

# Bend hospital support staff drop SEIU, even as nurses ratify contract

**About 600 staff joined SEIU 49 21 months ago, but never got a contract**

Support staff at St. Charles Medical Center in Bend, Oregon, voted 334 to 212 to go nonunion Nov. 1 — 21 months after a union was narrowly voted in.

The workers' 255-to-251 vote in January 2011 to join Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 49 was Oregon's biggest private sector union win in years, and at Central Oregon's largest employer. But Local 49 never secured a union contract in the course of more than 40 formal negotiating sessions.

In a press statement, Local 49 spokesperson Jesse Stemmler said it was clear soon after the election that the hospital was not taking bargaining seriously and was going to instead do whatever it took to disband the union.

When a year was up, as federal law allows, anti-union workers circulated a petition to decertify the union. Normally, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) would schedule an election to determine whether workers wanted to remain unionized, but that was put on hold while the agency investigated charges that the hospital violated labor law.

"We felt it was nowhere near a fair and democratic environment to hold an election," Stemmler told the Labor Press.

But the decertification election went forward after the NLRB approved a voluntary settlement in early August. In the settlement, St. Charles agreed to post and e-mail a notice promising not to do 18 things they were accused of having done, including surveilling employees, disciplining employees for supporting the union, removing union bulletin board postings, prohibiting distribution of union materials, telling workers not to talk about the union, barring the wearing of union stickers, telling workers they were being watched because of union activities, denying union staff access to the hospital, and on and on.

An 11"x17" notice may seem like a

pretty frail remedy for creating the atmosphere of dictatorship, but that's the standard end to so-called "unfair labor practice" charges when the NLRB finds merit to the union's accusations. When the agency doesn't find enough evidence — as when St. Charles fired three union supporters — workers have no further recourse under U.S. labor law. Local 49 appealed approval of the St. Charles settlement, but the appeal was denied and the election date set.

Stemmler blamed anti-union consultants for the union's election loss. Stemmler said St. Charles Medical Center hired The Burke Group, Cruz and Associates, and Barran Liebman. The attorneys and consultants trained hospital managers, who then called workers in for one-on-one meetings.

For workers who came in on their day off to vote in the decertification election, the hospital paid them for their time, and reimbursed them for mileage, Stemmler said.

"All members of the St. Charles family will work together to move forward," the hospital declared in a press release announcing the vote result.

## Nurses remain union

As for the hospital's 670 nurses, they'll move forward with a new three-year contract, ratified Oct. 26 after contentious bargaining that included a picket by the union and preparations by management to bring in strikebreakers.

The nurses are represented by a different union — the Oregon Nurses Association (ONA).

St. Charles backed down on two proposals the union objected to — a proposal to replace charge nurses with nonunion clinical supervisors and a proposal to eliminate "float" nurses who serve as rapid responders throughout the hospital. Instead, the two sides agreed to slight changes to charge nurse job descriptions, and a staffing committee will resolve the question of how many float nurses are needed.

The contract provides for annual wage increases of 2 percent a year, though it also increases the employee share of health insurance premiums.

Nurses will have a new high-deductible health insurance option coupled with an employer-paid health savings account and a requirement to take part in a wellness program. Nurses who keep the existing coverage, offered through a Preferred Provider Organization, will pay an increased share of the premiums in the second and third years of the contract. Currently they pay 5 percent of the premium for employee-only coverage, and 15 percent for dependent coverage, and that will rise to

10 and 20 percent, respectively. Total premiums for 2013 will work out to just over \$1,000 a month for individuals, and \$2,463 a month for full family coverage.

ONA labor representative Alison Hamway described it as a fair contract. The union bargaining committee recommended passage, and ONA reported a 95 percent margin in favor when

## Norman Sylvester to headline Dec. 1 Unions for Kids 'Date Night'

Norman "The Boogie Cat" Sylvester will headline the second annual "Date for Doernbecher" fundraiser Saturday, Dec. 1, at the Lotus Cardroom, 932 SW 3rd Ave., Portland.

The event is a precursor to the annual Unions for Kids motorcycle poker run in June. The poker run raises thousands of dollars for Doernbecher Children's Hospital, primarily through a raffle for a Harley Davidson motorcycle. Raffle tickets for the 2013 bike will go on sale soon.

"Date for Doernbecher" starts at 6 p.m. There is a tax deductible cover charge donation of \$10. Since it's a "date night," couples can get in for \$15 if they bring a brand new toy that will be donated to Doernbecher for the holiday season. The Lotus will be featuring "Unions for Kids" specials on certain beverages and food items.

Sylvester, a member of Musicians Local 99 and a recent honoree into the Oregon Music Hall of Fame, will perform at 7 p.m.

For more information, contact Lee

## Unions to host kids' holiday party Dec. 1 at Elsinore Theatre in Salem

The 72nd annual "Holiday Party for Children" will be held at Saturday, Dec. 1, at the Elsinore Theatre, 170 High St. SE, Salem.

The free event, sponsored by the Marion, Polk, Yamhill Counties Labor Council, will feature holiday songs by Norman Sylvester and Friends, a

showing of the movie "Ice Age 4: A Continental Divide," a visit from Santa Claus, and a free goody bag. Sylvester recently was inducted into the Oregon Music Hall of Fame. He is a longtime member of Musicians Local 99 and a retired Teamster.

Doors open at 9:45 a.m.

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