

# Behind the Dome

THE UNION VOICE OF THE MEN AND WOMEN BEHIND BNA



SUMMER 2005

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## GUILD ASKS BNA TO BEGIN BARGAINING THE EFFECTS OF MOVING TO VIRGINIA

On Aug. 17, Reza Namdar, unit chair, and Paul Reilly, the unit's union representative, met with Joseph Sanneman, BNA's director of employee and labor relations, to discuss ground rules for negotiating the effects of the company's decision to move to Crystal City.

On July 14, the Guild presented management with a letter requesting effects bargaining, a legal requirement of management to deal with the union regarding the effects of its decisions that affect bargaining units—such as relocation—as opposed to regularly scheduled bargaining on the terms and conditions of employment.

The Guild has circulated a survey to bargaining unit employees to gather information on the effects the move will have and how people feel about various topics that may be the subject of effects or regular bargaining.

BNA employees have already raised a number of concerns regarding the move out of long-time home in the District. Among the most important issues to everyone are transportation and commuting. As Metro raises its fares and parking rates, employees are concerned about the effects of possible increased

transportation costs and how BNA's tax-deductible transportation subsidy may change. Employees who drive to work—many of whom will be driving further—are concerned about the parking situation in Crystal City. The increased commute for many also makes the extension and improvement of BNA's telecommuting policy an item of renewed interest.

Other concerns are more immediate: if employees are to have a say in the design of the new building, *now* is the time to make our voices heard.

For example, although BNA has expressly said it will not include a physical fitness facility, we can still encourage the company to include showers. As the company has proudly noted in the informational package delivered to all employees, the Mount Vernon bike trail ends very near the new location. But workers who commute by bike, or those who jog or run during their lunch break, may not want an expensive gym membership just to have a place to shower and change into work clothes.

Our cafeteria unfortunately will not be joining us, and we will not have a new one across the river. Therefore, we will need a sensible and affordable alternative to the fast food and pricey eateries in the Under-

ground and elsewhere nearby. Many of our co-workers work the later hours, and will need access to healthy food. Members have indicated that having more and better break rooms could be a priority.

BNA has been progressive in contracting with a daycare provider so that parents of young children have ready access to emergency daycare. BNA hasn't given any indication how it plans to replace the current provider.

It is also time that the Guild be represented on the company's Relocation Committee. Management's stated reasoning for excluding employees from participation—that the negotiations needed to be kept secret—is now a moot point.

Whatever concerns you have regarding our move—transportation subsidies, parking, facility enhancements, daycare—speak up! Talk with your guild representative, contact our union officers, and lend your strength to our efforts to make sure that our new headquarters across the river meets your needs and expectations.

*By Sean Forbes*

## UNIONS IGNORING PROFESSIONAL, CLERICAL WOMEN; MISSING ORGANIZING OPPORTUNITIES, RESEARCHER SAYS

A study released by Cornell University researcher Kate Bronfenbrenner earlier this year found that female professional, technical, and clerical workers are not being actively recruited for unions as their blue-collar male brethren are. This is despite statistics showing that when recruited, women nurses and teachers become enthusiastic



union joiners.

In her study conducted at Cornell School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Bronfenbrenner presents statistics gathered from National Labor Relations Board certifications, 1999 through 2003, and several state labor boards.

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## WELCOME TO THE NEW *BEHIND THE DOME*

Some of you who have been around BNA for a few years will remember our old “Behind the Dome.”

As the Guild prepares for negotiations and as the company prepares for the move to Crystal City, it’s time to bring back our newsletter. Right now, we’re planning to put out a quarterly four-page newsletter.

We would like this to be a forum for BNA employees to express their concerns about what is going on now and what they would like to see happen in the future. We want to bring you some of the issues of concern—not just at BNA (although mainly that)—but also in the broader labor movement of which we are a part.

We welcome your contributions and suggestions. Any comments and feedback would be greatly appreciated. We want to bring you news you can use and address the issues that interest and concern you.

We’re open to ideas for improvement and suggestions for topics that



concern you—at BNA, in contract negotiations, about the move, or in the labor community.

And, of course, if you’d like to volunteer to work on one article, one issue, or as many future issues as you’d like, let us know. We can use as much help as we can get. If you’d like to volunteer, contact Rich Bronson or any of the Guild officers. Since the coordinator for each issue will vary, the editor of the next issue will contact you. And we’ll add you to the newsletter e-mail list to keep you posted as plans for new issues develop.

Enjoy our first new issue. We look forward to providing many more.

