

History of Local 5106

In the winter of 1996 Episcopal nurses, frustrated by a lack of respect from management, inconsistent awarding of merit raises and no recognition for seniority, began to consider unionizing. Our first attempt was half-hearted and management waged an aggression anti-union campaign. Votes challenged during the election resulted in the ballots being impounded for several months. During that time management was prohibited from making any changes in our wages or benefits. We were lulled into a false sense of security and we actually forgot about the election. Management, however, did not.

In August, 1996 the result of the election was announced. We lost.

Within days, letters went out to all of the nurses detailing cutbacks. Our weekend program and 36 for 40 hour program were abolished. Our sick time was cut from 12 to 6 days a year; our personal days were cut from five to two days a year. Anyone working less than forty hours a week was reduced to part-time status and benefits. With the decrease in hours and wages some nurses saw a 20% salary decrease. *Meanwhile unionized workers at Episcopal lost nothing.*

The shock propelled us into action. We realized that without the strength of a union and a legally binding contract we would never regain what we had lost. We formed an organizing committee and went shopping for the right union. After meeting with representative from three unions, we chose HPAE. Within two weeks of our first meeting, 70% of the RNs at Episcopal had signed cards calling for a union election. The hospital challenged our right to unionize based on the premise that we were all supervisors. The National Labor Relation Board ruled in our favor. We prepared for an anti-union campaign that never came.

On December 23, 1996 the nurses won an overwhelming victory: 210-31. The technicians followed soon after with their own union election victory.

In October 1997 the nurses and technicians of Local 5106, Health Professional and Allied Employees, signed their first contracts with Episcopal Hospital.

Fourteen months later Temple University Health Care System “acquired” Episcopal. On December 7, 1998 Temple imposed their “Terms and Conditions of Employment.” Temple officials not only refused to honor our contract they used a legal loophole to deny our union recognition. Temple reduced shift differential, deprived us of sick time and ignored our scheduled pay raises. Seniority and a real grievance procedure no longer existed.

Many Episcopal employees resigned almost immediately. Our existing staffing problems became critical. *We feared that Temple’s true intention was to drive away staff and downsize Episcopal until it no longer existed.*

Our response was immediate. We reorganized and applied to the Pennsylvania Labor Board for an election. Temple tried to postpone the election as long as possible with legal maneuvering over who should be included in the bargaining unit. Our threat to picket the Apollo (now known as the Liacouras Center) resulted in a speedy compromise and on March 23, 1999 our RN and Tech units won overwhelming victories for the second time.

We were ready to start bargaining immediately. Temple, however, wasted months of our time by coming to negotiations without proposals and without the authority to make a decision. When they finally did start to bargain their proposals were insults to the loyal employees who had remained at Episcopal. Realizing that Temple had no intention of bargaining seriously, our members approved a two-day strike for July 11 and 12, 1999.

In response to the strike Temple closed over half of the hospital and laid off a majority of our members. Now we were convinced that their plan was to keep enough of Episcopal open to channel patients to Temple.

We reached out to our political officials and community leaders to pressure Temple to reopen Episcopal fully or to share with us their plans for our future. We believed that our first step toward stabilizing Episcopal was a contract. Our bargaining committee went week after week to negotiate even though Temple's representatives rarely showed their faces. Temple hoped that if they ignored us long enough we would go away. It only strengthened our resolve to get a contract.

We took to the street again on Sunday, November 21, 1999 with a rally in front of the Apollo. (Now known as the Liacouras Center). We were joined by other union members and activists who spoke out on our behalf.

Temple finally realized we were not going away. By February 2000 a new contract was signed and ratified. *More importantly, in the course of our struggle, Temple made a public commitment to keep Episcopal open, which may not have happened without our persistence and hard work.* In the following years Episcopal became a whole new institution. In January 2001 our OB department was relocated to Temple. In March 2001 the operating room, short procedure unit, preadmission testing and endoscopy department were closed.

In May 2002 Behavioral Health started moving into Episcopal from Neumann and Temple. In 2003 we became known as Temple University Hospital, Episcopal Campus.

Local 5106 more than doubled in size, representing nurses in the ER, CRC, two extended acute psychiatric units, three acute care psychiatric units and one medical/telemetry unit, as well as the technicians in radiology, lab, heart station, respiratory and the Crisis Response Center.

In June of 2009, Northeastern Hospital closed and the Northeastern Ambulatory Care Center became part of Episcopal Campus adding new bargaining unit members in the following departments: out-patient chemotherapy, endoscopy, cardiology, radiology and the lab.

In February of 2010 a group of professionals made up of social workers and behavioral health therapists at Episcopal Hospital frustrated by unreasonable case loads and not having any say in the conditions of their employment decided they needed to be part of a union. When local 5106 leaders became aware of the professionals desire to organize our Local officers were happy to meet with them and share their organizing story and offer support for the fight ahead. HPAE assigned an organizer, Adam Clark, and before long the campaign was up and running. With an overwhelming majority of signed cards we met with Temple and asked for recognition on 8/26/10. They, of course, said no. The process would take longer than hoped for, but the Professionals were not deterred. A few months later 12/22/10 the Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board ruled that the social workers and behavioral therapists would become part of the RN bargaining unit pending on election. On January 27, 2011, despite a major snowstorm, the Social Workers and Behavioral Therapists came out and voted delivering an overwhelming 15 to 2 decision to become part of our Union.

For those of us who have been part of the struggle from the beginning and for those who have joined us along the way, it is clear that the decision to unionize was the right one. Being union has given us the voice that we need to protect our patients and ourselves.