

Wait Til This Year!

In baseball, the cry of those who do not win the championship is “Wait til next year!” After several championship-level years, my fantasy baseball team set a league record for futility in 2014. Well, it’s a new year, and in my own quiet presidential way, I’m excited – at least about Actors' Equity. For one thing, the Equity News turns 100 this year. Like our industry, our union periodical has changed a lot in the past century.

Equity News is now just one of the ways AEA communicates with its members. Membership meetings, our AEA website, snail mail, e-mail blasts, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram all give the leadership and staff of Actors' Equity a variety of ways to inform the membership. Members use many of these same methods to communicate with AEA, and we are reaching out even more in 2015. We are surveying members, using focus groups and holding town-hall-style meetings, all in an effort to solicit and develop new ideas, strategies and solutions for 2015's initiatives.

After (appropriately) spending eighty-some years communicating with 20th-century methods, AEA is embracing the technology of the 21st century to elicit the concerns and suggestions of our members and to inform them of our plans and goals and the progress we are making towards those goals. It's this progress that has me excited.

Nationally, we are gearing up for the negotiations of our flagship contract the Production Contract. Contract proposals and suggestions are being solicited not just from the Production Contract Committee members but from everyone who has worked on the Production Contract in the past two contract cycles. We are holding not one, not two, but three special informational Town Hall meetings in the next two months: one on Touring, one on Stage Management, and one for Broadway casts.

In Chicago, our informational, consciousness-raising campaign about whether the touring musical in a local theater's “Broadway” series has professional Equity performers or not -- #askifitsEquity – has been so successful that Council has voted to expand it nationally.

In Los Angeles, we are building the future, physically and metaphorically. We have constructed a gorgeous new Actors' Equity building with offices, meeting rooms, and state of the art audition facilities. We have hired a new Western Regional Director, a brilliant labor professional from SEIU named Gail Gabler. We continue to solicit the input of our members about the local Equity contracts and agreements. We held a special Town Hall meeting, attended by myself and four of your other elected officers, on January 12th about the 99 Seat Theatre Plan .

We have taken steps to consolidate and streamline our committee structure. Our national contracts now have one national committee – rather than three regional committees – so a question or a concession request doesn't get three different answers. We are taking advantage of telephone and video connections to make member participation easier from outside the office cities.

It's a New Year. It's a whole new ballgame.