

# OSEA seeks union recognition for 300 Head Start workers

**A multi-union effort backed by the AFL-CIO helped garner majority support**

Workers at the Mount Hood Community College Head Start program are on track to get union representation. On April 29, union organizers submitted cards to the state Employment Relations Board — signed by a majority of the 287 workers — saying they want to join Oregon School Employees Association (OSEA).

MHCC Head Start offers preschool, child care, health screenings, meals and other services in East Multnomah County to low income families with children under six. The program has 16 locations, and a culturally diverse and mostly-female workforce with many native Spanish and Russian speakers. The union would represent teachers, teacher assistants, aides, bus drivers, kitchen workers, administrative staff, interpreters, and other classifications.

OSEA represents Head Start workers in Clackamas County, Lane County, and in Central Oregon. Richard Ramirez, OSEA director of organizing, said the union had been reaching out to



**Carmen Medel speaks at a celebration of union organizing success at the Oregon AFL-CIO Office in Portland. (Photo by Russell Sanders, courtesy Oregon AFL-CIO)**

MHCC Head Start workers for over a year. But the campaign ramped up in mid-March when organizing staff from other unions joined OSEA staff and members — including members from other Head Start locations — for a four-day “blitz” of house calls, during which they talked with up to 150 workers. [Since employers almost never give ac-

cess to the workplace for union organizers to meet with workers, most union campaigns visit workers at home to talk about unionizing.]

The multi-union effort was run out of a single-wide trailer outside the Oregon AFL-CIO Portland office dubbed the “organizing annex” or “war room.” It included staff from American Feder-

ation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), American Federation of Teachers, Communications Workers of America, Machinists, and United Steelworkers, as well as staff from the Oregon AFL-CIO and the national AFL-CIO.

As organizers made house visits, workers who signed cards were asked if they’d be willing to have their picture taken and used in outreach materials; each day, the “Join us in building our union” flier expanded.

Organizers say workers’ concerns include job security, disparate treatment, less-than-ideal working conditions, and high turnover of staff. Collective bargaining could address those

issues, as well as the desire for better training and health benefits for part-timers.

Management’s response has been muted: Letters were mailed to workers “explaining the process,” and referring to the union as a “third party.” But MHCC Head Start managers have not waged the kind of anti-union campaign commonly seen in the private sector.

Under Oregon law, verification of the union authorization cards leads to union recognition — unless within two weeks 30 percent of the workers sign a petition in favor of having a union election instead. That objection period ends May 17 for this group.

## City of Portland files 11th hour objection to park rangers’ union

In April — after all 15 park rangers at the City of Portland signed cards to join Laborers Local 483 — a spokesperson for Mayor Charlie Hales told the Labor Press that the City of Portland favors its employees’ right to join a union, adding, “We look forward to the park rangers being part of the Laborers union.”

But that generous sentiment was contradicted a few weeks later by the City attorney’s office, which on May 13 filed seven pages of legal arguments with the Oregon Employment Relations Board as to why the rangers shouldn’t be allowed to be part of the multi-union coalition known as the District Council of Trade Unions (DCTU).

In March, the rangers had met as a group with Mayor Hales to explain their job and why they want a union: Though they’re uniformed “ambassadors” of the City who patrol parks in pairs to enforce City regulations, 11 of the 15 rangers make \$11 an hour, have no benefits, and get terminated after working 1,400 hours because the City classifies them as “temps.” They hoped that by unionizing, they could bargain their way into permanent jobs with benefits.

But in legal objections filed 30 minutes before the deadline, Deputy City Attorney Matthew Farley argues that because they aren’t real jobs, they don’t belong in the DCTU. The 11

temps shouldn’t be allowed to join the DCTU because of their “tenuous employment relationship with the City.” They don’t have regularity and continuity in their work schedules. Their positions are non-budgeted. They have no reasonable expectation of permanent employment. And they’re not eligible for health insurance, paid vacation, service credits, have no appeal rights, and serve at-will. For all these reasons, the argument goes, they are not like existing members of the DCTU, and therefore don’t belong in the DCTU.

But there’s more. The rangers are security/policing personnel, not laborers, so they don’t belong in the Laborers. Local 483 is wrongly “seeking to lump security/policing personnel with manual laborers.” No other Local 483 members do security or investigations.

