**IEA Awesome Podcast**

**Episode 24 - Meet the Newest IEA Managers**

00:00 KELSEY: Welcome to the Awesome IEA Podcast brought to you by the Illinois Education Association.

00:05 DIANA: The podcast for curious well-informed Association members.

00:08 KELSEY: I’m one of your hosts, Kelsey Harms, a Computer Specialist from the IEA Program Development Department.

00:13 DIANA: And I’m Diana Zaleski, one of your Instructional Resource and Professional Development Directors from IEA Teaching and Learning.

00:20 KELSEY: The goal of this podcast is to educate our members about important new educational policy initiatives in a brief and hopefully entertaining format.

00:27 DIANA: Today we’re going to meet our three newest IEA managers. We’re so excited to introduce you to Sean Denney, IEA Director of Government Relations. Sean, thank you so much for joining us today.

00:39 SEAN: Happy to be here. Thank you very much.

00:41 KELSEY: First, can you tell us a little bit about yourself and what you did prior to your new director position?

00:47 SEAN: Sure, well, I actually have been a member of the Government Relations Department for over ten years now. Before I took on that job as a lobbyist in the Government Relations Department, I was actually a member of the IEA. I was a high school English teacher at Evanston Township High School. I was also a football coach there and I just moved up through the ranks as a Grassroots Political Activist, got elected to the Board of Directors.

1:12 I was also very active locally as far as my executive board was concerned. I was on the bargaining committee there. When the opportunity came to come work for the Government Relations Department it seemed like a really interesting challenge that doesn’t come around very often so I jumped on it and got the job and I’ve been down here for over ten years now. I’m very happy with the decision I made.

01:36 DIANA: Can you help us understand what your new role is in the organization?

01:40 SEAN: So, just like all the work that takes place in the Illinois Education Association, it’s really about advocacy on the behalf of our members. And, what we really focus on in the Government Relations Department is making sure our members’ voice is heard in the capitol.

01:56 Oftentimes our members can feel like they’re getting lost in the bureaucratic shuffle that often takes place in the state capitol. And, what we want to do is make sure that we’re hearing from our members, that the messages that they want to convey to our elected officials gets delivered to the right people and that action takes place on their behalf.

02:17 So, I really view my role as a part of being an extension of our members’ voices because I know that what they’re fighting for is for better schools and better education for all the students in Illinois. So, for me to be able to be their voice at the state capitol is a huge, huge honor. Now this is just an extension of the work that I’ve been doing for some time on behalf of our members.

02:40 KELSEY: Sean, can you share with us what you’re most excited about doing in your new position?

02:45 SEAN: I think one of the things that can happen in an association as large as this is that oftentimes we can sort of get lost in our department. And, I’m really looking forward to the opportunity or reaching out, and just reaching out to as many members as possible but I also want to figure out ways to work more collaboratively with all staff across all departments.

03:07 It’s a challenge when you have an association that represents as many people as this, to sometimes breakout of your comfort zones. But I’m really looking forward to the challenge of figuring out new ways to work with staff across the board, not just with the legislators and the politicians in the capitol.

03:26 DIANA: Is the government relations department working on something that you’d like to share with our members? Or, can you share how the work of your team impacts or benefits our members?

03:35 SEAN: So, right now the fair tax campaign is really starting swing into gear. The nice thing about the fair tax campaign and initiative is that we’ve got this long run up because the vote for that actually isn’t until next November. So, for us to have this amount of time to prepare is actually very nice.

03:54 Obviously, the opposition is already sending their message out there so we need to get on top of our stuff and start getting our message out there as well. But there’s no question that switching from the regressive tax structure that we have now to the fair tax structure is going to help us do a lot of things.

04:10 First of all, we switched to the new evidence-based funding formula which is great for our students. But we need to make sure that it’s actually getting funded each year and switching to a progressive tax system will obviously make that a lot easier to do. We also have, I’m sure that everyone knows, some substantial debt requirements as far as our pensions are concerned.

04:28 Again, switching from a regressive to a progressive is going to help us actually pay down some of that debt and the sooner we can get that debt paid off the better its going to be, not just for our members and our student but that’s going to better for the entire state of Illinois. So, the progressive income tax is something that we all should be working towards. It can only benefit all of us.

04:48 KELSEY: Thank you so much for joining us today, Sean.

04:51 DIANA: We are so excited to introduce you to Sylvia Rios, IEA General Counsel. Sylvia, thank you so much for joining us.

04:59 SYLVIA: Thank you so much for inviting me. I’m glad to be here and talking with everyone.

05:03 KELSEY: First, can you share a little bit about yourself and what you did prior to your new position?

05:09 SYLVIA: I’m from Chicago and I still reside in that area. Before I became IEA General Counsel, I worked here at the IEA as Associate General Counsel for just under seven years. Before that, I was an assistant attorney general with the Illinois Attorney General’s Office. And, before that I worked for a state agency. Before that I work at a small labor-side law firm.

05:33 I would say what got me interested into unionism, what got me to this side of the table is that my father himself was a union member for many years, he was a warehouse worker. But, even working in that type of industry, the difference between having a union job and having a non-union job was a huge difference and it made a big impact on our life and the quality of life for me and my family.

05:56 DIANA: Can you help us understand what your new role is?

06:00 SYLVIA: That’s a fun question. My new role as general counsel, one thing I do is I oversee our Legal Department which is comprised of nine attorneys, paralegals, paraprofessionals, and legal secretaries as they do work on behalf or our locals and our members in coordination with our UniServ Directors.

