



In a Salem parking lot outside the office of the Oregon Employment Relations Board, Oregon State University graduate assistants celebrate, joining hands to sing "Solidarity Forever." Graduate research assistants voted by a 9-to-1 margin to join American Federation of Teachers. (Photo by Matt Loewen.)

## OSU graduate research assistants unionize

CORVALLIS — Graduate research assistants at Oregon State University have won union representation. Overcoming administrative opposition and legal obstacles, they voted 287 to 32 to join American Federation of Teachers (AFT) in ballots counted March 8.

The 781-member group joins an existing bargaining unit of about 900 graduate teaching assistants, known as AFT Local 6069.

The research assistants are graduate students who get full scholarships and a stipend in exchange for helping faculty conduct research. Last year, they turned in union authorization cards signed by nearly 500 graduate research

assistants, but the OSU administration argued that they're students, not public employees. The Oregon Employment Relations Board disagreed, and scheduled an election.

Local 6069 President Wren Keturi said the union hopes to soon start negotiating additions to Local 6069's contract, which runs through mid-2016.

The research assistants are likely to seek cost-of-living increases and protected leave, Keturi said; teaching assistants are allowed to take time off during winter, spring and summer breaks, but research assistants don't currently have that right.

## Blues Festival April 13 to benefit Health Care for All-Oregon

Health Care for All-Oregon is throwing a party on Saturday, April 13, at the Melody Ballroom, 615 SE Alder, Portland.

The Inner City Blues Festival: "Healing the Healthcare Blues" — In the Groove of Love will feature some of the Northwest's biggest blues stars for a night of music that will benefit the work of the statewide coalition Health Care for All-Oregon for universal, affordable health care for all Oregonians.

Included in the program are:

- Richard Arnold "Tribute to the Crooners;"
- LaRhonda Steele and Andy Stokes "Motown Songbook;"
- Norman Sylvester Band with Ben Rice, "Blues Stains on my Hands;"
- DK Stewart Band "Tribute to Etta James;"
- Lloyd Allen Band "Portland Blues Legend;"
- Shoehorn "Tap Dancing Sax Man;"
- Mad as Hell Doctors "Mad Minutes;"
- Steve Cheseborough "Acoustic

Blues."

Masters of ceremonies for the evening are Paul Knauls, former owner of legendary blues/jazz clubs Geneva's and the Cotton Club, and Renee Mitchell, former columnist for the Oregonian.

For more information about the Inner City Blues Festival and Health Care for All-Oregon go to: [www.hcao.org](http://www.hcao.org). To purchase tickets on line go to [www.tickettomato.com](http://www.tickettomato.com).

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## Schwarz retires from AFT-Oregon after 24 years

Richard "Dick" Schwarz retired after four decades in the labor movement and 24 years as executive director of American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Oregon. His last day was Feb. 28. During his tenure, AFT-Oregon helped Oregon School Employees Association affiliate with AFT's national organization, and teamed up with Oregon Education Association (OEA) in a civil racketeering lawsuit that brought down perennial union foe Bill Sizemore.

Richard Schwarz, 66, a self-described army brat, grew up in Germany, Illinois, Texas, and Missouri. He earned an honorary commission as a Junior ROTC cadet major. But opposition to the Vietnam War led him later to become a draft resister. He refused induction, until a motorcycle accident made that moot.

After graduating from University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1970 with a philosophy degree, Schwarz worked as a part-time general assignment and police beat reporter at the Wisconsin State Journal. When the paper's independent union began contract negotiations, he volunteered to serve on the bargaining committee, and later was elected union president. But he was let go by the paper's management. Schwarz then worked as a stringer for Associated Press and the Milwaukee Sentinel.

In 1978 he was hired by the Wisconsin Nurses Association as a field representative.

When AFT set up its health care division in 1979, it hired Schwarz to help set up locals in several states.

His first organizing campaign, at St.

Francis hospital in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, lost by five votes, but management labor law violations led the National Labor Relations Board to overturn that result and order bargaining to commence.

Schwarz moved to Oregon in 1981. He remained with AFT 33 years, including five years as assistant director of the organizing department for national AFT's health care division, and three years as a field rep for AFT in Oregon.

When Reagan appointees to the National Labor Relations Board made it harder for unions to form appropriate bargaining units in health care, Schwarz helped craft the AFL-CIO's response, which eventually prevailed in federal court.

In 1988, he was assigned to help AFT members during a strike at Kaiser Permanente. Besides AFT's nurse and health professional affiliate, members of Oregon Nurses Association and United Food and Commercial Workers also struck. The strike lasted 58 days.

Schwarz became AFT-Oregon's first executive director in 1989.

In 1990 and 2000, he was sent to Bulgaria to assist newly-independent trade unions.

In 2001, Schwarz led AFT to join the OEA suit against Bill Sizemore's ballot measure operation, in which the plaintiffs charged that fraud and forgery were used to qualify an initiative



RICHARD SCHWARZ

on the 2000 ballot. The initiative was intended by Sizemore to bleed public employee union treasuries, and indeed they spent buckets of money to defeat it. In 2002, a jury found the Sizemore organizations had committed a pattern of fraud and forgery. The judge awarded over \$2 mil-

lion in damages, and later issued an injunction that tied Sizemore's hands from committing further abuses. Schwarz credits the lawsuit for ending abuses in Oregon's initiative system; exposures during the trial led voters to pass a union-backed reform measure that year that ended the per-signature bounty in initiative campaigns.

During his tenure, AFT-Oregon grew from 5,000 members to about 15,000, adding units of university and community college faculty and staff and graduate students at Oregon State University.

Schwarz says he never gave any thought to quitting, despite organized labor's ups and downs.

"I'm a Cub fan," he said. "There's always tomorrow. To last in this movement, you have to accept the notion of incremental gains."

In retirement, Schwarz says he plans to reintroduce himself to his wife, Judy, who retired last June as a medical social worker at Oregon Health and Science University. The two live in Northwest Portland along with two miniature schnauzers.



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