

The new face of labor?

At Doshā salon, 155 workers will vote whether to go union

By DON MINTOSH
Associate Editor

Doshā Salon and Spa could become the first salon in Portland to go union in recent times. Its 155 union-eligible employees will vote March 29 and 30 whether they want to join Communications Workers of America (CWA) Local 7901.

Doshā does hair, nails, makeup, and massage. It's a successful business, with four Portland-area locations and plans to add a fifth later this year. But a group of employees have decided they want more say over their working conditions — and maybe a greater share of the profit, too.

Doshā charges \$70 for an hour-long massage, and pays a licensed massage therapist \$13 to \$17 an hour to perform it. It pays hair stylists as little as Oregon's \$8.50-an-hour minimum wage, while customers pay \$35 for a 45-minute haircut. Higher-in-demand stylists can make \$20 an hour, with customers paying \$70 to \$120.

Doshā co-owner Ray Motameni also owns Aveda Institute Portland, and Doshā hires many of its graduates. Students can take out \$10,000 in student loans to pay for the training at Motameni's school, then work at his salon for \$11 an hour while they pay off the loans.

Yet money isn't the top motivation for unionizing, pro-union Doshā workers say. And while they suffer an accumulation of low-level indignities, they have no personal difficulty with owners Ray and Melissa Motameni. More than anything, they see a union as a way to turn a job they love into a career that can sustain them.

The union campaign has been bubbling below the surface for a year and a half, several workers told the Labor Press. It began when a Doshā esthetician talked about work with her friend Cameron Taylor, a business agent for Bakers Local 364. Joe Crane, then the local's volunteer organizer, met with Taylor and several co-workers, helped them get a committee started, and called around for a union willing to help. Eventually, CWA Local 7901 agreed to sponsor a union organizing drive.

Doshā employees have many motives for unionizing.

- Employees interviewed by the Labor Press said management favoritism dictates how well any employee will do at Doshā. New hires might make \$1 an hour more than senior employees, for no obvious reason.

- There are no sick days, so when workers get



Pro-union workers at Doshā Salon and Spa attend a March 7 elections hearing of the National Labor Relations Board. About 155 workers at Doshā's four locations will have a chance to vote March 29 and 30 whether to join CWA Local 7901. Pictured from left to right are: esthetician Ali Grove, licensed massage therapist Philip Aust, hair stylist Kelanie York, esthetician Rachel Voorhies, spa host Sarah Pearson, and laundry worker Dominic Casciato.

sick, they must get co-workers to cover them, or work sick and expose their customers, or go to a doctor for a note.

- Doshā will pay half the health insurance premium for full-time workers, but workers remain uninsured if they can't afford the other half on their earnings.

- Employees who work full-time hours get a week's paid vacation after a year, but if they want to use it, they're responsible for getting co-workers to cover their shifts.

- There's no pension or 401(k).

- Workers are made to sign broad "non-compete" agreements which forbid them from working their trade within three miles of any Doshā location, during and up to 18 months after employment at Doshā.

- There's constant pressure to sell product to their customers. An esthetician, for example, is expected to sell \$15 of product per customer — whether they're paying \$16 for a 15-minute brow wax or \$65 for an hour-long facial. Stylists sell

shampoos. Massage therapists sell oils. They get no commission for the sales, but are written up if they fail to sell enough.

- Managers set employees' sales goals each month. Employees are disciplined if they don't meet them, but have no control over how many clients they're given, except that they're expected to re-book.

- Workers are sometimes talked down to or yelled at by managers for minor infractions or missing sales goals.

- Employees often start at an hourly wage and later have a chance to be paid on commission, but how the commission is computed is very poorly understood, and they may be automatically docked nearly one-fourth of their commission for product, regardless of how much they actually use.

- Rules can change at any time.

Union supporters want more affordable health benefits. They'd like to be paid extra if they have to work on Christmas eve. They'd like greater assurance that they'll get tips their customers give them. [Cash tips don't always make it to their intended recipients, workers say.]

