

UNION ORGANIZING

Oregon Ballet Theatre dancers unionize

OBT voluntarily recognizes a union after dancers and stage managers sign union cards

Oregon Ballet Theatre (OBT) on Sept. 19 officially recognized American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA) as the representative of 30 dancers and stage managers after a majority of them signed cards authorizing the union to represent them.

AGMA, an affiliate of the AFL-CIO, represents about 7,500 opera singers, ballet and modern dancers, and production personnel at most major ballet companies and several

modern dance companies across the country.

Oregon Ballet Theatre (OBT) is the largest professional ballet company in Oregon, employing nearly 200 people and attracting artists from around the globe.

The new bargaining unit consists of 28 dancers and two stage managers.

OBT is the third ballet company this year where employees have unionized with AGMA. In March, employees of Sarasota Ballet in Florida voted to join AGMA. And in April, employees of Sacramento Ballet voted 23-1 in fa-

vor of unionization.

OBT Board Chair Nancy Locke said in a press statement that OBT views the dancers' and stage managers' selection of AGMA to represent them as a positive. "The Ballet is proud of the long, positive working relationship that it has had with the dancers and stage managers," Locke said. "That relationship was built on mutual respect and trust, and having the dancers and staging staff represented by AGMA will strengthen that relationship."

Negotiations for a first contract are expected to begin this month.

Bus drivers in Hood River win union

Columbia Area Transit drivers will be part of Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757

Bus drivers at Columbia Area Transit (CAT) in Hood River have won union representation with Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 757.

Ten full- and part-time CAT bus drivers filed a petition with the Oregon Employment Relations Board (ERB) Aug. 18 asking state agency to certify them as members of Local 757. ERB accepted the drivers' petition Sept. 21 because the overwhelming majority of eligible workers filed union authorization cards.

In a press statement, Local 757 said CAT bus drivers just want to be treated fairly. Driv-

"For 100 years, our union has worked to organize and improve the lives of transit workers across Oregon and Southern Washington, and that century of experience has made one thing crystal clear: Workers win when we stand together. We're looking forward to rolling up our sleeves and fighting for a fair contract for CAT drivers."



— ATU Local 757 President Shirley Block

ers have seen their hours cut without being consulted, the union said. They get less time to inspect their buses to make sure they're safe before a trip. And the company has demanded that they work a two-hour layover in Portland without pay.

Now that the drivers' petition has been approved by ERB, drivers will appoint a bargaining team to begin negotiating their first contract with Columbia Area Transit.

No bargaining dates have been scheduled.

...Precision Castparts welders join Machinists

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partment or occupational classification could unionize while others remained nonunion. The Machinists asked the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) in July to hold a union election for a proposed unit consisting of 100 rework welders at Precision Castparts sites in the Portland area. But Precision Castparts argued that the only legally appropriate union bargaining unit was the company's entire 2,000-plus local production and maintenance workforce. That group as a whole rejected unionization by about a 4 to 3 margin four

years ago, following three previous unsuccessful attempts to unionize in the 1970s and 1990s.

But the NLRB rejected Precision Castparts' argument in accord with its decision in a 2011 case known as *Specialty Healthcare*. That case opened the door to smaller units known as "micro-units." Antiunion business groups have thundered against that ruling ever since, and paid for an unsuccessful court challenge. They hope it will be overturned after new Trump appointees take their seats on the NLRB.

Precision Castparts has appealed the NLRB's ruling al-

lowing the welders-only union bargaining unit. But for now, at least, the company is required by federal law to recognize and bargain with the union.

Lukens said the next step is for the union to work with the welders to appoint and train union stewards in the workplace to defend members, and to form a contract bargaining committee. Members will likely seek safety improvements, better health benefits, and wage increases, Lukens said. Wages currently range from \$26 to \$31 an hour among members of the group.

— Don McIntosh

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

WPAS strike ends, but strikers fired

MERCER ISLAND, Wash. — Seventy-five members of Office and Professional Employees Local 8 ended a nearly five-week long strike against Welfare and Pension Administration Services, Inc. (WPAS) Sept. 25 after ratifying a new collective bargaining agreement. But hours after the contract was ratified, WPAS owners abruptly fired 10 of the strikers before they could return to work. The 10 women were handed boxes with their personal belongings and told to leave the premises when they showed up to work. Most had worked at WPAS for more than 15 years, and one employee had been there for 30 years. Local 8 filed an unfair labor practice charge and grievances on behalf of the fired union members.

Under the new collective bargaining agreement, workers

won their fight to keep seniority rights, sick leave benefits, and to place a cap on health care costs. Several other takeaways WPAS had demanded were dropped, the union said.

"WPAS owners make their money from administering union health and pension trusts, said Local 8 Business Manager Suzanne Mode. "Shame on them."

WPAS, headquartered in Mercer Island, Washington, provides third party administrative services to union health and pension trusts.

A "Go Fund Me" account has been set up to help the "WPAS 10" who were fired, as well as the 75 strikers who sacrificed wages and benefits for more than a month. To contribute, visit gofundme.com/36vk5bs.

...DCTU declares impasse

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nical Employees Local 17.

"And then to force the DCTU to accept what they settled for," said Rich Thallheimer, a parking code enforcement officer and member of AFSCME Local 189. "Well, I've got news for you. That's not enough for the DCTU. We're bargaining our own contract. We're not bargaining a master contract for all of the other labor organizations in the City. But if you do want to force a contract on us, feel free to force the police PPA (Portland Police Association) contract that gave them 3 percent (raises) a year for three years. We would be happy to take that."

DCTU is seeking across-the-board raises for all employees. Members gave up cost of living increases (known as COLAs) in the previous contract, and half of their COLA in the current contract that expired June 30, 2017, because of a bad economy. The economy has now rebounded, and now DCTU is asking to get back what they sacrificed, Thallheimer said.

DCTU also insists on full retroactive pay back to June 30, when the contract expired, maintaining internal promotion language, and no HIPAA (Health Insurance Privacy and Protection Act) release requirement to maintain lower out-of-pocket insurance costs. DCTU supports workers getting a preventative

medical exam, but argues that a doctor's note that the exam has been completed should be sufficient.

"The things we are asking for at the bargaining table are not created in a vacuum; they are carefully drafted with a chorus of input and support from all of the employees we represent," said Mary Prottsman, a police desk clerk and member of Local 189.

"We want to get a fair contract," Bush told commissioners. "We want to get it resolved soon so that everybody can get back to work and put the sideline grumblings that are happening in all the shops in the past."

Also speaking before the City Council were Chris Montgomery of Operating Engineers Local 701 and Mark Hinkle, a 20-year electrician at the Bureau of Environmental Services and a member of IBEW Local 48.

Following their declaration of impasse, Mayor Ted Wheeler responded: "I'm sorry to hear that," before moving on to the next item on the agenda.

Members of the DCTU handle parking enforcement, police records, finger printing, permit inspections, delivery of clean water, revenue collection, maintenance and repair of critical infrastructure and the City fleet, as well as administrative support for all of the City's bureaus.

Other unions affiliated with DCTU are Plumbers and Fitters Local 290 and Painters and Allied Trades District Council 5.