

SUMMER 2026 NEWSLETTER

Grand Rapids Federation of Musicians/AFM Local 56

AFM Local 56 Membership Continues to Grow!



We are very pleased to report that our ranks have grown steadily since the new year. We now have 320 musicians in AFM Local 56! A warm welcome goes to our new and reinstated members.

Brendan Bety, Natanel Bikov, Trae Brockett

Julia Brown, Andrew Gagi, Lester Givens

Christian Green, Qingzhuo Li, Greg Miller

David Mish, Bridget Pei, Deidreanna Potter

Seth Ruse, Sue Stuit, Bernard Thomas

Mark Thompson, Lisa Yarton-Shatney, Alex Yeomans

ANNOUNCING OUR SUMMER MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Do you have ideas to share with Local 56 leaders? Do you want to network with other AFM Local 56 musicians? Do you like pizza?

We think so, which is exactly why we have scheduled our summer membership meeting as an opportunity for Local 56 members to speak to their elected board members in an informal setting.

This gathering will happen on Monday, August 3rd, beginning at 5pm, at the Masonic Center's 6th Floor Conference Room (233 Fulton Street E, Grand Rapids MI 49503). Board members will be listening to you and jotting down your suggestions to bring forth at their next monthly meeting.

Pizza and refreshments are scheduled for 6pm, and the event will wrap up by 7pm. We hope to see you there — let's talk!

AFM Local 56 Membership Meeting Monday, AUG 3rd, 5pm to 7pm 6th Floor Conference Room/Masonic Center



Beverages & Pizza provided!

“Let’s Talk!”

An informal gathering
to express your ideas and concerns
with your elected Local 56
Executive Board members.



PHOTO GALLERY/SUMMER 2026

Music Performance Trust Fund Events



Local 56 bands were busy during Memorial Day, Juneteenth, and America 250, giving free concerts throughout West Michigan.

OFFICIAL NOTIFICATION

Local 56 Elections



Per our bylaws, Local 56 membership was notified by July 25th regarding available positions on our Executive Board. The election will occur in the fall.

Nominations are now being accepted for the following positions:

Secretary/Treasurer/Delegate to the AFM Convention
One Member at Large position
One Member at Large/Grand Rapids Symphony position
One Member at Large/Lansing Symphony Orchestra position

The three-year terms for these positions begin January 1, 2027. Any AFM Local 56 member in good standing for at least 12 months preceding the nomination deadline may run for office.

Should you wish to run for these available positions, contact our office to obtain the nomination form (233 Fulton Street E, Grand Rapids MI 49503, or email GRFM@GrandRapidsMusicians.org).

Have two Local 56 members who are in good standing sign the form and return the completed form our office (via mail, email, or hand delivery) no later than midnight, September 1, 2026.

Nominations will close beginning September 2, 2026.

For details about the duties of these positions, refer to the AFM Local 56 bylaws which are available on our website:

<https://grandrapidsmusicians.org/>

NOTE FROM MEMBER-AT-LARGE CARSTEN FORESTER

As I am sure many of you are aware, we are mere days away from the August 4th primary. Of particular importance this year is the Democratic primary race for one of Michigan's two Senate seats. The race is down to Abdul El-Sayed and Haley Stevens. For those of you that are unsure of who to support, I will briefly make the case for why I believe Abdul will represent the interests of our members better.



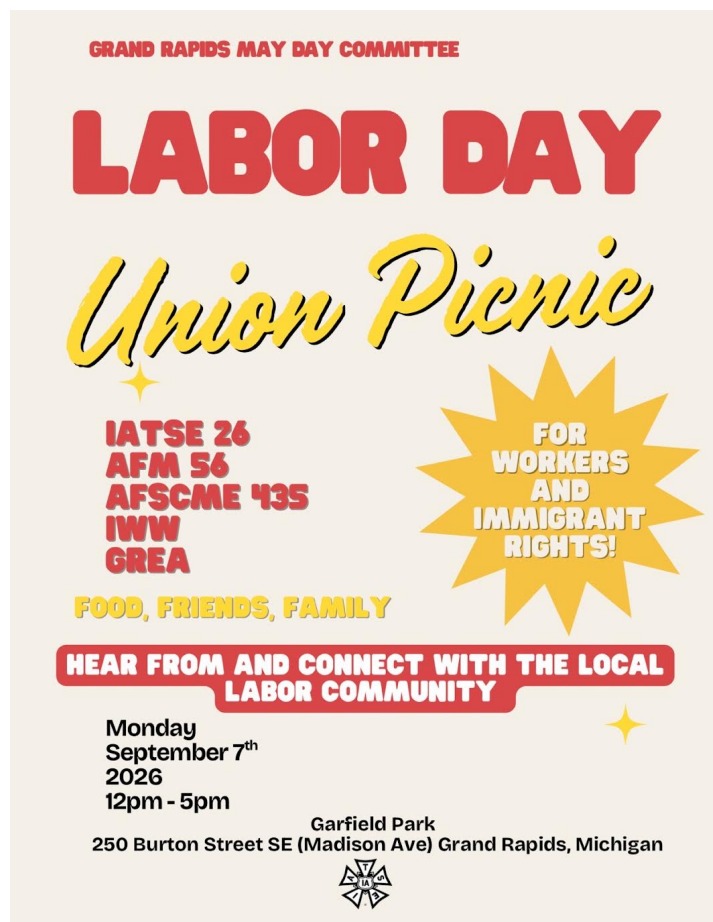
1) He elevates the labor movement in his campaign. Abdul understands that he needs the support of union members like ours to win both the primary and the general election. He had won the endorsement of the UAW and AFT nationally as well as many union locals, including our sisters and brothers in IATSE 26 and UA 174. I was won over after going to a labor lunch event he had at the UA hall in the spring. He has spent a lot of time meeting and listening to the concerns of union members and that is very much reflected in his platform.

