METRO

BUSINESS NEWS/C 14-15 □

SOUTH BEND TRIBUNE ■ THURSDAY, OCTOBER 3, 1985

Tribune Photo/ DENNIS WHITE

Vicki Saporta, right, director of organizing for the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, meets Wednesday with South Bend Community School Corp. secretaries, perhaps the next group to be organized by Local 364 of the Teamsters. From left are Marcia Samarich, Cindy Montgomery, Gayle Farrell, Barb Ferraro and Marcella Kovatch. Fran Lein, back to camera, sits on the table with Saporta.

Union official 'tells it straight'

By GAIL HINCHION
Tribune Staff Writer

No sweet talking for Vicki Saporta. The only woman organizing director of a major American union tells it straight, tells it fast, tells it like there is nothing to argue about.

"We are on the forefront of organizing clerical workers," Saporta said Wednesday at the start of a two-day visit to Local 364 of the Teamsters union. She is director of organizing for the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

"Our contracts for secretaries are the best," she said with certainty. "We have practiced comparable worth. We have implemented it in the public sector."

She has been speaking about why the Teamsters are the right union for the South Bend Community School Corp. secretaries. She speaks with the authority of almost 10 years with the union in offices across the country.

A committee of secretaries who want to organize selected the Teamsters 18 months ago. "They came to us," Saporta pointed out.

"Organizing is a matter of education. Once the people understand what the union is about, they would choose ours," she said. Organizing usually is left to the local units. But Teamsters President Jackie Presser reactivated a national organizing assistance operation and sought Saporta, 33, to run it.

Some secretaries hesitate to organize, and some hesitate to organize with the Teamsters, in part because of the masculine image the union has. Some are concerned the Teamsters would not be right for clerical workers, or for workers in the public sector.

The secretaries are gentle people. Some have gotten teary-eyed when discussing organizations. Teamsters business agent Robert Schulz said the fact Saporta is a woman — and might better reach these women — was considered when local union leaders asked her to visit.

"This local doesn't need my help," Saporta countered, praising local leaders for the 18-month campaign they conducted for a referendum on whether secretaries should organize. The workers are to vote by mid-November.

Teamsters officials were to negotiate with Superintendent Robert A. Fallon today on whether

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Saporta

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the referendum ballot will bear the Teamsters name, Schulz said. He wants the secretaries to vote for or against the Teamsters instead of voting for or against organization in general.

"We're not even worried about winning an election. We're worried about putting together a contract that addresses the issues they're concerned about," Saporta said.

Meeting with secretaries Wednesday night, Saporta assured them that the union has a long history with clerical workers and with workers in the public sector.

"Most people don't really understand what we're about as a union. We are the most diversified union in the country," she said.

"We are on the forefront of organizing clerical workers," she said.

"We've represented clerical unions since 1950," she said. "We've been in public works since the 1940s."

In a series of contract negotiations in San Bruno, Calif., the union succeeded in upgrading half the clerical workers' jobs because they were found comparable to the jobs of more highly paid employees, she said.

Saporta's observations about why women organize should strike home with secretaries, whose efforts began with what they consider unfair assignment procedures.

Money usually isn't the biggest problem, she said.

"Most of the time, it's working conditions that make them place the phone call," she said.

"They want a way to deal with problems they have on the job, to make their jobs fair," she said. "They're looking for a grievance procedure. They are also looking to be treated with some dignity."

"They need a sense of security and a sense of recognition which nobody can have without a union contract," she said.

THE ESQUIRE 1985 Register

A Celebration of Man At His Best

This second annual edition of the best-selling Esquire Register is the result of an extensive, ongoing search to identify those American men and women under forty who compose a dynamic new leadership class. In selecting and profiling more than one hundred individuals, Esquire honors those whose talent and determination are the guiding forces of this changing society. And in an exclusive survey undertaken by the editors of Esquire, the values and opinions of the leadership class are revealed for the first time.

