

Carpenters will go high-tech as they prepare for contract talks with contractors, drywallers

The Pacific Northwest Regional Council of Carpenters has a new game plan for contract talks that begin later this month.

Their campaign — “Contract 2007: Taking Care of Business” — will go all out to mobilize members at two massive unity rallies and recruit hundreds of worksite “captains.” They plan to employ tech-savvy methods to keep members up to date as talks progress.

The Seattle-headquartered Pacific Northwest Regional Council of Carpenters — which represents

23,500 construction workers in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana and Wyoming — has three agreements set to expire May 31 that cover close to 11,000 members: drywall hangers in Oregon and Western Washington, and general construction carpenters in Western Washington.

In the past, says Regional Council spokesperson Eric Franklin, the union waited for members to attend regular local meetings. As with most unions, only a tiny fraction of the membership showed up.

This year they want to demonstrate the size and power of the entire membership — and then take the union to the members at the worksites.

The campaign kicks off with a pair of rallies: Sunday, April 15, at the Oregon Convention Center in Portland, and Sunday, April 22, at the Tacoma Dome. Carpenters members, who are typically dispersed across far-flung job sites, will be able to see just how big the union is.

“We want to develop a sense of pride and solidarity,” said union negotiator Ed Triezenberg, “so that when we talk to the contractors, they know the members will stand behind the bargaining team.”

To publicize the rallies, the union has sent out 13 pieces of direct mail in the style of a political campaign, and will follow up with “robo-dial” reminders to 20,000 members.

Organizers expect 3,000 to 5,000 people in Portland and 5,000 to 8,000 in Tacoma. Some members from Idaho will be coming by charter bus, and members from Montana and Wyoming will carpool and be put up in local hotels by the union. To attract members, the union will give away a brand-new

Chevy pickup and several flat-screen televisions.

The rallies are open to union construction workers and their families, not just Carpenters, and free hot dogs, chips and soda are on offer. Every attendee will be eligible to win the televisions, but only Carpenters members can win the truck. On both dates, doors open at noon and the rallies begin at 2 p.m.

After that, a core of “contract captains” will be entrusted to keep members up to date where they work. The Regional Council sent business reps out to worksites to find out who were the most respected members on the job — and recruit them to be the contract captains. They hoped to get 300. Over 700 signed up.

“What we found is that people were waiting to be asked,” Franklin said.

Apparently, members want to be kept in the loop as bargaining takes place. About 3,600 have signed up for e-mail updates via the campaign Web site, www.contract2007.org.

And with the cell phone now an essential part of a carpenter’s tool kit, the union plans to poll and update members using the text message feature.

Four years ago, Carpenters in Western Washington walked off the job in a nine-day strike after bargaining broke down over the issue of health care coverage. This year, Triezenberg expects negotiations to proceed smoothly with the employer groups.

“We have a philosophy that our contractors are our business partners,” Triezenberg said. And business right now is good, with employment levels high and construction in a continued boom.

Forum will debut ballot measures to Portland’s Charter

Supporters and opponents of ballot measures to amend the City of Portland Charter will appear in a forum moderated by the League of Women Voters of Portland on Tuesday, April 10, at 7 p.m. in the Board Room of the Multnomah Building, 501 SE Hawthorne, Portland. The event is free, and the public is invited to attend.

In November 2005, the City Council assembled a citizen Charter Review Commission to review Portland’s City Charter. The Commission’s recommendations will be on the ballot in the May 15 Special Election in four ballot measures proposing changes to the City Charter in the following areas: Measure 26-89 — implementation of periodic Charter review; Measure 26-90 — Portland’s Civil Service system; Measure 26-91 — Portland’s form of city government from a commission to a strong mayor; and Measure 26-92 — the Portland Development Commission and its relationship to the city.

Labor unions are opposing all but the PDC measure, which they support.

Two speakers for each measure will present arguments in favor of and against the measure. Speakers include Bob Ball and David Kelleher, members of the Charter Review Commission; Chris Smith, co-chair of the Committee for Accountable City Government; City Commissioner Randy Leonard; Rob Wheaten of Laborers Local 483; Mark Rosenbaum, PDC Board chair; and Amanda Fritz, a neighborhood activist.

Following their presentation, the audience will be able to submit questions.

For more information, call the Portland League office at 503-228-1675.

Diana Stewart, labor attorney, named as judge

Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski has appointed longtime labor and family law attorney Diana Stuart to a vacant judge position on the Multnomah County Circuit Court.

Stuart was a partner in the Goldberg, Mechanic, Stuart, Gibson law firm, which represented workers and labor unions. The firm dissolved at the end of 2006 and the partners went separate ways.

Stuart’s appointment means she’ll have to find other attorneys to pick up her active case load. The list includes one long-running case in which Stuart represented a Tri-Met bus driver who was terminated under the employer’s drug policy — not because she failed a drug test but because she was unable to provide a large enough urine sample. Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757 has hoped to use the case to overturn inhumane provisions of drug-testing policies. The case is now before the Oregon Court of Appeals.

Motorcycle Poker Run to raise funds for Doernbecher Hospital

Tickets are on sale to win a new Harley-Davidson motorcycle and raise funds for Doernbecher Children’s Hospital in Portland.

The fifth annual Motorcycle Poker Run and Chili Cook-Off will be held Saturday, June 9, in Northeast Portland. The event is sponsored by “Unions for Kids,” a non-profit organization comprised of members of various unions in Portland and Southwest Washington.

Tickets to win the motorcycle — a 2007 suede blue and black Dyna Low-Rider FXDL — are \$10 each. Only 3,500 tickets will be sold.

For more information, go to www.unionsforkids.org or call Lee Duncan at 503-260-5905.

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