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## Enjoy Your Labor Day!

Vocalist and saxophonist Patrick Lamb, a member of Musicians Local 99, will perform at this year's Labor Day picnic on Monday, Sept. 3, at Oaks Amusement Park in Southeast Portland.

The picnic, which attracts nearly 15,000 people, is sponsored by the Northwest Oregon Labor Council.

Lamb is a popular performing and recording artist from Portland. He plays rhythm and blues, soul and jazz.

He will perform on the main stage from noon to 1 p.m. and again from 2 to 3 p.m.

Also featured for the first time this year will be professional wrestling, starring Dr. Pain. Matches will be held throughout the day, capped by a 20-man "over the top battle royale" starting around 3 p.m.

Other featured wrestlers are Caution, Hazard, Cowboy 'Tex' Thompson, Widowmaker, Buddy Highway, plus more.



PATRICK LAMB

"It will be a day full of fun and excitement," said Bob Spicher Jr., promoter of Northwest Sports Entertainment. (Spicher is the son of Bob Sr., a retired union representative of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555.)

Plenty of politicians will be on hand — no, not to wrestle, but rather to meet union members and their families. The politicians will take the stage from 1 to 2 p.m.

The Labor Council will sell food scrip for 25 cents each. Three scrip will get you a hot dog and chips, two scrip a soda pop, and four scrip a beer. A deluxe ride bracelet costs \$8.25 and is good from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The ride bracelet also includes admission to the roller skating rink.

Call the Labor Council at 503-235-9444 to order scrip or for more information.

The following are union-sponsored Labor Day picnics that have been con-

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## Pulse of the Unions: *How are workers doing?*

By DON McINTOSH  
Associate Editor

What kind of shape is the local labor movement in, and how are working people doing? Labor Day is a good time to take the pulse of labor, so for perspectives on the subject, the Northwest Labor Press talked to Tom Chamberlain, president of the Oregon AFL-CIO; Bob Bussel, director of the University of Oregon's Labor Education and Research Center (LERC); and Art Ayre, labor economist for the Oregon Employment Service.

Overall, says Ayre, wages for Oregon workers have been rising faster than inflation, though most of the wage growth has been at the high end and low end. Meanwhile, Oregon's unemployment rate has dropped a lot, from 8.5 percent in mid-2003, the highest in the nation, to 5.1 percent now — about the middle among states.

But union membership, Ayre said, is flat. As of 2004, Oregon union membership stood at 223,500. That number is almost identi-

cal to 1983, when Oregon had 223,000 union members. Thus, unions represent a smaller share of Oregon's workforce — from 26 percent in 1983 to 15 percent today.

And the composition of the labor movement has changed, Ayre said, tracking the decline of manufacturing and extractive industry employment. Today, Oregon's public-sector union members outnumber private sector 115,000 to 109,000. Close to 46 percent of Oregon's public workers are union, compared to 8.1 percent of private-sector workers.

In most occupations, union members earn more on average than their nonunion counterparts. And the real union difference continues to be in benefits, where the defined benefit pension plan and employer-paid full-family health coverage are still the union standard, even as they become rare in nonunion workplaces.

"The union movement is about building power for working people," says the AFL-CIO's Chamberlain. "Workers join a union to

get better wages and health care. One worker standing alone can't do it."

At one time, when unions represented a much bigger slice of certain industries, and workers by custom had the right to strike, union power was chiefly economic. Today, it's chiefly political: Unions have come to focus limited resources on the democratic process to try to level the playing field when they face powerful employers.

Professor Bussel says unions are much more political today than they were 30 years ago. Three things have happened: The Republican Party became more anti-union. The union movement became more political. And finally, the Democratic Party began to take labor movement more seriously.

"In the mid-1970s, there were easily a dozen Republican U.S. senators who had 80 percent or better union voting records," Bus-

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