



Delegates elect top officers and Executive Board with no opposition Feb. 26; new vice presidents are installed (left), and AFSCME ends administratorship.

“New team for a better union”

By GREGORY N. HEIRES

THE District Council 37 delegates chose Lillian Roberts to head the union Feb. 26 in an election that was also a homecoming for the new executive director.

“My life has come full circle,” she said after taking the oath of office with the union’s three other new top officers and 20 vice presidents. Ms. Roberts served as the number two official at DC 37 during the 1960s and ‘70s and led the organizing as the membership soared from 30,000 to 120,000.

The 300 delegates also elected Local 372 President Veronica Montgomery Costa as president, Local 983 President Mark Rosenthal as treasurer and Local 2627 President Edward W. Hysyk as secretary.

“Tonight is a historic night,” said SSEU Local 371 President Charles Ensley in his nominating speech for Ms. Roberts, who was known during her previous 17 years at the union for her militant leadership, for championing membership services and for broad social justice concerns.

“Members come first”

“Lillian Roberts has spent her adult life defending the rights of working people,” said Mr. Ensley, who noted that Ms. Roberts cut her teeth as a union activist when she started out as a nurse’s aide in Chicago in the 1940s. He called Ms. Roberts a “teacher” and a “fighter” and said she “understands that members come first.”

When Ms. Roberts came to DC 37 in the 1960s, she spearheaded a successful organizing drive among 22,000 hospital aides and clerical workers and played a central role in creating the DC 37 Education Fund, the Personal Services Unit and the union’s campus of the College of New Rochelle.

Ms. Roberts ran for office with a slate of candidates who stressed the need for job protection, improved union services, more effective political action and greater unity within DC 37. The group ran with the slogan, “A New Team for a Better Union.” Because

the candidates were not opposed, Local 1321 President John Socha, head of the DC 37 Election Committee, immediately declared them elected. The two other committee members, Local 1219 President Magda De Jesus and Local 374 President Jacob Azeke, helped Mr. Socha run the election.

Under the union constitution, any local that represents more than 5 percent of the total membership is entitled to a vice presidential seat on the DC 37 Executive Board. The leaders nominated and elected for those posts at the Feb. 26 meeting were Mr. Ensley of Local 371, Local 372 Executive Vice President Santos Crespo, Local 375 President Claude Fort, Local 420 President James Butler and Local 1549 President Eddie Rodriguez.

The at-large positions on the new Board went to 15 local presidents who were also nominated and elected without opposition as vice presidents of DC 37 (see at right).

In a poignant moment during her acceptance speech, Ms. Roberts paid tribute to her mother. Ms. Roberts said that two days before she passed away, her mother said, “Lil, your work isn’t over yet.” Returning to DC 37, Ms. Roberts said she finally understands the true meaning of that prophetic remark.

Reflecting on her upbringing in a Chicago tenement, Ms. Roberts told the delegates she was taught that “material riches mean very little” while “love, respect and dignity” are what really count in life.

Mr. Rosenthal said he expected the new leadership team to make DC 37 a tougher and more progressive union that would “always focus on the needs of the membership.” Mr. Rosenthal nominated Ms. Montgomery Costa, describing her as a strong, honest



New vice presidents applaud Lillian Roberts after installation.

leader who had reinvigorated her local.

For her part, Ms. Montgomery Costa pledged that as president she would strive to make sure past differences are put aside and would “give 110 percent to make that happen and take DC 37 to new heights.”

Mr. Hysyk noted that even during the union’s recent “darkness,” the institution never compromised its mission as the “ultimate safety net” for the membership.

Administratorship ends

After he swore in the new leaders, former Administrator Lee Saunders announced the immediate end of the trusteeship DC 37 had been under since 1998.

The eagerly awaited news came in a letter from Gerald W. McEntee, president of DC 37’s parent union, AFSCME, which imposed the administratorship because of vote fraud and financial corruption at DC 37.

“You have your union back,” said Mr. Saunders to applause from the delegates.

After she commended Mr. Saunders for his leadership as administrator, Ms. Roberts made a pledge to the membership: “I will never let you down.”

She told the delegates, “We have one thing in common: We all want to make sure that the members of this great union get the respect and services they deserve.”

Executive Board

The following DC 37 vice presidents were elected Feb. 26:

Donald Afflick
Local 1655

Leonard Allen
Local 2021

Patrick Bahnken
Local 2507

Melvin Bentley
Local 1502

Mario Braga
Local 1931

James Butler
Local 420

Santos Crespo
Local 372

Charles Ensley
Local 371

Claude Fort
Local 375

Michael Hood
Local 1505

Barry Jamison
Local 154

Cliff Koppelman
Local 1070

Ray Markey
Local 1930

Walthene Primus
Local 957

Joan Reed
Local 2054

Eddie Rodriguez
Local 1549

Jim Tucciarelli
Local 1320

Esther Tucker
Local 384

Maf Misbah Uddin
Local 1407

Edna Williams
Local 1597