

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Finally: Oregon Shakespeare Festival signs IATSE contract

A year after stagehands voted to unionize, they have a contract with raises and job security

By Don McIntosh
Associate editor

Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OSF) has reached agreement with IATSE on a first-ever union contract for a group of 70 stagehands. Ratified June 13, the collective bargaining agreement raises wages and greatly improves job security.

The agreement covers seasonal stagehands who run backstage operations during the nine months of the year that shows are being rehearsed and performed. On June 10, 2015, they voted 37 to 25 to join International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE). Then, after fending off legal maneuvers by the employer, they began contract bargaining Sept. 28.

The resulting contract provides immediate raises for workers whose pay is less than it's supposed to be under a new

unified pay scale. That's followed by annual raises of 25 to 50 cents an hour. The contract expires Nov. 15, 2019, a date which coincides with OSF's budget year.

The contract also results in greater gender pay equity: By the end, all the master-level workers will be earning the same hourly wage — traditionally-female wig-masters will earn the same as their traditionally-male counterparts who handle electrical equipment, for example.

The agreement maintains current health care benefits, and locks in current paid holidays and a 4 percent employer match to 401(k)-style retirement savings accounts. OSF will also on its own contribute 0.5 percent of payroll to the accounts for workers who've been there 10 years, and 1 percent after 15 years.

It also contains a number of job protections:

- Only union members can do the work of union members.
- Workers can't be terminated ex-



cept for just cause, and will have the right to a grievance and arbitration process to challenge unfair discipline.

- After a worker's first season, considered a probationary period, they automatically return subsequent seasons.
- Most of the unit will be guaranteed at least 40 hours a week; others 35 or 30, depending on classification.
- Shifts will be at least 2.5 hours long for those who change sets between shows.

The union worked to remain positive throughout. That spirit is reflected in the contract's preamble: "Oregon Shakespeare Festival and the Union are com-

mitted to a relationship of mutual respect, trust, accountability, and communication; to work together to create an environment which allows and encourages every employee to do their best work and every patron to have the best possible experience."

Management of non-profit OSF opposed the union effort, but never resorted to the kind of scorched-earth tactics many employers use to keep unions out. The tentative agreement was reached in an all-night negotiation session that wrapped up at 4 a.m. June 7. OSF made a number of late-breaking concessions after union stagehands and their supporters, wearing union T-shirts, assembled publicly outside a theater before a performance.

The crew will now officially be members of IATSE, and will be part of brand-new IATSE Local 154. The number 154 was chosen because it's the number of sonnets William Shakespeare wrote in his lifetime.

Oregon study to look at single-payer health insurance system

RAND Corporation, a prominent national think tank, was hired by the Oregon Health Authority in mid-May to study the merits of a single-payer health insurance system and other health care options. RAND was awarded \$395,525 to conduct the study, to be completed by Nov. 1. The study was mandated by the 2015 Legislature. It's also supposed to identify a funding mechanism for a single-payer system.

Back when the legislation that became known as Obamacare was being debated, U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) was able to pass an amendment allowing states to experiment with single-payer systems starting in 2017. Under the legislation, states would be allowed to repurpose federal subsidies that currently support the Obamacare insurance exchange in order to pay for universal health care.

RAND will also look at the feasibility of a public insurance option that could be sold on the insurance exchange.

AFL-CIO rates Washington state lawmakers after low-energy session

Elections matter: That's the lesson Washington State Labor Council (WSLC), AFL-CIO drew from the 2016 session of the Legislature. WSLC went to the State Capitol in Olympia with an agenda to make Washington a better place to live and work. It was stymied by Republican control of the Senate, and even the House, controlled 50-48 by Democrats, failed to pass some of its proposals. But then, WSLC knew it was going to be tough going in.

"Expectations were low for the 2016 legislative session, and these expectations were met," wrote WSLC President Jeff Johnson in the state labor federation's 2016 legislative report.

Some examples of what went wrong:

- **Flirting with contempt of court on school funding** The state Supreme Court ruled that the Legislature has failed to adequately fund K-12 education — violating a voter-approved ballot measure. To comply with the court order, next year the state must come up with an additional \$3.5 billion to fund public



schools. But this year's Legislature made no decision on how to do that. And Washington has one of the most regressive tax structures in the nation: all sales and property taxes, and no income tax.

- **Boeing whistling on the way to the bank** In 2013, Washington lawmakers gave Boeing the biggest tax break in history — valued at \$8.7 billion over 16 years. Since then the company has laid off hundreds of workers. This year, some lawmakers wanted to tie the tax incentive to job creation and maintenance. But the bill couldn't even make it out of its House

committee, much less get a Senate vote.

- **Not dying at work: Maybe next year** After a 2015 incident in which a farmworker drowned in a manure pit, WSLC and United Farm Workers pushed a bill to mandate more frequent inspections and improved safety training at dairies, among other things. It died in the House Appropriations Committee.
- **Know the law before you bid** Washington State Building and Construction Trades backed a bill to require that public works contractors be

trained in prevailing wage standards and compliance in order to qualify as responsible bidders. It passed the House 50-45, but died without a hearing in a Republican-led Senate committee.

Among Southwest Washington legislators, labor had some solid allies. Five local Democrats had 100 percent voting records for 2016: State Sen. **Annette Cleveland** and state Reps. **Jim Moeller** and **Sharon Wylie** of District 49 in Vancouver, and **Brian Blake** and **JD Rossetti** of District 19 in the Longview area.

But six Southwest Washington Republicans had the lowest possible score. No one got 0 percent rating, because WSLC included several bills that passed unanimously, including a bill to extend reimbursement for corrections workers who are assaulted by inmates.

ONLINE EXTRA

See the full report, and the list of bills and votes, at <http://bit.ly/1Uo1ZqZ>

WASHINGTON LEGISLATIVE VOTING RECORDS AS RATED BY WSLC, AFL-CIO

	2016	Lifetime
DISTRICT 49		
Sen. Annette Cleveland (D)	100	97
Rep. Sharon Wylie (D)	100	91
Rep. Jim Moeller (D)	100	91
DISTRICT 17		
Sen. Don Benton (R)	25	26
Rep. Lynda Wilson (R)	18	14
Rep. Paul Harris (R)	18	27
DISTRICT 18		
Sen. Ann Rivers (R)	22	15
Rep. Brandon Vick (R)	18	10
Rep. Liz Pike (R)	18	10
DISTRICT 19		
Sen. Dean Takko (D)	89	80
Rep. JD Rossetti (D)	100	100
Rep. Brian Blake (D)	100	90
DISTRICT 20		
Sen. John Braun (R)	22	5
Rep. Richard DeBolt (R)	18	15
Rep. Ed Orcutt (R)	18	13