

SEIU 49 secures first contract for 450 private security officers

Contract delivers raises and better benefits at Securitas, ABM, G4S, and AlliedBarton

There were tears of joy down at the union hall May 4 as a group of private security officers approved a first-ever industry-wide agreement with Portland-area security contractors.

"Now we can actually go see a doctor," said John Dearborn, who patrols City of Portland facilities as an employee of G4S.

About 450 security officers became members of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 49 last August, and now a union contract is delivering raises and improved benefits at four large companies with operations in the Portland area: Securitas, ABM, G4S (formerly Wackenhut), and AlliedBarton. Local 49 spokesperson Jesse Stemler said collectively the four companies have 80 percent share of the Portland-area market for security services.

SEIU — which represents 35,000 security professionals in 13 other U.S. cities — was able last year to get commitments from the four companies to remain neutral during organizing efforts among Portland employees — and to recognize and bargain with the union once a majority of workers had shown support by signing union cards.

Dearborn, a former law enforcement officer in the U.S. Air Force, says he

was skeptical when union organizers first knocked on his door. But online research, and his daughter's experience as a Teamster-represented UPS employee, convinced him to sign the card, help the campaign, and ultimately become a member of the team that met with company representatives to bargain the contract.

The first-time contract that resulted contains immediate 30-cent raises for security officers employed at government buildings and within Portland city limits — followed by 30-cent raises in January 2014, March 2015, and March 2016. Officers working outside Portland (about a third of the total) get 25-cent raises on those dates. The contract expires Feb. 28, 2017.

The contract also sets a wage floor of \$9.50 an hour for security officers in Portland, and \$9.25 an hour outside of Portland. Union organizer Will Layng says most officers currently are paid more than that — in the \$10 to \$11 an hour range — but the wage floor means they can't be paid less. The raises were on top of whatever pay officers were previously earning.

The contract also provides much-improved health insurance. Companies will pay \$333 a month for employee-only medical coverage provided by Kaiser Permanente, with employees contributing an additional \$55 a month. Previously workers paid around \$200 a month, and as a result, less than half opted into the insurance, Layng said. Both employer and employee contributions will rise in future years.



Security officers affiliated with SEIU Local 49 rally outside City Hall March 15 after marching with picket signs past many high-profile officer towers that they're entrusted to protect. On April 4, they voted to authorize the bargaining team to call a strike. And on May 4, they ratified a first-time union contract with raises, improved benefits, and job security protections.

Workers will also receive one week of paid vacation per year after one year of service, two weeks a year after five years, three weeks after 10 years, and four weeks after 15 years. There's bereavement leave, one paid day and three unpaid. And they'll have paid time off which they can use for personal reasons: 1 day a year after a year of service, two days after three years, and three days after five years. When scheduled to work on holidays, workers

will be paid time-and-a-half. The contract does not include a retirement plan.

The contract has many other features that increase job security, Dearborn says. It's a competitive industry, and as the contract was being bargained, Dearborn said, G4S won a local contract with Wells Fargo, replacing another company. Pay was cut \$4 an hour, and the incumbent security officers left. That practice is barred now: Under the new contract, when a contract changes hands, security officers at a location get the option to keep their jobs, with the same pay, benefits, and seniority, working for the new employer. And security officers who are members of the armed forces can return to their jobs with no loss of seniority after they're called up for active duty.

"This [contract] is a great victory for the common people," Dearborn said. Several members were moved to tears during the ratification vote, Dearborn said — overcome by emotion at the prospect of a contract that provides affordable access to a doctor, and job security for security officers.

The contract campaign in Portland is part of a broader effort, dubbed "Stand for Security," in which SEIU has been trying to persuade building owners of the value of a unionized industry. Better wages and benefits would reduce turnover, for example — and lessen the danger of security breaches by dissatisfied former employees.

"Officers who stay on the job understand their workplaces better and are better prepared to respond quickly and effectively to problems that arise," the union argues in a white paper aimed at building owners. "Experienced officers have the confidence of knowing who should be on the premises and who should not."

And an industry-wide agreement — the union has argued — takes wages out of competition and lets companies compete without sacrificing quality.

Lansing tapped to international Bakers Union executive board

Terry Lansing, financial secretary of Portland-based Bakers Local 114, has been elected to the General Executive Board of the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union. He is the first person from Local 114 to ever serve in such a capacity. He succeeds Donna Scarnano, president of Oakland, Calif., Bakers Local 125, who announced her retirement at the General Executive Board held in San Francisco the last week of March.



TERRY LANSING

Lansing, 62, was asked to fill the Region 6 vacancy by International President David Durkee. "He called and asked if I would be interested in a seat on the board, and I accepted," Lansing told the Labor Press.

Lansing will have to run for a full four-year term at the next international union convention, which is in July 2014. The board is comprised of three representatives from six districts, plus the international union president and secretary-treasurer.

Region 6 covers the western United States, including Oregon, Washington, California, Idaho, Montana, Colorado, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, and Wyoming.

Additionally, Lansing was elected vice president of the Western Conference of the BCTGM. He has served as a trustee for the past three years.

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