

...Three union contracts ratified

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\$300 bonus. But they'll get no step increases during the life of the contract.

The unit had been without a contract since June 30, 2005. The new two-year agreement runs through June 30, 2007.

Most classifications now will range from \$10.50 to \$19 an hour; most members in the unit earn about \$13 an hour. As with the cafeteria workers, PPS' health benefit contribution cap was raised to \$779 a month.

"It was as good as we could get under the circumstances," Hornstein said. PPS didn't give the union any wage proposal until bargaining had been under way six months, and its starting offer was zero percent.

Two groups of workers have yet to negotiate new contracts with the district: The 16-union District Council of Unions, which has been without a contract since Dec. 31, 2005; and the soon-to-be-reinstated custodians, who will be represented by SEIU Local 503.

DCU represents about 300 workers in a variety of occupations and unions, including maintenance, bus drivers and mechanics. The first bargaining sessions are scheduled this summer.

As for the custodians, they were still waiting for the district's offer of

reinstatement as of press time. The entire custodial department, with 330 custodians, was terminated in a 2002 privatization. But the Oregon Supreme Court ruled in December 2005 that their termination was illegal.

Cathy Minberg, PPS chief operating officer, said the district will have to offer them reinstatement at their old wages and benefits, and negotiate a new union contract then with SEIU. Minberg said the district doesn't believe any back pay is owed, however. That issue will likely be settled in federal court, with Mark Griffin and one other attorney representing custodians in separate class action lawsuits.

Jim Coon, the attorney who won the Oregon Supreme Court case, told a PPS Board committee June 14 that about half of the 330 terminated custodians are interested in reinstatement. The rest have gotten better jobs, retired, become disabled, or died.

Minberg said the district won't be able to afford the previous number of custodians unless the Board increases the custodial budget.

PPS' janitorial contract with Portland Habilitation Center expires July 14; the district is seeking to extend it month-to-month until the transition to in-house custodians is complete.

Some have concluded from the re-

cent contract settlements that PPS is embarking on a new era of labor peace, and may be trying to bury the hatchet before the November 2006 election, when it will ask local voters to approve a property tax increase to fund schools.

PPS spokesperson Bob Lawrence agreed the coming election was a factor.

"A new positive relationship takes time," Lawrence said. "In our relation with represented groups, the perception was we didn't have a respectful collaboration."

With the PAT agreement, for the first time in years PPS broke its habit of never signing a new union contract until the old one was expired. The agreement was signed with two weeks remaining in the previous contract.

But the SEIU and AFT-Oregon contracts weren't completed until nearly a year after the old ones expired. And the district's negotiating behavior prompted SEIU to file legal charges with the Oregon Employment Relations Board.

Toensmeier accused the district of "bad faith bargaining," after it took six months of bargaining before the district made any wage or benefit proposal. SEIU's case will go forward despite the contract settlement.

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