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Portland park rangers win raises in long-sought first contract

It took 18 months, but park rangers are now part of the coalition of City unions

City of Portland park rangers ratified a collective bargaining agreement Oct. 31 that provides wage increases of up to several dollars an hour, and adds them to the larger agreement with the multi-union coalition known as the District Council of Trade Unions (DCTU).

The City employs about two dozen uniformed rangers who work with police, social service agencies, and neighborhood groups to maintain security in City parks. They solve conflicts, help park users, and enforce dog leash/scoop rules and prohibitions on camping and alcohol consumption, and they can issue park exclusions, if necessary.

In March 2013, the rangers unionized with Laborers Local 483, which represents other Parks employees, but the City refused to recognize their choice until after it lost legal challenges and saw the result of a May 2014 union election. Bargaining commenced soon after, though there wasn't much of it: The agreement rangers voted on was substantially the same as the City's ini-

tial offer. Still, the agreement contains a number of improvements.

Under its terms, full-time permanent rangers will have a starting wage of \$18.99 an hour (up from \$17.47 an hour currently), and get periodic raises until they reach \$25.16 after four years on the job. Rangers hired as seasonal employees will make a starting wage of \$15.83 an hour (up from \$12 an hour now), rising to \$20.55 in year 3. Rangers will also participate in a safety committee. Other terms, including health insurance and other benefits, match those of the DCTU contract, for regular rangers. And seasonal rangers will be eligible for health care benefits under the City's Seasonal Workers Plan starting January 2015. Seasonal rangers who perform satisfactorily will also get priority consideration for rehire the following year.

This was the only time the rangers will bargain separately with the City. Next time, they expect to bargain as part of the 1,600-member DCTU. The current DCTU contract runs through June 30, 2017.

"From where we were two years ago, it's good," said bargaining team member Sam Sachs, one of the rangers who led the push to unionize.

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ATU and TriMet ratify new labor contract for first time in a decade

By DON McINTOSH
Associate Editor

Members of Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 757 have ratified a new union contract at TriMet — for the first time in over 10 years. A six-year deal ratified in March 2004 was followed by a four-year contract imposed by an arbitrator. Earlier this year it looked like the two sides would go to binding arbitration a second time, after contract bargaining stalled in May. Instead they reached a negotiated deal Sept. 30 with the help of a state mediator. The new four-year agreement was ratified by the TriMet Board Oct. 22 and by active union members in ballots that were counted Oct. 24.

The agreement covers about 2,000 workers and 1,200 retirees, including bus and rail operators, mechanics, cleaners, and customer service workers.

It provides 3 percent across-the-board pay raises Dec. 1, 2014 and Dec. 1, 2015, plus immediate raises of \$1 per hour for about 345 journey-level workers.

It also resolves the most contention in bargaining: health insurance.

"Our members fulfilled their commitment to their passengers and the citizens of the community by accepting reduced health care benefits," said Local 757 President Bruce Hansen in a press statement. TriMet says the reductions will reduce its expenses by \$50 million over the life of the contract.

Under the new agreement, current employees and retirees under 65 have four choices: Pay 5 percent of the premium for a Kaiser Permanente plan with \$10 co-pays — or for a Regence plan that pays 80 percent of health expenses; pay that same amount plus the extra premium in order to keep a current Regence plan that pays 90 percent of expenses; or pay no premium at all for a high-deductible Regence plan that combines with a health savings account (HSA). Once current employees and retirees become eligible for Medicare at age 65, TriMet will reimburse their Medicare premiums and pay for supplemental insurance coverage. But future hires won't have employer-pro-

vided health insurance when they retire: They'll get \$800 a month to purchase health care until they become eligible for Medicare, at which point they won't be eligible for any TriMet insurance benefit. Total monthly premiums for active employees in 2015 will range from \$671 to \$2,216, depending on

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Home Forward first local body to OK \$15-an-hour minimum wage

Inspired by a national protest movement for a \$15-an-hour wage for fast food workers, some local unions have begun talking about a \$15 wage floor for their own least-paid members.

On Oct. 31, AFSCME Local 3135 and Laborers Local 296 became the first unions in the Portland area to put \$15 into their union contracts — thanks to a proposal from Michael Buonocore, the new executive director at Home Forward. Home Forward, formerly known as Housing Authority of Portland, is the federally-funded public cor-

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Oregon supremes hear arguments in PERS case

By DON LOVING

SALEM — The waiting game begins in earnest now that the Oregon Supreme Court has heard arguments in the Moro case, the lawsuit filed by the PERS Coalition to overturn Public Employee Retirement System (PERS) changes enacted by the 2013 Oregon Legislature.

The Oregon high court heard from PERS Coalition attorney Greg Hartman and others during oral arguments on Oct. 14. There are two primary issues to Moro: a change to retirees' cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) from a guaranteed 2 percent to a rolling, lesser figure based on annual retirement benefits, and ceasing to pay a tax offset for out-of-state residents.

As per court protocol, the petitioners — those who filed the lawsuit — spoke first, led by Hartman representing the PERS Coalition. The PERS Coalition is a voluntary association of public employee unions with members in PERS. The coalition is comprised of Oregon AFSCME; Oregon Education Association; Service Employees International Union; Oregon School Employees Association; American Federation of Teachers-Oregon; Oregon Nurses Association; Oregon State Fire Fighters Council; Association of Oregon Faculty; Teamsters Local 223; the Association of Engineering Employees; American Association of University Professors;



PERS Coalition attorney Greg Hartman makes a point at the lectern before the Oregon Supreme Court Oct. 14.

Oregon State Police Officers Association; the District Council of Trade Unions; the Association of Oregon Corrections Employees; and Oregon PERS Retirees, Inc., an association of PERS retirees.

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