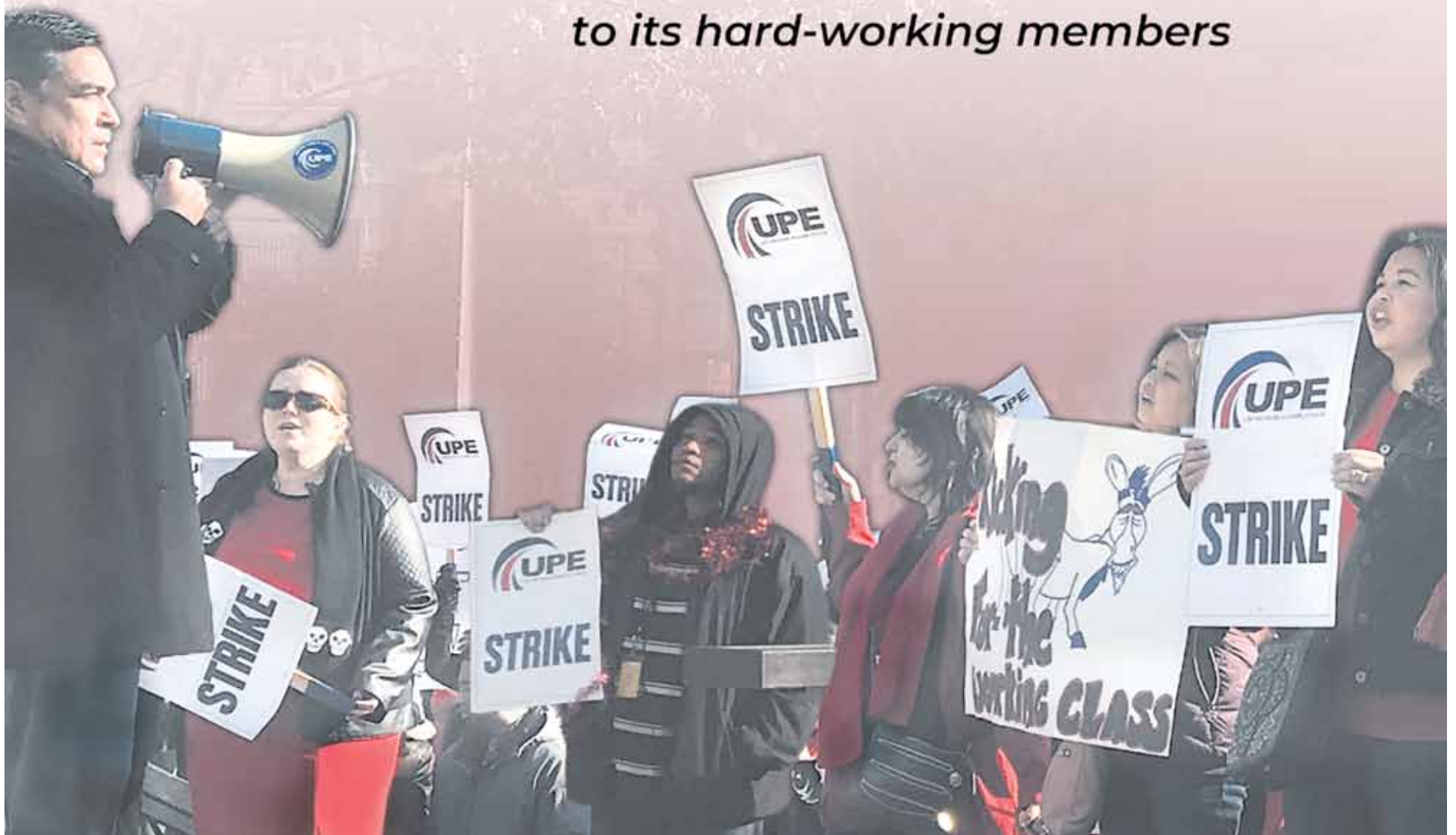


TOGETHER



WE ARE STRONG

*United Public Employees is dedicated
to its hard-working members*



DIRECT REPRESENTATION

BY
THEA
MARIE
ROOD

Learn how a Sacramento-based, member-run union protects workers' rights — and gives them a voice in the process

The United Public Employees union serves approximately 4,500 county government employees — and it does so through local, personal, hands-on relationships with its members, as well as a grassroots, bottom-up decision-making process.

