Herbner, the Distribution Supervisor. “It inhibits me from submitting the clearance—not knowing if I can do what I need to do.”

With electronic maps you’re not going to be able to see where you’ve come from and where you’re going, says Jerry Waylett, a Hayward-based DO with 25 years experience at PG&E. “With a wall map you can see everything.”

“Situation normal” to an operator is a system that’s functioning in a state of dynamic equilibrium, delivering power to where it’s needed. When something malfunctions, an operator’s instinct is to get the system back to a state of grace, defined in our age as “lights on.” System Operators are conservative by nature. It’s an occupational bias.

IBEW members can be almost fanatic in their commitment to service reliability. Just trying to get a lineman to go home during a storm when the neighborhood he’s working in is still dark. It practically takes a court order.

The operations room is the temple of service reliability, and System Operators are perhaps the most devout practitioners of the faith. In a very real sense they view the grid as their universe. They feel protective toward the system they operate, and are naturally alert to anything that threatens it.

Wall maps are the visible representation of that universe, the primary means by which operators stay in touch—in communion you might say—with that universe.

Waylett, the Hayward DO, wants to make sure you’re clear on this concept: “The wall maps are our bible.” It’s a metaphor that keeps popping up, as it did when Norman Harris came into the Edenvale operations room one day last month to check something on the map.

“With electronic maps you’re not going to be able to see where you’ve come from and where you’re going. With a wall map you can see everything.”

–Jerry Waylett, System Operator, Hayward

With electronic maps you’re not going to be able to see where you’ve come from and where you’re going. With a wall map you can see everything.”

–Jerry Waylett, System Operator, Hayward

Those entrusted with system reliability—DO’s, troubleshooters, engineers—are not opposed to technology. They’re conservative, yes, but they’re not some sort of modern-day Luddites harboring secret wishes to smash machinery. They know the technology. They understand that software can be useful.

“I don’t mind change,” says Ryles, the Hayward DO. “I don’t mind adapting to new things. But let me see it first.”

Well, sure. Let them see it first. If you’re going to monkey with a system that successfully keeps the lights on, talk to the people responsible for operating that system. Let them see what you have in mind.

But the prospect of creating something “new and improved” can be intoxicating. The corporate imperative to “innovate” can sometimes devalue the tried and true. DO’s, it turns out, were not consulted about PG&E’s consolida-
Stewards Conference salutes the past, looks to the future
Defending the members, protecting the work, building the union

Story and photos by Eric Wolfe

When Harry Bridges, the legendary leader of the Longshoreman’s union, strolls into Ronald T. Weakley Hall in Vacaville and begins reminiscing about the great San Francisco General Strike of 1934, you know you’re experiencing history. Especially considering that Bridges died in 1990.

But it’s hard to believe that Bridges stayed dead when you see actor Ian Ruskin pace the room brandishing a bottle of whiskey and reflecting on decades of labor struggle. Ruskin breathes life back into the irreverent, irrepressible labor leader: Bridges on strike. In jail. Defying Congress. And this too: Bridges’ lawyers, his daughter, his several marriages … and most of all his fierce loyalty to the members of his union—and to the working class he stood with to the end.

For those attending the Local 1245 stewards conference in Vacaville on Feb. 10, a bracing whiff of Harry Bridges put the role of the union in proper perspective. Makes you realize you’re part of something much bigger, something that was around before you came along, and—because you added something to it—will still be around when you’ve left the scene.

Local 1245 stewards don’t spend a lot of time on strike, in jail, or being grilled by Congressional committees. But it rubs you wrong—just like it did Bridges—to see a member kicked around, or union standards being trampled, or union work disappearing. And the great thing about being a union steward is that you are sometimes in a position to do something about it.

The conference on Feb. 10 was organized to give stewards knowledge they can use to defend individual members, protect the work and build union strength. In attendance were Local 1245 staff members running the Feb. 10 conference were, from left, Dispatcher Kelly Dark, Business Rep. Larry Thomson, Administrative Associate Nancy Kendrick, Senior Business Rep. Ron Cochran and Dispatcher Gina Britt.

Dalzell praised the role of union stewards in resolving workplace disputes, noting that the best grievance outcomes are usually those that are settled by stewards on the spot.

