

## Let me say this about that

—By Gene Klare



# Labor Honor Roll

**THE LABOR HALL OF FAME**, sponsored by the Northwest Oregon Labor Retirees Council, honors living union retirees for the work they did on behalf of their unions and the rest of the labor movement. In this issue of the Northwest Labor Press and now and then in future issues, we'll look back to the past at women and men who deserve being listed on a Labor Honor Roll.

We'll start by recalling the work of Caroline Gleason, once described in the Labor Press as "one of the great heroines of the Oregon labor movement." She earned that accolade because she was responsible for passage of the first state wage and hour law in the United States of America. She was a 1910 graduate of the University of Minnesota.

**IN 1912**, Miss Gleason, a Portland social worker, undertook a survey of working conditions in factories and stores. In pursuing her quest for information, she took a job in a Portland paper box factory where she pasted labels on the ends of shoe boxes. Four decades later in the 1950s, she told the Labor Press in an interview:

**"AFTER TWO OR THREE** labels, our hands were covered with glue and had to be washed, but there was no hot water. We carried five-gallon pails to another part of the plant where live steam was pouring from a pipe. We held our pails under the pipe until the steam had heated the water. You must remember that this was piecework and all these preparations took time. In three days I earned \$1.52."

After quoting her, the Labor Press went on to say: "Miss Gleason also took careful note of the appalling sanitary and safety deficiencies in this and other plants. Her survey, published late in 1912, had such an impact that a wage-hour bill was introduced on the opening day of the 1913 legislative session."

**NOT LONG AFTER** compiling her survey, Caroline Gleason became a Catholic nun with the name Sister Miriam Theresa and worked as a faculty member at Marylhurst College, a Catholic institution near Lake Oswego. It later attained university status. Sister Miriam Theresa headed the school's sociology department and inspired young women students to become social activists.

**MAY DARLING**, another pioneer, was a Portland school teacher who in 1919 was one of the founders of Teachers Local 111, which today also represents other school employees.



MAY DARLING

May, once termed in a Labor Press headline as "Oregon labor's Darling," campaigned for passage of school levies throughout her career. In 1934, Darling was elected a second vice president of the Oregon State Federation of Labor, which was an affiliate of the American Federation of Labor. At the time, she was one of only 20 women in the U.S. who were officers of state labor federations. Darling was a founder of the Oregon State Labor Federation's college scholarship program in 1947. It was continued by the Oregon AFL-CIO, which was formed in 1956 in a merger of the state councils of the American Federation of Labor and the

Congress of Industrial Organizations, and still exists today.

**IN 1916**, ELIZABETH GEE of the Garment Workers Union in Portland ran for a state representative post in the Oregon Legislature. Although endorsed by labor, she lost.

**MRS. C.C. GUNDEN** was president of the Portland Carpenters Ladies Auxiliary Union No. 15 when the Auxiliary won second prize for its float in the 1919 Portland Rose Festival Parade. "

**GERTRUDE SWEET** joined Portland Waitresses Local 305 in 1920, became one of its leaders and went on to hold the office of vice president in the Hotel & Restaurant Employees & Bartenders International Union. (That

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# Nurses at Roseburg's Mercy Medical Center vote for ONA

**ROSEBURG** — Registered nurses at Mercy Medical Center voted Jan. 11 to join the Oregon Nurses Association. The vote, conducted at the hospital in Douglas County by the National Labor Relations Board, was 178 to 97 in a bargaining unit of 310.

The election is one of Oregon's largest union election victories in the last five years, and it represents the certification of the largest collective bargaining unit of registered nurses in Oregon by any union in more than 25 years, the ONA said.

The victory didn't come without some roadblocks.

In November, the hospital challenged the rights of 16 charge nurses to vote in the election by defining them as supervisors. The nurses withdrew their first petition for an election, and five of the 16 challenged nurses resigned their positions on the Organizing Committee to remove any suggestion of undue supervisor influence. Organizers quickly collected a sufficient number of authorization cards to submit a new petition.

Last month, hospital chief executive Victor Fresolone apologized in a letter to his nurses for an "inappropriate remark" he made to a physician in August. In the letter, he acknowledged "referring to some nurses as 'BMW's,' which, I regret, stands for 'bitchers, moaners and whiners.'"

Registered nurses at Roseburg's only community hospital had been

publicly voicing their concerns about compromised patient care due to inadequate staffing levels and deteriorating working conditions.

The hospital's nursing turnover rate was 17 percent a year, compared with a statewide average of 9 percent, according to a 2004 survey by the Oregon Center for Nursing.

The nurses said they sought representation with the ONA so that they could have greater control over their work setting to act as advocates on behalf of their patients.

"This confirms our commitment to

provide the best possible care to our patients," said Laura Garren, a 20-year Mercy employee who is a registered nurse in Mercy's Family Birth Place.

The next step for the nurses is to negotiate a contract with the hospital. "Mercy nurses trust that the hospital will respect their decision to be represented by the Oregon Nurses Association and that the hospital will agree to sit down and negotiate a contract with them in good faith," said ONA Assistant executive director of labor relations Paul Goldberg.

ONA represents 10,000 nurses.

## More Cingular Wireless workers sign up with CWA

Employees at Cingular Wireless continue to show what happens when workers have a free choice to form a union: Nearly 16,000 Cingular employees who once worked for AT&T before the Cingular/AT&T merger have joined Communications Workers of America since August under a neutrality agreement in which Cingular agreed to honor the workers' freedom to form a union when a majority signs authorization cards.

More than 2,400 Cingular Wireless workers became the most recent to join CWA in late December and early January. The new CWA members include 1,288 Orlando, Fla., call center workers; 400 retail sales workers at several Pennsylvania locations; 158 sales and customer service workers in Hawaii; 151 retail sales reps in Colorado; 51 retail sales workers in Iowa; and 14 New Mexico sales workers.

Last year, 400 Cingular call center employees joined Portland-based CWA Local 7901.

Including the newly organized units, CWA now represents 32,000 Cingular Wireless employees. Prior to the merger, CWA represented over 20,000 Cingular employees, but none at the non-union AT&T Wireless.

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