“Our union was established to provide direct representation to our members,” said Ted Somera, executive director of UPE, which is located in Sacramento. “[So] when you call, you won’t get a call center back east somewhere. And the turn-around time is 72 hours; an assigned business agent will get back to you

within that time to address your issue.”

That same agent will see the member all the way “from point A to point Z,” even if that eventually ends in arbitration, Somera said. “This is different than other unions — we’re not handing you off to someone else, which can be frustrating: ‘I already told that person my story, now I’m telling it over and over.’ It also means it’s

more personal and more time is spent on your particular case.”

Cases can involve unfair labor practices or working conditions, as well as contract disputes affecting salaries and benefits. Union members include county and court employees in Sacramento, Sutter, Yuba and Merced counties — all of whom are involved in union decisions, up to and including the choice to strike. “The bargaining team has to approve the authorization to strike by taking it back to the members and the members have to decide,” Somera said.

Such partnership results in employees who have a strong voice both on the job and within their own union, said Fabrizio Sasso, executive director of the Sacramento Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO, a federation of 100 local unions throughout six counties that works closely with UPE.

“You saw it last year when the Sacramento court employees went out on a one-day strike,” Sasso said. “It showed how strong the UPE members are. There were a lot of people on the picket line, fighting for things we all advocate for.”

Both the Council and UPE have as their missions improving the lives of working-class people by ensuring a high quality of life through good wages, benefits and retirement. But they also increasingly advocate for issues beyond work, such as health care for all and rent control.

“Our members have come to expect that their executive director will be there speaking up,” Somera said. “Look, folks just want to come to work and earn a decent living, take care of their families, not be oppressed or suppressed.”

But UPE members also care deeply for the public they serve. “We worked with UPE on making Cesar Chavez Day a paid county holiday,” Sasso recalled. “And when they got it, (union members) decided to do community service projects. So they advocated for their own day off, and then gave their time back to help their communities.”

“Look, folks just want to come to work and earn a decent living, take care of their families, not be oppressed or suppressed.”

Ted Somera
Executive Director, UPE



Ted Somera, UPE's executive director, helps give a strong voice to Sacramento County employees.

PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES

SUPPORT WHEN YOU NEED IT

Helping professions carry their own stresses, but unfair office management shouldn't be one of them

BY THEA MARIE ROOD



Tatyana Kagan has been a county social worker for 26 years, arranging and providing in-home support for low-income seniors and people with disabilities.

"I really love my job," said Kagan, who is originally from Russia. "I work with the Russian and Armenian community — this is my culture — and I can really help them."

In fact, between her professional training, specialized language skills and unique understanding of her clients' backgrounds, she's always considered herself to be very good at her job — a judgment that was echoed for more than two decades in her supervisor's evaluations of her work.

But then came a new supervisor who changed the working conditions of the department and began to micromanage the social work staff, many of whom had worked from home and arranged their own schedules with clients. Now they were expected to account for every minute of every day, spend set amounts of time at certain predetermined hours in clients' homes, and had to work from the office. Several of the social workers, including Kagan, were suddenly accused of poor job performance.

"I received a letter of reprimand and I was invited to an interview with HR," recalled Kagan. "It was a very nervous

time. But my [union] business agent, John Bonilla, was there when I arrived for the interview, which lasted for eight hours over two days. John also told me after that first interview, 'They want to fire you.' He understood what was going on."

