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At Clackamas Town Center

AFSCME 9-1-1 dispatchers first to respond to mall shooting

By DON LOVING

Tuesday, Dec. 11, 2012, is a day that Jeff Campbell and his co-workers at the Clackamas County Department of Communications Center will never forget. The center, colloquially known as C-COM, was thrust into the national spotlight when Jacob Tyler Roberts opened fire inside the Clackamas Town Center shopping mall, killing two people and seriously injuring another, before taking his own life.

The first call came in at 3:29 p.m.

"It's not all that unusual for someone to call in to say they heard a shot fired, or at least thought they heard a gunshot somewhere," says Campbell, a veteran C-COM 9-1-1 dispatcher and longtime member of Oregon AFSCME Local 350. "But then immediately there was a second call, and a third. You can see calls build on the screen for the same event, so it didn't take long for all of us on the floor to know what was happening: there was an 'active shooter' at the Clackamas Town Center."

For 10 minutes, calls came fast and furious ... from people running out of the mall, from people in the mall, people in stores, people in hiding, and then, quickly, from people tending to victims.

"We were quickly triaging calls," said Campbell. "We asked, 'Did you see anything, or did you just hear the gunshots?' 'Are you hiding?' 'Are you barricaded?' 'Do you believe you're safe?' If they felt safe, we encouraged them to stay put and wait for emergency personnel."

It's the kind of situation no one wants to be a part of, but Campbell says he and his colleagues were prepared for the task.

"It's a credit to our union that we were able to respond as we



Jeff Campbell, a member of AFSCME Local 350 at his Clackamas County 9-1-1 dispatch desk.

did," says Campbell. "That fact is undeniable. It was fortunate the event happened near a shift change, so we even had some extra people on hand. But we've fought tooth and nail over staffing here at our center (for years). Adequate staffing levels at any 9-1-1 center are a perpetual issue, but we're in pretty good shape here because of our union."

As the event unfolded, Campbell says it took about an hour before dispatchers could figuratively take a breath. C-COM typically

receives 200 to 300 calls per day; they fielded over 100 calls in the first 10 minutes after the shooting. For the day they totaled 546 "emergency" calls, another 600 that were classified as "non-emergency" plus 72 classified as "fire" calls, many of those also attributable to the Town Center situation.

"Of course, while this was going on, we were still receiving other, 'regular' 9-1-1 calls," said Campbell. "We had to dispatch those as well. I'm proud of all of us here at C-COM. I believe we handled the situation professionally, and we handled it well."

Campbell says dispatchers have had some limited "tactical dispatch training" geared toward an event of the magnitude of the Town Center shooting, but for the most part, he and his colleagues relied on their regular training.

"It's pretty much the same thing, just on a bigger level," he said. "Again, the union deserves credit on that point. (Union leaders) were dogged over the years in demanding training. Our contract includes required trainings, and we even have a training coordinator in our bargaining unit. We have a good relationship with management on the training issue today, but that's due to the union's insistence on the topic in previous years."

Campbell, who's been a 9-1-1 dispatcher for about 17 years, has been in his share of prickly situations. He says Clackamas County dispatchers receive a "wide gamut" of call types, including their share of Mt. Hood-related search and rescue operations.

"But this event goes right to the top," he said. "It's the situation you never want to have to deal with. But we did, and again, we did

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2012 — A YEAR OF SUCCESSES, SETBACKS FOR LABOR

2012 was a year mixing successes and setbacks for organized labor, both nationally and locally.

President Barack Obama was re-elected with union backing, but immediately after the votes were in, union leaders felt a need to mobilize to push him, and Congressional Democrats, not to mess with Social Security or Medicare as part of a "fiscal cliff" compromise.

Labor failed in its effort to recall Wisconsin's Republican Governor Scott Walker — who made war on public employee union rights in 2011. But three months after Walker beat back recall with 53 percent of the vote, a state judge struck down parts of the law.

And in December, a lame duck Legislature passed a law, with little public notice, making Michigan the 24th "right-to-work" state, or as one pro-union legislator put it, "a right-to-free-

load" state. Right-to-work laws make union dues strictly optional, even though unions are bound by law to represent all workers in a workplace.

In Chicago, a weeklong strike by 26,000 public school teachers in September dealt a partial blow to a corporate reform agenda for schools. Later, voters in Idaho and South Dakota rejected anti-teacher reforms.

But at bankrupt Hostess Brands, management responded to a weeklong protest strike in November by members of the Bakers Union by closing the 85-year-old company for good, putting the company's assets up for sale and laying off close to 18,000 workers.

In Oregon, unions lost some hard-fought campaigns, and won others:

- Doshia Salon Spa, an Aveda-branded salon chain that unionized in 2011, fired several union supporters in 2012, and campaigned to decertify the

union; predicting certain loss, Communications Workers of America (CWA) Local 7901 called it quits after failing to secure a first-time union contract.

- At TriMet, an arbitrator picked management's offer over the union's, leading the transit agency to demand workers pay up to \$7,080 for retroactive health insurance premiums. But Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757 challenged that in court, and won several partial legal victories in a set of cases that are still pending.

- At Cascade Steel Rolling Mills in McMinnville, about 300 members of United Steel Workers Local 8378 got annual raises of up to 2.5 percent after a 12-day strike, but also paid more for health coverage.

New union members:

- In March, 1,912 University of Oregon faculty unionized with American Association of University Professors.

- In July, 500 Portland security officers joined Service Employees Local 49 at four companies that agreed to "card check" union recognition: Securitas, ABM, G4S, and AlliedBarton.

- In November, TriMet Lift workers at a long nonunion unit of contractor First Transit voted 111-31 to join ATU Local 757.

But at BrucePac, a Willamette Valley cooked meat and poultry processor with 284 workers, a three-year-long campaign to join the Laborers Union went down by more than 3-to-1 in a July union election.

And in November, a group of 600 support staff at St. Charles Medical Center in Bend voted 334 to 212 to go nonunion Nov. 1. Workers voted narrowly in January 2011 to join Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 49, but never got a union contract in the course of more than 40 formal

negotiating sessions.

Portland City Council made some policy changes that will benefit working people:

- In September, it approved a model "community benefits agreement" that commits to build city projects with union labor, and to use minority workers and contractors.

- And in November, it voted to issue 50 taxi permits to Union Cab — a newly-formed driver-owned co-op that is affiliated with Communications Workers of America Local 7901.

The recession seemed to end for many local building trades workers as work boomed at Intel's giant new manufacturing facility and in projects building a "cloud" of computer data centers in the high desert of Central Oregon.

In July, Coquille Valley Hospital

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