

At City of Portland

AFSCME 189 elects Hussey president

By **DON McINTOSH**
Associate Editor

In ballots cast at members' workplaces Jan. 25, Debbie Hussey, a longtime union steward at Portland's 9-1-1 call center, outpolled fellow state executive board member Carol Justice to win election as president of American Federation of State, Local, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 189. Hussey won by a margin of 189 votes.

The union represents workers at the City of Portland and the City of Cornelius. Local 189 has just under 900 members, and is down by several hundred because of layoffs in recent years.

Hussey, 51, grew up in a strongly union family in outer-Eastside Portland. Her father worked for the phone company and her grandfather was a machinist. Every year as a child, she attended the union picnic at Oaks Park.

"We were raised that you never crossed a picket line," Hussey told the Labor Press.

After working a nonunion office job at Freightliner, Hussey got a job in 1994 as a 9-1-1 dispatcher at the City of Portland Bureau of Emergency Communications (BOEC). She stayed, and became lead worker and coach. She got involved with her union, became a steward in 1998, and eventually a trustee on the Oregon AFSCME Executive Council. She continues in that position.

As president, Hussey said she hopes to forge a collaborative relationship with City management. City of Portland workers just signed a three-year contract, so she won't face major contract bargaining during her two-year term. Instead she plans to recruit members to get involved in the union, recognize members for the work they do, and undertake community outreach — to counteract the present mood of public resentment against union members and public employees for having comfortable pay and benefits.

"Union people are working families," Hussey said. "That's middle class America. I don't think that having a home, food for our families, and health care, are luxuries."

The public has been led to think of public workers as "bureaucrats," easy to hate in the abstract, Hussey said, but that attitude is harder to maintain when public workers have faces and

personalities, and are known as such by their neighbors and friends.

"It's important the citizens know who we are, and see what we do," Hussey said. "We're people who go to work and do good work every day."

Hussey, a mother of six, has one grandchild, and lives with her husband in Oregon City.

She succeeds three-term Local 189 president Carol Stahlke, who decided to run for local organizer — a less time-consuming position that frees up time for her to care for her two-year-old.

Local 189 members elected other officers as well: Mike Gipson, executive vice president; Victoria Hellman, secretary-treasurer; Joanne Hampton, recording secretary; Stephanie Babb, chief steward; and Kathryn Alsworth, communications editor. All candidates except Hellman ran unopposed.

None of the offices are considered paid staff positions, though some come with a stipend.

James Hester has long been the full-time union rep for Local 189. But the retirement last month of Local 328 rep Dave Raahahn at Oregon Health and Science University led to a reshuffle at Oregon AFSCME Council 75: Multnomah County union rep Val Andreas assumed Raahahn's OHSU workload, Hester replaced Andreas, and Rob Wheaton, who represented workers at several non-profits, now represents Local 189 members at the City of Portland.



Debbie Hussey, pictured at a work station in the City of Portland's 9-1-1 call center, was sworn in Jan. 25 as president of AFSCME Local 189. (Photo by Don Loving, courtesy of Oregon AFSCME.)

OPEN FORUM

Daughter turns anger against asbestos into action, joins ADAO

To The Editor:

In 1982 my father, Stan "Swede" Grimberg died of mesothelioma, and I would never be the same. Justice knows no timeline.

With excellent medical care and his fighting spirit, my father lived a painful 18 months. He wanted to know his granddaughter, but he left us six days before her first birthday.

I was introduced to the Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization (ADAO) last year, and I now have a place to turn my anger into action.

I am dedicated to this organization doing its vital and important work. To do that work, it takes leadership, volunteers, and money.

Please join me in honoring those we have lost, and those who are still fighting, for their lives. When you make an ADAO family tribute program donation or register for the ADAO 7th Annual Asbestos Awareness Conference, "Asbestos: Impact on Public Health, Environment, and the Economy" to be held April 1-3 in Atlanta, you are supporting advocacy, education, and outreach.

The northwest region has lost many tradesmen and women to asbestos diseases such as mesothelioma and asbestosis. Anything you can do to help me spread the word to help this organization raise awareness, and keep doing its vital and important work is really appreciated.

My heart soars as I honor my Dad. He is not forgotten. He would be proud.

For more information about the Asbestos Disease Awareness Organiza-

tion, go online to www.adao.us.

**Ann Samuelson
Jewell, OR**

(Editor's Note: Stan "Swede" Grimberg was a 28-year member of Plumbers and Fitters Local 290 and owner of Astoria Plumbing.)

Korean trade deal mirrors NAFTA; is bad for workers

To The Editor:

If the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)-styled Korean Free Trade Agreement had the "unprecedented support of business and labor," as President Obama declared in his State of the Union address, he would not have to ask Congress to pass it. It would have fallen into the category of a no-brainer.

The truth is, the Korean agreement has very little labor support. It was originally negotiated by former President George W. Bush, but never passed by Congress because it was modeled after NAFTA, which has been a disaster for U.S. workers and their families. Obama should fix or repeal NAFTA before working on any other trade deals. I remember that as one of his campaign promises when he ran for president.

**Bruce R. Dennis
Carpenters, Retired
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