

Support workers strike at for-profit hospital in Springfield

SEIU Local 49 accuses McKenzie-Willamette of further labor law violations

By DON McINTOSH
Associate Editor

Over 300 hospital support workers represented by Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 49 went on strike Oct. 28-30 at McKenzie-Willamette Medical Center in Springfield.

McKenzie-Willamette is part of Community Health Systems (CHS), a for-profit hospital chain that has a record of union disputes and labor law violations around the country. Local 49 represents service and maintenance and technical workers at the hospital, including housekeepers, cafeteria workers, certified nursing assistants, respiratory therapists, X-ray and emergency room technicians, and other technical and support occupations.

The three-day strike was called ostensibly to protest labor law violations at McKenzie-Willamette. That's because U.S. labor law allows employers to permanently replace strikers, except when the strike is to protest labor law violations (known as unfair labor prac-

tices). Local 49 filed unfair labor practice charges with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), including accusations that union reps were barred from new employee orientation, and that employees were made to sign a sheet if they wanted to attend a union informational picket. The NLRB issued a formal complaint Aug. 29, and scheduled a hearing to take place in January. And the hospital has still not complied with a judge's order in an earlier case over refusing to provide relevant information to the union in bargaining.

But the crux of the labor dispute is the lack of progress in negotiations on a new contract. Workers have been without a union contract since the last one expired Dec. 31, 2013. The two sides have been meeting since Oct. 17, 2013, entered federal mediation in the summer, and last met Oct. 17, 2014.

In bargaining, the union has proposed a three-year contract with 2.5 percent raises each year, and no changes to the health benefit. Management's proposal is a two-year contract with raises of 1.2 percent the first year and 1.5 percent the second — as well as 4 or 9 percent increases to employee premiums while also increasing co-pays and deductibles.

"This is a hugely profitable hospital, and they can afford to do better by the



workers and the community," said Local 49 Healthcare Division Director Steven Ward. "At this point, they're extracting profits from the community and

sending them out of state, and we don't think that's good for anybody."

Because of a legally-required 10-day strike notice, the hospital remained open, using replacement workers and managers to do the work of strikers. Some replacement workers were flown in from other states, and were put up at Candlelight Suites hotel in Eugene by the company. Members of the Oregon Nurses Association also worked during the strike, as their union contract doesn't allow them to honor other unions' strike picket lines, though some members wore stickers in support and came out to the picket line.

But Local 49 spokesperson Jesse Stemmler called the strike a success, citing picket line support from local unions and elected leaders. Congress-

Members of SEIU Local 49 conduct three-day unfair labor practice strike at McKenzie-Willamette Medical Center in Springfield, Oregon. McKenzie-Willamette is part of Community Health Systems (CHS), a for-profit hospital chain that has a record of union disputes and labor law violations around the country. (Photo by Angus Maguire, courtesy of SEIU Local 49.)

man Peter DeFazio visited strikers on the picket line, and so did Lane County Commissioner Pete Sorenson, state senator Lee Beyer, and state representatives Phil Barnhart, Paul Holvey, and Rob Nosse.

INDEPENDENT RETIREMENT LIVING

Kirkland Union Manors
3530 SE 84th Ave.
Portland 97266
503-777-8101

Westmoreland's Union Manor
6404 SE 23rd Ave.
Portland 97202
503-233-5671

Manors Make the Difference

- Studio and One-Bedroom Apartments
- Affordable Rent includes Utilities (EXCEPT PHONE AND CABLE)
- Planned Events, Clubs, and Activities
- Ideal Locations offer easy access to Bus Lines, Shopping, and Entertainment
- No Costly Buy-In or Application Fees
- Federal Rent Subsidies Available (MUST QUALIFY)



WESTMORELAND'S UNION MANOR
Opened in October of 1966



LABOR LEADERS IN THE PORTLAND BUILDING TRADE MOVEMENT ORGANIZED THE UNION LABOR RETIREMENT ASSOCIATION IN 1962, WITH THE SOLE PURPOSE OF PROVIDING HOUSING FOR THE ELDERLY.

"We believe that everyone earns the right to retire, free from pressures of earlier years."



Kirkland Union Plaza
1414 Kauffman Ave.
Vancouver 98660
360-694-4314

Marshall Union Manor
2020 NW Northrup
Portland 97209
503-225-0677

WWW.THEUNIONMANORS.ORG



Quest Investment Management

Serving Multi-Employer Trusts for over 29 Years

Cam Johnson
Jon Bettendorf
Greg Sherwood
Monte Johnson
Doug Goebel

One SW Columbia Street, Suite 1100
Portland, Oregon 97258
503.221.0158 ■ www.QuestInvestment.com