

LERC's Marcus Widenor retires; Raahi Reddy hired as instructor

University of Oregon's Labor Education and Research Center (LERC) has a new instructor — Raahi Reddy — who has a 20-year record as a labor educator and union organizer. LERC hired Reddy in September 2013 to fill a vacancy created when associate professor Marcus Widenor retired Oct. 1, 2012.

LERC is a kind of university extension service, offering training to workers and unions, and applied research on work, employment, and labor relations.

Reddy, 41, was born in India and grew up in Jersey City, New Jersey, the daughter of a single mom and hospital nurse. She was an activist from an early age, volunteering at 16 for Jesse Jackson's 1988 presidential campaign.

She joined a student labor action group at Rutgers University, and after earning a political science degree, went to work for Service Employees International Union (SEIU). She then spent five years as an SEIU organizer in New York and New Jersey, seven years as lead organizer and organizing director at 20,000-member SEIU Local 715 in San Jose, and three years as deputy director and chief of staff at 85,000-member Local 721 in Los Angeles. She also earned a master's degree in urban planning from UCLA, spent several years as a labor educator, and in 2005 helped found an annual training for union organizers at the UC Berkeley Labor Center. While at UCLA, she authored a report that helped win passage of a project labor agreement in which local development agency committed to employ union labor — and open up high-paying union jobs in construction to low-income people and minorities. She's been active in the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance since 1992, and was president of



MARCUS WIDENOR



RAAHI REDDY

the Los Angeles chapter.

In 2012, Reddy moved to Oregon with her husband Hays Witt and their infant daughter. Witt went to work for the Partnership for Working Families, and Reddy went to work as organizing director for Basic Rights Oregon, working on the same-sex marriage initiative aimed at the November 2014 ballot. Now, at LERC, she's back to educating union leaders.

Widenor, 61, will continue to teach one class a year at UO, most recently an undergraduate sociology class called American Unions and Workers Movements. He joined LERC in 1984 after working as a labor educator at the University of Minnesota and as an organizer in South-

ern textile mills for the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. At LERC, he became an expert on the wood products industry, Oregon's labor and working-class history, and public sector labor law. Looking back, Widenor says his 28 years at LERC coincided with the collapse of private sector unions in Oregon — and the ascendancy of very sophisticated unions in the public sector. But the labor movement can't continue without a strong private-sector component, Widenor said. On the other hand, Widenor said, Oregon's labor movement has more women in leadership now than it did in the 1980s, and more young and committed union organizers.

For the future, Widenor said he's most excited about the development of alternative worker movements — “experiments in the cracks at the edges of collective bargaining,” like recent strikes by fast food workers in a number of cities. “The collective bargaining system, as we know it, is broken,” he said.



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