2) Abdul stands against corporate money in politics. Unions like ours will never have the resources to compete with armies of lobbyists. The legal framework around so much of our industry is outdated. If we want to change it, we benefit from a level playing field and a friendly voice in our highest legislative body.

3) He wrote the book on Medicaid for all, literally. Health care reform is one of the most pressing issues we face for many people, especially freelance musicians. Abdul has the medical and health system experience and expertise needed to lead a comprehensive overhaul of the medical system.

4) Abdul is against military intervention. Especially in the second Trump era, the constant military misadventures result in senseless deaths, cost billions we need here at home and destabilize our economy. Frankly, I'm tired of paying so much at the pump just to get to a gig.

Hopefully this helps other Local 56 members make their decision. No matter who you decide to vote for, make sure you go out to the polls on Tuesday!



OUR LABOR DAY EVENT!

AFM Local 56 is partnering with other labor organizations in our area to co-sponsor a Union Picnic in celebration of Labor Day.

WHEN? Monday afternoon
07 SEPT 2026

WHERE? Garfield Park
Burton Street at Madison Avenue
Grand Rapids MI 49507

FORMAT? Local 56 is pleased to assist in providing food for the event. We will have a table with AFM membership materials. There will be kid-friendly activities.

WHO ELSE IS A CO-SPONSOR? The West Michigan Stage Hands Union (IATSE), Grand Rapids Educators Association (GREA), and the Grand Rapids Community College's unionized staff.

WHAT TO WEAR? Since Labor Day falls on our 121st birthday this year, we would love to see many of you wearing Local 56 t-shirts at this event. Don't have one yet? Just stop by our office during office hours to get a free t-shirt with the promise of attending and wearing it to the Labor Day Union Picnic.

FINAL THOUGHTS? Labor Day is a national holiday that honors workers and recognizes our contributions. We hope to see many Local 56 members at this picnic to celebrate unions.



MESSAGE FROM LOCAL 56 PRESIDENT BENNIE KEYS

Hello Local 56! Here is my report on the 103rd AFM convention in Ottawa, Canada, that Secretary/Treasurer Paul Austin and I attended last June.

The AFM convention was a lot of hard work, as it always is. I was on the Law Committee, and we had several joint sessions with the Finance Committee which proved to be very helpful for us in reaching some important decisions which will help the AFM move forward and to also to regain membership.

The big item on the AFM's agenda was organizing casual musicians and improving current working conditions. We want to be able to understand what we can do collectively to expand our union rights through political channels, in order to get better legislation.



We look forward to your ideas for moving forward and getting the resources you need to survive in this challenging environment. By working together, we can overcome the major obstacles that come in our path and impede our overall growth. Let's make it a point to attend more membership meetings. This is the best way to better understand your needs and what we can do together to influence the communities where we play.

On a final note, it was an honor to have been elected President of the AFM Mid-America Conference in June. This is a great privilege to serve our Local in a larger capacity and to show what Local 56 is all about — we rule! And it's because of your membership and ideas that we can con-

tinue to be a great influence on the musical community for many years to come. Thank you for your Local 56 membership and for your dedication to our union.



NOTES FROM OUR SECRETARY/TREASURER PAUL AUSTIN

Last winter, I organized our application for an award that the AFM was giving to Locals for their achievements in diversity. Brainstorming with other Local 56 board members led us to many exciting initiatives to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion in our community.

One of the ideas that was mentioned in our application was to invite former AFM Local 56 member Joseph Conyers to speak to our membership. Currently Principal Bassist of the

Philadelphia Orchestra, Joseph is also an enthusiastic speaker and a dedicated educator. When I reached out to Joseph about this idea, he gladly accepted our offer and suggested a Question and Answer session about careers, diversity, and education. We will provide pizza and refreshments afterwards, too.

It will be an honor and a pleasure to host Joseph Conyers for our event on Thursday, August 27th, from 5:00pm to 7:00pm, at the Masonic Center's 6th Floor Conference Room. We are so fortunate that Joseph will be shining his light upon us that day, and you definitely will not want to miss this opportunity.





AFM Local 56 aims to protect the interest and welfare of its members, to establish a minimum scale of prices to be charged for professional services, and to promote good faith and fair dealings between its members. Having signed a charter with the American Federation of Musicians on September 7, 1905, Local 56 has 320 members today. Our jurisdiction covers west, central, and northern Michigan.

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