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Portland**Learning a trade**

Trish Chancellor, a journey-level steamfitter out of Plumbers and Fitters Local 290, shows a Reynolds High School student how to solder a pipe at the 15th annual Women in Trades Fair held May 3-5 at the NECA-IBEW Training Center in Northeast Portland. Chancellor, of Grants Pass, emphasized the importance of math and science to the students. "A lot of the students say they're not good at math, but if you can apply it to something you like, there is a reason to learn," she said. Chancellor also told the students about apprenticeship training and how they work and get paid while they learn a trade. "It's a great way to make a living and learn a valuable skill," said Chancellor, who has attended the fair since 1996. The trades fair is geared toward attracting women to high-paying, highly-skilled careers in the construction, highway, electrical and mechanical trades. It features 80 hands-on workshops and exhibits led by tradeswomen from apprenticeship training centers, community colleges, trades-related employment and government agencies. May 3-4 was set aside specifically for junior high and high school students. May 5 was open to the public. More than 1,350 people attended the trades fair.

SEIU 49 agrees to no card check organizingBy DON McINTOSH
Associate Editor

Portland-based Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 49 appears to have been targeted for legal action by the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation, an anti-union group based in Virginia. Lawyers for the group helped a Portland maintenance worker press a pair of unfair labor practice complaints against both Local 49 and his employer — Somers Building Maintenance (SBM) — a janitorial contractor based in Sacramento.

In a settlement agreement with the National Labor Relations Board, Local 49 pledged last month not to use card-check organizing for six months and SBM agreed to not recognize Local 49 for a period of one year unless the union goes through an NLRB election. The NLRB is the federal agency that runs union elections.

SBM is unionized except for several locations in Oregon, said Local 49 organizer Maggie Long. A couple years ago, the company agreed to a stance of neutrality toward union drives at its nonunion locations, and said it would grant union recognition where SEIU presented authorization cards from a majority at any location.

So in January 2006, Long and fellow Local 49 organizer Silvia Ruiz began contacting workers from a 33-worker SBM unit that cleans a Portland silicon wafer plant owned by Siltronic. Working from a list provided by the company, they began visiting workers in their homes to tout the merits of belonging to a union. By

June, Long says, they believed they'd signed up a majority, and presented cards to the company. But SBM managers held off on union recognition, saying that in fact the union was short of a majority. And then three SBM-Siltronic workers wrote to the union saying they'd changed their mind.

Notwithstanding SBM's neutrality commitment, Long says she thinks company managers provoked the turn-arounds in mandatory one-on-one meetings with workers. Meanwhile, the company experienced turnover, so that the slim pro-union majority that existed in June evaporated.

Nonetheless, on Oct. 12, SBM agreed to recognize the union retroactively, on the basis of the ostensible majority in June.

That ran afoul of NLRB rules. So-called "card-check" agreements like the one SEIU had with SBM rely on a provision in the law that allows employers to voluntarily recognize a union where there is majority support for it — without going through an NLRB-supervised election. But the law forbids granting or accepting union recognition unless there is some objective demonstration that the union has a majority.

Unions prefer card check because they say the NLRB election ground rules tilt the field heavily in the employers' favor, and are working to make card check possible by passing the Employee Free Choice Act in Congress. Employer groups, including the National Right to Work Foundation, are pushing a bill that would out-

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Major reform possible in immigration policy, proponents believe

Major reform of U.S. immigration policy may soon be coming. As of press time, U.S. Senators Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.) and John Kyl (R-Ariz.) were negotiating with the White House. If they hammer out an agreement, the Senate could debate and pass an immigration reform bill by Memorial Day, which would then go to the U.S. House of Representatives for approval. On the other hand, if they fail to come up with a bill the president will sign, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) has said he will schedule as much as two weeks for the Senate to debate proposals, such as one the Senate approved last year when Congress was in Republican hands. That bill failed because it couldn't be reconciled with an enforcement-only bill that passed the House.

If the two sides do reach a compromise, it will most likely include:

- Increased border enforcement;
- Quicker and easier ways for employers to verify employees' legal status, but tougher penalties on employers who hire illegal immigrants;
- A path to legal status for illegal immigrants who are now working in the United States; and
- A guest worker program that would allow employers to bring in new immigrant workers.

Both labor and business interests are working intently behind the scenes to make sure any reform is one they can live with. Busi-

ness, represented by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, wants a steady supply of immigrant workers. Labor, chiefly the AFL-CIO and several members of the Change to Win union federation, wants a policy that protects American workers — in part by ensuring immigrant workers have some kind of legal status and basic workers' rights, so they can't serve as super-exploited competitors to other workers.

U.S. population surpassed 300 million last year, and about 36 million of those are foreign-born. Of foreign-born U.S. residents, just over a third are naturalized U.S. citizens, a third are legal resi-

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