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Business & Industry

BRASH INNOVATION, EXPLOSIVE GROWTH, SHREWD MOVES

THE ESQUIRE 1985 Register

HONOREES

William Howard Beasley III A man of steel
Janelle Bedke & Robert Metcalfe Heroes of Silicon Valley
Marilyn Adams Coleman Poultry's grade-A consultant
Rafael Collado Computerizing the Bronx
Esther Dyson Getting the word processed
David Gibson Making Kansas City a hot commodity
Sanford Grossman The economics of information
Dennis Hayes The man behind the modem
Larry Kopald From advertising with love
Ted Lemon American wine with a French accent
David Mueller A commuter airline takes off
Bob Pittman Igniting a cultural explosion
Lewis Ranieri Wall Street's roof raiser
Jacques Robinson Management as the mother of invention
Jesse Russell A breakthrough in telephone technology
Vicki Saporta Improving the state of the unions
Kirk Stauss One man's hunger project

Bob Metcalfe: *"I'm only comfortable working with Type-A, aggressive, hypercompetitive people."*

Janelle Bedke: *"I don't work on weekends."*

Jesse Russell

Software designer
Whippany, New Jersey
Born April 26, 1948

Reinventing the telephone

Jesse Russell has a unique habit. He likes to grab hold of a napkin and a ball-point pen to sketch quick diagrams of complex processes—like the transmission of the cellular-telephone. One of the first computer engineers in the United States to specialize in digital-systems design (he entered the field back in 1972), Russell now heads an innovative band of fifty engineers and scientists at AT&T's Bell Laboratories in Whippany, New Jersey. Last year the division designed the software for a new cellular mobile phone that will allow conference calls and call forwarding for motorists. That software system was named the best new product of 1984 by *New Product Development Newsletter*, which monitors emerging technologies.

When asked the secret of his success, Russell answers, laughingly, "Arrogance." An engineer, he maintains, "can't accept that a problem can't be solved." Certainly that's been his philosophy throughout his thirteen years with Bell, a period in which he has done everything from circuit and terminal design for digital telephone equipment to mathematical modeling and complex software design. But Russell is also conscious of his responsibility as a black professional. He devotes a large portion of his personal life to minority recruitment and counsels minority technical employees already at AT&T. In addition, he lectures at career programs in Tennessee and Ohio to encourage minority youths to pursue careers in science and engineering. A better role model would be hard to find: in 1980 this Stanford alumnus became the first black ever to win the Outstanding Young Engineer of the Year award from the Society of Electrical Engineers.

Vicki Saporta

Union organizer
Washington, D.C.
Born September 11, 1952

The capital's Norma Rae

She's been called Miss Dynamite, a Norma Rae–like firebrand. And with all that heat, it's not surprising that Vicki Saporta, thirty-three, has been hugely successful as director of organizing for the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. In her two years on the job, Saporta, the daughter of a Rochester, New York, tailor, has helped raise Teamster membership from 1.7 million to its current 1.9 million with her recruitment of factory and clerical workers and other nontruckers. More important, Saporta is helping dispel the union's image as a hidebound haven for gangsters. "You don't see any mobsters in the hall," she says. "The Teamsters are hardworking people who are at their jobs day and night, not out at the golf course or on the take."

Probably no one in the union, though, works harder than Saporta herself. Although she maintains an address in Washington, D.C., she spends about two hundred nights a year on the road. Often seething with the barely contained anger that was once a hallmark of the labor movement, Saporta drives home the point that

eternal vigilance is necessary to keep management from exploiting employees. "Some employers like to think of themselves as enlightened," Saporta says. "But the profit motive always gets the better of them, and the workers get it in the neck."

Kirk Stauss

Farmer
Spirit Lake, Iowa
Born June 28, 1947

Finding ways to feed the world

It always disturbed Iowa farmer Kirk Stauss that America's way of combating world hunger was to "feed grain to livestock so we could sell steak and pork chops to starving people." It seemed so much more practical just to stick with the basic grains, as did his family, which has been farming 1,200 acres of corn and soybeans for three generations in the northwest corner of Iowa. So about five years ago Stauss, who has an M.B.A. and was working as a bank examiner when he took over the family farm, set out to blend his crops into a kind of trail mix that would be highly nutritious, taste good, and wouldn't spoil. "We wanted a product that you could just open up and start eating," he says. After a series of failures he tried an extrusion method that quickly (about fifteen seconds) and relatively coolly (about 300 degrees) cooked the grain into an edible blend. Three hundred grams of his concoction, now called Nutrameal, provides 1,100 calories and the minimum nutritional requirements for an adult male.

