

# Erica Askin new business manager at Laborers #483

**Appointed by E-Board to succeed 'Buz' Beetle, who retired**

By **DON McINTOSH**  
Associate Editor

Laborers Local 483 has appointed new leadership. Longtime business manager Richard "Buz" Beetle retired at the end of February, and on his recommendation, the Local 483 Executive Board designated organizer Erica Askin to fill out the remainder of his three-year term. Askin was sworn into office March 1.

Local 483 is a public sector local within Laborers International Union of North America, which represents mostly private-sector laborers in building and highway construction. Local 483 represents about 850 employees at the City of Portland and the Metro regional government, particularly at the Oregon Zoo and in City bureaus responsible for wastewater treatment, parks, and street maintenance.

Askin, 34, has been an employee of the local since Nov. 10, 2009.

She grew up in St. Petersburg, Florida, and earned a degree in social work from Florida State University at Tallahassee, and a law degree from Rutgers University in New Jersey.

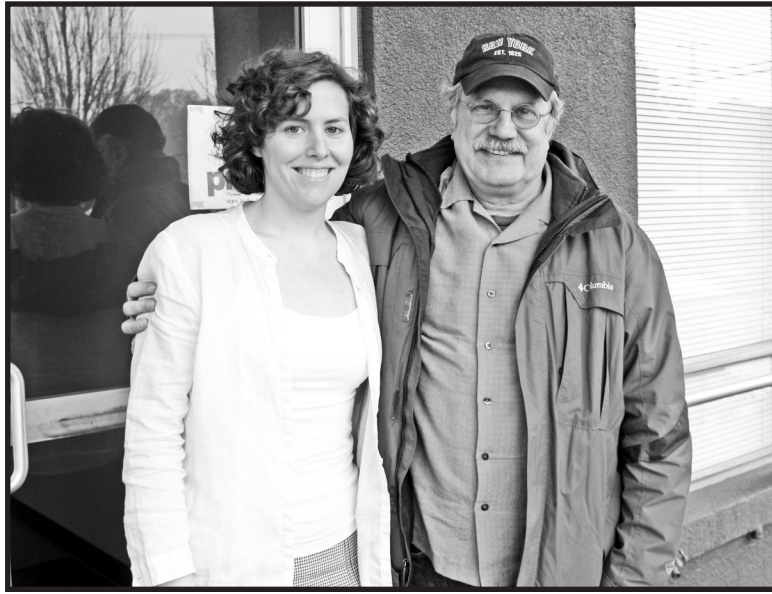
While in college, she canvassed for a minimum wage increase for the group ACORN, and then worked at Florida Impact, an anti-poverty advocacy group. While in law school, she worked on workers' compensation cases for New Jersey law firm Livingston Siegel. She later worked for labor law firm Weissman and Mintz representing Communications Workers of America (CWA) members employed by Verizon and the State of New Jersey. She passed the bar exam and was admitted to practice law in New York and New Jersey.

After graduating law school in 2008, she served a year-long clerkship with a trial court judge. The judge encouraged her to apply at a land use law firm that had Walmart for a client. But Askin rejected that direction. After a trip to Oregon, she started applying for union jobs on the West Coast. She wanted to be an organizer.

Beetle gave her the chance, bringing her on to organize nonunion workers and get existing members better prepared for budget and contract battles.

Askin says she's always felt working class. Her mom earned little as a career office administrator in St. Petersburg, and her dad was disabled.

"Growing up in a nonunion background, like most people in this coun-



**Richard "Buz" Beetle (right), longtime business manager of Portland-based Laborers Local 483, retired last month. Erica Askin, the union's organizer, was appointed his successor.**

try, people think they're powerless," Askin told the Labor Press. "When you go into a union environment and see how emboldened people are, and they take action and have a culture and history of doing that, you can see how it makes a difference."

Askin helped organize Local 483 members to take action opposing layoffs and budget cuts. About 100 Local 483 members saw their jobs on the chopping block when the City's budget was first announced in early 2012. Local 483 hired an expert to look at the books, found funds that could be tapped to avert the cuts, and put political pressure on Mayor Adams to use

those funds instead of laying off staff during the recession. In the end, no Local 483 members were laid off.

Meanwhile, Local 483 had long complained about City use of low-paid contracted-out labor to do the same work as union members. With her legal background, Askin looked at one such contract in City rec centers, and saw a violation of the union contract. The City said Local 483's grievance was untimely because the contracting out had happened a decade ago. But Askin showed that the City had never notified the union that it was contracting out members' work, and based on the legal theory of continuing violation, she

won at the first stage with an arbitrator. The City settled the grievance, agreeing to phase out the outsourcing contract.

Now she faces likely her biggest challenge: Helping to win an acceptable union contract for the roughly 550 members of Local 483 who are part of the District Council of Trade Unions (DCTU). DCTU, a seven-union coalition, is in the midst of a strike vote after its members voted down a tentative agreement in February.

Askin said she plans to run for election when the term expires. The local will take nominations in May, and hold an election in June if more than one candidate seeks the position.

Beetle, 65, retires after decades of involvement in Local 483, and an even longer tenure as an activist. He grew up in Neosho, Missouri, in a household headed by his mother, after a divorce from his father, a captain in the U.S. Army. While working at a lumber yard on evenings and weekends, Beetle attended Southeastern Missouri State College in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, for a time. He joined Students for Democratic Society, and in 1969, dropped out of college, moving to New York the following year. There he got a job working for the National Peace Action Coalition — the group which organized a 750,000-strong anti-war march on April 24, 1971 — the largest rally ever held outside the U.S. Capitol.

"People learn through struggle," Beetle told the Labor Press. "I got in-

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