Out-of-work books as of Feb. 14:
Lineman 1: 28
Lineman 2: 39
Lineman 3: 2
Lineman 4: 10
Cable Splicer 1: 1
Cable Splicer 2: 3
Cable Splicer 3: 2
LEM 1: 4
LEM 2: 7
LEM 3: 3
Groundman 1: 28
Groundman 2: 9
Groundman 3: 28
Groundman 4: 66

Dispatch report for January 2007 —job referrals:
Linemen: 45
Line Equipment Man: 12
Groundman: 11
Cable Splicers: 2

Jesse Frieling discusses a recent accident in a neighboring jurisdiction.
stewards from Outside Line, Sacramento Regional Transit, Turlock Irrigation District, Turlock Irrigation District, Western Area Power Administration, and US Bureau of Reclamation.

Business Manager Tom Dalzell discussed an issue of major concern right now among Outside Line members: PG&E’s recent decision to scale back construction work for contractors.

Union contractors can be a valuable supplement to PG&E’s regular workforce, but large fluctuations in the available work is disruptive to the lives of Outside Line members and does not serve the utility’s interests in the long run, Dalzell said. Outside Line members may decide to seek work elsewhere, making it more difficult for PG&E to find experienced workers when it decides to ramp up again.

Dalzell praised the role of union stewards in resolving workplace disputes, noting that the best grievance outcomes are usually those that are settled by stewards on the spot.

Senior Business Rep. Ron Cochran, the principal organizer of the conference, offered a brief update on issues affecting Outside Line members. But most of the day was devoted to discussing the role that stewards play at the jobsite, and how they can play that role effectively.

Business Rep. Landis Marttila discussed the roles and responsibilities of the Local 1245 steward, including some jobsite situations that require judgment calls on the part of the steward. Responding to worksite accidents and OSHA investigations were among the topics covered.

Business Rep. Sam Glero reviewed the “seven tests” used to determine if discipline has been for “just cause.”

Senior Business Rep. Ray Thomas discussed the Supreme Court’s historic Weingarten ruling (NLRB v. Weingarten, Inc.), which established an employee’s right to have a union representative present at a meeting that may, in the employee’s opinion, result in disciplinary action.

In “Grievances 101,” Business Rep. Lynne Morel explained that grievance procedures vary from contract to contract, and that grievances must be grounded in the language of the contract you’re dealing with. When a jobsite problem arises, a good way to determine if there is a contractual violation, said Morel, is to ask the five “W” questions: What happened, who was involved, when did it happen, where did it happen, and why did it happen?

Business Rep. Darryl Norris discussed the importance of filing grievances in a timely manner, conducting a thorough investigation, and keeping good records of your investigation. Executive Board member Mike Cottrell described the Outside Line steward’s role at the jobsite.

So, do you think you have what it takes to be a steward? Let your business representative know. Next time it might be your turn to meet Harry Bridges.

A capacity crowd turned out for the stewards conference.
Small residential new construction work is getting a new look by PG&E's Six Sigma project.

In early January, three IBEW members and three ESC members met with various PG&E managers and specialists to re-examine assumptions made around consolidating small residential new construction into Resource Management Centers (RMCs) rather than keeping the work in local headquarters. Through the use of Six Sigma, an analysis tool designed in the 1980s and used at General Electric and Motorola as well as many other large and small companies, the team challenged the original assumptions by tracking jobs through every phase of the construction process and identifying non-productive time lags. The unanimous recommendation: small residential construction, which comprises about 8% of total construction each year, should be kept in the local headquarters.

Operating, from page 1
have now crafted a solution that could bring displacements all the way to zero, while opening up opportunities for voluntary severance. This is good news."

In a joint statement to PG&E employees, Dalzell and PG&E Senior Vice President Russ Jackson noted that the letter agreement “provides for the soliciting of an expanded group of classifications who may volunteer for severance. Upon receiving the list of volunteers, PG&E will use a phased approach by accepting a certain number of severance requests when reductions are warranted due to the implementation of new technology or procedures.”

The company will hold meetings in late February and early March for Operating Clerical and certain Physical Clerical employees to address specific details and answer questions, according to the joint statement. (See the joint statement as well as the text of the agreement at www.ibew1245.com)

Workforce Transition Benefits previously negotiated by the union in Letter Agreements 05-66 and 06-18 will be available to impacted Operating Clerical employees who accept the voluntary severance. These benefits may include a Transitional Leave of Absence for employees aged 52 and above, an Educational Leave of Absence and a Financial Planning Seminar.

