

CWA #7901's Linda Rasmussen hangs it up after 46 years

Communications Workers of America (CWA) international staff representative Linda Rasmussen has retired after 46 years in the union.

A Portland native, Rasmussen served two terms as president of CWA Local 7901 in the early '80s. It was in her second term that the international union hired her as a staff rep, taking her to Tukwila, Washington. She spent three years there before heading to Denver and the union's District Office. After nine years in Colorado, Rasmussen returned to Portland. As a staff rep, Rasmussen has been responsible for member mobilization activities during collective bargaining and political action campaigns. She has handled grievances, arbitrations and contract negotiations, and was assigned to be education director for the 14-state region.

"Working in the labor movement has been very rewarding," Rasmussen said. "I have been fortunate to work for CWA. The union has provided me lots of great opportunities."



Linda Rasmussen (right), poses for a picture with Grady Storms (left) and Elana Guiney at her retirement party. Rasmussen, a 46-year member of CWA Local 7901, retired in January as an international union staff rep. A former phone operator, she was in her second term as president of her local when she was called up by the national CWA.

Outside the CWA, Rasmussen, 65, has been an active participant in the Oregon labor movement as well. Until her retirement in January, she was an at-

large member of the Oregon AFL-CIO Executive Board. She was the founding president of the Oregon Chapter of the Coalition of Labor Union Women, a

past president of the Industrial Union Council, and a former member of the Board of Directors of the Oregon Labor Press Publishing Co., which owns the Northwest Labor Press.

Outside the labor movement, she served as a governor's appointee to the Oregon Employment Advisory Council — the last three years as chair; she is a past president of the Urban League of Portland and a former president of the Portland Civil Service Board.

After graduating from Cleveland High School in Southeast Portland, Rasmussen attended Western Oregon University (then known as Oregon College of Education) and Portland State University. She left school to take a job as an operator at Pacific Northwest Bell. She immediately became active in her union, volunteering as a shop steward, to the Legislative Committee, and writing for the newsletter.

She says union activism came easy, owing to her mother, who was president of the Brotherhood of Railway and Air-

line Clerks local at Union Pacific Railroad.

"As a kid, she took us to picket lines and union meetings," Rasmussen said.

Retired for less than 60 days, Rasmussen has already applied to volunteer for Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) for Children. She's delivering Meals on Wheels to house-bound seniors, and has signed up for her neighborhood's SMART program (Start Making a Reader Today).

Rasmussen also has already committed to help the Oregon AFL-CIO work for labor-endorsed candidates in this year's primary and general elections.

She was honored at a reception Jan. 16 in Northeast Portland.

Exterior/Interior Specialists Local 2154 ratifies new contract

Voting by mail, members of Exterior/Interior Specialists Local 2154 overwhelmingly approved a new contract with Associated Wall and Ceiling Contractors of Oregon and Southwest Washington, after voting down an earlier version in mid-November.

The new agreement is retroactive to June 1, 2009, and runs to May 31, 2013. The pact covers about 1,200 building trades workers who specialize in installing walls and ceilings. That includes the 870 active members of Portland-based Local 2154, as well as about 300 interior/exterior specialists

who are members of general Carpenters locals in Oregon and in Klickitat, Skamania, Clark, Cowlitz, Wahkiakum counties, and part of Pacific County, in Washington.

The agreement makes no changes to health care benefits, which are offered through a multi-employer trust.

On pension, members earlier voted to transfer \$1.10 an hour from wages to shore up their multi-employer retirement fund, which, like most, lost value in the financial crisis. The extra contribution is meant to keep the fund from going into "red" status — a designation

under the Pension Protection Act of 2006 in which the trust would be required to cut benefit "extras," like the all-important "80-and-out" early-retirement provision. Under that rule, members can retire with full pension benefits if their age plus years of service equal 80 (e.g., a 55-year-old member with 25 years in the trade.) Because hanging drywall takes a significant toll on the body, keeping 80-and-out is a top priority for members.

"We like retiring when we have bones that move," explained Local 2154 president Bruce Epstein.

Under the new contract, members gave back the 45-cents-an-hour increase they won after a 2007 strike; that plus the \$1.10 shift to the pension brings the wage portion of the compensation package to \$31.59 an hour for journeyman drywallers. The contract contains no raises during its four-year time frame, but does have an option each year to reopen negotiations on wages. It also has a "me-too" provision: Drywallers would get a vote on any wage increase offered to general carpenters who work under the separate Associated General Contractors agreement.

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is a partnership between Community Solutions for Clackamas County, the Oregon Employment Department and Labor's Community Service Agency, Inc.

The goal of HOV is to increase the employment of Veterans by providing employment services to Veterans, education to employers on the benefits of hiring a Veteran, and by serving as a vehicle for connecting employers to skilled Veterans.

Program efforts are focused on Vets who have served in a war, are recently separated from service, have service-connected disabilities or significant barriers to employment.

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