The county did fire Kagan — which the union was able to negotiate into administrative leave with pay. Kagan began to fear she needed an attorney, but her agent advised her to remain calm and go step-by-step through the union's process.

"It might happen to anybody. ... I was a very good worker and I did not expect this situation at all."

Tatyana Kagan
Social worker and UPE member

"Now I know that he had the experience and that he was right," Kagan said. "At the arbitration hearing, the judge focused on my supervisor: 'Why did you fire her?'"

Kagan was immediately reinstated and her program manager, supervisor and both HR staffers were asked to retire or move to other jobs. All the social workers were able to return to their autonomous working conditions. "Now I work from home, just like before," said Kagan, who also is back in charge of managing her in-home visits with clients.

But she has a word of warning for other public employees. "It might happen to anybody — as I said, I was a very good worker and I did not expect this situation at all," Kagan said. "So I suggest everyone be a member of the union."

BALANCING THE SCALES

Unfair labor practices can be fairly obvious, like employers refusing to bargain in good faith or not honoring a contract. But they also can be more subtle, said UPE Executive Director Ted Somera.

"For example, the county just had a budget hearing and decided to eliminate a bunch of vacant positions," he said. "But the remaining employees are doing more work for the same money and are impacted in terms of sick leave, vacation, workload and overall efficiency. If the county refuses to meet, their refusal maybe an unfair labor practice."

Whatever the circumstance, the union moves through these steps:

1. A UPE business agent contacts the director/ employer to try to work out the conflict through a process called "meet-and-confer."
2. If that fails, UPE "proves merit" to bring the case to the Public Employee Relations Board, and a complaint is filed.
3. An attempt is made to settle the case through PERB's State Mediation Conciliatory Service.
4. If that fails, a PERB hearing is held and that decision is binding.

ALWAYS ON YOUR SIDE

A reasonable request for ADA accommodations was denied and the union stepped in to save a career

BY THEA MARIE ROOD

Erica Flores-Santoyo does critical work: She helps ensure low-income residents of Sacramento County have health care and enough food to eat.

She also didn't ask for much when she got her job at the county. "I have a physical disability," Flores-Santoyo explained. "And our building has no [dedicated] parking—we share a parking lot with the Sacramento Natural Foods Co-op at 28th and R, which is about one block away and a five-to-six minute walk. It's a simple task for most people, but with my condition, it can be hard — and hard to get to there on time."

Although she was parking by 7:45 every morning, she was arriving at the office about three minutes past her designated start time, so she asked her manager for an accommodation: Could they get her a closer parking place or let her come in a little later? No, she was told, and when she began to fear for her job — she was still on probation and could be let go with no stated reason — she contacted the union.

"My business agent, Seth Alexander, immediately determined that I had asked for an ADA accommodation and management had failed to comply," she said. "And the irony of it all was I'd worked before for one of the biggest employers in Sacramento and they made every accommodation — they were wonderful — and nothing with me was a problem."

Together, she and her agent researched the laws and went into arbitration armed with facts. "Just knowing my rights, and even that they knew a union rep was there and he knew my rights, (was) so important," Flores-Santoyo said. "We are eligibility specialists, but the union helps us with our own self-

"Just knowing my rights, and even that they knew a union rep was there and he knew my rights, (was) so important."

Erica Flores-Santoyo
County Eligibility Specialist
and UPE member

care. Without it, we could end up on the other side, and we want to continue to be employable and to work. I could have lost my career."

This is in fact the mission of the union, said Angel Barajas, a UPE business agent who frequently assists individuals on issues of attendance and discipline.

"Not only are we looking to see if any rights are violated, but we also look at any policy and laws that are violated," he said. "We typically respond in less than one business day, investigate thoroughly, interview people, sit with members and discuss options. UPE business agents tend to be problem-solvers that don't look at things as black and white — we see different angles and many solutions. And we always advocate on the side of the employee."