Operating Clerical employees who wish to maintain employment with PG&E will also have several Workforce Transition Benefits available to them, including assistance with career planning, additional consideration for entry level bargaining unit and A&T vacancies, additional testing opportunities and test preparation workshops, an increased relocation allowance and an increased tuition refund allowance.

The letter agreement acknowledged that the voluntary approach ultimately “may not capture all of the needed reductions,” but stressed that the use of displacement procedures is “the least desirable option.” In support of this principle, PG&E agreed to explore the use of existing contractual options to address staffing imbalances on a temporary basis.

Six Sigma's approach is to break down a problem into its smallest components. Through collaboration, and the absence of pre-conceived solutions, this process often comes up with unexpected recommendations.

“Six Sigma has demonstrated what we have been saying all along—you need to hear from the people who are doing the work,” said Local 1245 Business Manager Tom Dalzell. “We are now exploring the possibility of a Six Sigma team to work on outage issues.”

The current team is wrapping up the first stage of their work, which involved studying and visiting five local headquarters to ask for input and feedback on their conclusions.

“This has been a very rewarding experience,” said Jeff Johnson, Operating Clerk from Auburn. “It shows once again how we can make a big difference for our customers by significantly reducing wait times for service.”

Marlayne Morgan is assistant to Business Manager Tom Dalzell.

Representing IBEW Local 1245 on the Six Sigma project are (from left) Jeff Johnson, Operating Clerk, Auburn; Pam Brinkley, Operating Clerk, Concord RMC; and Maureen Bird, Work Resource Coordinator, Santa Rosa.

By Marlayne Morgan

PG&E’s Six Sigma Project
New look at residential construction

PG&E Chief Operating Officer Bill Morrow, IBEW Local 1245 Business Manager Tom Dalzell and others gather for an update on the Six Sigma project examining small residential new construction work.

PG&E Counters, from page 1

Petaluma, Half Moon Bay and Geyerville.

To address the impacts of the closures, Letter Agreement 07-11 provides affected employees with "enhanced choices" including accelerated bidding rights, relocation, and Transformation benefits.

Final implementation of Letter Agreement 07-11 is contingent upon the settlement receiving all necessary approvals as well as ratification by affected employees in the Clerical bargaining unit. Employees will be provided with their options once the settlement has been ratified.

Report dates and severance dates will be determined by the company and are expected to coincide with the actual closure of the employee’s office.

Oroville, CA
January 26, 2007

35 years: Rodney Dyer, left, and Donald Silva, right, receive 35-year awards from Business Manager Tom Dalzell.

30 years: Gary Covert, Robert Stout and George Bell receive 30-year awards.

25 years: Stephen Niegel and John Hursh receive 25-year awards.

March 2007

The Honorees

40 Years
Darrell McMaster

35 Years
Rodney Dyer
Richard Kappel
Ron Murphy
Donald Silva
Kenneth E Smith
Harold Friemark
Kent Massey
Mike Mathis
Robert Seaman
Donald Thomas

30 Years
George Bell
Robert Bell
Aric Cook
Gary Covert
Lee Deadmond
Marsha Hagler
Dan Hogan
John S Little
William Malacky
Merritt Monroe
Calvin Moss
Robert Parker
David Poliquin
Scott Stalder
Robert Stout
William Weeks
David West

25 Years
James Anderson
William Arave
Eileen Bird
Lynn Blodgett
Suzanne Cleland
John E Franklin
John H Hursh
John H, Johnston III
Stephen Niegel
Chris Sawyer
Norman Stanberry
Back Exercises for People Who Sit

These easy back exercises are designed for people who sit. Taking a microbreak for back exercise can help realign a slouching spine. It can also relieve muscle tension caused by sitting. You’ll feel an energy and circulation boost, too. Try these exercises at your desk, at home or even in your car. You can take a few minutes for all six exercises, or just do one or two. But the more you do, the better you’ll feel. Do each exercise slowly, stretching as far as you can. Then pause a moment (but don’t hold), and release.

If you have had back problems in the past, or if you feel back pain during any of these exercises, stop and consult your health care provider before continuing.

For Your Cervical Curve

Chin glide
Why: To help align your cervical curve.
How: Glide your chin straight back, keeping your head and ears level. (You’ll know you’re doing this exercise right if it gives you the feeling of a double chin.) Repeat 5 to 10 times, several times a day.

