



Dads & Daughters

An Invitation to All Tradespeople & the Young Women in their Lives to Celebrate and Share their Careers

Free Breakfast with Oregon Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian

Saturday, May 16, 2009
10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

IBEW Local 48 Union Hall

Next Door to NECA/IBEW
Electrical Training Center
16021 NE Airport Way, Portland OR 97230

Please RSVP
503.335.8200 x21
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After breakfast, explore trades careers at the 17th Annual Women in Trades Career Fair. Free attendance, hands-on workshops, exhibits, and networking with active tradeswomen.

www.tradeswomen.net

...DePaul fires union promoters

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wouldn't immediately attract management attention.

To sign up the plant's many Spanish speakers, Pierre and Taylor recruited another quality control worker — Priscilla Perez. Perez, a well-liked 18-year-old of Cuban and Puerto Rican descent, was six months into the job, her first. She liked the job, but was bothered by what she described to the Labor Press as management favoritism. And she had felt wronged when a supervisor wouldn't grant her a day off to attend a court hearing determining her guardianship of her 14-year-old sister.

With Taylor, Pierre and Perez signing up co-workers and passing out union authorization cards, the break room became a hotbed of union recruitment. So did Taylor's car, parked out back along a windowless wall. Within two weeks, over 100 of the approximately 130 workers had signed cards saying they wanted to join BCTGM.

The union was an easy sell. DePaul's charitable mission may be to provide employment opportunity, but the supposed recipients of that charity — its employees — sure had a lot of complaints. And not just about low wages and bare-bones benefits. According to six current and former workers interviewed for this article, managers showed favoritism toward some and verbally abused others. The office area was air conditioned, but workers packaging products for Frito-Lay, Tazo Tea, and Starbucks would sometimes faint from exhaustion on the hot and poorly ventilated shop floor. The assembly line moved so fast that Frito-Lay's own managers at one point asked that it be slowed down. Forklifts raced around, with no taped-off "safe" areas. One worker was hospitalized when a forklift ran over his foot. And on top of that, workers faced termination without warning for trivial



DePaul employee Claude Pierre helped collect union authorization cards. For that, he believes he was fired.

offenses.

Taylor, Pierre, and Perez tried to use caution, talking to workers they knew, getting signatures while on break. But when one co-worker told Perez she wouldn't sign the union card, and would have to talk with a supervisor about it, Perez knew her cover was blown. A team leader friendly to Perez told her to be careful, warning that she'd be fired if she was caught collecting union signatures.

Soon after, a manager accosted Perez and demanded to know what the signature campaign was about. Perez, frightened, told her to talk to Pierre. Pierre told her he was signing up co-workers for a martial arts class he planned to teach.

The manager began appearing in the break room, watching workers, trying to make small talk in English with foreign-born assembly line workers who couldn't speak the language.

Then a whole shift of workers who'd signed union cards was transferred to another location. New workers were brought in to replace them.

A week after her exchange with the

manager, Perez was the first of the union supporters to be fired. Managers wouldn't tell her why, she says.

Pierre was next. According to his version of events, the same manager who had talked to Perez told him he was being disciplined — for failing to complete a scale calibration report. He protested: He *had* done the report, and he tried to show her. Told she was going to discipline him anyway, Pierre pulled out a cell phone and took a picture of the scale readout, which he felt proved he'd done the work. The manager told him it was against company policy to take pictures, and demanded he hand over the phone. Pierre refused, and tried to leave the building. He said two managers then pushed him into an office and blocked the door, one of them spitting out a profanity and using a racial epithet. Pierre pushed his way out. A visit to the human resources department the following day confirmed he had been fired.

Other firings followed. Billy Francois, 19, signed a union card on break and was fired that day without explanation, after seven months without incident. So was Pierre's ex-wife Clarinate Vilson.

The firings took place the week before what was supposed to be the big union meeting. Several dozen DePaul workers turned up at the North Portland Carpenters Hall, but Crane said the fear was pervasive.

"It may be the worst job in the world," Crane said, "but it's not like the people working there have so many other opportunities."

The union campaign was for all intents and purposes dead, except that it had an echo in a pair of unfair labor practice charges — the bureaucratic term for violations of the National Labor Relations Act, the 1935 law that established U.S. workers right to unionize. An agent of the National Labor Relations Board looked into whether the DePaul firings had been meant to kill the union campaign. Pierre's story was said to be compelling, but DePaul management

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