

Fred Meyer employees able to return to work

PORTLAND (AP) — All bargaining units representing striking grocery workers in the Portland area have accepted new contracts, ending the 87-day strike affecting 126 stores.

A group of Fred Meyer central checkout cashiers voted by a 2-to-1 margin to accept the contract after an hour long meeting Sunday. Members of the bargaining unit had turned down the same offer a day earlier.

The cashiers were all members of the Local 555 of the United Food & Commercial Workers Union. Five other bargaining units had voted Saturday to accept new contracts.

Several of the cashiers said they didn't like the contract but felt pressured to approve it, end the strike and get back to work.

"I'm thrilled to be going back to work," said Bonnie Tiller, a checker at the Stadium Fred Meyer store. "But

I wish we had a better contract."

Other workers complained that their pay should have gone up more, and most were angry about a clause banning sympathy strikes.

Fred Meyer spokesman Rob Boley said, "I'm very happy that the strike is now over. We have the process under way to get all Fred Meyer employees back to work over the next few days."

The bargaining units that approved contracts Saturday were the grocery clerks and meat cutters in Portland and Vancouver, Wash., and the Fred Meyer central checkout cashiers in Vancouver.

About 7,000 members of Local 555 were affected by the lockout that began Aug. 18. Three Teamsters locals walked off the job at Fred Meyer on the same day.

Union officials had said a big factor in the rejection of the checker contract was the company's refusal to bring

top wages closer to those of grocery clerks.

Although some grocery clerks are assigned exclusively as checkers, the classification also includes produce, dairy and frozen-food workers and the freight and receiving crew.

Central checkout cashiers do checkout work exclusively. They ring up items not just from the grocery department but from many other Fred Meyer departments.

Because of their broad checking duties, these checkers and the union had contended their pay should be about 90 percent of the pay of grocery clerks. It will be lower under the new contract.

Journeyman pay for clerks, formerly \$12.20 an hour, will climb to \$13.10 in the third year of the three-year contract. Central checkout cashier pay will rise from \$10 to \$10.90 for journeymen, but at the 90 percent level would have risen to about \$11.80.

New Braille system created by physicist

CORVALLIS (AP) — An Oregon State University physics professor who lost his sight during routine eye surgery is developing a new Braille system to expose the blind to math and science.

John Gardner's work is being supported by a National Science Foundation grant worth \$500,000. The foundation also is considering Gardner for a \$900,000 grant to help make computers more accessible for blind people.

"I never wanted to become known as a blind scientist. I wanted to continue my work like I had before," Gardner said. "But you learn you have a certain amount of responsibility to help others."

An established material physics researcher, Gardner lost his eyesight six years ago when surgery to correct his glaucoma and cataracts went awry. He eventually returned to work with the help of a talking computer and a sighted assistant.

But he quickly realized that he could still do his science only because he had learned it as a sighted man, with access to all the textbooks, scholarly journals and laboratories.

Almost no advanced mathematics materials are available in Braille, he learned, and the popular six-dot Braille traditions can't even express complex equations.

In those Braille traditions, the symbols for numbers are often clunky or easily confused with punctuation symbols such as commas and semicolons. Plus, there is no subscript and superscript.

So Gardner created DotsPlus in 1991, a Braille-type math writing system that uses a combination of regular math symbols and a system of eight dots to represent numbers.

With DotsPlus, mathematical equations are enlarged about 2 times. About the only real difference in the notation is the fact that instead of Arabic numbers, there are Braille numbers.

"It is so simple, it's amazing no one thought of it before," Gardner said.

The National Science Foundation liked the concept, awarding him a \$30,000 grant to improve the system. A year later, they were begging him to continue.

Gardner eventually agreed to continue.

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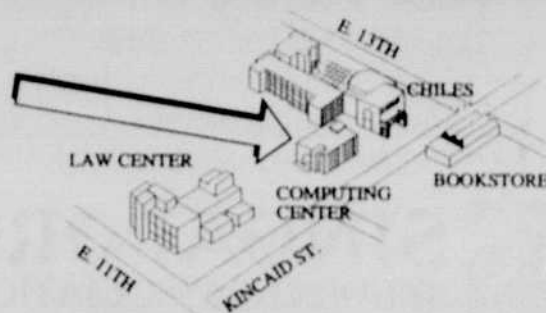
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