"I joined the union to make things better," says esthetician Rachel Voorhies, 26.

Voorhies is part of the third committee of Doshā workers to work on the union campaign at Doshā in the last 18 months. Two previous efforts fizzled when committee members quit or were fired. In late January, Voorhies and co-workers began gathering signatures on official union authorization cards. They kept going until they reached a supermajority of Doshā workers.

On Feb. 22, Voorhies and eight co-workers entered company offices armed with a petition requesting that the company voluntarily recognize their union.

"[Going into the office] they were terrified," Crane recalls. "But after that, they were jumping up and down. They had conquered their fear."

Human resources manager Trisha McMakin didn't agree to union recognition. So the group asked the National Labor Relations Board to conduct a union election, which it set for March 29 and 30.

Owners and managers — with support from some workers — have been campaigning vigorously against unionizing: holding meetings at each location, talking about all the things Doshā does for employees, giving out Blazer tickets and spa packages. Right-wing talk radio host Lars Larsen gave an anti-union Doshā worker five minutes on his March 8 show.

But pro-union workers say management's campaign has sometimes backfired. Crowing that stylists make \$23.71 an hour plus tips isn't persuasive to a room full of stylists making \$11. Loving testimonials by favored employees who have risen rapidly in the company only further the sense that the rest of them need a fairer, more transparent system of pay and promotion to replace the current system based on arbitrary management decisions.

Since Feb. 22, the two camps have set up dueling Facebook pages, but the pro-union page is trouncing its counterpart. At last count, 431 Facebook users are signed onto the "Doshā Workers Unite" group, compared to 231 for "Doshā As Is." The pages make for entertaining and revealing reading. Doshā Workers Unite has a consistently positive and enthusiastic tone. Workers comment that they love the job, and want it to be a career. Doshā As Is, by contrast, is broadly anti-union, with hyperventilating posts like this one from stylist Shaddie Yazd: "It angers me to no end that these moronic, inexperienced, selfish people think they have any right to change or take away something that Ray and Melissa have worked so hard for."

If it succeeds, Doshā would be the only large union-represented salon in Portland. United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555 represents 11 barber shops and salons [See "Union Style" below], but they're small shops, brought into the union in 1980 when it absorbed the tiny Barbers, Beauticians and Allied Industries International Association. A union at Doshā would be an altogether new creature in an overwhelmingly non-union industry. It would be whatever Doshā workers make of it.

UNION STYLE

At 11 barber shops and beauty salons in Oregon and Southwest Washington, a shave and a haircut will cost more than six bits. But it's still very affordable, and it supports the wages and benefits of members of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555.

Carman and Co Salon, 1133 SW Market St., Suite 200, Portland. 503-224-3171

Donovan's Barber Shop, 12344 SE Division St, Portland. 503-761-9777

Marshall Union Manor Salon of Beauty, 2020 NW Northrup St., Portland. 503-248-9917

Sam's Barber Shop, 2430 SE 182nd Ave., Portland. 503-661-7989

Mirror Image Hair & Nail Salon, Albany. 541-791-3910

Frank's Barber Shop, Astoria. 503-338-4700

First Edition Hair Designs, Eugene. 541-689-7004

Split Ends Salon, Eugene. 541-683-1317
Dick Rowe's Clip Snip & Style, Creswell. 541 895-4500

Jesse's Barber Shop, Grants Pass. 541-474-1004

Sportsmen's Barber Shop, White Salmon, Washington. 509-493-2120



Labor Bowl Challenge for MDA

Clark County MDA ambassador Conor McCarty gets help from his father, Paul, at 22nd annual Labor Bowl Challenge for the Muscular Dystrophy Association. Early tallies from the March 13 event show \$13,600 raised, with more to come. A full report and more photos will appear in the April 1 issue of the Labor Press.