

## Let me say this about that

—By Gene Klare



## Willie Marion honored

**WILLIE MARION** of Portland, a retired business manager of Molders Local 139, is the newest member of the Labor Hall of Fame, which is sponsored by the Northwest Oregon Labor Retirees Council.

The Retirees Council is affiliated with the NW Oregon Labor Council, AFL-CIO, and holds its monthly meetings in NOLC's boardroom in the Scandia Building at 1125 SE Madison St., Portland.



**WILLIE MARION**

**MARION**, who turns 71 next week, retired as Local 139's executive officer in 2001. Local 139's parent union is the Glass, Molders, Pottery, Plastics and Allied Workers International Union (GMP) of the AFL-CIO.

Willie Marion Jr. was born on Feb. 22, 1936 in Tupelo, Mississippi. His father was a plumber whom Willie Jr. helped in his boyhood years. Willie Jr. graduated from Nettleton High School south of Tupelo. While in high school, he had a job in a doctor's laboratory. Later, he worked as a railroad section repairman, a job known as a

"gandy dancer." He worked with his father on the railroad.

**MARION SERVED** in the U.S. Army in 1956, '57 and '58. During most of those three years he was stationed at an anti-aircraft base in Fairbanks, Alaska, and earned the stripes of a specialist-fifth. He received his honorable discharge at Fort Lewis, Washington.

After his Army duty, Marion settled in Tacoma, Wash., and found a job in a foundry, joining the Molders Union. He worked there for eight-and-a-half years, then moved in 1966 to Portland. He was hired at Oregon Steel Foundry and transferred his membership to Local 139. He later worked as a molder at Western Foundry.

**IN 1977**, after 11 years of being active in Local 139, Willie Marion was elected to the union's top job, business representative. He succeeded Jim Rogers, who was appointed to an international representative's job based in Seattle. Marion told the Northwest Labor Press that he thinks he's the first black unionist to be elected to a Portland local union's top job in which one person was responsible for handling every function in the union's operation. That makes him a trailblazer for black unionists. In Marion's tenure, the title of Local 139's top post was changed from business representative to business manager.

Marion negotiated collective bargaining contracts with employers, handled grievances and other problems; served as a trustee on health & welfare and pension trust funds. He represented Local 139 at meetings of the Multnomah County Labor Council and later at NOLC meetings; served on the labor council board; represented Local 139 at Molders International Conventions and at sessions of the Oregon AFL-CIO. He also represented the Molders at meetings of the Portland and Vicinity Metal Trades Council. In his many years on that council, Marion recalled a series of executive officers including Lloyd Knudsen of the Electrical Workers, Dick Schneider of the Machinists and Mike Fahey of the Shipwrights, an affiliate of the Carpenters.

**MARION SHARPENED** his union skills by attending training sessions conducted by his international union back east, and by participating in classes at the Labor Education and Research Center of the University of Oregon.

Looking back, Marion told the Labor Press that it took him about three years on the job of running Local 139 to gain the respect of the employers with whom he dealt.

A historical note regarding the Molders Union: The Iron Molders Union was organized in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1859 and later evolved into the Mold-

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## Former union volunteer, organizer Willy Myers elected BA at Sheet Metal Local 16

Union organizer Willy Myers was elected business agent at Sheet Metal Workers Local 16 in votes counted Feb. 2. Myers outpolled three other candidates to replace Steve Kowats, who left to take a job with the training department of the Sheet Metal Workers International Association.

Myers will be one of four business agents of the 2,200-member local, and will be responsible for dispatch, contract negotiations and member grievances in the construction side of the industry. The local's top elected office — business manager/financial secretary — is held by Len Phillips.

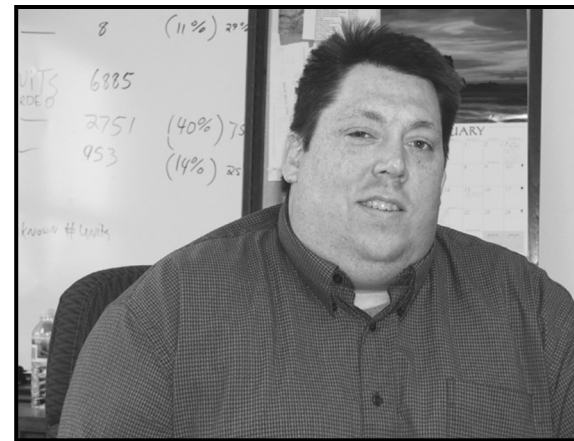
Myers said he hopes to continue what he began as organizer — an energetic effort to unionize workers in the local sheet metal industry.

Myers got his start with the union in 1994. As a shop superintendent at a nonunion HVAC installer, he was driving a service department van back to the shop when the brakes went out. The van tumbled down a 50-foot embankment outside Salem, hitting trees on the way down. Coughing up blood, he called the company owner, who had

his son drop him off at the hospital. But Myers came away from the experience feeling like he was valued less than the equipment. After two weeks recovery, Myers asked to be returned to a job he had earlier held at the company, but had his pay cut 25 cents. He decided to take action.

The owner had promised employees a job review and a raise after six months of work, but hadn't followed through. Myers got two dozen co-workers to sign a petition, and marched into the office with the demand, which the owner refused.

Myers went back to his co-workers and said, "They can't fire all of us; let's walk." Employees called in sick the following day, and instead of going to work, met in a park with Local 16 representative Mike Anderson, whom



**WILLY MYERS**

Myers had invited.

Three days later Myers was fired. "I was right," Myers recalled. "They couldn't fire all of us; they just fired me."

A charge was filed with the National Labor Relations Board, but the government agency, charged with protecting workers' union rights, ruled that Myers was a supervisor and therefore didn't have rights.

But Myers' termination lit the fire under him. He volunteered his time to help Local 16 unionize the company. It took a year, but eventually the owner signed a union contract, and has been a good union employer since, Myers said.

Meanwhile Myers became a union member and kept busy with jobs through the Local 16 hiring hall. He volunteered to help organizing campaigns, and in 1999 was hired as the Local's staff organizer.

His new post brings a pay raise and a new set of charges, including responsibility for the well-being of hundreds of members.

"I've seen both sides of the fence," Myers said. "There are so many people out there that don't know what unions stand for. I want to take that message to every member of my craft, and tell them 'You deserve more respect from your employer, and you can win more respect with a union.'"



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