Shoulder Circles
Why: To release muscle tension in your neck, shoulders, and upper back.
How: Circle your shoulders backward in a wide arc. Make several circles, then relax. Repeat 5 to 10 times, several times a day. You can also circle your head, slowly and gently in either direction, to release tension in your neck and upper back.

For Your Thoracic Curve

Middle Back Stretch
Why: To realign your thoracic curve.
How: Bend both elbows and press one arm above you (as if you’re trying to brush your ear with your elbow) and the other behind you. Press as far as you can stretch. Pause a moment, then release. Repeat 5 to 10 times on each side, several times a day.

Elbow Press
Why: To release muscle tension in your middle back.
How: Bring your elbows out to the side at chest level. Press them gently backward as far as you can stretch. Pause a moment, then release. Repeat 5 to 10 times on each side, several times a day. Try this when you feel a little stiff or tired.

For Your Lumbar Curve

Reverse the Curve
Why: To reverse the “slouch curve” and release muscle tension in your lower back.
How: For your safety, stand up. Press your palms on your lower back for support, and gently bend backward. Pause a moment, then release. Repeat 5 to 10 times, several times a day.

Tummy Tuck
Why: To strengthen your abdominal muscles. These muscles help support your lower back and keep it aligned.
How: Sit with your buttocks firmly against the back of your chair. Exhale and tighten your abdominal muscles for a count of 10. Release. Repeat 5 to 10 times, several times a day.

Source: State Compensation Insurance Fund

Accident claims Robert Curutchet

Robert Curutchet, a Gas Transmission Foreman at PG&E and 15-year member of IBEW Local 1245, died in a car accident on Jan. 27 on Highway 162 and Avenue 15 in Chowchilla near his home.

Brother Curutchet, 36, has traveled throughout the PG&E system working on many large projects. He is survived by his wife and 3 stepchildren.

The family is in the process of setting up a scholarship fund for their children. Checks payable to Laurie Curutchet can be sent to Renee Silveria at PG&E GC Superintendent Office, 4040 West Lane, Bldg. 2, Stockton, CA 95204.

Local 1245 offers its condolences to the friends, family and co-workers of Robert Curutchet.
Skyline Tree Service signs with Local 1245
By Ray Thomas

Skyline Tree Service of Red Bluff, Ca. is now signatory to a line clearance tree trimming labor agreement with IBEW Local 1245.

Meetings with Skyline began last September and culminated in a two-year agreement effective Jan. 1, 2007. The agreement covers contract work performed for PG&E, SMUD, City of Shasta Lake, City of Redding and the City of Palo Alto.

With PG&E emphasizing that its line clearance contractors utilize minority-owned businesses, Skyline Tree Service will make a great signatory subcontractor. Skyline is recognized by the California Department of Transportation as a minority-owned business.

Skyline also expects to receive minority-owned status with PG&E in the very near future. If not utilized as a minority-owned subcontractor, Skyline may also decide to work as a prime contractor on one of the utility properties.

Currently Skyline is a residential contractor in the North Valley. Skyline is owned by Frank and Autumn Fales of Red Bluff. The Fales’ family heritage is linked strongly to North Coast logging. Danger tree felling and removal are a specialty of the company.

As a minority-owned and union-sig- natory line clearance contractor, I believe that the future for Skyline is bright.

Skyline Tree Service firma un convenio con el Local 1245
por Ray Thomas

Skyline Tree Service de Red Bluff, California ha firmado un convenio laboral para la limpieza de líneas con el Local 1245 de la IBEW.

Las reuniones con Skyline comenzaron el pasado mes de septiembre y culminaron en un convenio de dos años que entró en vigor el 1º de enero de 2007.

El convenio cubre todo el trabajo ejecutado para PG&E, SMUD, la ciudad de Shasta Lake, la ciudad de Redding y la ciudad de Palo Alto.

PG&E enfatizó que sus contratistas para la limpieza de líneas utilizaran subcontratistas minoritarios y Skyline Tree Service es un subcontratista que cumple con ese requisito. Skyline es una firma reconocida por el Departamento de Transporte de California como una empresa cuyos propietarios son miembros de minorías étnicas.

