

Smith

Day one, 2008, MEA-MFT executive director David Smith will retire. When he does he will have completed fifteen years of service to our great union.

He will be missed.

Smith is the consummate professional. Analytical, caring, dispassionate, nonjudgmental, self-effacing, he helped guide us through difficult, sometimes turbulent, yet creative and productive years.

When Smith came to work for us, MEA-MFT did not exist. We were just a maybe, a possibility, a-who-would-ever-imagine. We were barely at the front end of all that was to come.

We were the former MEA and the former MFT. We had just begun what proved to be a decade long march to merger. Whereas each of our former selves played significant leading roles in public education and public service across Montana, we were in fact pale facsimiles of what we were to become. . . once we merged.*

Smith never wavered in his support for and guidance of our merger. This was his greatest contribution to what we have become—the largest union of any variety in Montana, more than half of the AFL-CIO, with members dedicated to quality public programs living and working in every community across our state.

Navigating stormy waters

Today, looking back, one might erroneously conclude that merger of MEA and MFT was an easy walk through the park, the inevitable outcome of smart people coming together in common cause, a more or less so-what.

If only.

Boo birds peered down from every branch. “Be careful, be wary, go back, start over,” they squawked. Not every member/leader got on board. Our NEA national affiliate strained to be helpful, but purposefully worked to slow things down.

When delegates to the 1998 NEA Representative Assembly in New Orleans caved to petty jealousies and silly suspicions and rejected NEA merger with AFT, we had every reason to believe

a Montana-specific merger might be impossible if both our national affiliates were not on board.

At that point, a different executive, a more cautious executive, an executive less committed to the dramatic changes we aspired to implement right here in Montana, might have advised us to throw in the towel.

But Smith never flinched. He never gave in. He stood right in there shoulder to shoulder with MEA and MFT governance and staff leaders determined to make merger a reality.

And make a merged MEA-MFT work better than either former part.

Smith never wavered in his conviction that we can and must not only grow bigger, we must grow better.

He will be missed.

We wish Smith the best as he moves on—whatever he decides to do hereafter.

Burke takes the helm

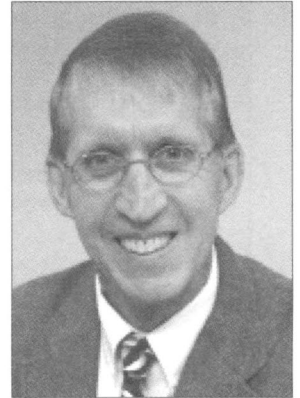
Day two, 2008, Erik Burke, our current director of public policy and professional development, will become only the second MEA-MFT executive director in history.

Burke never worked for the former MEA. He never worked for the former MFT. He knows only MEA-MFT.

We are looking forward to Burke’s leadership. Like Smith, he is the consummate professional. Articulate, diplomatic, self-starter, experienced in the programs and services our members deserve and demand, Burke will help lead us into the future David Smith helped design and deliver.

Marco Ferro will take Burke’s position. An accomplished music educator, Ferro has served for several years as president of the Bozeman Education Association and member of the MEA-MFT board of directors. He will be great. ■

** To read a quick history of our march to merger, check out www.mea-mft.org/chron.html. For the record, MEA and MFT officially merged September 1, 2000. Three other NEA and AFT state affiliates are merged: Florida, Minnesota, and New York.*



BY ERIC FEAYER
MEA-MFT PRESIDENT

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