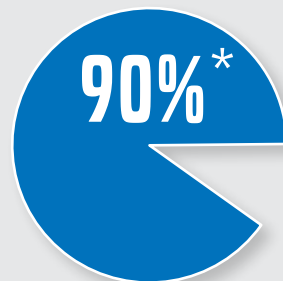


BY THE NUMBERS

One look at UPE's extremely high membership rate gives good insight into how members feel about their union.

"If it wasn't for the union — if we didn't have a seat at the table — the county would implement a lot of outrageous things," said Crystal Jones, a UPE business agent. "We do a good job at mitigating negative impacts for employees."

UPE's membership rate compared to overall union membership rates



**Nine out of 10
eligible county
workers join UPE**

10.8%* National overall
union membership rate

33.9%* National public sector
union membership rate

6.4%* National private sector
union membership rate

* According to the U.S. Board of Labor Statistics, 2018

UPLIFTING THE COMMUNITY

BY
ANNE
STOKES

UPE successfully represents members in Merced County

In Merced County, supporting a family of three takes between \$55,000 and \$65,000 a year. Unfortunately for some county employees, their income falls short. Merced County clerical workers are among the lowest paid employees; at the highest pay grade, office assistants and account clerks earn less than \$50,000 a year. Even working full time, some rely on county aid to make ends meet.

During 2017-18 negotiations, general administrative support workers were hoping to see an improvement in their wages. Instead, the county's first proposal allowed for 0.5% wage increases. In comparison, the county offered other units up to 3%.

"We thought it should be fair for the lowest paid employees to get a significant raise just to be able to [meet] cost of living and be able to raise a family and really view Merced County as a career and not just a job," said Angel Barajas, UPE business agent. "At the bargaining table [the county] said they had the ability to pay ... they were *choosing* not to."

Barajas said the key to ensuring a successful outcome for members was reaching out to the county Board of Supervisors. Members appealed to the elected officials at a board meeting. It worked: Within a month, UPE was able to sign a one-year agreement with a 2% wage increase.

"As they explained their stories, the Board of Supervisors were able to understand that these are real hard-working people who are not only working to keep their families alive, but they're working to provide crucial services to those in need in Merced County," Barajas said. "We were able to put faces to numbers on spreadsheets, ... not just county workers, but residents of Merced County."

By March 2019, they were back at the table to negotiate a successor agreement. The county initially presented a 1% wage increase, but UPE Business Agents Crystal Jones and Angel Barajas were determined to build upon the last negotiation's success. Together with UPE members, Jones negotiated a

three-year agreement with an initial 3% raise and 2% raise the following year.

"If it wasn't for the union and their participation, they would have received one percent," Jones said, adding that ensuring a livable wage benefits more than just the workers themselves. "If they have a livable wage, they're contributing to their communities, they're spending, they're shopping, they're investing, which uplifts everybody."

"We were able to put faces to numbers on spreadsheets, ... not just county workers, but residents of Merced County."

Angel Barajas
UPE Business Agent



UPE Business Agents Crystal Jones, left, and Angel Barajas represented administrative support workers in recent contract negotiations with Merced County.

PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES

KEEPING THE AMERICAN DREAM ALIVE

Since its creation, UPE has fought for members' cost-of-living wage increases, retirement, affordable health care, safe working conditions and more.

"The American Dream is becoming much more unaffordable for the working class," said Ted Somera, UPE executive director. "By being part of a union, you are part of an extended family that will fight for your well-being not only at work but at home as well. As a union member, you become part of the solution in obtaining and maintaining the American Dream."



UPE is currently **4,500 members** strong with an average wage earned of **\$53,000**



UPE represents a **wide range of job classifications**, including: office assistants, communications operations dispatchers, sheriff records specialist, communicable disease investigators, courtroom clerks, court reporters, human services specialists and social workers.



UPE was the first and only union to lobby Sacramento County to recognize labor and civil rights activist Cesar Chavez. The Sacramento County Board of Supervisors approved **Cesar Chavez Day** holiday in May 2015.



