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CSEA workers ratify contract with 3% to 4% pay increases

Gerald McKinstry The Journal News

Westchester County's largest union yesterday approved an agreement with the county that gives its workers 3 percent to 4 percent pay raises through 2011.

Civil Service Employee Association Unit 9200 - the union representing 4,000 county workers - ratified an agreement that gives workers 3 percent retroactive raises from 2006, and 11.25 percent increases over the next three years.

The contract was approved by a vote of 2,659 to 226 and conducted by a third-party arbitrator, union leaders said. "Given the economic climate," it was good for members to support the contract, union President Jack McPhillips said yesterday. "Our big gain or keep was that we don't have to contribute to our health insurance," McPhillips said. "The bad part is that it took so long."

The union consists of clerical staff, middle management, laborers, caseworkers and other county workers and had been without a contract since 2005. Most earn about \$50,000 a year, county officials said.

The deal provides pay increases going back to 2006 and going forward through 2011. Highlights include:

- 3 percent pay increase for 2006
- 3 percent increase for 2007
- 3 percent increase for 2008
- 3.25 percent increase for 2009.
- 4 percent increase for 2010.
- 4 percent increase for 2011.

It also gives workers \$200 more in longevity pay starting in 2010 and does not require workers to contribute to their health plans. It increases county contributions to the benefit fund for dental and optical plans by \$100 per employee and restores an emergency sick bank provision that had been suspended.

Other givebacks included higher co-pays for prescription drugs, a requirement that members fill out a health assessment form or be charged 20 percent of their plan, and a prohibition of health-care coverage for spouses of new workers - those hired after Dec. 30 of this year - who have health care provided through their own noncounty jobs. After three years and many protests, including ones in front of the county office building, the county executive's home and the deputy county executive's home, the union and county last month reached a tentative agreement that both sides said was fair and equitable. The vote was tallied yesterday.

"We didn't settle in two weeks. We needed three years, and that's because it was hard-fought negotiations," said Deputy County Executive Larry Schwartz. Although Schwartz said having union members contribute to their plans was "dead on arrival" from the union perspective, the new concessions were the "closest we've come to sharing the costs of health care." "They didn't get everything they wanted. We didn't get everything we wanted," he said. "I think it was a fair and responsible contract for the employees and all of the taxpayers."