



NORTHWEST

LABOR PRESS

Volume 108
Number 6
March 16, 2007
Portland, Oregon



(PHOTO LEFT) Business Agent Steve Pickle shares information about Teamsters Joint Council 37 at the inaugural organizing workshop of the Change to Win labor federation in Oregon. (ABOVE) Lee Ann Halse (center) of SEIU Local 503 talks with Steve Witte of United Farm Workers and Patricia Avila of Local 503 during a break at the conference held March 3 in Southeast Portland. Nearly 125 delegates from around Oregon attended the conference. Change to Win is a national federation comprised of seven unions.

Letter Carriers to deliver message: Don't contract out mail service

By DON McINTOSH
Associate Editor

A Beaverton postmaster's decision to contract out mail delivery is producing a major outcry among union letter carriers. National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) Branch 82 has filed a complaint against Postmaster John Lee, and as of press time was planning to picket outside his office on March 15.

Residents aren't too pleased either. For over a month, homeowners at the new Arbor Parc Bethany housing development had to drive 10 miles roundtrip to a postal sorting station to pick up their mail.

The dispute is a local skirmish in a national war of ideology within the United States Postal Service (USPS). The Bush-appointed majority on the Postal Board of Governors has been pushing USPS to assign more deliveries to private contractors. Board Chair James C. Miller III, a former Reagan budget director, has called for wholesale postal privatization. NALC has energetically opposed the shift, arguing that privatization would not only threaten the jobs and incomes of America's 325,000 letter carriers, but would also compromise the security, efficiency and integrity of the mail, and put the long-term viability of the Postal Service in jeopardy.

In Beaverton, Willie Higgins just wanted to get his

mail. Higgins was the first person to move into the Arbor Parc development, in the Bethany neighborhood north of Interstate 26. Unpacking in his just-finished townhouse, he waited for a mailbox key to appear under his mat. It never came. Phone calls to Arbor Homes brought bad news: Delivery service — to the community mailboxes at the end of his street — would have to wait until mid-summer, when the development is half-full, he was told. Until then, he'd have to drive to Hillsboro to get his mail, a location that closes at 4 p.m.

And yet, all around him and across the street from him, older residences and businesses were getting regular mail service.

"I don't understand why the guy who delivers mail across the street couldn't simply add the new boxes to his route," said L.C. Hansen, president of NALC Branch 82. That's the way USPS normally handles new deliveries, Hansen said.

Instead, residents had to pick up their own mail while USPS advertised for a contractor.

USPS area spokesperson Kerry Jeffrey had few answers to Labor Press questions about the contracting process, but sources in the Beaverton post office said

(Turn to Page 3)

Change to Win unions share organizing ideas

Oregon locals of the Change to Win labor federation shared ideas for organizing in the Pacific Northwest — and pledged to support each other's campaigns — during a daylong organizing workshop March 3 in Portland.

Nearly 125 delegates representing all seven unions that make up the Change to Win federation attended.

The keynote speaker was GERALYN LUTTY, an international vice president of the United Food and Commercial Workers who also sits on the national leadership board of the Change to Win labor federation.

"There are no red or blue states in working America" Liddy said. "There is only a state of concern."

Liddy said workers are ready to make a change. "We can go hide, we can close our eyes and stay the same, or we can create change. This is why Change to Win was created. The status quo no longer is acceptable."

Union officials, staff, organizers and activists spent the day sharing organizing strategies and discussing how they can benefit by partnering with

other unions, community groups, elected officials, responsible employers, and other allies around the state.

"It was an opportunity for us to have some personal interaction with various activists and leaders of other unions," said Gene Pronovost, president of UFCW Local 555.

UFCW said Change to Win solidarity will play a huge role in its upcoming contract talks with grocers in Eugene and the Willamette Valley.

The Service Employees International Union said it can benefit from CtW resources in its campaign to organize 3,500 support staff at St. Vincent and Providence Hospitals. A candlelight vigil is slated for March 21.

"I'm not a union member (yet), but SEIU has changed my life," said Jen Little-Reese, a certified nursing assistant who is in the middle of the bitter organizing campaign at the Catholic-owned Providence Health Systems. "A whole bunch of people I know are really scared. I'm just a CNA who had big ideas, but took no action. I had no

(Turn to Page 7)