Skyline también espera recibir la clasificación de empresa minoritaria de PG&E en un futuro muy cercano. Si no es utilizada como una firma subcon- tratista minoritaria, Skyline también podrá decidir trabajar como un contratista primario en alguna de las propiedades de la compañía de servicios públicos.

Actualmente, Skyline es principalmente un contratista residencial en la región Norte del Valle. Skyline es de propiedad de Frank y Autumn Fales de Red Bluff. La historia de la familia Fales está ligada fuertemente con la industria maderera de la costa norte. La compañía está especializada en trabajar con árboles que están en peligro de caerse y en retirarlos de sus localizaciones.

Como un contratista minoritario para la limpieza de líneas, que ha firmado un convenio laboral con el Sindicato, creo que el futuro de Skyline es muy brillante.

Ray Thomas, Representante Principal de Negocios del Local 1245 de la IBEW.

Protect your seniority

To all Local 1245 Line Clearance Tree Trimmers and Vegetation Control Members:

Local 1245 wants to remind you of the importance of your Local 1245 “Union Seniority” which is governed by your current 1245 membership initiation date.

If your current employer loses your contract area to another contractor who is signatory to Local Union 1245, your Union Seniority protects you in two major ways: 1. Union Seniority deter- mines the priority in which Union Members are retained by the new employer. 2. Union Seniority deter- mines the level of PTO or vacation you shall receive with the new employer.

Subject to the Bylaws of IBEW Local Union 1245, you must not let your membership lapse for 3 months or more if you want to retain your current initia- tion date. Simply put, if you become 3 months or more in arrears with your dues payments, you will lose your former initiation date, and receive a new date, which will affect the benefits of your Union Seniority.

If you are off of work due to injury, Family Medical Leave, Military Leave etc, you may pay non-working dues by contacting the Union at (707) 452-2700. Also, it is very important to remind newly hired employees to fill out their membership packets as soon as possi- ble in order to secure their respective Union Seniority dates.

Ray Thomas, Senior Business Representative

Democratic tax cuts

The new Democratic-controlled Congress is looking to rein in looming tax increases on the middle class, possibly covering the cost by raising taxes on upper-income households, the Wall Street Journal reported. And the Bush administration may not stand in the way.

The possible bargain centers on the Alternative Minimum Tax, a kind of par- allel income tax that hit 3.5 million US taxpayers in the 2006 tax year. Congres- sional Democrats are eager to keep the AMT from ensnaring millions more mid- class taxpayers. They also must find a way to cover the estimated $50 billion cost of scaling back the tax this year.

In recent days, Bush administration officials have signaled they may not oppose a likely method of covering those costs: raising taxes on the nation’s wealthiest citizens. That concession could mark the beginning of a bigger debate on revisiting the Bush tax cuts, which could ultimately lead to reversing at least some of the cuts given to upper-income Americans over the past six years.

Get the latest news at

www.ibew1245.com

A mortgage program with you in mind

The Union Plus Mortgage & Real Estate program was designed with you in mind. Whether you have great credit or less than perfect credit, we’ll try to help.

call 1-800-848-6466 or visit www.unionplus.org/mortgage

Union Plus Mortgage & Real Estate

A mortgage program with you in mind
US lags in workplace policies for families

Only five countries in the world do not guarantee some form of paid maternity leave, according to a new study by Harvard and McGill University researchers: Lesotho, Liberia, Swaziland, Papua New Guinea and ... the United States.

The study, released Feb. 1, found that workplace policies for families in the United States are weaker than those of every other high-income country. The United States, which often lays claim to the title of “highest living standard in the world,” doesn’t always measure up when you actually start looking at the numbers.

The new study should add fuel to a discussion now beginning in Washington DC over the current federal law that provides unpaid family leave. The Bush Administration wants to scale back the benefit to working parents, while some in Congress want to expand the benefit to include paid family leave.

Among the study’s findings:

- Fathers are granted paid paternity leave or paid parental leave in 65 countries, including 31 offering at least 14 weeks of paid leave.
- At least 107 countries protect working women’s right to breast-feed; the breaks are paid in at least 73 of them. The US does not have federal legislation guaranteeing the right to breast-feed at work.
- At least 145 countries provide paid sick days, with 127 providing a week or more annually. The US provides unpaid leave through the Family and Medical Leave Act, which does not cover all workers; there is no federal law providing for paid sick days.
- At least 134 countries have laws setting the maximum length of the work week. The US does not have a maximum work week length or a limit on mandatory overtime per week.
- In some cases, local governments have taken the lead in guiding the United States toward workplace policies that are more supportive of working families. Recent legislation in California provides a maximum of six weeks of partial pay each year for workers taking time off from work to bond with a newborn baby, adopted or foster child, or to care for a seriously ill parent, child, spouse or registered domestic partner.
- Most workers will receive approximately 55% of their pre-taxed weekly wage, up to a maximum of $840, while on leave.

