



AFSCME members volunteer on 'MUD'

Karen Williams and Rick Rother, members of AFSCME Local 3336, volunteered at the Portland Habitat For Humanity's ReStore outlet store Oct. 16 — the first of several mandatory unpaid days (dubbed MUD) that state workers face due to economic circumstances. Williams coordinated two shifts of colleagues who helped stock shelves and sort materials at the ReStore. A second Local 3336 crew helped clean out invasive species at Whitaker Ponds Park for the Columbia Slough Watershed Council. Most state employees will be taking either 10, 12 or 14 mandatory unpaid days between now and June 30, 2011. "We'll be doing more in the future, and I would encourage other AFSCME state and local unions to do the same," Williams said. "We've had a lot of fun, and we've done good work for good causes. If we're going to have a forced day off, we may as well make good use of it." Local 3336 represents workers at the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality.

Recall vote held in Clatsop County

ASTORIA — Clatsop County Commissioner Jeff Hazen survived an Oct. 27 recall vote 1,250 to 978. A second commissioner, Ann Samuelson, lost by a count of 1,013 to 1,009. The four-vote difference triggers an automatic recount.

Clatsop County has 20 days to certify the vote and will then conduct a recount by hand Nov. 10.

Union Sportsmen's Alliance to hold clay shoot Nov. 12

SEATTLE — The Union Sportsmen's Alliance (USA) will host a first-ever clay shoot in the Puget Sound area Saturday, Nov. 12 at Sumner Sportsmen's Association in Puyallup, WA.

The USA is a program of the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership and its AFL-CIO trade union partners, providing outdoor benefits to union members. By hosting various shooting events, the USA hopes to bring together union members from different trades in friendly competition and raise funds for the program.

All proceeds from the event, which is being organized by Machinists District Lodge 751, support the USA and TRCP.

The shoot begins at 9:30 a.m., with registration open at 8 a.m. Registration is \$175 and includes ammunition, targets, a hat, and lunch, followed by a raffle featuring wildlife prints, a firearm, knives, outdoor gear and much more.

For more information, call Tim Bindl at 608-397-1023 or by e-mail at tbindl@trcp.org.

Oregon 'Geek Squad' workers in fight for right to join IBEW #48

Terry Reigle, a union organizer with International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 48, says he knew it would be a challenge to help Geek Squad home theater installers unionize. In America, workers have the legal right to unionize, but exercising that right can be tough when the employer has resources and a determination to resist.

Geek Squad, owned by big-box retailer Best Buy, is best known as a roving crew of computer fixers. But the operation has other divisions, including home theater. In late July, a Geek Squad home theater installer called the union and told Reigle his Oregon co-workers were interested in unionizing.

"This is as close as I'm going to get to a Walmart," Reigle said, referring to the big-box retailer that is legendary for its opposition to unions.

Geek Squad workers' interest in the union isn't about pay, Reigle said. It's about having a say. Workers have pushed the company to help them get licensed, without success. They are promised raises, but sometimes fail to receive them. Pay rates are arbitrary and up to managers. Workers negotiate compensation on their own, and are in the dark about each other's wages. Schedules can be changed on short notice with no say-so.

No U.S. workers at Geek Squad — or Best Buy — are union-represented. Communications Workers of America launched an exploratory union campaign last year via e-mail, but that doesn't appear to have gone anywhere.

In early August, a dozen Geek Squad home theater installers drove from as far as Bend to meet Reigle in Salem. That was half of the unit of workers in Geek Squad's home theater division; they work with the dozen Best Buy stores in Oregon and Southwest

Washington, and report to a single manager in Gresham. In a matter of weeks, the overwhelming majority had signed cards requesting union representation.

On Sept. 8, they filed a petition with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) requesting a union election. But Best Buy wasn't going to let that happen without a fight.

Best Buy, headquartered in suburban Minneapolis, has over 1,000 U.S. stores. The company had \$45 billion in revenues and \$1 billion in profit in its most recent fiscal year. To respond to union interest by this group of 24 workers, Best Buy hired the top-tier union-busting law firm Jackson Lewis.

On Jackson Lewis' advice, Best Buy filed legal objections to the union-proposed definition of the bargaining unit. It's a maneuver that can delay the election and dilute union support. Best Buy argued that 14 Geek Squad computer technicians should also be in the bargaining unit; the union disagreed. The home theater installers didn't really work with or know the computer technicians, Reigle said, and in any case it was the home theater installers who had expressed interest in the union.

The company e-mailed the computer workers and told them that the union was trying to exclude them. And it began holding joint meetings with the home theater installers and computer

techs, which rarely happened before.

After a two-day hearing, the NLRB agreed with Best Buy that the bargaining unit would have to include the computer techs. An election date was set for Nov. 5 (after this issue went to press).

Best Buy began to hold weekly meetings to persuade workers to vote "no." To counter those mandatory-attendance sessions, Reigle began holding his own voluntary weekly meetings — to answer questions and help the pro-union workers stay strong.

How much might this scenario have run differently if the Employee Free Choice Act were law? The Employee Free Choice Act would penalize employer anti-union abuses, speed up the unionization process, and guarantee an outcome — a union contract in a few months time. As Best Buy noted in its 2009 annual report, the Employee Free Choice Act "could make it easier for unions to be formed, and employers of newly unionized employees may face mandatory, binding arbitration of labor scheduling, costs and standards, which could increase the costs of doing business."

In accordance with U.S. labor law, Best Buy gave the union the names and addresses of the computer workers Oct. 14, three weeks before the election.

Reigle said that if card-signers stand firm and vote, they would win.

NW Oregon Labor Council to host veterans forum in Portland Nov. 11

As part of Labor History Month in Oregon, the Northwest Oregon Labor Council will sponsor a Veteran's Day forum to honor those who served in the military.

"Veteran Workers Tell Their Story: Our Living History," will be held from 2 to 5 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 11, at the Multnomah County Central Library, 801 SW 10th Avenue, Portland. The event is free and open to the public. Space is limited and seating is available on a first-come, first served basis. In addition to scheduled speakers, the program will include readings from the recently published, "Voices of Vets: A

Bridge Back to the World."

Labor History Month was enacted in 1991 by the Oregon Legislature.

"This is an opportunity to recognize and honor Oregon's veterans by listening to their experiences in the service and back home on the job. We will hear about current experiences returning to the workforce. We encourage family members attending to share stories and memories," said NOLC History Committee Chair Jim Cook.

For more information or to schedule an opportunity to speak, call Cook at 503 703-1693 or the NOLC office at 503 235-9444.



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