

IBEW launches organizing drive at Camas' Wafertech

By **DON McINTOSH**
Associate Editor

On Feb. 7, 2013, a worker at Wafertech in Camas, Washington, reached out to a union. Portland-headquartered International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 48 took the phone call, and assigned staff organizers to talk to workers.

Wafertech — a subsidiary of Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) — employs roughly 500 production workers at a Camas semiconductor foundry. They work in a clean room environment making silicon wafers.

Union organizers hoped to get a chance to gauge whether workers were interested without the employer launching an anti-union campaign. But Wafertech managers got wind of workers talking to the union. The union campaign went public, launching a campaign web site Nov. 8 — *wafertechworkers.org* — to provide a forum for workers to learn about and discuss the merits of unionizing. A Facebook page launched Nov. 19 — Wafertech-Workers-United — also provides updates about the campaign.

In mid-November, the company

held hour-long anti-union meetings on each shift. Managers showed a video that outlines the supposed dangers of signing a union authorization card. On Dec. 6, company president KC Hsu wrote to workers, saying Wafertech will best serve customers and employees without a union.

“WaferTech has empowered grass-roots ‘Employee Engagement teams’ to develop improvement plans,” Hsu wrote, “and these teams will be reporting their recommendations in the weeks ahead.”

The union stepped up its effort to talk to workers. In mid-December, staff from Locals 659, 76, 46 and IBEW’s Ninth District for a four-day marathon of door-knocking.

IBEW organizer Ray Lister says Wafertech isn’t a bad employer in some respects: It provides decent employer-provided health insurance, a workplace gym, and paid time off. But employees have complaints, and some would like a union to negotiate improvements. Work is 24-7, and shifts are 12 hours long, starting at 6 a.m. or 6 p.m. Workers say they’re directed by managers fresh out of business school who know nothing about



ORGANIZER RAY LISTER

the industry. And managers change work rules without any say-so from the affected production workers. Turnover is high, Lister said, likely because wages are low. Until this month, some production workers made \$10.50 an hour, barely above Washington’s minimum wage. But on Jan. 16, the company announced a sizable raise: as much as \$1.50 an hour for newer and lower-paid workers, and 50 cents an hour for more senior workers. The raises brought workers up to a new wage floor of \$12 an hour.

Lister thinks the raises were a reason to talk of unionizing.

“We’re still in the early informative stages of a union campaign,” Lister said. “These hourly workers don’t have degrees and are made to believe they don’t have value. But it takes four weeks to train and two years to get up to optimal. They achieve a level of mastery. We’re trying to get message out that their work has value.”

Jensen re-elected business mgr. of Iron Workers #29

Kevin Jensen was sworn in Jan. 2 to a fourth term as financial secretary-treasurer and business manager of Portland-based Iron Workers Local 29. He ran unopposed.

Joe Bowers was re-elected to a second term as president and Robert Camarillo was re-elected vice president of the 1,050-member local, which has jurisdiction in Oregon and Southwest Washington. Additionally, the local is training 175 apprentices.

Both Bowers and Camarillo also were re-elected as business agents and as delegates to the Iron Workers District Council.

Others re-elected were Kevin Soto, recording secretary, and Michael Newton, sergeant-at-arms/Executive Com-



KEVIN JENSEN

mittee/Examining Committee.

Joining Newton on the Executive Committee are Shane Nehls, Kevin Crocker, Rion Barrett and Joseph Fields.

Joining Newton on the Examining Committee are Camarillo and Jade Worthington.

Trustees elected were Steve Mahoney and William Sanders.

Soto, Fields and Joseph Cochran also were elected to the Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee.

All terms are for three years.


Oregon Building Trades Council endorses Kitahaber for re-election

The Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council (OBTC) has endorsed John Kitahaber for re-election as Oregon’s governor.


The council, which represents more than 25,000 union construction workers throughout the state, cited Kitahaber’s economic development plan, his focus on attracting industrial sector jobs to the region, his effort to raise the median income of Oregonians, and his commitment to bring vocational training back into the classroom, as their reasons for endorsing him.

“Gov. Kitahaber shares our core belief that the key to economic growth and prosperity is the creation of family wage jobs,” said OBTC Executive Secretary John Mohlis.

Kitahaber, a Democrat, served as the 35th governor of Oregon from 1995 to 2003. He was the first person to be elected to the office three times when he was elected to a non-consecutive third term as the state’s 37th governor in 2010. Prior to becoming a politician, he was an emergency room physician in Roseburg, Oregon.




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