

# Vancouver Fire Fighters give up wage hikes to help cash-strapped city coffers

VANCOUVER — Union firefighters have voted to give up a pay raise so that the City of Vancouver can afford to staff a new fire station.

In results announced Dec. 30, members of Fire Fighters Local 452 voted by a 91 percent margin to approve a one-year contract extension that contains scheduled step increases, but no cost-of-living allowance (COLA). The 164 members of the union had been scheduled for a 4 percent increase.

"The budget situation being what it was, we reconsidered," said Local 452 President Mark Johnston.

Vancouver city government has been hit hard by the recession: Sales tax revenue is down because of a decline in sales, and property tax revenues are expected to decline in about a year because of falling home values. So far the city has reacted by eliminating 30 positions, including 16 layoffs.

"We were just really concerned about public safety, especially in the east part of city," Johnston said.

The skipped COLA is expected to

save Vancouver \$700,000 in 2009, an amount that will make a difference when the city opens a new fire station in east Vancouver in January 2010.

Johnston said this is the first time in at least 25 years that the union has agreed to a wage freeze. Average wages are about \$70,000 a year for the group, which includes firefighters and paramedics.

Johnston said it helped that the sacrifice is being shared: The city has told managers and other nonunion workers they won't be getting a COLA.

Local 452's new agreement did have some improvements for members: An increase from six days a year of sick leave to 12 days, and an increase in the maximum amount of unused sick leave that can be banked: from about six months worth to nine months worth.

The skipped COLA could have implications for other unions at the city. Contract negotiations are under way for three other bargaining units: Fire Fighters Local 452, which represents deputy fire marshals; Office & Profes-

sional Employees International Union Local 11, which represents some city bureaus; and the Joint Labor Coalition, a four-union unit that includes members of American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 307-VC, Teamsters Local 58, Machinists District Lodge 24, and Plumbers Local 290.

"I know there are employers out there who are going to use this against their unions," Johnson said. "We don't necessarily recommend this, or say every group should be doing this."

The contract covering police officers won't expire until the end of 2009, and the Police Guild said no to reopening its contract to negotiate giving up the COLA.

## Economic crisis is focus of Jan. 31 town hall meeting

A town hall focusing on the economic crisis will be held Saturday, Jan. 31, from 1 to 5 p.m. at First Unitarian Church, 1011 SW 12th Ave. Portland.

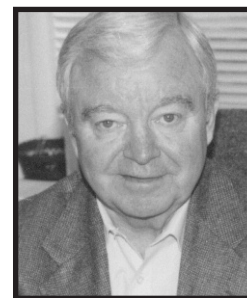
The event, free of charge, is being co-sponsored by Portland Jobs with Justice and more than two dozen union locals and community organizations.

A flier promoting the town hall said: "We have a great opportunity now to organize to get not just a bailout, but an economy that provides opportunity for working people; an economy that helps communities thrive and reverses decades of growing inequality, take-backs, union busting, unfair trade agreements, cuts in health care and more."

For more information, call JwJ at 503 236-5573 or go to [jwjd.org](http://jwjd.org).

# IN MEMORIAM

**TOM CUNNINGHAM**, a retired executive secretary-treasurer of Portland-based Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 49, died Dec. 21 from a head injury sustained in a fall during last month's winter storm. He was 77.



Cunningham, of Milwaukie, Oregon, served in the local's top post for 13 years. He was a 39-year member of the union.

Thomas David Cunningham was born in Janesville, Minn., on Feb. 22, 1931. He graduated from high school there in 1949.

He enlisted in the United States Air Force and served in the Korean War in 1951-52. He was honorably discharged as a staff sergeant in 1954.

Cunningham earned a degree in education from Mankato State University in Minnesota. A teaching opportunity at St. Mary's Home for Boys in Beaverton brought him to Oregon.

He left teaching to sell office machines. Then, in 1969, he was hired as a business agent by Marty Blake, Local 49's executive secretary-treasurer.

In addition to being a business agent, Cunningham became president of the Local 49 credit union in 1972, and was elected president of the local union in 1980. Three years later he became the union's business manager, succeeding Blake, who retired.

In his years as Local 49's leader, Cunningham held a number of posts, including Building Service Division Executive Board member, 1988-96; Hospital Division Executive Board member, 1988-92; delegate to International Federation of Labor meetings, 1994; Western Conference of SEIU Executive Board member, 1984-96; Oregon Council of Service Employees president, 1990-96.

Cunningham served on the Northwest Oregon Labor Council Executive Board and on the Advisory Board of the Labor Education and Research Center of the University of Oregon. He was president of the Portland Maritime Trades Council and of the Portland Provision

Trades Council. He was a delegate to the Columbia-Pacific Building Trades Council.

Cunningham was inducted into the Northwest Oregon Labor Council's Labor Hall of Fame in June 2001.

In retirement, Cunningham did volunteer work through his church, St. John's Catholic Church in Milwaukie, and helped at St. Vincent de Paul.

Cunningham and his wife, the former Geri McIntosh of Portland, were married in 1968. They had no children.

Gerri Cunningham had been hospitalized and was in intensive care when Cunningham had his accident. It wasn't until a few days later that the extent of his injuries were detected. Surgery failed to relieve swelling on his brain.

Funeral arrangements are pending as Geri Cunningham recuperates.

**TOM BERNARD**, a former officer of Teamsters Local 174 in Seattle and a union organizer for Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals Local 5017, died Dec. 27 of a heart attack while shoveling snow. He was 60.

Thomas Earl Bernard was born Dec. 18, 1948, in Detroit, Mich. He served in the Air Force in the Vietnam War and moved from Oakland, Calif., to Portland three years ago. He was active in the Portland chapter of Jobs with Justice and the anti-war movement.

In 1993, he married Helen Lee.

Survivors include his wife; son, Derek; daughter, Kristy Hemingway; stepdaughters, Jade Fox and Alison Lee-Whitney; stepson, Jesse Fox; and two grandchildren.

Remembrances to Sisters of the Road Cafe.



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