

Letter Carriers march in Starlight Parade



In keeping with this year's Rose Festival theme — "Bridging Communities" — about 30 National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) Branch 82 members marched in the festival's Starlight Parade May 30 alongside a float made of food cans made to look like the St. John's Bridge. Letter Carriers held signs with the names of their post office and the amount of food collected in this year's Letter Carrier Food Drive. In the photo right, Letter Carriers Janet Barlow and Darcy Nolan wave to crowd while riding the float. The parade crowd was estimated at 250,000.



Worker Freedom Act gets new life in State Legislature

SALEM — The Oregon Legislature is down to the last four weeks of its 2009 session. The season for hearings and testimony on bills is over. Now bills face deadlines for being voted out of committees and passing the House and Senate. It's not over until it's over, but it's due to be over June 30.

For labor, many closely-watched bills are still in the running, including the Worker Freedom Act (SB 519), the Oregon AFL-CIO's top priority. That bill, which would give workers the right to refuse to attend anti-union meetings, was thought dead three weeks ago. But Democratic leaders in the Senate may have secured enough votes to pass it. It passed the Senate Rules Committee May 29. Sen. Ginny Burdick (D-Portland), who opposes the bill, cast a courtesy vote for it to get it out of committee and permit a floor vote.

Lawmakers appear also to have agreed with labor and community groups that the budget crisis should not be solved with cuts alone. There's momentum gathering behind two union-supported proposals for raising revenue — increasing the corporate minimum income tax, and adding a higher income tax rate on individuals making more than \$125,000 a year and couples making more than \$250,000.

Another proposal to be decided in the remaining days of the session is HB 2116, which would use a new tax of 3 percent on hospitals and 1 percent on insurers to raise money, matched by

federal dollars, to increase enrollment of low-income Oregonians in the Oregon Health Plan.

And an increase in the gas tax and vehicle and title registration fees — to fund a \$960 million package of transportation projects — passed the House and cleared the Senate May 29. It now awaits the governor's signature. The gas tax would go up 6 cents to 30 cents a gallon, though not until 2011 (sooner if the economy rebounds.)

A package of reforms aimed at initiative fraud — HB 2005 — passed the House 52 to 7 May 19 and was on its way to the Senate floor as of press time.

Also passed by the House was HB 2699, a bill requiring that construction projects of over \$5 million that get enterprise zone tax breaks pay building trades workers the prevailing wage for their craft. The bill was in the Senate Rules committee as of press time.

CORRECTION

An article in the May 15 issue of the Northwest Labor Press, "Oregon AFL-CIO's top bill, the Worker Freedom Act, gets shelved in committee" incorrectly referred to State Senator Ginny Burdick (D-Portland) as chair of the Senate Rules Committee, to which the bill that is the subject of the article was referred. Burdick is a member of the committee, but it is chaired by Senate Majority Leader Richard Devlin (D-Tualatin).

SEIU's Dale takes job in Geneva; Local 49 names Niemi president

Alice Dale, a longtime Oregon leader at the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), moved May 30 to Geneva, Switzerland. Two days later, she began her new job as director of the Property Services Sector at UNI Global Union.

UNI (Union Network International) is an international labor federation formed in 2000 by the merger of four industry-specific global union federations. UNI affiliates represent about 20 million workers worldwide. Several large U.S. unions belong to UNI — SEIU, Communications Workers of America, and United Food and Commercial Workers.

In her new job, Dale will negotiate with multinational corporations like Danish ISS, Swedish Securitas, and British G4S to get "framework agreements" setting ground rules for union organizing campaigns. And she will oversee campaigns to unionize security and janitorial workers in India, Poland, South Africa, Malawi, and elsewhere.

Dale, 56, has a law degree from Loyola Law School in Los Angeles. She began her career in organized labor in 1978 as staff attorney for Oregon Public Employees Union, which was then an

independent union of state employees. OPEU affiliated with SEIU in 1980, chartering as SEIU Local 503.

Dale became Local 503's executive director in 1985, and led the union through a nine-day rolling strike in 1987 which won a major victory for gender pay equity.

"[The strike] was the culmination of a couple of years of work trying to build militancy within a rank-and-file organization," Dale said. "It was transformative for the membership."

The State of Oregon agreed to a classification study that resulted in pay raises of 10 to 30 percent for underpaid traditionally female-dominated occupations.

In the years Dale led the union, Local 503 grew from 12,000 to 26,000 members. By 2001, she was ready for a change.

She agreed to serve as trustee of Portland-headquartered SEIU Local 49, which represents janitors and hospital workers. Members elected her president in 2002. Local 49 grew from about 5,000 members to about 7,500 under her leadership.

Last year, the janitors won a major improvement in their multi-employer



ALICE DALE

union contract — company-paid health coverage for their children. However, a campaign to unionize several thousand workers at Providence Health System, begun in 2005, has been tough going, owing to strong employer opposition, Dale said.

Dale also has served on the national union's Executive Board since 1985, first with SEIU President John Sweeney and later with his successor Andy Stern. SEIU devotes a sizable fraction of its budget to organizing new members, and has been one of the fastest growing



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unions in the country. Now Dale will seek to replicate that in organizing workers worldwide.

Husband Frank Evans and their 13-year-old son Nicolas will join Dale in the move to Geneva. Dale speaks Spanish. Her new job will require her to learn French.

On Dale's recommendation, Local 49 organizing director Meg Niemi was appointed by the union Executive Board to fill out the remainder of her term.

Niemi, 38, grew up in Central Oregon and later Portland, where she grad-

uated from Jefferson High School. Niemi said union membership was important to her grandparents and her stepfather; when she graduated from Pitzer College in California with a degree in political science she decided to attend the AFL-CIO's Organizing Institute. She went on to become an organizer for SEIU Local 1199P in Pennsylvania, SEIU Local 250 in California, and Oregon School Employees Association in Central Oregon.

She returned to SEIU as Northwest organizing coordinator, and then joined Local 49 in 2004 as organizing director just as the Providence campaign was getting under way. Niemi said recent decisions by Providence to cut pension benefits could bring new urgency to the union campaign. So could passage of the Employee Free Choice Act in Congress.

Niemi could end up being Local 49's last president because the union is in discussions over possible mergers with other SEIU locals. In one scenario, Local 49's building services members would join Seattle-headquartered SEIU Local 6, while its health care members would join SEIU Local 503 or Local 1199 NW.