Through food brokers Stauss sells Nutrameal to governments around the world, helping to feed the hungry in the Far East, Africa, Central America, and the Caribbean. "We're trying to sell this as a food supplement," Stauss says. "We try to give you everything you need, but we'd rather say it's not the only thing you have to eat all day." Even so, he's doing his best to make Nutrameal appetizing. The blend comes in a variety of flavors: curry, cocoa, cinnamon, chicken, and the original corn. And beginning in January you won't have to be indigent to crave Nutrameal: Stauss plans to market a line of snack chips in U.S. health-food stores under the Freedom Farms label.

THE ESQUIRE

1985 Register

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BUSINESS

Democrat and Chronicle

ON THE MOVE

Read about job changes and promotions among area business people on **4F**.

SUNDAY

AUGUST 31, 1986

ROCHESTER

NEW YORK

THE ORGANIZER

Rochester native directs campaigns for the Teamsters

By John Campbell
Democrat and Chronicle

WASHINGTON — Vicki Saporta has a big office overlooking the U.S. Capitol, a house across town and an eager research staff to tap.

But Saporta, 33 years old, is not a corporate attorney or an investment banker.

Since 1983, she's been the director of organizing for the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, the nation's largest labor union and the only employer she's ever had since leaving her native Rochester to attend Cornell University in Ithaca.

IN HER DOZEN years with the Teamsters, Saporta, a trim, vivacious woman, has seen enough drama to fill several lifetimes.

"What really got me hooked was after I started," she said. "I sat and listened to these people's stories, and couldn't help feeling for them. Then it was, 'OK, how do we get going?' "

Early on, some employers spread false rumors of a sexual nature to try to discredit Saporta, recalled Rome Aloise, another Teamsters organizer in San Francisco.

They threatened to fire activist workers during her organizing campaigns. Police have arrested her for littering as she handed out union leaflets.

As her reputation for organizing has spread, more and more employers have retaliated by hiring expensive anti-union consultants.

"WHEN THEY find out Vicki's there, they bring in the howitzers," said Aloise. "Consultants have gotten very sophisticated in the past few years. They take the offensive much more."

On the theory that young workers today retain information better from television than from print, the recent breed of pinstriped consultants uses videotape "dramatizations" of workers coping with a union drive.

Consultants these days camp out for a month at their client's work place, rather than coming in just before a union election.

But Saporta can turn the enemy's tricks to her advantage. For instance, she coaches workers by showing them an anti-union videotape before their boss makes them watch it.

SAPORTA EVEN convinced one employer to appear in a videotape she produced. Len Martin, who owns an apparel-marking firm in Rome, Calif., talks in the film about his unsuccessful fight to defeat a Teamsters organizing drive in 1984.

"Business isn't democratic, it's autocratic," he says. When unions come in, he sums up, they make the work place more democratic.

That cameo demonstrates Saporta's charisma. "I charmed him," she said.

Abuse rolls off her back. When anti-union workers in North Carolina circulated cartoons mocking her as a savior on a white horse, Saporta appeared at a rally astride a real horse.

She has combined such touches of humor with fiery exhortations and careful spadework behind the scenes.

Gannett News Service

Vicki Saporta has worked for International Brotherhood of Teamsters for 12 years.

If a company official threatened (illegally) to close down a plant before succumbing to the union, Saporta made sure a group of employees presented him with a form guaranteeing the closing. Asked to sign the form, she said, the company official usually dropped the threat.

More important, according to many who know her, Saporta has a knack for understanding workers' problems and gaining their trust.

"She helps people get angry, to realize they can't depend on someone else for control in their life," said Ellen Gallant, an organizer with the Communications Workers of America Local 1170 in Rochester.

Gallant recalled Saporta's work in North Carolina: "As someone just entering the labor movement, it was real inspiring to watch her. Most of us were accustomed to seeing men in roles of authority — the 'stick with me kid' types."

In a field still dominated by graying men, Saporta and other young labor leaders are starting to reflect the diversity of their rank-and-file membership. More women and minority-group members have moved into the top ranks at local and regional levels.

Only a few have risen to top national staff positions, however, and Saporta is among the most prominent.

"Vicki is one of the brightest stars in the labor movement today," said James Medoff, a labor economist at Harvard University. "She has positively affected the image of labor and the Teamsters when their image overall is not very good."

Others in labor criticize Saporta for

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Rochester native top Teamsters organizer

FROM PAGE 1F

fiercely defending a union whose reputation has been tarnished by decades of connections to organized crime. Her 1983 appointment as organizing director by union President Jackie Presser, they contend, merely helped the union present a more respectable public face.