The US Labor Department, under pressure from business groups to scale back family leave benefits, is reviewing current regulations. But Congress may be more in the mood to expand the benefit than to restrict.

Sen. Chris Dodd is proposing new legislation to enable workers to take six weeks of paid family leave. Congress also is expected to reconsider the Healthy Families Act, a bill introduced last session that would require employers with at least 15 employees to provide seven paid sick days per year.

Letters, from page 3

toilet and the holding tank. Our son (bless him) cleaned it out for us. Then our water tank blew out, so he installed our toilet and the holding tank. Our son struggled at times. We made small progress for those of us in Operating that would be a driving force to help establish unity within the union and would appreciate our vote. That Lineman was Howard Stiefer. A few years later he and I would become related.

In 1978 I became the IBEW Shop Steward for the Electric Department, Public Works, and Clerical staff. I realized that I would not be a “favorite son” to management, since it would be I, informing them of employee rights, and enforcing the MOU. I would also be sitting across a negotiating table with a union representative bringing our members’ needs to management’s attention.

As each contract was negotiated, we struggled at times. We made small improvements, but were able to keep the MOU in place. We had a voice and respect from being part of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.

In 1981, Tom Dalzell, IBEW Local 1245 staff attorney, came to the City of Healdsburg and introduced himself to me. He informed me that he would like to take over the negotiating duties for that contract year. I was a little nervous at first, not knowing the intent of a union staff attorney representing a small union group in Healdsburg.

Tom has a demeanor at the negotiating table that one has to experience.

Tom wins over the opposition with style, and has the ability to convince the other side that our gains will also benefit their needs. Tom’s philosophy and guidance played a major role in my shop steward abilities and as a team we made major gains for union members.

As salary issues were most guarded by the City, we were able to move ahead with major benefit improvements. Most sections in the MOU were improved through every contract year.

Health and welfare benefits were our top priority in every contract year. To date we are one of the few places where medical, dental, and vision plans are provided at no cost to the employee. Two major accomplishments came in our last negotiated contract. We were able to, upon retirement, move unused sick leave (1000 hrs max) into a retirement health saving plan, which is paid medical during retirement. We also improved our retirement plan formula from 2.0%@55 to 2.5%@55, which provides our members the opportunity to retire with 90% of their final year compensation. On top of that, we achieved a 21% monetary gain over four years.

With these benefit gains, thanks to Tom, I will enter into retirement status with the City of Healdsburg. I thought about why we were so fortunate to have Tom represent us through these years. Was it the lure of the country living experience, or was it because I was related to the President of IBEW?

All IBEW Local 1245 members now have the fortune to have the top business manager to provide the unity and expertise to guide all members in their quest for better working conditions.

Through the years of employment these benefit gains and improvements were awarded to me and our membership because of participation in IBEW. I would like to thank IBEW and especially Tom for the assistance in providing me a great work environment, and I’m sure it will carry over into a great retirement.

Larry Giovannoni, Healdsburg, Ca.

Good news

Editor’s note: The follow e-mail was received from Operating Clerk Jackie Van Ingen concerning the new letter agreements on retiree health benefits and operating clerical job security.

Good news for retirees-and good news for those of us in Operating that have been living on edge wondering if we will have jobs. This voluntary severance may clear the way for some of the younger employees to stay on. Glad to see the results of the latest round of bargaining.

Jackie Van Ingent, Los Osos, CA

Kapaun named to Advisory Council

Brian Kapaun has been appointed by the Local 1245 Executive Board to fill the vacant Advisory Council position representing PG&E General Construction.

Kapaun has previously served as an alternate to the Council, filling in behind Mike Saner. In 2002 Kapaun, a 1st Field Clerk, served on the PG&E General Bargaining subcommittee dealing with General Construction issues.

He is a 28-year member of Local 1245.
Map Flap, continued from page 9.

