

Members of SEIU at Parry Center beat back union-busting campaign

Workers at Parry Center for Children have voted to stay unionized, beating back a decertification campaign which had the fingerprints of the virulently anti-union management on it. In ballots counted Dec. 2, the vote was 56 to 40 in favor of continuing to be represented by Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 503. Parry Center is a non-profit psychiatric residential care facility for children located in Southeast Portland.

Now the challenge will be to get a new contract for the 153-member bargaining unit. The most recent one expired Sept. 30. According to SEIU, management has been continuously hostile since the facility first unionized in 1997. Parry Center is one of two facilities run by Trillium Family Services. During a nine-week strike in 2004-05, a police report was filed alleging Trillium CEO Kim Scott hit a striker with his car after accelerating through a picket line.

Scott remains at the helm of Trillium. In May — according to documents filed with the U.S. Department of

Labor — he contracted with Oklahoma-based union-buster LRI Consulting Services, committing Trillium to pay at least \$65,000, plus expenses, for 20 days of consulting. That was in a campaign to defeat a union drive at Children's Farm Home — a juvenile psychiatric facility in Corvallis that gets most of its revenue from government contracts. Local 503 lost that election on a 59-59 tie. Children's Farm unionized with Local 503 once before, but the union was never able to get a contract, and withdrew.

Trillium also hired LRI for the Parry Center decertification campaign, though the dollar amount hasn't yet been disclosed. An LRI consultant — paid to bad-mouth the union — showed up at an all-staff meeting prior to the vote, Local 503 organizer Heather Blankenheim told the Labor Press.

Blankenheim said it was clear to her that the decertification campaign was aided by management: The anti-union campaign was well-organized and had access to information such as how much SEIU collects in dues. Anti-union cam-

aigners collected signatures over free cups of coffee at a nearby Starbucks.

Union support was strongest among Parry Center employees who work one-on-one with the children, Blankenheim said. The workers are expected to have a college education, but find it hard to pay off student loans at hourly wages that top out at \$11.44. Not surprisingly, Blankenheim said, Parry Center staff turnover is high. Very few workers are still at Parry Center who were there during the strike seven years ago. The dispute ended with 80 strikers returned to work alongside 25 who'd crossed the picket line and 28 others who'd been hired as permanent replacements.

Bargaining for the new contract has not progressed much since August. Workers want minimum staffing levels, and health insurance options beyond employee-only coverage, but management is insisting that non-economic issues be resolved first. Local 503 found that one of the management proposals that provoked the 2004 strike is back on the table: making Parry Center an open shop, in which union dues are voluntary.

Our members have the power to make the season bright.

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from
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The Executive Board, Staff and members of OPEIU Local 11 wish everyone a Happy and Joy-filled Holiday!

Office & Professional Employees International Union Local 11

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Happy Holidays from the Staff, Officers and Members of IBEW Local 48