"Her main job is to talk to you in the media," said Kenneth Paff, an official with the dissident group Teamsters For a Democratic Union in Detroit. "She doesn't have a real power base. Our problem is with her boss."

A labor leader in Rochester, who asked not to be identified, said, "She's a figurehead. When the Teamsters leadership gets questioned about the Mafia, they bring her in to beat it back."

The union was expelled from the AFL-CIO in 1957 for corruption and has been dogged by its Mafia connections. Three of Presser's predecessors were indicted, and Presser has pleaded innocent to racketeering, embezzlement and other federal charges.

The President's Commission on Organized Crime early this year said four big labor unions, including the Teamsters, are controlled or influenced by organized crime.

These allegations have surfaced frequently, Saporta acknowledges. But she's impatient with questions about them, and prefers to discuss them in the context of her organizing drives.

"A lot of times people call us because they want the biggest, toughest union they can find," she said. "They might be unhappy when we don't live up to our image. But at the first sign of violence we're out of there. You cannot organize people by threatening them, or intimidating them. The only thing that works is education."

Others note that corruption in unions does not look as significant when compared with business crime. Medoff and Richard Freeman, another labor economist at Harvard, cited surveys of large U.S. corporations by *Fortune* magazine and American Management Associations. The surveys revealed a higher incidence of crime, including bribery, tax evasion and arson, than was found in similar surveys of union members.

"They've had problems at the top," Medoff said of the Teamsters, "but it's wrong to infer that means they have problems in the middle or the bottom."

The Teamsters' legal problems haven't detracted much from the main accomplishment of Saporta and her staff — bringing tens of thousands of workers into the union.

Teamsters membership fell from 1.9 million in 1980 to 1.6 million in 1983, as job losses, particularly in trucking and basic manufacturing industries, offset recruiting. But Presser has increased the union's political and lobbying staff since he became president, and Saporta said membership has climbed back to 1.9 million.

In the Rochester area, the Teamsters represents 6,000 workers, said Thomas Kenny, a local Teamsters official.

Organizing hasn't solved all the Teamsters' problems, however. Of the 10 plants Saporta organized in anti-union North Carolina, only one reached a contract. After her initial campaigns in those plants, she had to turn the members over to less sophisticated local union representatives.

Saporta has tried to improve that type of servicing by keeping organizers in a campaign through the first contract, said Nick Salvatore, a professor of labor history at Cornell and a former Teamster.

"She's working within a flawed structure. Everything focuses on the marble palace," he said, referring to the Teamsters headquarters. "You don't have the strong intervention by local leaders."

Saporta knows all the unionizing tricks.

The Teamsters has devoted much of its recent organizing efforts to service industries such as health care, insurance, government and other fields full of female and young workers. Teamsters organizers often take on small units that other unions ignore, observers say.

The Teamsters union has also made a point of raiding other unions for members, the TDU's Paff claims, pointing to the unsuccessful drive to merge with the International Typographical Union. "Raiding is easier and quicker," he said.

Saporta responded that the Teamsters union has a no-raiding agreement with many unions, and has faced outside raiding itself.

Last year, she said, the Teamsters union was involved in 1,600 elections supervised by the National Labor Relations Board, roughly half the number of 1980. But those figures don't count organizing drives among public employees and some others regulated by the government, such as the current effort to sign on 2,500 flight attendants at Republic Airlines.

Many of the 700 Teamsters locals do organizing on their own, with assistance from Saporta and her staff of five. When a local calls for help, the organizing and research departments can provide a financial and labor-relations analysis of most major companies. Saporta also trains local Teamsters officials, lectures at universities, produces videotapes to use in organizing drives and commands some of those drives by phone.

The work involves long days, although Saporta has more free time now than when she traveled nine months of the year as a field organizer, living out of suitcases and sometimes working around the clock during crucial moments of a campaign. Outisde of work, Saporta, who's single, likes to sail and play basketball or tennis.

"She's driven," said Carolyn Jacobson, a staff member of the Bakery, Confectionary and Tobacco Workers union in Washington and a close friend of Saporta's.

Vicki A. Saporta almost didn't come into the labor movement.

"She always wanted to be a lawyer," recalled her mother, Leah, a homemaker who lives at 235 Simpson Road, Irondequoit. While at West Irondequoit High School, Saporta excelled in her studies, played numerous sports and placed second in a regional level of the Miss Teenage America competition, said her father, Abe, a tailor.

