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WORKERS RIGHTS

Burgerville workers wage one-store Labor Day strike

By Don McIntosh

Six workers at the Burgerville restaurant on Northeast MLK Jr. Boulevard walked off the job at noon on Labor Day in a one-day strike calling for holiday pay. Five of their coworkers remained on the job. Several others who were scheduled later in the day also joined in the strike.

The strike is the latest action by the Burgerville Workers Union, which launched in April 2016 and has been campaigning for affordable health benefits and a \$5-an-hour raise. Burgerville, a privately-held 47-store regional restaurant chain, has not recognized the union, and company managers have discouraged employees from joining, saying it would not be in employees' best interest.

"Labor Day exists because workers went on strike in the 1880s," said Burgerville striker Chris Merkel in a press statement. "The Burgerville Workers Union is taking our fight to the next level, marching with the millions of workers that have fought before us and alongside us."

Unlike union workers at grocery and other employers, Burgerville employees get no pay premium when they work on holidays like Labor Day.



This Labor Day, Burgerville employee Skyler Beaulieu did something formerly common and lately rare: She went on strike. Burgerville Workers Union has been campaigning for over a year for affordable health benefits and a \$5 an hour raise — but they've gotten the cold shoulder from company management so far.

As strikers walked out, drive-thru opener Skyler Beaulieu read a statement to the store manager explaining the strike.

"To our managers: This is not personal. This is economic. This is about our livelihoods," said the statement, in part.

Beaulieu, 20, earns the local \$11.25-an-hour minimum wage after 14 months at Burgerville,

and says she joined the union after she was approached by Merkel, the store's union representative.

"I like having an avenue to be able to fight for what I believe we deserve," Beaulieu told the Labor Press.

On the sidewalk outside the restaurant, strikers were joined in a picket line by other members of their union, which is affiliated with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).

Strikers then made their way to the Northwest Oregon Labor Council (NOLC) Labor Day picnic at Oaks Amusement Park. There they were welcomed by NOLC president Jeff Anderson to a stage where they received a standing ovation from Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler and other assembled Oregon elected leaders. The Burgerville Workers Union campaign has been endorsed by NOLC, the Oregon AFL-CIO and other labor organizations.

Back on the job at 5:30 a.m. the following day, Beaulieu and other strikers appeared to face no retaliation from the company. That's as it should be, under federal law. The National Labor Relations Act recognizes workers' right to strike, and makes it illegal for an employer to retaliate against workers for striking.

ONLINE EXTRA

Find out more at the union's web site, burgervilleworkersunion.org, and keep up with the latest developments by liking their Facebook page — facebook.com/burgervilleworkersunion

HURRICANE HARVEY

In response to catastrophic flooding in the Houston area, countless volunteers from the labor movement are assisting at shelters and other locations. The Texas AFL-CIO is asking union members to contribute to the Texas Workers Relief Fund, a charitable fund overseen by the Texas AFL-CIO that provides direct help to families in need.

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