Actually, said the City, the 11 temp rangers are members of the “Community Service Aid” [sic] classification, a classification of casual employees who work in multiple bureaus across the City. So they’re not the same as their co-workers in the Parks Bureau, who belong to the Laborers. Oh, and one of the rangers designs fliers, so he’s a “Community Outreach and Information Assistant,” which is a city-wide non-represented classification.

“Community Service Aide? I’ve never heard that term in all my time as a park ranger,” said ranger Sam Sachs, one of the four permanents. “Are they

saying our park rangers can work in other bureaus?”

Lastly, the city points out that AFSCME Local 189 has attempted to organize the rangers, and has a pending grievance claiming its other members have the right to perform certain specific duties of the rangers. The City argues that the rangers are more like AFSCME-represented “Water Security Specialists” and “Parking Technicians,” than they are like their fellow Parks Bureau employees, who belong to Local 483.

“We did speak to those park rangers, but at the time they seemed more interested in joining the Laborers,” says Rob Wheaton, business representative for AFSCME Local 189. “As far as I’m concerned, it’s up to the employees. We give zero weight to what union the City thinks they should be in.”

As for the grievance, it relates to a proposal that some rangers be hired in Washington Park and made responsible for writing parking tickets at metered spaces there. AFSCME thinks the work should go to its members in parking enforcement. But as of now the rangers don’t even do that work.

“We kind of expected they’d object,” says Local 483 Business Manager Richard Beetle. “Personally, I think this is all about temporary employment. They want to keep them in temporary status and not have to worry about unions.”

## Local Motion

### April 2013

A list of Oregon and Southwest Washington workplaces deciding whether to be union-represented — as reported by the National Labor Relations Board and the Oregon Employment Relations Board.

### Voting in union elections

Date	Workplace (Location) Union	Yes	No	
3/14	Pacific West Ambulance (Newport) NAGE/SEIU Local 5000	13	15	☞
4/2	Garda Cash Logistics (Eugene) SPFPA	3	0	☞
4/4	RAMS Security dams (Bonneville, John Day, Dalles) USGOA	10	10	☞
4/29	Oregon Aire (Portland) Plumbers & Steamfitters Local 290	7	1	☞

### Unionizing by majority sign-up

Date	Workplace (Location) Union	Number of workers in unit
4/4	Oregon Coast Community College support staff (Newport) AFT Local 6020	14
4/29	Mt. Hood Community College Head Start (Gresham) OSEA/AFT Local 6732	287

### Requesting a union election

Workplace (Location) Union	Number of workers in unit
Ore. Dept. of Corrections (various sites) Assn of Ore. Corrections Empls. vs. AFSCME	1,761
Rinchem chemical warehouse (Hillsboro) Teamsters Local 162	20
Emergency Comm. of Southern Ore. (Central Point) ECSOEA vs. Teamsters Local 223	37
City of Astoria Police Dept. (Astoria) Astoria Pub. Safety Assn. vs. Teamsters Local 58	20
City of Hood River Public Works Dept. (Hood River) CHRPA vs. Teamsters Local 670	12
First Student school bus drivers (Lake Oswego) Oregon School Employees Assn. <b>DECERT</b>	38
First Student school bus drivers (Molalla) Oregon School Employees Assn. <b>DECERT</b>	47
St. Andrews Legal Clinic (Portland) Natl. Org. of Legal Services Workers, UAW	16
Precision Castparts Corporation (all Portland area sites) Machinists	2,210
ITS Technologies & Logistics rail terminal (Portland) Teamsters Local 162	16
Bethesda Lutheran Communities DD care homes (all Oregon locations) SEIU Local 503	380
City of Myrtle Point police (Myrtle Point) FOP vs. Teamsters Local 206	4
City of Toledo firefighters (Myrtle Point) TPSA vs. IAFF Local 4619	2
KB00 (Portland) Communications Workers of America Local 7901	10

#### LEGEND

☞ : workers will be union-represented ☞ : workers will be on their own

**DECERT** : A decertification election occurs when some union-represented workers declare that the union no longer has majority support. A ‘yes’ vote is a vote for the union.