

University of Oregon LERC celebrates 40 years of support for labor

By Don McIntosh

University of Oregon Labor Education and Research Center (LERC) is celebrating the 40th anniversary of its founding this month. LERC is a university extension program that helps unions with training and research. The idea for it first came up in 1971 as a resolution passed at the annual convention of the Oregon AFL-CIO. It took several attempts, but with the help of Ted Kulongoski — who was then a state representative from Eugene — a proposal to establish LERC won approval at the Oregon Legislature in 1977.

Today, LERC has five faculty, five support staff, offices on UO's Eugene and Portland campuses, and an annual budget of just under \$1 million. An advisory board of about 30 labor and legislative leaders meets quarterly to offer guidance. LERC is one of at least 19 such programs around the country.

Unlike regular university programs, LERC doesn't offer academic credit. Instead, it's part of the state university system's adult education outreach effort, not unlike the agricultural extension work done for the farming industry at Oregon State University, or the Population Research Center at Portland State University that helps



LERC FACULTY AND STAFF IN 1994: Marcus Widenor, Lynn Feekin, Steve Hecker, Jill Kriesky, Bill Fritz, Charles Spencer, Margaret Hallock, Steven Deutsch, Lee Schore, Val Font, Clara Coester, Barbara Hedges, Malcom McRae, and Connie Wagner.

city planners.

"Education, research and service are the three pillars of a public university," LERC director Bob Bussell told the Labor

Press, "and I think we have done an effective job of integrating those functions and fulfilling the university's public mission."

LERC is best known for three regular programs that have trained generations of union stewards and officers over the years:

- **AFL-CIO Summer School**, a three-day program of classes that draw about 150 union participants to the UO campus in Eugene every summer;
- **Public Employment Relations Conference**, which takes place at the Salem Convention Center in the spring in even-numbered years, bringing together about 200 attorneys, arbitrators, and labor and management staff representatives for strategy workshops and updates on public employee case law; and the
- **Collective Bargaining Institute**, a five-day intensive bargaining training for about 30 union members, held every December at the Menucha Retreat and Conference Center in Corbett.

Lately, LERC has also worked with a number of larger unions to help with strategic planning and leadership development. And LERC staff have published research that has had an impact on public policy, like a report on abusive scheduling practices by employers, which

contributed to legislation passed this year.

Will LERC be around another 40 years? Only if unions and their allies maintain their support of it. As Bussell has often said, "eternal vigilance is the price of a labor education program."

Funding for LERC and programs like it elsewhere sometimes comes under political attack by opponents of the union movement, who argue that taxpayers shouldn't support union training — never mind the fact that it's the official policy of the federal government to encourage collective bargaining.

"There are people that question the legitimacy of a publicly-funded program in the university that views the union movement and workers as its primary constituency," Bussell said. "We've been fortunate that we've had people who have been prepared to step up and defend us when our legitimacy and role have been questioned."

LERC'S 40TH ANNIVERSARY BENEFIT CELEBRATION

- **Where/when:** Oregon Zoo, Wednesday, Oct. 11
- **Cost:** \$100 per person
- **Information and tickets:** lerc.uoregon.edu/40th-anniversary

POLITICS

NW Oregon Labor Council endorses PCC bond renewal

Delegates to the Northwest Oregon Labor Council voted Sept. 25 to endorse Portland Community College Bond Measure 26-196, which will appear on the ballot in an election Nov. 7.

If approved, the measure would not increase the tax rate, because it is a renewal of an expiring bond, passed by voters in 2000. The tax rate is currently 40 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value.

The bond money would provide \$185 million in funding to be directed toward constructing job training facilities, and to expand and modernize technology and equipment.

Ballots will be mailed starting Friday, Oct. 20. Ballots must be received at your county elections office or official drop site location by 8 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 7, 2017, to be counted. Postmarks do not count.



Thomas Mitchell
Regional Sales Director
Taft-Hartley Services

OneAmerica Retirement Services, LLC
a ONEAMERICA® company
15 Robbins Lane
Lakeville, MA 02347
Main: (508) 923-3452
Cell: (339) 309-9590
thomas.mitchell@OneAmerica.com



THOMAS, COON, NEWTON & FROST

PORTLAND LAW FIRM SINCE 1980

Even if an employer fails to buy workers' comp coverage an injured worker has the right to obtain benefits. Learn about your rights before you give up on obtaining help when you are hurt on the job.

- Workers' Compensation
- Construction Injuries
- Death Claims
- Personal Injury & Product Liability
- Medical Malpractice
- Social Security Disability
- Mesothelioma

503-228-5222
Straight answers.
No cost for consultation.

820 SW Second Ave., Suite 200,
Portland, OR 97204

www.tcnf.legal



Raymond Thomas



James Coon



Cynthia Newton



Chris Frost



Melissa Haggerty



Sydney Montanaro



Scott Sell



Chris Thomas