Cornell's School of Industrial and Labor Relations looked to Saporta like a good foundation for a career in criminal law. In the summer after sophomore year, she took a Teamsters-sponsored job as a counselor for a group of teen-agers touring Europe. Besides the usual tourist attractions, the group walked through factories and met with labor leaders.

After completing a year at the London School of Economics and graduating from Cornell, Saporta talked her way into a $12,500-a-year organizing job for the Teamsters Western Conference. (She wouldn't disclose her current salary, but TDU said she earns about $90,000 a year.)

Saporta's first assignment was to organize workers for the concessionaire at Yosemite National Park. She lost the election, but learned valuable techniques such as swapping information and staff with environmental groups.

Other assignments took Saporta to towns large and small, from Utah to Chicago to Sweden. The scenes may have changed, but she saw a common struggle among workers for a stronger voice in their lives.

She also met a common obstacle — the fear of being fired for supporting a union. Last year, the NLRB ruled that one in 25 workers who voted for a union was fired illegally, 10 times the rate reported 30 years ago, said Medoff of Harvard. The actual rate is much higher, he said, because many fired workers never complain to the NLRB.

Saporta's approach is to make a large group of workers the leaders of a campaign, to go public soon after and to bring in Teamsters retirees or rank-and-file members to talk about the union.

"If you've got one spark plug signing up 80 workers, the company can make a point by firing that one," she said.

"Once you build that committee, you can sign up hundreds, even thousands in a week or two. People will come in for that initial meeting with their heads down. Then they get mad, then they get scared to death. When they realize no one's being fired, they have a whole new attitude. They sense power for the first time."

Working Profile: Esther Peterson

Everyman's Advocate

By IRVIN MOLOTSKY

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 7 — Since the 1930's Esther Peterson has been enlisting young soldiers in her fights for women's rights, trade unionism and consumer protection. Now, at 80 years of age and with a battalion or two of her followers in the field, she is still seeking recruits.

The battle metaphor was suggested by one of those young followers, Ellen Haas, executive director of Public Voice, a consumer organization. "She has inspired a whole army of consumer activists," Ms. Haas said. "She has combined warmth with toughness to coax Presidents and members of Congress to oppose consumer abuse."

Two hundred people from all the varied parts of Mrs. Peterson's life gathered in Washington this weekend for a birthday party at the Woman's National Democratic Club.

Some were from Government, since Mrs. Peterson served in the White House as the consumer adviser and the Labor Department as head of the Women's Bureau. Some were from the consumer movement; her interests in that field extend to this day in her role as a consumer representative at the United Nations. Some were from the diplomatic corps, for Mrs. Peterson put her activism aside for a time to accompany her husband, Oliver, now deceased, on his Foreign Service assignments abroad.

Attack on Consumerism Seen

Mrs. Peterson herself professed to wonder what the fuss was about, asking what was so magical about an 80th birthday and suggesting that 85 was a rounder number.

She sipped coffee the other day in her house and discussed the state of various issues today, finding consumerism under attack. "It's gone down during this Administration," said Mrs. Peterson, who served three Democratic Presidents. "One problem is that it has people working on laws who don't believe in them. Scanlon is a good example."

Mrs. Peterson's reference was to Terrence M. Scanlon, whose elevation to the chairmanship of the Consumer Product Safety Commission she opposed. Mr. Scanlon, however, had praise for her: "While we have not always agreed on the best means of achieving goals, her energy and dedication have been an inspiration."

The New York Times/Ken Heinen

Public television recently carried a documentary film, "Women of Summer," about a 1930's project at Bryn Mawr College that gave working women a taste of education. One of the leaders was a dark-haired, forceful woman who taught physical education and drama. She was Esther Peterson, practically unchanged today except for the graying of her hair. The forcefulness remains, especially when she compares the influence of consumerism in government today with that of the Kennedy, Johnson and Carter Administrations she served.

"Carter approved an executive order I asked for banning the export of a list of things considered too hazardous to be used in the United States," Mrs. Peterson said. "Poorer countries liked the list because they couldn't afford the research for themselves. Reagan canceled that order."

To Ralph Nader, one of her greatest contributions was not in government but in linking two of her other interests, labor unions and consumerism. "She has stressed that workers are consumers," he said, "and she also said that we have to be concerned about third-world consumers."