Since 2017, UPE has awarded **\$19,000 in college scholarships** to member families.

Sacramento County court workers took action, knowing they had the support they needed.
PHOTO PROVIDED BY UNITED PUBLIC EMPLOYEES

A UNIFIED FRONT

Court employees banded together to fight for better pay – and won

BY THEA MARIE ROOD

The conflict between the county courts management and its workers was years in the making — and came to a head late last year when UPE members voted to strike.

“In 2010-11, the court managers came to us and said, ‘We’re in the hole and we don’t want to lay people off,’” recalled Brooke Ryan, a court reporter and the chair of the court technical bargaining unit. “And they told us either we had to take a pay cut to save people or they would lay them off. It created chaos and it scared people.”

It also put the union under enormous pressure that resulted in a very close vote, but eventually the employees agreed to

take a 5% pay cut and defer an upcoming pay raise — with the understanding no one would lose their jobs.

“But they went ahead and laid people off anyway,” Ryan said. “And to add insult to injury, management ballooned by 300 percent. And later we found out they had \$24 million in reserves when they laid people off and made us take pay cuts.”

By 2018, court employees hadn’t seen a decent raise in

“When we send out a message — ‘we need you’ — [our members] show up and fight.”

Detria Terry
Chair, UPE Board of Directors

nearly a decade, but the number of managers — and their salaries — kept going up, and vast sums of money were being diverted toward a court software program.

“They also haven’t brought people back, so it’s not just the pay,” Ryan said, citing doubled workloads and difficulty taking vacation or sick leave. “Court employees care about helping the public. You have a woman who is standing there bloody, trying to get a restraining order, so you keep showing up to work. You have to do right by the public — it’s our duty.”

The union began good-faith negotiations and worked hard with contract language, but soon it was obvious the court management “just wouldn’t move” and a strike was approved by members. “It’s very important to let them be included and make decisions,” said Detria Terry, chair of the UPE board of directors. “And none of us are on the East Coast, L.A., Seattle — we’re all right here.”

The workers eventually got more than the courts wanted to give them, and considered that a victory to build on.

“The courts think so poorly of us, they would never have even met with us if it wasn’t for the union,” Ryan said.

The strike also empowered workers and sent a message to county management across the board. “Our members get involved,” said Terry. “When we send out a message — ‘we need you’ — they show up and fight.”



THE UNION NEEDS YOU

Two types of union officers are directly elected by their peers: **shop stewards** and **governing board members** for each bargaining unit.

“If a union member is having an issue at the work-site — unfair treatment from the chain of command or a contract violation — their first point of contact is with the shop steward,” said James Starr, a county worker who is a steward himself, as well as the vice president of the UPE executive board and of the 008 governing board. “And ideally we like to see a grievance solved at the lowest possible level.”

Governing board members are involved in both “meet-and-confer” and contract negotiations. Bargaining unit board members are also eligible to serve on the **UPE Executive Board**.



“Board members and stewards, in addition to establishing policy and providing representation for members, also provide valuable information that is shared up and down,” Starr added. “That makes us stronger and more empowered to defend ourselves as employees.”

A FAMILY OF WORKERS

Q&A with United Public Employees senior business agent Michael 'Mico' Collins

BY ANNE STOKES

With 30 years of experience under his belt, Michael "Mico" Collins works with union members in need of help. For the past 11 years, he's represented and advocated for UPE members and helped them stand up for their rights as county workers.

As a business agent with UPE, how do you serve members?

Because of the multitude of policies and procedures, processes, mission statements, values statements [and] contracts, a lot of times employees have no clue about their actual rights. You have ADA issues, issues for personal injuries, all these different types of things that can occur on the job, stress-related issues, harassment, discrimination. A lot of those issues are mixed and intertwined with laws as well. So to navigate through those processes, they need help.

How is UPE different than other unions?

