

AFSCME Local 88 closing in on agreement with Multnomah County

The County rebuffs catch-up-to-inflation proposals, but drops a demand for health benefits change

Multnomah County and its largest union have just a few items remaining to negotiate in bargaining over a new contract to replace the one that expired June 30.

American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 88 represents about 2,900 county employees. Three years ago, the union agreed to a 1.2 percent cost-of-living increase, followed by 0 percent in the second year; and 3.3 percent the third year. And that was after members voluntarily gave up a bargained-for 2.8 percent cost-of-living increase and a 3 percent step increase in 2008 — in order to preserve county jobs and services at the depth of the recession. So this time, the union proposed catch-up raises of 1 percent or even 0.5 percent over inflation. But the county negotiating team, led by labor relations director Steve Herron, said no to that.

Still, Local 88 President Deirdre Mahoney-Clark said bargaining has been respectful and productive.

Management backed off a proposal to allow the county to offer health benefits through a state-wide public employee insurance plan instead of the current self-insured arrangement. Mahoney-Clark said union members value the existing set-up, in which member representatives are part of the team that bargains benefits with providers like Kaiser and Moda. In recent years, the team has found enough savings to keep



AFSCME Local 88 members held a rally Oct. 28 outside Multnomah County headquarters in Southeast Portland calling for a fair contract with cost-of-living raises and a \$15 minimum wage.

premium increases low or nonexistent while preserving benefits.

The union bargaining team is still waiting to hear whether the county will agree to its Oct. 1 proposal of a \$15 minimum wage for the county's lowest paid employees, to be phased in over three years. Mahoney-Clark says about 160 Local 88 members currently make below \$15 an hour, including library pages, food service workers, animal care aides, and bridge operators. Some members earn so little that they are eli-

gible for food stamps and other public assistance.

"This is a fight for justice, and the time is right," said Oregon AFSCME Executive Director Ken Allen at an Oct. 28 union rally outside county headquarters. "The county budget is in the best shape it's been in six years."

Mahoney-Clark said she expected the two sides to reach a tentative contract agreement at the negotiations scheduled for Nov. 5, after this issue went to press.



Union dentist brings smiles to labor agency

Labor's Community Service Agency on Oct. 24 received a \$2,122 donation to its Helping Hands program from Sunrise Dental. The money was raised at the Hot August Clay Shoot sponsored by Sunrise Dental Aug. 16 in Gervais, Oregon. More than 40 labor unions and organization contributed to the fundraiser. Thirty-five people took part in the clay shoot. In addition to LCSA, a like amount was donated to Sunrise for Children, a program to help end child slavery. Pictured above making the presentation to LCSA is Shannon Walker (left) of Sunrise Dental. Accepting the check is LCSA Executive Director Vickie Burns and LCSA office manager Eryn Byram. The clay shoot is slated again next year on Saturday, Aug. 22. Mark your calendars now.

... Park Rangers get contract

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Local 483 has also pushed to make more rangers permanent employees, and limit the number of rangers designated as seasonal. In the past, most rangers have been classified as seasonal workers, laid off after they work 1,400 hours in a year. Responding to rangers who spoke Oct. 22 at a City Council

meeting, City Commissioner Amanda Fritz said she will try again to add nine permanent positions to the budget.

"Portland Park Rangers serve admirably as the goodwill ambassadors of our parks and natural areas, and I am pleased we have come to this agreement," Fritz said in an Oct. 29 press statement.

LERA awards to be presented Nov. 12

The Oregon chapter of the Labor and Employment Relations Association (LERA) will hold its awards ceremony and annual meeting Wednesday, Nov. 12, at the World Trade Center, 121 SW Salmon St., Portland. The awards program recognizes individuals from labor, management, academics and neutrals who have made major contributions to labor-management relations.

The awards presentation will take place at a reception immediately following the annual program. This year's program will feature top political lobbyists for labor and management discussing Oregon's election results and its implications for labor relations.

The program is from 3:30 to 5 p.m., followed by the awards presentation and annual meeting.

You can register online at www.oregonlera.org. Cost is \$25 for LERA members and \$35 for non-LERA members.



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