

Bend hospital fires SEIU supporters amid decertification campaign

A union vote at St. Charles Medical Center is on hold while the NLRB investigates violations

BEND — The biggest private-sector union win in Oregon in recent years is at risk of unraveling.

At St. Charles Medical Center in Bend, a narrow majority of workers voted Jan. 5, 2011 to join Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 49. But in 10 months of negotiations, no collective bargaining agreement has been achieved for the unit of 604 support workers.

When there's no union contract a year after the vote to unionize, federal law allows a re-vote. On Feb. 21, anti-union workers turned in signatures from the required 30 percent of the workplace, and the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) scheduled a decertification election for March 21.

But then the federal agency put the vote on hold, at the union's request, pending investigation of union charges that St. Charles broke federal labor law. The agency's regional office determined that the allegations were sufficiently serious that they could potentially affect the outcome of the election, NLRB public affairs director Nancy Cleeland explained. Cleeland said the

NLRB has begun interviewing witnesses and is aiming to have a decision within five weeks.

The environment at St. Charles has become hostile to union supporters, says union organizer Will Layng. The hospital placed bargaining team member Ken Daniels and two other union supporters on unpaid leave Feb. 22, and then terminated them on March 12 — because of their union activity, the union alleges. Daniels — a 12-year employee who sterilized equipment at the hospital — was the worker who first called the union.

In a written response to questions from the Labor Press, St. Charles CEO Jay Henry said the terminations were in no way related to union activity. But the hospital doesn't disclose details related to personnel issues, he said.

Local 49 also says that St. Charles:

- Engaged in "surface bargaining" without intent to reach agreement;
- Had supervisors and managers shadow and listen in on conversations of employees who are union activists;
- Imposed illegal no-solicitation rules, no-talk rules, no-access rules, and rules against the wearing or distribution of union insignia.

Moreover, the hospital has been holding mandatory-attendance anti-union meetings, Layng says, and front-line managers are meeting individually with every member of the bargaining unit.

St. Charles is advised by an outside labor relations consultant that specializes in "union avoidance" and "preventive labor relations."

Henry denied holding mandatory meetings, and rejected the charge that St. Charles engaged in surface bargaining.

"We have been and continue to negotiate in good faith," Henry wrote, adding that the two sides have met over 30 times, including with a federal mediator, and that the hospital had provided more than 140 written proposals. Twenty-nine items have been tentatively agreed to.

The two sides were scheduled to meet again for bargaining April 3-4, after this issue of the Labor Press went to press.

Memorial service for workers killed on the job set for April 26

SALEM — The Oregon AFL-CIO will hold a Workers Memorial Day service at noon Thursday, April 26, at the Fallen Worker Memorial at the state Capitol Mall.

The actual date of Workers Memorial Day is April 28. The day was established by the national AFL-CIO in 1988 to remember and honor workers killed on the job. It is also a day when members of organized labor can demonstrate their commitment to ending the needless pain, suffering and loss of life, which are associated with unhealthy and unsafe working conditions.

The Oregon AFL-CIO service will feature remarks from elected officials, union leaders, and safety and health advocates, and will include a reading of the names of Oregon workers killed on the job and Oregonians killed in military service in calendar year 2011.

Workers Memorial Day 2012 marks the 41st anniversary of the federal Occupational Safety and Health Act. Despite this landmark piece of legislation, American workers continue to face inordinately high rates of employment-caused injuries, diseases, and death.

The Fallen Workers Memorial is located on the State Capitol Mall in Salem next to the main entrance of the Labor and Industries Building. It was donated to the State of Oregon by the Oregon AFL-CIO and dedicated by Gov. Ted Kulongoski on Workers Memorial Day 2009.

Unions to bowl for MDA April 29

The 23rd Annual Labor Bowl Challenge to benefit the local Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) will be held Sunday, April 29, at Sunset Lanes, 12770 SW Walker Road, Beaverton.

This year's is a western theme. Registration starts at 11 a.m., with bowling under way at "High Noon."

Money for MDA is raised by individual fundraising and a silent auction. The goal is to pre-register 30 five-member bowling teams representing more

than 20 union locals.

In addition to bowling, there is a silent auction, door prizes, pizza, and soft drinks for participants. Prizes will be awarded to the top fundraiser, the top average (three games) and lowest average bowler, plus a prize for the best western outfit. Also, there are prizes for incremental levels of fundraising.

All proceeds benefit the local MDA, which provides much-needed support to over 1,200 local individuals and families living with neuromuscular diseases. Money goes to buy wheel chairs and braces for children, as well as medical services, research and summer camps.

Since its inception in 1989, the Labor Bowl — coordinated by the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) Branch 82, the Northwest Oregon Labor Council, and other participating Oregon labor unions — has raised

\$326,767 for MDA.

For more information, or to sign up and receive fundraising packets and instructions, call Jim Cook, president of NALC Branch 82, at 503-493-5903. To donate silent auction items, call NALC's MDA Coordinator Debby Burbank at 971-404-5384.

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