And unlike many leaders in the consumer movement, Mrs. Peterson has also worked in business, as the consumer representative at the Giant supermarket chain from 1970 to 1977, when she became President Carter's consumer adviser. "Izzy Cohen is coming" to the birthday party, Mrs. Peterson noted with some happiness, referring to the chain's president. "He never comes to these things."

Odonna Mathews, who worked at Giant for Mrs. Peterson and succeeded her at Mrs. Peterson's suggestion, said, "Esther, in a sense, trained and sensitized Giant executives to listen to the consumers."

"She is an extremely young 80," Mrs. Mathews said. Perhaps this is due to the fact that she has such a rich past but is not rooted in it. Her attitude seems to be the same as it was at the Bryn Mawr sessions for working women, always learning, always making fresh discoveries.

Learning From a Teamster

Her latest discovery is Vicki Saporta, head of organizing for the teamsters. Mrs. Peterson is almost aghast that the teamsters, no longer dominated by trucking and warehousing, are doing a better job of organizing women than the traditional unions she had worked for. She comes from the old school of organizing — clothing and garment workers and teachers.

She appeared recently before the teamsters and was introduced to Ms. Saporta, "one of the most clear-headed people I've ever met."

Mrs. Peterson came away having learned something from a far younger person, saying, "We have to find new ways to organize."

Ms. Saporta was equally impressed by Mrs. Peterson, saying, "She was wonderful — she was everyone's favorite speaker."

Spotlight

The Washington Times

Teamsters may get a woman driver

Vicki Saporta has been truckin' for workers all her life

By Betsy Pisik
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

When Vicki Saporta's eighth grade class visited the plant of a nearby menswear manufacturer, the other middle school students learned how suits were put together. But Miss Saporta, the daughter of a Rochester, N.Y., tailor, discovered the roots of her lifelong commitment to organized labor, what she calls "my gut and a sense of justice."

"I basically walked through and took apart [the operation]. I asked a lot of questions," she recalls. "By the end of the field trip, they were like, 'Who is this kid?' "

Today, Miss Saporta is the highest-ranking female Teamsters member in North America. As the union's director of organizing since 1984, she's relied on that gut feeling and a laser-like determination to help bring an uncountable number of new members into the union, from accountants to zoo keepers.

Now she wants to lead them.

Miss Saporta, 39, is running for one of the five at-large vice presidential slots on the union's general executive board. And if she wins, it will be the first time in the Teamsters' 88-year history that a woman has helped guide this most unruly of labor unions.

To outsiders, the Teamsters' name is synonymous with burly, striking truckers or the missing Jimmy Hoffa, but that's not quite accurate anymore.

For starters, one-third of the 1.5 million-member International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Chauffeurs, Warehousemen and Helpers of America is female, a group that is beginning to press its own specific concerns and issues.

For another, the union is cleaning house under the purview of the Justice Department, which is intent on routing generations of corruption and mob influence. In compliance with a Justice Department consent decree, the union is holding its first democratic elections of top officers with the participation of the rank-and-file members.

All of which makes Vicki A. Saporta — an Ivy League, charismatic and mediagenic woman — a highly palatable addition to the old-boy executive board.

"It's hard to look at her and dredge out the Jimmy Hoffa jokes," says Jane Danowitz, executive director of the bipartisan Women's Campaign Fund and a friend of Miss Saporta's since 1975. Electing her "would give them a remodeled image . . . an image only a woman could give them."

Which is precisely the point made by her biggest detractor, R.V. Durham, who is running for general president on another, all male, slate. In plain language, he calls her a token and says she was chosen because of her gender rather than for her accomplishments. Mr. Durham, 60, told reporters in June that Teamsters women are not ready for the big leagues, and should stay in "the farm teams."

"That token-label doesn't stick to me," she says, detailing her accomplishments within the union. "He's offended every woman Teamster in North America, from the nurse in Newburg, N.Y., to the cannery workers in California who have stood up to harassment and threats and walked picket lines and organized their workplaces!" she steams.

"That we've never had a woman on the board isn't right," says the candidate, frankly feminine and trim in tailored suits and light make-up. "One third of our membership needs better representation."

