

## Laborers leader Dave Tischer clocks out

“I owe everything I have to the Laborers union,” Dave Tischer says. Tischer, 54, retired Jan. 1, 2017 after 19 years as a local leader of the Laborers. For 11 years he was business manager at Laborers Local 320, a Portland-headquartered local with about 1,000 members in the heavy highway side of the construction industry. Local 320 merged with Locals 296 and 121 in 2015 to form a new state-wide construction local, Laborers Local 737, and Tischer served as its first president.

Born in Minnesota, Tischer moved to Aloha, Oregon, at age 11, and graduated from Aloha High School in 1980. After working four years nonunion building apartments, he joined Laborers Local 320 in 1988. As a member of Local 320, he poured concrete at a wastewater treatment plant, the west-side light rail tunnel, on reservoir projects, and on the airport light rail line.

He went to union meetings, got involved, and was elected to the Executive Board in 1998. In 2000, he was hired as a field rep by then-business manager Dale Sabroski, and in 2004, he



Dave Tischer

succeeded Sabroski as business manager. A resident of Keizer, Tischer also served as president of the Marion-Polk-Yamhill Central Labor Council for a decade.

Looking back on his time as business manager, Tischer is proud to have maintained good relationships with contractors, and proud of members' record of involvement in projects that were completed on time and on budget, including light rail projects and the City of Portland's combined sewer overflow project. Tischer's biggest regret is that the I-5 replacement bridge never broke ground. But Local 320 mem-

bers did dirt work and concrete placement for over 1,000 windmills during his tenure.

“Sustainable energy is the future,” Tischer says. “And natural gas, which is a clean burning fuel compared to coal, is a great bridge fuel to that future. That's why I think the opposition to natural gas is off track. And opposition to natural gas expansion, in Oregon, has been definitely detrimental to the trades.”

Going forward, Tischer says the biggest challenge, for all the building trades, will be to recover market share that's been lost since the 1980s. Unions can maintain high wages and standards only if they are account for a significant share of the labor force in their industry.

“We have to be the big dog in the room,” Tischer says. “They say you're either at the table or on the menu.”

“The new [Trump] administration definitely concerns me,” Tischer said. “I think we're at a crossroads in the labor movement.... You can't get frustrated. You gotta keep pushing ahead, and you have to fight the fight.”

## ATU vs. TriMet case headed for Oregon Supreme Court

By Don McIntosh

A legal dispute between TriMet and Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 757 is now headed for the Oregon Supreme Court. The case has to do with whether public sector unions and their employers have the right to allow the press and members of the public to observe union contract negotiations. Normally, both sides prefer to negotiate privately, on the assumption that grandstanding and showmanship would otherwise get in the way of reaching agreement. But ATU leaders think they'll win in the court of public opinion — if the public is allowed to witness what they see at the bargaining table from TriMet labor relations director Randy Stedman.

State law pretty clearly lets either side open up bargaining to the public. “Labor negotiations shall be conducted in open meetings unless negotiators for both sides request that negotiations be conducted in executive session,” says ORS 192.660(3). In fact, that provision in the law was proposed by a Republican

legislator who thought public employers would be less likely to give away the store if press and the public could sit in on union contract negotiations.

But lawyers for TriMet have argued that provision doesn't apply to them because their bargaining sessions aren't “meetings” as defined by Oregon's Public Meeting Law, which ORS 192.660(3) is a part of.

“They have attempted to use every kind of technical definition to destroy what to me seems like a pretty plain statute,” says Aruna Masih of the Bennett Hartman law firm, who's representing ATU in the case.

The case has been under way since late 2012.

In 2013, Multnomah County Circuit Court Judge Leslie Roberts ruled in favor of TriMet's position. But the Oregon Court of Appeals overturned her decision in February 2016, and on Jan. 13, 2017, the Oregon Supreme Court accepted a request to review the case. A hearing is scheduled for June 14.



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