

Steward won't seek re-election as president of AFSCME Local 88

American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 88 President Becky Steward will step down when her term ends Nov. 18. Steward, 59, plans to retire in the next year from her job as senior business analyst at Multnomah County's Department of County Management.

Local 88 vice president Michael Hanna is running unopposed to succeed her.

Steward has been Local 88 president since 2005, when she was elected to serve the remainder of her predecessor Marla Rosenberger's term. She was twice re-elected to two-year terms.

Local 88 represents about 2,700 employees of Multnomah County, 84 percent of whom are full union members. Also in Local 88 are employees of three non-profit organizations: American Friends Service Committee, Central City Concern, and Transition Projects.

Looking back, Steward said union president was hardest but also the best work of her career; hardest, Steward said, because there's always more you can do. Members have high expectations for the position, which carries a



BECKY STEWARD

\$300 a month stipend but is not a paid staff position.

The job was also a healthy stretch for the self-described introvert.

The successes she has seen she attributes to group efforts. Those she is proudest of include bargaining a wage freeze with the county that prevented layoffs; making the local more aware of the issues of the non-profit sub-local; and changes in how meetings are conducted.

"We instituted democratic principles in our meetings. Everybody gets a chance to speak. Even if people disagree, we work to give everybody an

opportunity to express their voice. And then we vote."

That included candidate endorsements, which are now made by members, after a forum in which they hear from candidates for County office. The political committee makes a recommendation, but it's the members at the meeting who decide, directly.

Steward said she's always been a union supporter, owing to her upbringing as the daughter of a Presbyterian minister who taught about social justice. While earning a bachelor's degree in anthropology at Portland State University, she worked at Pacific Northwest Bell as an operator, clerk, and dispatcher, and was a member of Communications Workers of America until she was promoted into management, then downsized.

She went to work for the county in 1987, and later got involved in AFSCME, first as a steward, then chief steward, then secretary.

She said she will remain active as a steward and member until she retires. Once she retires, she plans to buy a trailer and travel around the United States for 12 to 18 months, and then return to enroll in a service program like Americorp.

Hard times in construction industry lead to wage freezes for Carpenters

Hard times in the construction industry — and last year's stock market meltdown — took a bite out of compensation in recent contract settlements covering thousands of union Carpenters.

In mail ballots counted Sept. 18, members of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters ratified an agreement with the Oregon-Columbia chapter of Associated General Contractors (AGC) that looked much like the deal they rejected at meetings in June. Under the terms of the two-year agreement signed by the Pacific Northwest Regional Council of Carpenters (PNWRCC), the journeyman carpenter wage will be frozen at \$32.40 an hour through June 2010.

And starting Dec. 1, 2009, that wage will be reduced by \$1.10, money that will instead go to shore up the pension trust, where assets lost value in last year's stock market tumble. Unlike the rest of the employer pension contribution, the \$1.10 won't accrue future benefits. Regional council spokesperson Eric Franklin said members' average age is mid- to late-40s, and shifting funds to make up for the pension shortfall prevents the trust from having to eliminate benefits such

as the "80 and out" early retirement provision.

"We wanted to make sure our retirees are protected and there's not a diminishment of benefits," Franklin said.

The new contract also raised the threshold for a lower wage on smaller privately funded jobs: Projects of \$4 million or less can pay \$27.54 an hour — 85 percent of the regular wage. Franklin said that wage will make union-signatory contractors more competitive with open shop contractors in bidding on small projects like strip malls and light commercial work.

"We're partners with our contractors, and they're really hurting," Franklin said. "We're just basically trying to make sure that we keep their doors open and get through this spot in the economy."

The new AGC contract covers 5,000 to 7,000 general construction carpenters, millwrights and pile drivers, most of whom work for general contractors in Oregon and Southwest Washington. It expires June 1, 2011. Wages for the second year of the contract will be negotiated next year.

On Oct. 28, PNWRCC announced a tentative Exterior/Interior agreement

with Associated Wall and Ceiling Contractors of Oregon and Southwest Washington. Mail ballots went out this week and must be postmarked by Nov. 12. Similar to the AGC deal, the agreement contains a one-year wage freeze at \$33.14 an hour for journeyman drywallers, with wages in the second year of the contract to be negotiated later. The threshold for a lower 85 percent wage on smaller private projects was raised to \$750,000.

In a letter to members and their families, PNWRCC leaders said the bargaining team didn't like the agreement, but considered it the best of the bad options.

"Today our contractor base has been badly shaken by cancelled projects, lack of credit, and fewer opportunities to bid," the letter stated. "We must remain in the game and still have a base of contractors with whom to bargain in better times."

The agreement runs through May 31, 2011 and covers about 1,500 drywallers and lathers at Exterior and Interior Local 2154.

Bargaining on the two contracts had been under way since February and March. Both previous contracts had expired as of May 31, 2009.

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