

Providence nurses say 'UNION YES'

A group of about 200 nurses at Providence St. Vincent hospital in Portland voted Feb. 13 to join Oregon Nurses Association, becoming part of an existing unit of 1,300. The tally was 94-19 — a pretty strong showing that the “resource nurses” want the benefits of a union contract.

ONA staff attorney Alan Yoder said the economic downturn played

a part in the nurses’ decision to unionize. Many health care facilities are seeing a reduction in patients owing to the severe recession, and the resource nurses, who don’t have a set schedule and substitute for regular staff RNs, were concerned they might be targeted for layoffs.

“Both groups of nurses realized they’d be much stronger working together,” Yoder said.

More Steelworkers laid off at Cascade Rolling Mills

McMINNVILLE — If there’s a recovery on the way, it’s not yet visible at Cascade Steel Rolling Mills.

The steel plant makes rebar, so it’s a good bellwether for the construction industry. If these steelworkers are busy, odds are somebody on the West Coast has placed an order for materials used in construction, and building trades employment can’t be far off.

Right now, they’re not busy.

About 75 Cascade steelworkers were laid off permanently in December, at which point United Steelworkers Local 8378 negotiated a “rolling layoff” for the 325 who remained: For three months, they worked two weeks out of four, and the company continued to pay for health

coverage during the two weeks workers collected unemployment insurance benefits. Because the maximum unemployment benefit doesn’t come close to their union wages, workers lost over a quarter of their income for the three months. But they kept their jobs.

That deal ended March 28, and 75 more workers were laid off permanently. Of the remaining 250, most remain on temporary layoff until April 13. The union learned that 16 of the company’s nonunion employees were also laid off, out of about 150.

Local 8378 President Joe Munger says company salespeople are starting to get inquiries from customers, but have no big orders yet.



ED HALL

Merkley appoints Hall labor liaison

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.) has hired longtime Fire Fighters Union leader Ed Hall as a staff liaison to organized labor, in order to strengthen outreach efforts to labor groups.

Hall said he plans to attend local union and labor council meetings on Merkley’s behalf to listen to union members and convey their concerns to the senator. His role would also be to meet with labor unionists when Merkley is in Washington, D.C., or otherwise unavailable. He is based at Merkley’s Portland office and is reachable at 503-326-3386.

Hall, 52, grew up on the South Coast in Brookings and is a lifelong resident of Oregon. Until Jan. 5, he was vice president and political director of the Portland Fire Fighters Association Local 43, but decided not to run for reelection. He retired as a firefighter March 7 after 31 years at fire departments in Salem, Corvallis, and Portland. He began his new job March 9.

UNITE leaves HERE, joins SEIU

PHILADELPHIA (PAI) — Delegates representing some 150,000 members of UNITE HERE voted March 21 to secede and affiliate with the Service Employees International Union.

At a convention in Philadelphia, the 450 delegates elected Edgar Romney, executive vice president of UNITE HERE, as president of their new organization — Workers United. They then voted to affiliate with SEIU, where they intend to organize food service and hotel workers, among others.

UNITE, which represents apparel and laundry workers, merged with the larger Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union in 2004. The new

400,000-member UNITE HERE affiliated with the Change to Win labor federation, where Romney is a top official.

Ironically, the leader of the secession movement, UNITE HERE International President Bruce Raynor (formerly of UNITE), will remain in that post until UNITE HERE’s convention in June.

John Wilhelm, president of UNITE HERE’s Hotel and Restaurant Division, denounced the move, saying its constitution did not allow for secession. That issue is now before the courts.

The UNITE HERE Executive Board has since voted to withdraw from Change To Win, where SEIU is the leading member.



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