

Have A
Happy
Holiday!



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Unions host holiday party for kids of out-of-work members

Labor's Community Service Agency (LCSA) and the Northwest Oregon Labor Council held their annual "Presents from Partners" holiday party for children of out-of-work union members Dec. 14 at the Sheet Metal Workers Local 16 union hall in Northeast Portland. Several hundred boys, girls, tweens, teens, toddlers and their parents participated. Children received a Christmas stocking hand-made by retirees of the American Federation of Teachers-Oregon; a turkey lunch catered by Madison's Grill; dessert made by members of Bakers Local 114 at Fred Meyer; face painting, coloring, a visit with Santa Claus (played by Dave Williams of IBEW Local 48), and several toys and books.

IBEW and United Workers Federal Credit Union also sponsored a room with gifts for moms and dads. Children selected an item for each parent, and volunteers from the credit union helped wrap them.

Union organizations, members, unionized businesses, and professionals that work with unions donated toys and cash for the event, said LCSA Executive Director Vickie Burns. A total of 90 volunteers (pictured above) helped in some fashion, either by decorating the union hall the night before or assisting families the day of the event. This year, United Way of the Columbia-Willamette donated T-shirts for all the volunteers to wear.

"The outpouring of support was a gift from and for working people and organized labor," Burns said.



See more photos on Page 15.

TriMet, ATU may join to fight health cost burden

By DON McINTOSH
Associate Editor

In the long and bitter battle between TriMet and Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757, the biggest fight is health insurance. TriMet wants bus drivers, mechanics and others to pay a much bigger share of the costs, which are by all accounts sky-high — up to \$28,966 a year to cover an employee and his or her spouse and children on Regence Blue Cross Blue Shield.

Neither side created America's grossly overpriced health care system, but that only explains why costs are high to begin with, not why they're higher than average at TriMet.

But now a foundation-funded initiative — and the intervention of Portland City Commissioner Steve Novick — has a chance to bring the two parties together to grapple with the underlying issue: why so many TriMet workers and their families have health problems, and why they're so expensive to treat.

In April, the nonprofit business group known as the Oregon Coalition of Health Care Purchasers (OCHCP) received a \$50,000 seed grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to galvanize a community to address its health issues. OCHCP executive director Jill Freeman reached out to TriMet and Local 757 leaders and met with each side separately. Freeman, a former benefits administrator for Les Schwab and Jeld-Wen, was given access to the underlying data about how 3,500 TriMet workers, managers and retirees use health care — so she could better understand why costs are so high.

On Dec. 5, Freeman presented her findings to a meeting attended by 30 leaders from the union, TriMet management, and Novick's office, as well as health experts. The numbers were shocking.

TriMet workers have diabetes and high blood pressure at rates twice as high as the general population served by Kaiser Permanente. They have greatly elevated rates of depression and coronary artery disease. They go to the emergency room more often. And they smoke at a rate significantly higher than the general population.

"Data tells a story," Freeman said. Just not necessarily a story where the

sick are to blame for their illnesses. Are there things about TriMet as a workplace that are worsening worker health?

Smoking, for example, can be a response to stress, and is more common in stressful occupations. More frequent visits to the emergency room may suggest that work hours make it difficult to see a primary care physician and get preventive care.

Union leaders have been telling TriMet for years that the nature of the work, and some management decisions, are contributing to workers' health issues. Bus drivers perform a sedentary job, in a vibrating workspace, with all the attendant stress of maneuvering a large vehicle safely through traffic, watching for people at bus stops, and interacting with passengers, while

(Turn to Page 21)

Sheet Metal rep to head building trades council

Willy Myers, a business agent at Sheet Metal Workers Local 16, was elected executive secretary-treasurer of the Columbia Pacific Building and Construction Trades Council. He defeated Eric DeSantos of Plumbers and Fitters Local 290 by a vote of 61-19. The election was held Dec. 2.

Myers will succeed Jodi Guetzloe Parker on Jan. 6. Guetzloe Parker, a member of Laborers Local 320, is stepping down from the full-time position mid-term.

Myers, 44, has served as president of the Columbia Pacific BCTC since 2010. Before that he was a delegate representing Local 16.

Nominations for the vacant president's post will be held in January.

Myers got his start with the union in 1995. He has worked for Local 16 as an organizer and as elected business agent since 1999.



WILLY MYERS