

Portland airport shop workers want a union too

Another group of low-wage workers at Portland International Airport (PDX) is seeking to unionize.

UNITE HERE Local 8 organizer Shellea Allen says more than two thirds of a group of 45 employees of the multinational corporation World Duty Free Group have signed union cards. The World Duty Free Group employees staff four shops at PDX: Kiehl's, Rich's News, The Oregonian, and The Market.

On Feb. 18, pro-union workers and supporters presented a demand to local management that the company recognize their choice to unionize, and they set up a brief informational picket at the airport. The company declined to respond.

The workers want more regular schedules, affordable health care, and wage increases, Allen said. Currently their wages range from Oregon's \$9.25 minimum wage to a little over \$10 an hour. World Duty Free Group has over 500 stores in 20 countries, and specializes in airport sales of fragrance, wine and spirits, cosmet-

ics, food, travel accessories and souvenirs.

UNITE HERE represents World Duty Free workers at the Detroit, Oakland, and San Jose airports.

The effort to unionize World Duty Free is part of a larger fight to improve wages and conditions for airport service workers. Last September, the multinational food concessions company HMS Host agreed to recognize UNITE HERE Local 8 as the representative of its 176 PDX employees at Starbucks Coffee, Gustav's Pub & Grill, Rogue Ales Public House, and Rose's Restaurant and Bakery. Gustav's later closed when airport managers cancelled its lease, but the union is bargaining a first contract for the remaining workers.

The World Duty Free shops used to be staffed by HMS Host, but the company sold its retail division to World Duty Free and kept its food service division.



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Regional Council spokesperson Ben Basom says the film crew shot a second skit at the office, which may even feature union secretary Martha Verduzco as an extra, though it hadn't aired as this issue went to press.

Basom says the union was approached last year by a location scout who admired the building. The Regional Council allowed Portlandia to use its location at no charge, and filming took place over about four hours Aug. 1. Portlandia is famed for lampooning Portland's quirks. It's available through Hulu, iTunes and Amazon, and on Netflix streaming.

A union office like something out of Portlandia

Keen-eyed local unionists might have noticed something familiar about a location in a recent episode of the comedy show Portlandia: It's the regional satellite office of the Pacific Northwest Regional Council of Carpenters. Of course, that wasn't obvious: In the

show, the union sign on the front of the building was digitally replaced with "Make-A-Wish" for a skit about a very immature man (played by Fred Armisen) diagnosed with cancer. But that is the union office in Season 5, Episode 3, "Health Care," which aired Jan. 22 on the IFC cable network.

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... IATSE, IBEW, and SAG/AFTRA gear up for conflict at KGW

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anyone in to do our jobs, and you couldn't prevent that," said Brad Anderson, executive director of SAG-AFTRA in Seattle.

"We've been struggling for months to get an explanation as to why this is all of a sudden necessary," said attorney John Bishop, who was brought in to assist Portland-based IBEW Local 48 in negotiations.

Gannett has already elimi-

nated the union jurisdiction clause in a SAG-AFTRA contract at television station WUSA-TV in Washington, D.C., and pushed it so hard in bargaining at KSDK-TV in St. Louis that members of IBEW Local 4 launched an ongoing boycott of their employer 10 months ago, using billboard and radio ads, an airplane banner, and a web site and Facebook page to call on viewers to stop watching.

According to Gannett's most recent annual report, about 10 percent of its U.S. employees are represented by unions, divided among 78 bargaining units and eight international unions.

In Portland and Seattle, IATSE, IBEW and SAG-AFTRA are joining forces to fight Gannett, though they continue to bargain separately for contracts at the two stations. KGW and KING became Gannett properties when the company acquired Belo Corporation in 2013. IATSE represents camera operators and video editors. SAG-AFTRA represents on-camera staff. IBEW Locals 48 and 46 represent master control operators and maintenance technicians.

"We're all in this together," said IBEW Local 48 business rep Donna Hammond.

IATSE Local 600 representative Dave Twedell says Gannett is pushing other issues besides jurisdiction. It's also proposing to eliminate the "successor" clause that keeps the union contract in effect if the company sells the station. And in January, it unilaterally worsened the family health insurance coverage — raising the employee share of the premium from \$250 to \$475 a month, and increasing the deductible from \$1,500 to \$5,000 a year.

That's despite the fact that Gannett is highly profitable. Gannett's broadcast revenue set a new record in the fourth quarter of 2014. The company paid CEO Gracia Martore \$7.9 million in total compensation in 2013. And on Feb. 24 Gannett announced it will pay \$45 million in quarterly dividends.

Twedell said IATSE will fight the health care change with an unfair labor practice charge at the National Labor Relations Board.

Union reps say they won't agree to give up jurisdiction, but management hasn't budged from its demand that they do.

"We have every reason to believe this is going to be their final proposal as well as initial, first of all because that's what they told us," Twedell said.

That sets the ground for a standoff, and the allied unions are beginning to line up outside backing for a public campaign. Last month the Northwest Oregon Labor Council, AFL-CIO, passed a resolution of support.

The labor clash comes as Gannett prepares to spin off its newspaper and broadcast/digital divisions into separate publicly-traded companies, a move that has drawn interest from corporate raider Carl Icahn, who owns 6.6 percent of Gannett stock.

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