It's a smaller organization which allows for more personal attention for members. That also allows them participate more readily versus a large union. ... A smaller organization is much more personal, it's much more open. We think also that most of the focus for UPE is on representation ... versus larger organizations that may have a lot of other things going on like organizing [and] political action committees. They're less likely to be focused on the membership and representation for those members and making their work sites better.

How does creating better working conditions for UPE members help the entire community?

The more they are feeling good about their job, the more they produce. The more they produce, the more they help the

community, especially in jobs that are dealing with the public — financial aid and social service departments. ... If we can make their job better for them, in turn they're more apt to be able to take care of the needs of the public.

What do you want people to know about how unions can help them?

A lot of workers say, "What does the union do for us?" Well, you're the union! We're here to help you. We'll stand next to you, we'll start the fight for you, we'll end the fight for you, we will do everything we can, but we need you there. It's like family: When you don't participate in family, how strong is your family? It's the same for the union; it's a family of workers.

MEET UPE'S STAFF



TED SOMERA
Executive Director

For more than 27 years, I have been involved and worked within the labor movement. I have serviced every bargaining unit we represent here at UPE for the past 19 years, 11 of those years as the Executive Director. Our commitment to our membership is: to advocate and obtain improved livable wages and benefits including retirement; to enforce and protect our members rights prescribed within the negotiated contracts and law; to improve working conditions; and to give back to the communities in which our members reside. Our members come first, and when it comes to protecting our members rights, justice will neither be delayed nor denied!



JOHN BONILLA
Business Agent

I have worked in the labor movement for 20 years, but have been involved since birth. I have been with UPE for almost 11 years. It is incumbent upon those working in this profession to take an active role in maintaining a strong working class as it is my belief that a strong working class is the back bone of our economy.



MIKE COLLINS
Business Agent

I have been involved with the labor movement approximately 31 years, 11 of those years have been with UPE. The work at times can be extremely taxing but always rewarding. I enjoy helping others and have always had a passion for equitable treatment and fairness.



ANGEL BARAJAS
Business Agent

I have been involved with the labor movement almost my entire life but employed as staff for 12 years, in which seven have been with UPE. I love advocating for working families by ensuring that fair and equitable treatment at the workplace is enforced along with negotiating livable wages and benefits!



SETH ALEXANDER
Business Agent

I have been a part of the labor movement for 15 years, the last five with UPE. I am committed to protecting our workers' rights and ensuring management treats all workers with respect.



CRYSTAL JONES
Business Agent

I've been involved in the labor movement since 2011. I've been with UPE for four years. The most rewarding part of the work we do is helping workers find their voice and empowering them to stand up for their rights.



JENNIFER OLIVER
Office Manager/Executive Assistant

I have proudly served the UPE membership for nine years. I am excited about the work we do here; by providing the tools, we empower the working class and bridge the gap between our members and management.



NATALIE FOWLER
Senior Office Assistant

After recently relocating to California, I was intrigued by the idea of working at a labor union and supporting an organization that advocates for employee rights. I have been with UPE for eight months now and enjoy that each day offers unexpected challenges, insightful co-workers, rewarding learning experiences and an opportunity to serve others.



REQUEST TO JOIN

@ info@upe1.org

📞 916-736-9503

📍 9333 Tech Center
Drive, Suite 300
Sacramento, CA
95826

**Completed applications can be
submitted by email, mail or dropped off
in person.*

JOIN UNITED PUBLIC EMPLOYEES TODAY!

Union membership has its benefits. Standing united with UPE gives workers a voice in ensuring safe working conditions, equitable workplace treatment, retirement security, benefits, wages and more.

- Membership is not automatic. Employees **must enroll with UPE.**
- Dues are **1% of gross pay** for all members and can be paid via automatic payroll deduction.
- Employees can join immediately after being hired. **Even during employment probationary periods,** members still enjoy UPE protection.
- Unsure of which bargaining unit you're in? Contact UPE to find out and get to know your business agent!



For more information, visit www.upe1.org



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