



*Cecil
Pendergrass*

A Message From the President of the **Gulf Coast Chapter**

Negotiating and Organizing

The Gulf Coast Chapter has been very busy over the last several months. Contract negotiations have begun with two of our agencies, Hendry County Sheriff's Office and Fort Myers Police Department. Our biggest project by far has been the process in organizing the Lee County Sheriff's Office.

When I was first approached by many of the Lee County Sheriff's Office employees to organize their department, I thought the process would run smoothly. The current **Sheriff Mike Scott** had been vocal in the past about providing his blessing to employees who desire to become a part of the FLPBA family. It was quite an awakening for me as the climate changed overnight from him conveying that "the PBA is good" to "I don't think you (employees) need the PBA."

Now, after five months of a strong push by hundreds of Lee County Sheriff employees and me, it appears that reality has set in for the Department. The excitement grew among the employees when they heard from our current members about the benefits and job security that comes with PBA protection. As a result of this unified effort, we have received approximately 48 percent of the blue cards in favor of unionization from the department's 386 members in the deputy job class. We have also been collecting blue cards for corrections and sergeants. The PERC vote is only a few weeks away; we look forward to and expect a positive outcome. Special thanks go to Central Florida PBA President

John Park, who met with Lee County Deputies and related how Orange County Deputies had faced a similar struggle and now enjoy the benefits of a collective bargaining agreement.

Jim Wiggins, FLPBA Director of Organizational Services, and I began contract negotiations in September 2009 with **Hendry County Sheriff Steve Whidden**. We are reviewing the current LEO contract as well as composing a new contract for the Corrections Division. All has been going well and we look forward to working with Sheriff Whidden who has been a friend to the PBA and law enforcement.

Negotiations have also commenced for the Fort Myers Police Department contract. The City of Fort Myers has been slightly more challenging; however, we are hopeful for a positive resolution by the end of the month. A major issue currently being addressed is that the City is requesting to freeze the police step plan, which is included in the binding contract. The plan provides for a seniority step for each member who has been in classification for one complete year as of October 1st. This article was agreed to by the employees and the City; however, the City's overspending has caused it to seek alternative ways to make up its deficit. Our position is that a lack of funding for the police step plan is unacceptable. I have addressed this issue with all City Council members and the Mayor, and will continue until our voices are heard. Loss of the step plan will not occur while I am President. ■

We're proud to serve those who serve our communities.

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