If she is elected, her priorities are a renewed emphasis on organizing and contract negotiations; the pressing of women's issues; and grass roots political organizing to back up DRIVE, the Teamsters' bipartisan $10 million PAC, the largest

see VICKI, page F2

Vicki Saporta shakes hands and passes out literature outside D.C. Jail where T

Photo by Kevin Gilbert, The Washington Times

eamsters represent many corrections workers. She seeks an at-large vice presidency in the union.

VICKI

From page E1

in the country.

Miss Saporta is a savvy, deeply committed woman, capable of driving her arguments home with the same force and economy of a Teamsters carpenter. Collective bargaining, she says, is the only chance the worker has against corporations and multinationals "demanding concessions they don't really need."

She says, "This isn't about an extra 11 cents an hour, [but about] job security, self-respect and fair compensation."

She tells of a stalled contract negotiation in which management wanted union drivers to accept a $150 a week pay cut. Miss Saporta targeted the corporate officers' neighborhoods and churches, distributing fliers with the Teamsters' message.

"You bet we took this to a personal level," she says of the union's eventual victory. "When you threaten a livelihood, you're making it personal. We told their neighbors exactly what kind of people they lived next to."

Although trucking and warehousing is still the backbone of the union's membership, the union is making inroads into service industries, health care and high-tech workers, clerical and white-collar positions. Mickey Mouse is a Teamster. So are the corrections officers at the D.C. Jail and the flight attendants on numerous airlines.

Miss Saporta has been involved with the IBT all her adult life. After graduating from Cornell University's prestigious school of industrial and labor relations in 1974, she abandoned thoughts of a law career and badgered the union into creating a full-time position for her. They were skeptical about using a college graduate to organize, rather than lobby, but relented in the force of that soon-to-be-famous determination.

"They said this was an experiment," she says, smiling at the mem-

Photo by Kevin T. Gilbert/The Washington Times

■ "It is possible that if I don't win, I won't be there. I took that risk. But I didn't do this to lose. I plan to win."

— Vicki Saporta

away from her Northwest Washing-

supposed to be relaxation.

"I'd be racing this boat in the distance, and it didn't know I was racing it, and well, I've stopped that now," she laughs. She says it's natural, having raced for Cornell's sailing team. Her friends speak of her cool head in squalls and intuitive skill on the water.

"She is just a good a sailor as she is an organizer," says Caroline Jacobson. "It's her major escape. I've seen this incredible difference in her before and after she sails. She's like a whole different person."

But the campaign schedule has gotten in the way. "This year I haven't even seen the boat," she says with a shrug. "It could be sunk."

Miss Saporta is pursuing the vice president's position — which pays $75,000 a year — at her old organizing pace: hitting a city for a day or two at a time, leafleting, speaking, pressing union flesh. It's taken a toll. Her voice is hoarse and she's on antibiotics for the cold that hangs on with Teamster-like temerity.

In the past, appointed delegates would vote every five years for a new general executive board, leaving the rank-and-file out of the electoral process completely. Candidates point out that the new system means campaigning in factories and job sites across America, Canada, Guam and Puerto Rico to a membership that makes this larger than 26 Senate races. So far, says Walter Shea, who is running with Miss Saporta for general president, the five-person slate has raised and spent some $300,000. He hopes to double that as the campaign swings into its final weeks.

Mr. Shea, who has served as top adviser to the last five Teamsters presidents, says Miss Saporta has an excellent chance of being elected, independent of the slate.

"There are over 300,000 women and she's the only female at-large vice president in the running," he says. Mr. Shea denies the tokenism charge, but couches his praise of Miss Suporta in terms of gender.

"She's the most qualified woman in this union," he says. "She's very

Miss Saporta was charged with organizing the concession and hotel workers at Yosemite National Park. She and her team worked day and night for 10 weeks, but it wasn't sufficient. Afterward, she says, people were fired — illegally — for their organizing efforts, losing their jobs and their park housing.

"It's not like you can just find another Yosemite to live in," she says, tearing up at the 17-year-old memory over lunch in a Capitol Hill restaurant. She says she still feels personally responsible.

She won the second battle, she recalls. And the third. "But the ones you win never make up for the ones you lost."

She says she cannot guess her track record, but offers, "I'm the director of organizing because I'm good. I've found my niche."

In 1985, Esquire magazine included her in its issue devoted to the 116 people under 40 who are changing the nation.

