

UNITE HERE Local 9 gets contract at Portland Hilton

Contract negotiators for the Portland Hilton Hotel & Executive Tower and UNITE HERE Local 9 reached a breakthrough May 29 that will likely end the union's seven-month-old boycott of the hotel.

The company agreed to nearly every major proposal by the union. If, as expected, members approve the contract in a vote to take place next week, the union's boycott coordinator will spend time trying to bring business back to the hotel.

Dozens of unions, non-profit groups and politicians cancelled events or scheduled them elsewhere out of respect for the boycott, and the Democratic Party of Oregon pledged not to schedule any events at the Portland Hilton this year. That meant hundreds of thousands of dollars in lost business for the hotel.

Housekeepers were reportedly dancing in the break room when they heard the news that their work load will decrease — which was a key union goal. In two months, the daily cleaning

quota will be 15 rooms, down from the current 16. And of those rooms, the number which are "checkouts" will go down from 12 to 11, and to 10 in a year's time.

The new agreement contains higher wages than those paid in Seattle, which has a higher cost of living than Portland. The contract has a four-year term, and is retroactive to Aug. 1, 2007; workers will get a back pay check of 45 cents an hour for any hours worked since the old contract expired. The roughly 100 housekeepers, who now make \$10.10 an hour, will be making \$12.20 when the new contract ends July 31, 2011. Even parking valets, who had been making minimum wage (plus tips and benefits), will now make a dollar over minimum.

In the banquet department, workers will now get to keep 90 percent of the automatic gratuity, up from the current 75 percent.

The Hilton agreed to a bus pass subsidy of \$25 a month, which will rise to \$30 and then \$40 by

the end of the contract. The Portland Hilton may be the only one in the country to agree to such a subsidy.

And the contract contains a variety of provisions that will increase job security and enable the union to build power.

Management agreed to successorship language, so that if the Hilton sells the hotel, the contract will remain in force with the new owner. That was a big issue for the union; the last time the Benson Hotel was sold, the new owners fired and rehired all the employees and the union had to bargain the contract anew.

The agreement also contains language restricting subcontracting of bargaining unit work, and even bring back in-house some bakery work that had been outsourced. And the bakers got a sizable bonus for the disruption they suffered.

The contract end date is the same as the contract expiration date for the Seattle and Vancouver, Washington hotels, in accord with a union

goal that all contracts expire at the same time to maximize worker bargaining power. The Seattle Hilton settled its contract May 28, and Local 9 was hopeful the Vancouver Hilton would also sign its first agreement soon, two years after workers joined the union.

And the hotel agreed for the first time to allow members to take leaves of absence to do union work: up to three workers for an indefinite amount of time, and up to 10 for any two-month period.

Finally, for any hotel the Hilton builds or acquires within Portland city limits, the company agreed to adopt a stance of neutrality toward unionizing efforts, and to recognize the union if a majority of workers sign authorization cards.

Local 9 called the contract a major leap forward. Assuming ratification goes off without a hitch, the union may push the Portland Hilton as a model, and as a hotel deserving of business from unions and pro-labor organizations.

Letter Carriers collect record 73.1 million pounds of food

The 2008 National Association of Letter Carriers' "Stamp Out Hunger" Food Drive collected a record 73.1 million pounds of food donations in the nation's largest one-day effort to combat hunger.

Locally, more than 3,000 letter carriers throughout Oregon and Clark County, Wash., set a new record this year, collecting more than 1.65-million pounds of food. In the Portland metro area, letter carriers collected 843,258 pounds of food. That's an increase of nearly 3 percent over the previous year.

"While we didn't reach our goal of two-million pounds of food, we are thrilled to have set a new statewide record for the food drive for the second year running," says L.C. Hansen, president of Letter Carriers Branch 82. "We thank everyone who donated to the drive, and we encourage people to continue to fight hunger locally throughout the year."

The NALC food drive takes place annually on the second Saturday in May.

"What our letter carriers do on this one day is simply amazing," said Rachel Bristol, executive director of Oregon Food Bank. "We also thank the

hundreds of volunteers who stepped forward to help and the hundreds of thousands of postal customers who donated high-quality food for their letter carriers to pick up on this day. Your efforts made a big difference."

Machinist to hold Guide Dog Dash motorcycle event

Machinist Lodge 63 will host the second annual "Guide Dog Dash" Motorcycle Run Saturday, June 28.

The start and finish will be at the Machinists Hall, 3645 S.E. 32nd Ave. Portland. Registration is 8 a.m. and the first bikes will go out at 8:30 a.m. The last bikes will go out at 9:30 a.m.

Each rider and passenger will receive an event t-shirt.

Pre-registration is a \$25 donation per rider and \$10 per passenger. Day of ride: \$30 per rider, \$10 passenger. Pre-registration must be received at the hall no later than June 25.

All proceeds go to "Guide Dogs of America." Registration forms are online at www.iamdl24.org.

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