*By Kathy Carroll*

## PEERING THROUGH DENSE FOG IN VISION CARE

If you were hoping to read an article clarifying the details of BNA’s Vision Service Plan, I have three words for you: find another article. I can’t figure out what the VSP covers and doesn’t cover, and a few others are similarly wandering in a fog. A thin silver lining is that we’re all in this together, and perhaps after this article appears, so will some clarity of terms with our eye care.

First, the good news. We have an

eye care plan—not all employers offer one—and some people are delighted with VSP. Laura Francis, who joined BNA in February as a legal reporter with the Government Employee Relations Report, went for her annual eye exam recently. “Not only were the people there telling me how great VSP is in comparison to other plans, [but] I wound up paying for new glasses and the exam for about \$300 less than if I had paid entirely by myself (which I

used to do before I came here, when I didn’t have vision insurance),” she said.

A fair portion of the price of eye glasses are covered by VSP, especially if you do not require thick Coke-bottle lenses. Pearl Vision seems to be affiliated with Aetna and will give Aetna health insurance members a deep discount on eyewear, regardless of their vision insurance.

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## UNIONS IGNORING PROFESSIONAL, CLERICAL WOMEN

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The stats show that women constitute 58 percent of professional/technical “white-collar” workers in professions in the business, legal, and scientific fields, yet have the lowest rates of union participation, only 6 percent organized.

At the same time, more traditional professional fields that are largely dominated by women (nursing and teaching) show high rates of union participation from 80 to 92 percent. “There’s been a heavy resource alloca-

tion by union organizers in their recruiting campaigns towards blue collar men,” argued Rutgers University professor and study reviewer Dorothy Sue Cobble. “It is hardest nowadays to recruit new and unionize new white male factory workers, yet those are the very sectors of the workforce unions recruiters are chasing, while neglecting other workers, such as white collar women.”

Cobble suggested that one answer might be offering a “different type of union” to clerical and technical workers

that provides benefits such as filing lawsuits or grievances on the white-collar women’s behalf, with less emphasis on a hard push towards collective bargaining for high salaries.

“The unions now need to focus on professional workers,” Bronfenbrenner agreed. Copies of the paper can be requested by e-mail at [klb23@cornell.edu](mailto:klb23@cornell.edu).

*By Sue Darcey*

## PEERING THROUGH DENSE FOG IN VISION CARE

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So, a good rule of thumb is to check Pearl Vision first for glasses.

But as lenses and frames come in all different sizes and strengths, it is difficult to plan in advance what one's costs will be. It's like our move to Crystal City—who knows what it will cost, or what traffic will be like on the bridges over the Potomac on any given day? Approach your eye care costs in the same spirit.

For the record, if you use a network provider (oh, these terms will destroy what's left of the English language), here is what VSP states it will cover:

- Routine eye exams are covered once a year. Your co-payment is \$10. The plan pays the balance.

- Lenses are covered once a year, frames once every other year. Your co-payment is \$30 for lenses and/or frames. The plan pays the balance, up to the plan allowance. You pay all charges that exceed the plan allowance. *[Please note the many exceptions to the coverage of lenses listed below.]*

- Elective contact lenses are covered at an allowance of \$95 instead of eyeglass lenses and frames. You pay the balance.

- Medically necessary contact lenses are provided by VSP with prior approval.

- The plan is designed to cover visual needs rather than cosmetic materials. There will be an [unspecified] extra charge if you select the following: blended lenses, oversize lenses, progressive multifocal lenses, photochromic lenses, tinted lenses other than Pink #1 or Pink #2, coated or laminated lenses, cosmetic lenses, optional cosmetic processes, UV protected lenses, or a frame that costs more than the plan allowance.

- Finally, the plan covers routine vision care only. The plan provides no benefit for professional services or materials connected with: orthoptics or vision training or any associated supplemental testing, plano lenses, two pairs of glasses in lieu of bifocals, or replacement of lost or broken lenses or frames (except at normal intervals for plan benefits). Some of these services

may be covered under the regular medical plan.

If you go out of the network, the terms are the same, but you must pay for everything upfront and then submit your bills to VSP for compensation.



### *Contact Lens Confusion*

The more serious problems seem to arise with contact lenses, which are generally more expensive than spectacles anyway. I have worn contact lenses since I was 12 years old and would walk into walls without them. Shortly after joining BNA, my vision grew a bit blurry—I do wish that the font size in PS2000's URL-checking tool could be enhanced. I went to my eye doctor, who suggested that I get bifocals. Bifocal contact lenses, that is. But those lenses are not covered by VSP. I paid \$1,000 for my contact lenses, as if they were cosmetically-tinted lenses rather than medically necessary lenses.

Sue Darcy's story is similar. She joined BNA in 2004 as a reporter for the *Human Resources Report*. She declined to sign on with Aetna or Kaiser, because she's had trouble before in getting full care with these two, and in getting these insurers to pay health care claims. She elected instead to sign on with M.D. IPA.

