

MEDIA GUILD

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA MEDIA GUILD LOCAL 39521, COMMUNICATIONS WORKERS OF AMERICA

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BENEFITS OF THE CHRONICLE GUILD CONTRACT

A note to members: This is an informal summary of some key provisions of our collective bargaining agreement. We've tried to make it accurate, but you should refer to the actual contract to be sure. Go to the Chronicle Unit section of our Local website, mediaworkers.org, to find a copy of the legal document. Please let us know if you have any questions or suggestions.

Guild members at the San Francisco Chronicle enjoy many benefits under our current collective bargaining agreement. Here are a few highlights:

Job Security: Despite all the challenges facing the newspaper industry and the recent wave of job cuts, it would have been far worse at the Chronicle were it not for the job protections spelled out in our contract for Guild-covered employees who have passed their initial probationary period.

The company must follow seniority when layoffs are implemented, although certain employees deemed to be of "major importance" need not be laid off despite low seniority. In the news department, when the company recently cut more than 80 of our jobs, we negotiated buyout terms that allowed management to meet its cost-cutting goals without a single involuntary layoff. Even the most junior employees were able to obtain buyout packages worth at least six weeks pay plus continued health care, unemployment benefits and job-search assistance. Some senior employees took away much more. A total of some \$10 million in buyouts was paid to our members at a time when nonunion newspapers – and even some Guild papers with less favorable contract language – were laying off even veteran employees with little or no cushion.

Other than economic cutbacks, Guild employees can only be dismissed for just cause. Disputes are subject to grievance and binding arbitration. That is the core of our contract: When the chips are down, you can rely on a defense. We all have to work hard and do our jobs well. But when the management targets one of our members for dismissal or any kind of discipline, our shop stewards and union officers make the bosses prove their case.

In nonunion companies, employees work "at will," which means they can be let go anytime, with or without just cause.

Health Care: It's no secret that the health care system in this country is broken. We are suffering the consequences of the ongoing meltdown, along with everybody else who faces skyrocketing costs and shrinking benefits. That's why our co-pays and other costs have just been increased once again.

Still, our members are better off than most employees elsewhere. The ones who do better - and there are some -- usually are workers who also have strong union contracts in government or private industry not facing the sort of economic problems we face.

At the Chronicle, our health care is administered by the Guild. Our members sit with management on a board of trustees, negotiating the best terms we can with the HMOs and insurers. So, when times are tough as they are now, we have a seat at the table and a voice in the discussions. In fact, one of our most knowledgeable members, Sabin Russell, who covers health and medicine for

the Chronicle, serves as chairman of the health board.

It's usually just take-it-or-leave-it at nonunion employers. Any cost increases borne by the employer are just passed along. And of course, many employers don't offer any health care at all.

We have pushed over the years for progressive policies covering families, drug and alcohol recovery programs, and domestic partner benefits. We have a chance to do even better in future negotiations if we keep building a strong Guild and can push for the priorities our members want.

Salaries: Our Guild negotiates weekly minimum pay scales for all covered employees. In most cases, these pay scales are substantially higher than what you will find elsewhere in the Bay Area, particularly when our health benefits and pensions are taken into account. We were able to win across-the-board pay raises through 2010 despite all the cost-cutting in our industry.

Less experienced employees can expect large raises as they gain experience on their way up the ladder to the top minimum pay scale. For Schedule A employees, a person with less than a year's experience would be guaranteed \$779 a week to start as of July 2007, but would be increased by roughly \$100 a week for each of the next two years of additional experience. At six years experience, when the pay scales reach the top minimum for Schedule A, Guild employees get at least \$1,189 a week.

This next December, our Guild's top minimum Schedule A rate tops \$1,200 a week for the first time. While some other newspapers have higher top minimums, keep in mind that health costs and other benefits may be very different, so direct comparisons are tricky.

Of course, these are only the minimum pay rates. Guild members are always free to negotiate compensation above the minimums spelled out in the collective bargaining agreement. Like baseball players and opera singers, our union includes some extraordinarily talented individuals. We are proud of them, and we are also proud of their support when we seek to win fair terms for everybody who does a good job.

Other benefits: Limits to commute distances if you are transferred. Protections against unfair changes in schedules. Mandatory overtime. Paid holidays. Up to four weeks annual vacation. Five days a year paid sick leave. Rights to take leaves of absence. Byline protections in the news department.

Those are a few of the more notable benefits of our current contract. None of them are written in stone. As we have learned across the country, newspapers must become more efficient to survive, and that has made for a difficult environment in which to bargain contract improvements, or even hang on to what we've got.

With your support, we plan to build toward our next round of bargaining in 2010.

We want to find new ways to work with management in order to help solve our business difficulties. That way, when our next contract is ready to be negotiated, both the Guild and the Chronicle can be stronger than ever.

If you have any questions about your contract, or how you can help make the next one better, contact your shop steward or unit officer, or call us at the Guild office at 415-421-6833.

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