

Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757 turns 100

Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 757 turned 100 on June 28. To mark the occasion, the union threw a big party June 23 at the Lloyd Center's Doubletree by Hilton. Featured speakers were International Secretary-Treasurer Oscar Owens, and Ion Radoi, president of Uniunea Sindicatelor Libere din Metrou (USLM), Local 757's sister union in Bucharest, Romania. Also making remarks were Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain, and Eryn Byram, executive director of Labor's Community Service Agency.

"We gather to celebrate a 100-year history marked by moments of extraordinary courage, led by officers of extraordinary vision, who together over the past 10 decades have forged a remarkable record of accomplishments, benefiting not only our members in Oregon, but ATU locals in every state and province in the U.S. and Canada. Thank you all for what you do, and for all you have done," Owens said.

He then acknowledged retiree Ron Heintzman for his leadership over the years. Heintzman is a former ATU international union president. He served as president of Local 757 from 1988-2002.

USLM was founded with the assistance of the AFL-CIO in the aftermath of the 1989 revolution that toppled communist dictator Nicolai Ceausescu. Local 757 and USLM became sister organizations in 1992, led by Heintzman, who was president of the local.

At the centennial celebration, Radoi said through an interpreter: "No matter where we are, no matter in what corner of the world we are in, we all share the same goals, and we all want the same things to happen for our people."

"We all stand up for our employees' rights whenever they have trouble. And doing these things for 100 years ... we salute you, and we hope you have a bright future ahead."

Local 757 was chartered on June 28, 1917, as the Amalgamated Association of Street and Electric Railway Employees of America. For many years, employees of the Portland Railway, Light and Power Company had an organization known as the "Brotherhood." But it was nothing more than a company union, as officers of the Brotherhood also were part of the company's management team.



In the photo left, ATU International Secretary-Treasurer Oscar Owens (right) presents a "Century of Service" award to ATU Local 757 officers from left to right: Vice President Jon Hunt, President Shirley Block, and Financial Secretary-Treasurer Mary Longoria. In the photo above, Ion Radoi (center in suit), president of USLM, Local 757's sister union in Bucharest, Romania, enjoys Local 757's centennial celebration with USLM officers and family members.

When the legitimate union was announced, almost 500 applications for membership were filed. As reported in the *Oregon Labor Press* of June 27, 1917: "Several of the staunch union supporters were fired, and others with stellar work histories were called up on the carpet and told that it would not be healthy for them to join the union. The threats didn't seem to have much effect, and the organizational work is going merrily on."

The union changed its name a couple of times over the decades, first to Streetcar Men's Local 757, and in 1961 — as buses replaced streetcars — to City Tran-

sit Employees Local 757. It eventually settled on Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757.

Along the way, Portland Railway, Light and Power Company reorganized many times as the streetcar system, which never were profitable, began converting to buses and trolleys.

In 1924 it became the Portland Electric Power Company, or PEPCO. Gasoline buses were purchased for the first time, allowing for expansion of services without the cost of laying new tracks. In 1930, Pacific Northwest Public Service Company was in charge. In April 1946, a new California company called

the Portland Traction Company took over. Ten years later, privately-owned Rose City Transit (RCT) assumed the city routes of the Portland Traction Company.

By 1968, RCT was on the verge of collapse.

At that time, ATU Local 757 Business Rep Mel Schoppert, a former RCT bus operator, helped spearhead a bill through the Oregon Legislature enabling the formation of public transit districts. On Oct. 1, 1969, Portland City Council passed a resolution to create TriMet. On Dec. 1, TriMet took formal possession of Rose City Transit properties and began operation as a public

transit agency.

Today, ATU Local 757 represents 23 properties with nearly 5,264 active members and retirees. In addition to TriMet, the union represents workers at:

C-Tran in Vancouver, Wash.; Lane Transit in Eugene; Cherriots in Salem; Valley Transit in Walla Walla, Wash.; Tillamook County Transit District; Rogue Valley Transit in Ashland; Canby Area Transit; Paratransit Services in Bend; Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council in Redmond; City of North Bonneville; Lamar Transit Advertising; Cherry Lift and Carts; First Student school bus operators and mechanics in Portland, and school bus and city transit operators in Corvallis; First Transit Region 1, 2, and 3; and Portland Public School bus operators.

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