In our yellow "BNA Group Health Program for 2004" booklet, there is a summary of the major plan provisions. Under M.D. IPA's "Vision Care" section, plan benefits are listed as: "Routine vision care is covered, subject to a \$25 co-payment. Discounted eyewear and related services are available at participating optical centers."

Sue needed new contact lenses in September 2004, and started calling optometrist providers, drawn from the list in the M.D.

ner in her town of Hyattsville, Md., if they still accepted her insurance and if part of the cost of the exam and contact lenses would be covered. She found only one optometrist's office, Stanley Tempchin on Belcrest Rd. in Hyattsville, who said it would accept her insurance and cover part of her expenses.

But Sue discovered that her "routine vision care" was not subject to the \$25 co-payment outlined in the booklet. Instead, her portion of the exam cost \$90. But the biggest shock came when the eye doctor announced that her contact lenses would cost approximately \$600 for a year's supply, and that none of that was covered under her plan. Sue was also told that she had to buy a full year's supply of lenses right then, "because we can only sell them in full box amounts." She was stunned, particularly since the plan promised that "discounted eyewear and related services are available at participating optical centers." The receptionist flatly told her that "your insurance company tells us that covering the cost of your eyewear is 'elective' for the doctor, and we have elected not to cover it."

After much bickering back and forth, the optometrist offered one complimentary pair of lenses, but then charged her \$50 for a pair of reading glasses, which the doctor said she might need with the new lenses, for close reading.

Sue said she felt totally ripped off. Later, when her year's supply of contact lenses wore out, she contacted Lens Crafters, saw a doctor there, and the entire cost of her exam, plus a 12-month supply of contact lenses, came to \$360. "The contacts I got from Lens Crafters were also superior to the ones at Stanley Tempchin's office, and I no longer required reading glasses," she said. "In the long run, I was better off not using my insurance provider at all for vision care, and I got better quality of service."

We will all, I hope, soon see our vision care terms more clearly. Until then, I'm examining canes and seeing eye dogs.

*By Wendy Leibowitz*

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By the way, VSP has a new toll-free phone number: 800-877-7195. Visit [www.vsp.com](http://www.vsp.com).



# Behind the Dome

*Behind the Dome* is written and edited by Washington-Baltimore Newspaper Guild members employed at the Bureau of National Affairs and produced by WBNG. WBNG can be reached at 202-785-3650.

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#### **Editorial Policy**

We invite your submission of articles and letters to the editor. Forward any material to one of the Guild officers who will forward it to the editor of the next issue. We reserve the right to edit submissions for space, content, and appropriateness.

If you have any ideas or suggestions for future topics you would like to see covered, please contact Rich Bronson by phone or e-mail. We look forward to hearing from you. We want this newsletter to serve the interests of the workers here at BNA.

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## QUESTIONS FOR UPCOMING ISSUES OF *BEHIND THE DOME*

**As we plan for our future issues, we have some ideas for articles but we would like some additional feedback from bargaining unit members.**

If you can answer any of the following questions, please contact Sue Darcey:

1. Have you ever had a problem with your BNA paycheck not arriving on time?
2. Do you think Ceridian is doing a great job with your getting your complete pay and leave credited to you on time?
3. Have you ever had a problem not getting your complete pay, or your proper annual leave/sick leave/personal leave balance being credited on your Ceridian paycheck stub?
4. If you did have problems with your BNA paycheck, were you able to

contact Ceridian and get the problem corrected promptly, say, within 24 hours?

5. What was the nature of your problem?
6. Did a BNA accounting or payroll person also help you with your problem, or were you told you could only deal with Ceridian?

7. How long, and how many phone calls and follow-up did it ultimately take to resolve your problem?

8. If you have direct deposit, how swiftly after payday Wednesdays is your check deposited to your account?

9. Do you have any other comments about our Ceridian payroll system?

If you have answers to the following questions, please contact Wendy Leibowitz:

1. Have you ever been told to remove items from your personal Web site and/or blog?

2. Have any limits been placed on your off-duty activities?

For the following question, please contact Kathy Carroll:

If you've served on a joint committee, what has been your experience? Positive? Negative? Problems? Any issues you wanted addressed that management wouldn't consider?

[Your responses will remain confidential if you so request.]

## ANSWER THE CALL

**Your union needs you.**



Consider volunteering a little bit of your spare time to help make our union a little bit better than it is. Do you have design skills, do you draw, write poetry, act, sing, dance, play an instrument, or sew? Let us know. Contact Steve Cook at [scook@bna.com](mailto:scook@bna.com)

**Put your talents to good work.**