Wright, the Hayward DO. “Why change a system that works?” asks Wright, the Hayward DO. “We’ve proven it to work safely and efficiently over time. Why change to something new, something unproven? It’s alarming.”

The system being implemented by PG&E, is, in fact, unproven. No other utility in the country operates exclusively from computer maps, according to the DO’s interviewed for this article. Some utilities are experimenting with computer maps, but even they are preserving their wall maps as back up.

“I’m a man who likes to have a back-up plan,” says Ryles, the Hayward DO. “If the electronic maps fail I want to have something to work with.”

In an outage, he says “the paper map isn’t going to malfunction—it’s not going anywhere. You have the whole layout—you can see everything.”

Martin, the San Francisco DO, shakes his head at the prospect of a world without wall maps. He writes down this observation on a piece of paper, like a note in a bottle addressed to anyone out in the great corporate sea who might be listening:

“It is foolish to believe that a major circuit outage spanning across several square feet of highly congested wall map, and involving dozens of devices and numerous backties, can be fought with equal safety and efficiency when the operator’s only reference is a 21-inch computer screen.”

“Chewy” Guillin, the T-man, points to the Edenvale wall map. When he begins to speak, it feels like a benediction:

“This is the way it was built, it works, it’s been working since before my time. I think electronic maps will help the budget, but it’s not going to help the restoration time. But we’ll see.”

“It’s teamwork.”

–Glenn Martin,
System Operator, San Francisco

“When you have the map on the wall everybody can gather around and analyze the situation together. It’s teamwork.”

–Glenn Martin,
System Operator, San Francisco

“We were told we were going to electronic mapping—we had no input at all,” says Montoya, the San Francisco Lead System Operator.

“The only consulting we got,” says Ryles, “is ‘This is going to happen.’”

“You get so familiar with it you get a picture of it in your mind. It gets to be ingrained, that’s what these maps do,” says Wortman, the Edenvale DO. “And that’s something management doesn’t understand, but operators understand because they work with it every day.”

Wortman is trying to explain how the wall maps attune DO’s to the current state of the system. It’s probably easier than trying to explain transubstantiation, but not by much.

“The comfort level of having these maps in here for field personnel is unmeasurable,” says Herbner, the Distribution Supervisor. “Foremen from all over the area come in here and go to the wall maps prior to submitting clearances.”

“Having the map on the wall allows the DO to take an overview of the entire jurisdiction and take notes on what needs to be addressed,” says Glenn Martin, a San Francisco-based DO. “When you have the map on the wall everybody can gather around and analyze the situation together. It’s teamwork.”

It turns out that teamwork isn’t just a corporate slogan. It’s something that happens at a wall map—in an actual physical space—where people gather to “get a picture” in their mind. Does the problem span one circuit or many circuits? Are there any crews or T-men in harm’s way? Is there old abnormal switching for trouble that needs to be restored?

The need for this physical, tangible clarity is especially great when new crews arrive on the scene in a crisis, in response to an appeal for emergency aid.

“When outside crews come in, we can show them where they’re going and they have the opportunity to see where their clearance points are and what other work is going on around them,” says Crawford, the Edenvale DO.

The maps are knowledge, written large.

“The unknown scares any operator. You can’t make a mistake in this job,” says Waylett, the Hayward DO. “We’re leery. Are the (electronic) maps going to be up to date? Are they 110% foolproof? They have to be foolproof. Somebody could get hurt out there.”

DO’s are not rebels. They’re conservative, remember? Team players. You don’t find them making a lot of waves. Unless they think something is really wrong.

They think the elimination of wall maps is a really big mistake.

“The people who made the decisions have never been in operations before,” says Hendrick Han, a San Francisco DO. “Why change a system that works?” asks Wortman, the Edenvale DO. “We’ve proven it to work safely and efficiently over time. Why change to something new, something unproven? It’s alarming.”

The system being implemented by PG&E can, in fact, prove unproven. No other utility in the country operates exclusively from computer maps, according to the DO’s interviewed for this article. Some utilities are experimenting with computer maps, but even they are preserving their wall maps as back up.

“An outage is a stress test,” says Mike Davis, the Lead System Operator at the San Francisco operations center. “When you have the map on the wall everybody can gather around and analyze the situation together. It’s teamwork.”

–David “Chewy” Guillin,
T-man, Edenvale

Above: Lead System Operator David Montoya updates switching assignments as the San Francisco operations center.