

Postal service tries to ditch door delivery in Portland

By JAMIE PARTRIDGE

Despite telling local KATU News that it's "just an idea ... we're not really pushing for it ... it's just a discussion, they're just talking about in Congress," the Portland District of the U.S. Postal Service is indeed soliciting property owners and managers to convert from at-the-door to at-the-corner "cluster box" mail delivery. And the local Letter Carriers union is fighting back.

According to Jim Falvey, president of the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) Branch 82, "the Portland District has instituted a program that involves the solicitation of property managers and/or owners whose location has multiple delivery points. One example was Royal Villa, a 55-and-over retirement community located in King City near Tigard, with about 250 door-to-door deliveries. Postal management solicited the property managing firm and offered to install cluster boxes free of charge and maintain them at no cost. In return, the postal service wanted to eliminate door-to-door delivery."

Postal management does not have to ask or even inform residents that this conversion is going to occur, if they get the cooperation of the manager or owner of the property.

Falvey was incensed to learn that residents of Royal Villa, many of whom are frail, would be forced to walk some distance in the wind, rain, snow, ice, dark and other dangerous conditions to retrieve their mail. And, of course, he was angered that letter carrier work would be reduced and jobs eliminated.

Alerted by a local mail carrier who found out through a USPS manager's slip of the tongue, the union president contacted Royal Villa's property manager and convinced her to stand up to the postal service offer of free mail boxes.

The Letter Carriers union, both locally and on a national level, is mobilizing to fight cluster box conversions, which would change the one-third of deliveries now at-the-door, and eliminate 80,000 mail carrier jobs. [KATU News reported that 394,821 total deliveries across Oregon and Southwest Washington, as far north as Castle Rock.

USPS, according to a recently released Government Accountability Office report, could save up to 55 percent per delivery by converting from at-the-door to cluster boxes. Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe, President Obama, and committees in the U.S. House and U.S. Senate — led by Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.) and Sens. Tom Carper (D-Del.) and Tom Coburn (R-Okla.), are all proposing legislation to allow this service cut, based on an alleged postal financial crisis.

Congress itself is responsible for the postal "debt," through a 2006 mandate to pre-fund retiree benefits 75 years in advance. Without this mandate, union officials say, the postal service would be profitable.

Arena football players affiliate with AFL-CIO

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The Arena Football League Players Union (AFLPU) will join the AFL-CIO after its board of player representatives voted unanimously to affiliate with the 56 unions and 12.5 million members of the national labor federation.

The AFLPU, which began operations in 1987, now has 14 teams — including first-year team the Portland Thunder — and is looking to expand into China. The union represents some 350 players, more than 90 percent of the league's players.

Ivan F. Soto, executive director of the players union, explained the move: "It was just a natural fit for us. With the rapid growth of the league we're starting to see, we felt it was good to align ourselves with an organization that can help us domestically and internationally."

"We're happy to have the backbone of the AFL-CIO behind us. That's what solidarity is about — trying to grow the pie for everybody, especially the players, the labor."

Soto added that arena football is a dangerous sport and that the players "don't earn the kind of compensation that National Football League (NFL) players do." Joining the AFL-CIO, he said, was a way to make sure that games are played with properly trained union players with sufficient protections.

The NFL Players Association also is an affiliate of the AFL-CIO.

Good luck with that: One wage and hour investigator for every 123,000 workers

At an academic conference May 29 in Portland, newly-installed U.S. Wage and Hour Administrator David Weil outlined the task ahead of him: To enforce minimum wage, child labor, and overtime laws for 135 million workers in 7.5 million establishments ... with 1,100 investigators.

"We can never be in enough places to enforce the law on our own," Weil told attendees at the 66th annual meeting of the Labor and Employment Relations Association (LERA), "and you could double our allocation and it would still be that same small statistic."

The national conference was held in Portland May 29-June 1 at the Hilton Portland and Executive Towers. It drew nearly 400 representatives from labor, management, government, academics and neutrals to Portland.

Weil said he plans to continue the approach of his predecessor: educate employers and worker advocates about the law, and use "strategic enforcement" and "directed investigations" to increase compliance.

Weil said that contrasts with the Wage and Hour Division's historic ap-



THE 'DON'T BUY STAPLES' CAMPAIGN by postal worker unions got a significant boost May 30 when the national AFL-CIO announced its support of the boycott. The unions are fighting a U.S. Postal Service deal that privatizes postal jobs by turning over some retail postal service work to the office supply chain store. In the photo above, 70 protesters marched around the Staples store at Portland's Cascade Station on May 18 chanting, "the U.S. Mail is not for sale." In pilot openings last fall, 82 post offices were launched inside Staples stores with low-paid, nonunion, non-postal workers. None of the pilot stores are in Oregon. USPS plans to open post offices inside all 1,600 Staples stores nationwide beginning this September. Another rally and picket is slated for Friday, June 20, at 5 p.m. at the Staples store at 122nd and Northeast Glisan, Portland. Postal unions also encourage everyone to sign an online petition at www.StopStaples.com.

At their state convention, the Oregon State Association of Letter Carriers (OSALC) resolved to fight for at-the-door delivery which, "facilitates quality service, such as individualized parcel and bulk mail drop and pick-up locations" as well as "residential customer contact, which protects the health and welfare of neighborhoods, especially looking-in on the frail and seniors."

OSALC also noted that "cluster box mail receptacles are less secure than at-

the-door and are more often targets for mail thieves" and "mail is more likely to accumulate day-to-day and more likely to be dropped on the ground, leading to litter problems."

Following the lead of Canadian postal workers, who are also facing the elimination of at-the-door delivery, OSALC is encouraging local branches to mount campaigns to inform business and residential customers about the dangers of ditching door delivery. For-

tunately, postal regulations require that property owners or "owners' associations" or "managers" approve, in writing, the conversion from at-the-door delivery. Unfortunately, the USPS can insist that any new housing, where delivery has not been established, can be forced to receive mail at a cluster box.

(Editor's Note: Jamie Partridge is a retired letter carrier and an organizer with Community and Postal Workers United.)



U.S. Wage and Hour Administrator David Weil spoke at the national conference of the Labor and Employment Relations Association, held this year in Portland.

proach, in which investigations were done only in response to complaints, and tended to focus on back pay awards without trying to understand what was leading to violations of the law.

Weil — a professor in the Boston University School of Management — has written a good deal about labor law enforcement in the modern era of lower worker expectations and increasingly fragile employment relationships. And

in a 51-42 vote on April 28, he became the first Wage and Hour administrator to be confirmed by the U.S. Senate since President Barack Obama took office in 2009.

Obama nominated two others to head the agency, which is housed within the Labor Department, but the Senate never voted to confirm them.

The U.S. Constitution gives the president the power to make appointments "with the advice and consent of the Senate." But Republicans were able to block consent of hundreds of Obama appointees thanks to the Senate's self-imposed filibuster rule, which in practice allows any and all action to be halted by 40 of the 100 senators. This year Senate Democratic leadership finally did the obvious: It used a simple majority vote to change the filibuster. But it only did so for Senate confirmations of presidential appointments. Legislation, the Senate's real work, remains almost totally stymied. And it would take legislation to add enforcers to the Wage and Hour Division. Weil said Obama is proposing funding to add 300 more investigators.