"I've watched her work and there are few people around who have her enthusiasm and electricity," says Carolyn Jacobson, director of public relations for the international Bakers Union. "It's amazing to see her in action. She has charisma. It's like — and I mean this in a positive way — she's a one-woman show."

"In person, she's not like that. It's something that happens to her in public," says Ron Seeber, associate dean of the School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell, who has known her professionally for a decade. "Vicki always has a purpose, and she can really turn herself on" at the pulpit.

Organizing is a calling for Miss Saporta, but work can be grueling.

"I was organizing in North Carolina when [the 1979 Sally Field movie] "Norma Rae" came out, and I'll tell you, we had much more exciting things going on. I've had people point guns at me at 4 o'clock in the morning. You get threatening phone calls. People try to run you over when you're leafleting.

"Organizing is like a war," says Miss Saporta, who for years was have to wonder what kind of energy you're actually running on."

The organizer says her body is long-accustomed to getting less than five hours of sleep a night. She wears her silvering black hair in an attractive, low-maintanence style and has organized herself to live out of suitcases.

"You get this feeling in the pit of your stomach if you have to get on one more plane, check into one more hotel," she sighs. "But the work I enjoy doing is with the rank-and-file members. You can't be effective if you're not out there in the field."

Being home only two nights a week has strong-armed her love life.

"Most of the men that I have met in my life are initially attracted to me because I'm independent," she says carefully. "But then they want to get married and they say, 'You'll give this all up and stay home,' and of course I won't. As you get older and you get even more independent, it becomes harder and harder to make the compromises necessary to get married."

Her mother says this single-mindedness was always there.

"She was always good at what she did," homemaker Lea Saporta says of her oldest daughter. "If she was selling Girl Scout cookies, she sold the most cookies. Our temple, Light of Israel, would sell raffle tickets and they were amazed at how much she sold."

"I think I've always been an over-achiever," Miss Saporta says. "I've always gone the extra . . . whatever. For me, that has always paid off. It's not lost on the rank-and-file, either."

Mrs. Saporta, who says she is proud of her daughter and no longer worries "too much" about her, says "she feels that she can make a difference for people by getting them a contract, medical care, whatever they deserve. She wants these people to have good things, I think that's what drives her."

It's clear that something does.

Even out on the Chesapeake in her 30-foot sloop, the "Sail Away," Miss Saporta says her competitive streak can get in the way of what is

[illegible] Teamsters watchers give Miss Saporta a good chance of getting onto the board — gender notwithstanding. One union official, whose job forbids him from commenting on specific candidates, speculated that her organizing efforts have made her a virtual brand name to many of the rank-and-file members.

If Vicki Saporta is elected with more votes than the other four at-large vice presidents, she will be No. 3 in the Teamsters hierarchy, a position of clout and respect.

But if she doesn't win a seat, her organzing job of 17 years will be endangered. The other candidates for general president have made clear that they will probably appoint their own people to key positions.

"It is possible that if I don't win, I won't be there," she says. "I took that risk. But I didn't do this to lose. I plan to win."

Running against the odds

Woman faces uphill fight for Teamster vote

By SANDRA LIVINGSTON
PLAIN DEALER REPORTER

Vicki Saporta faces a daunting challenge: She is campaigning for an office that represents 1.6 million people in the United States, Canada, Puerto Rico and Guam. Yet her war chest is largely financed by sales of T-shirts and buttons.

She is seeking to break into a "club" that has never had a female member.

And she is running in a first election where voters have a tough time naming more than two of the 50 candidates.

Welcome to the campaign for the executive board of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

The election for 17 top union posts will be in December. Meanwhile, candidates are meeting with workers in union halls and outside plant gates.

Few seem to spend as much time on the road as Saporta, 39, the union's national organizing director. She once spent 250 days a year on the road and now thrives on 19-hour days short on food and long on visits to members. She is one of two women running for vice president. The other woman is Diana Kilmury from Vancouver, British Columbia.

"I love it," Saporta said during a recent campaign swing through Northeast Ohio. "I'm an organizer and I understand what it takes to get ballots back."

Yet predicting the turnout or outcome of this election is nearly impossible. Never before have rank-and-file Teamsters chosen their top leaders.

Many within the union believe 400,000 to 500,000 of the union's 1.6 million members will mail back their ballots. Until votes are

PD/CHRIS STEPHENS

Vicki Saporta, one of two women campaigning for vice president of the Teamsters, met workers in Solon recently.