In the next few months, we will be electing our bargaining committee and preparing our bargaining survey. Our bargaining committee will be made up of stewards and members from both branches, as well as the lab, and will be in direct negotiation with Kaiser’s bargaining team. Our bargaining survey is an opportunity for Optical members to vote for our top priorities this year.

As we get ready to bargain, it’s important to stay up-to-date with bargaining currently underway with our brothers and sisters in the three other NUHW-represented bargaining units in Northern and Southern California Kaiser (IBHS, Psych-Social and HPC). These units are in simultaneous contract negotiations and coordinating statewide actions. This means that almost 4,000 workers are acting in unison, including the statewide strike that took place last month.

We saw amazing support from many Optical workers who joined our strike to fight for adequate staffing, improved patient care, and wage and benefit parity — some of the same issues we’ll be fighting for in our contract. Optical workers’ show of solidarity sent an important message to Kaiser leadership that our workers united and ready to fight and win!

Our Optical contract ends on September 30, 2019, and we’re already getting ready to win a great contract!
At the March 2018 Stewards Council meeting, NUHW organizer Peter Brogan talked to some of Optical’s long-time stewards about why they got involved. Here, Demeka Hudson reflects on her experience, and why it is important to have strong stewards at every branch and in every department and shift.

**Where do you work, and how long have you been a steward?**
I am an optician in Fremont, and I’ve been a steward for 15 years.

**Why did you become a steward, and why have you stuck around?**
The reason I became a steward is Terry Tang. He encouraged me to become a steward when he was stepping down. I’ve been a steward ever since.

**Why is it important to have strong stewards at every branch?**
Because we have managers who violate the contract. If you don’t have a strong, professional steward who can present a clear message when management violates the contract, you’re in trouble.

When I think a member has been wronged or there has been a violation of the contract, I will talk with the manager first and give them a chance to fix the problem. If they don’t, I file a grievance.

A lot of people vote for stewards like it’s a popularity contest, rather than electing stewards who are going to be able to challenge management when they need to. We need stewards who recognize that, when they are in the role of steward, they are equal to their managers, and are comfortable pushing back.

For those people in branches without a steward, what would you say to them to convince them to become one? What advice would you offer on how to be a strong steward?

I would say, you pay union dues every month, so why not see what it’s about by getting involved as a shop steward? There are a lot of great things that come along with it, like being able to help out your co-workers and fellow union members when they really need you.

Whether it’s management violating the contract or writing people up unjustly, stewards can make a world of difference. Every branch needs someone to go to when there is a problem or something isn’t right. If we don’t have that person, then management can just run amok.