

## Two IEA local leaders share their formula for building strength through family, communication, cooperation, training and community outreach

**D**avid Massena and Brent Fisher are co-presidents of the 85-member Greenville Education Support Professionals Association (GESPA). The local represents all classifications of non-certified staff, including secretaries, paraprofessionals, food service employees, custodians, maintenance and transportation employees. Members of this local association work in three Bond County communities — Sorento, Pochontas and Greenville.



*ESP members Brent Fisher, left and David Massena*

The GESPA was organized and chartered in the early 1990s. Massena was elected its first local president. According to UniServ Director Marcus Albrecht, the organizing effort wasn't confined just to GESPA.

“At that time, the IEA began encouraging ESPs to organize non-certified bargaining units,” said Albrecht. “We had many unorganized non-certified employees in our area. Our region put together an ESP organizing task force made up of ESP leaders from several different locals. They went out to school districts and spoke to non-certified staff, encouraging them to organize under the IEA banner. The effort was quite successful. Many new locals were organized. At one time we were told that regions in the Edwardsville Office represented more than 10 percent of the ESPs in IEA.”

Massena and Fisher are highly respected, well-rounded, long-term community members with many community connections. Massena's wife recently retired as Southwestern Illinois College Comptroller. Massena personally serves as a Sunday School Superintendent of his local church. They have three sons. One is a Technical Project Manager in Seattle; another works in the Webster University Admissions Office; the third coached a youth soccer team and ran a local soccer camp and then went on to coach soccer at Lincoln College.

Fisher attended Brownstown High School and was a star athlete on the school's track team. After high school he worked in construction and then came to the school district where he has been employed for the past 18 years. He served for six years as the elected president of the Brownstown Community Center. His wife also works as a custodian for the school district. They live in the country and have two children—a son who graduated from Greenville College and is a successful business manager for a local company, and a daughter who graduated from business college and lives nearby.

Massena and Fisher make a strong leadership team. Over the years they have earned credibility by being practical and principled local leaders.

For the past two decades, through strategic negotiations, the GESPA has achieved an excellent contract and the local leaders have seen to it that the

hard won contract rights were enforced. In recent years the state's underfunding of public education has led to a reduction in the number of positions within the district. The local also absorbed a large number of new employees when a multi-district special education cooperative dissolved and its employees were hired by the district. More recently the district received a Kindergarten Readiness Program grant for an early childhood education program. This brought the potential of additional new members. Each has been personally welcomed and encouraged to join and become active in the local.

The Greenville school district has also had a series of different superintendents and changes in the composition of the school board. These changes have sometimes created challenges for the leadership team.

"We have spent considerable time developing new relationships," said Fisher. "Sometimes we have felt tested. But we keep focusing on making progress for employees and creating a great place for children to learn and grow. We're proud of our efforts."

In addition to representing non-certified employees, the local actively supports a yearlong district "backpack program" which provides weekend food to needy students. This past year the local applied for and received an IEA SCORE grant in order to provide Christmas presents to foster children in the county.

Local GESPA leaders are also involved in IEA's legislative and political action activities. They regularly meet with area legislators and were successful in convincing the local state senator to support IEA's legislation to limit subcontracting/outsourcing of non-certified school staff.

These types of engagement efforts, according to Albrecht, contribute to the overall success of the local.

"Because of the high quality and comprehensiveness of the local's contract, many teacher locals in southern Illinois have reviewed the GESPA contract for ideas in their preparation for their own contract negotiations proposals," Albrecht said. "It really is a tribute to the work the entire GESPA has done."

Members of the GESPA have also developed and maintained a strong working relationship with the Greenville Education Association, the district teachers' local. This relationship has already produced results. Last year, at the urging of the two local presidents, both associations came out publicly in support of a countywide facilities sales tax initiative. The locals purchased an ad in the community paper asking voters to support the referendum. This support was credited as crucial in the community's passage of the referendum.

"It's been part of our mutual commitment to build and sustain a quality school district," said Massena. "We work together whenever we can and each group mutually supports the other."



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