06:17 In addition, I also function as a counsel to the Board of Directors and to the Executive Committee on various issues. And, I also consult with our various departments on laws and other issues that are coming up that concern our members.

06:34 KELSEY: Sylvia, what are you most excited about doing in your new position?

06:39 SYLVIA: What I’m most excited about doing in the new position is that, as associate general counsel, we were often working on cases, very important cases, for our locals and our members. But, in this position, the work from my perspective as I see it, is more organizational and really has an ability to help steer the direction of the organization and the goals that our members in our locals want to achieve. So, it’s really cool to be part of that work and to see the types of accomplishments that we make on a statewide level.

07:14 DIANA: Is the Legal Department working on something you’d like to share with our members? Or, can you share how the work of your team impacts or benefits our members?

07:22 SYLVIA: Those are great questions. One thing that the Legal Department is currently working on, like I said earlier, the attorneys tend to work on individual matters, so while those matters are important to the member and the local, they do not always have statewide impact, but they can.

07:41 One example is we currently have a case that’s pending before the Illinois Supreme Court on behalf of one of our members and that case will address the circumstances for which a teacher can take sick leave for birth. So, it’s a case, we expect to get some traction possibly in the media and we’re hoping for a positive outcome for that member but more importantly for members statewide.

08:04 And for your question about how the work of the legal team affects our various members, it happens in both big ways and small ways and even in ways that sometimes our members don’t see. We are often behind the scenes consulting our UniServ Directors on various employment matters when our locals are at the table bargaining.

08:24 The attorneys are often in the wings reviewing certain elements of contract language, to always think about how things could be tweaked, how proposals could better serve our members by providing those types of suggestions and then when an individual employment matter comes up either through the grievance procedure or potentially court litigation, our legal services department is there to assist individual members and locals to try to achieve objectives that will serve their needs.

08:53 KELSEY: Thank you so much for joining us today, Sylvia.

08:55 DIANA: We are so excited to introduce you to Jamie Schumacher, IEA Director of Business Services. Jamie, thank you so much for joining us.

09:03 JAMIE: Yes, thanks for having me. I’m excited to be here.

09:05 KELSEY: First, can you tell us a little bit about yourself and what you did prior to your new director position?

09:11 JAMIE: Growing up, I wanted to be a news broadcaster for the local television station, I loved watching the news, being up-to-date on current events, economics, and even the weather. I did a fifth-grade report using a microphone I received as a gift on my desire to do this sort of work.

09:27 I was passionate about information. I’m not sure if it was the downfall of the content of the news or the growing passion I had about numbers, but at some point, it because clear to me that my passion was in financial reporting and finance. While attending college I worked part-time as a bookkeeper for a discount store and then I moved into banking.

09:47 When I left the banking world, I took a job as an office manager for a book binding company whose primary customer base was school district libraries. It was in that role that I began to work with educators and through that interaction I learned and admired the passion for the work that they do and, more importantly, their passion for the students who they were working with and for.

10:08 When the opportunity presented itself, I took a position in a district as a bookkeeper. Working in the school with the faculty staff and students was one of the most rewarding and enjoyable points in my career. I had heard about the love of working with a school district growing up from my mother, who was an ESP, and she had taken an active role in organizing the ESPs in her district as an IEA local back in the early nineteen nineties.

10:32 While browsing the Black Friday ads in the local newspaper, I saw a job posting for an accounting position with IEA. I came to IEA as staff in 2009. And, then I was hired as the Director of Business Services in 2018.

10:46 So, can you help us understand more about your new role in the organization?

10:50 JAMIE: The Business Services Department of Accounting, Membership, and General Services’ primary role is safeguarding the assets of the organization. All financial activity is handled by this department, both by Membership and Accounting. General Services obviously takes care of our buildings. Not only do we focus on data accuracy, financial reporting and compliance for IEA, IPACE, and the IEA Foundation, but we also assist locals with membership reconciliation, financial recordkeeping, and reporting requirements.

11:18 We provide support and resources for local presidents, treasurers, and membership contacts. We’re always here to assist with any questions or concerns that arise from financial reporting or membership, IRS compliance, State Board of Elections reporting, just to name a few. So, as the Business Director, my role is to work with this team on all of these items that I mentioned and to ensure that the business services of the Association runs smoothly.

11:45 KELSEY: Jamie, what are you most excited about doing in your new position?

11:50 JAMIE: I am most excited about working with members and I especially enjoy when I’m able to visit the schools and see the faces of the reasons we are all here, which is the students. It’s always exciting to get in there and see their faces. I’ve had a lifetime of learning, adapting to change both economic and political, and I look forward to continuing to be part of this team as we face all of the challenges that lie ahead of us.

12:13 DIANA: Is the Business Services Department working on something that you’d like to share with our members, or can you share how the work of your team impacts or benefits our members?

12:22 JAMIE: Currently, the membership department is working diligently to update our membership records for the 2019-2020 membership year. Accounting is currently engaged in our annual audit as well as working on other fiscal year end reporting that we’re required to do. We are working with our regions to get their annual budgets in and approved by the Executive Committee.

12:42 We are preparing to file the annual 990 report for all of our locals with a May or June fiscal year end date. I am also scheduled to meet with several locals and regions to conduct financial audits of their books and go over recordkeeping. I look forward to being out and about meeting each one of our members.

12:59 Thank you so much for joining us, Jamie. If you have any questions, comments, or feedback, please check out the contact section on the Podcast page on the IEA Website.

13:08 DIANA: Special thanks to Mark for the audio help, Amanda for the transcription, and Dan for the website. As always, thank you so much for being a member, and thanks for joining us!

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