

# ...Union drive launches at New Seasons

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Since its founding, nonunion New Seasons has cultivated a reputation as an ethical business. New Seasons calls itself a “progressive employer” that “leads with its values,” “supports work/life balance” and encourages a “speak-up” culture. Breaking with the rest of the grocery industry, New Seasons executives testified in favor of legislation increasing the minimum wage and mandating fair scheduling practices. Its web site says the company distributes 20 percent of after-tax profit to employees through a profit sharing plan. But some current and former workers say it’s not the company it used to be.

New Seasons started with one store in 2000. Today, according to a company web site, it employs more than 3,250 workers at 18 stores in the Portland metro area, plus two in Northern California and one outside Seattle. Two more stores are on the way in Seattle, and another two in the Bay Area. It also has a subsidiary based in Santa Cruz, New Leaf Community Market, with six locations.

Only one of the three original founders remains on the board

“I think that unions are important for workers in order to have a voice in the decisions that are being made that affect them.”

— Vesta McGee,  
cashier at the Slabtown New Seasons



“When we speak up together, we have the power to effect the changes we want to see. We want the company to sit down with us. We want to be part of the decision making process.”

— David Adams, cook at the Seven Corners store

of New Seasons, which is now majority-owned by Endeavor Capital, a Portland-based private equity firm that began investing in the company in 2009.

Workers at the union launch event said with the company so focused on growth, customer experience and employee working conditions are slipping. In particular, members of the fledgling New Seasons Workers United spoke up against New Seasons’ decision, announced in October, to increase the number

of hours Portland area part-time workers must work each week to qualify for employer-sponsored health insurance, from 20 to 24. Workers said that could result in nearly 150 workers losing access to health insurance. Though 24 hours a week might still be a generous threshold, workers had no say in the change, and it raises questions about New Seasons’ claim that it puts people and profits on equal footing.

Will New Seasons’ CEO

meet with New Seasons Workers United? Will the company agree to neutrality?

New Seasons, through public relations firm Maxwell PR, declined to answer those or any other questions from the *Labor Press*, or make any company representative available for questions. But the company did say, in an emailed statement: “We place as much value on taking care of our staff, communities and environment as we do in growing a sustainable and profitable business, which is validated by our independent, third-party B Corp certification.” That phrase is lifted directly out of half a dozen press releases that accompanied store openings in California and Washington.

New Seasons has placed great emphasis on its “B Corp” certification, but few people know what that is. B Corp is a trademarked label offered by a nonprofit called B Lab. For an annual fee, B Lab certifies that a company meets high standards of social and environmental performance — based on company answers to an online questionnaire. B Corp shouldn’t be confused with “benefit company,” a

legal status conferred by Oregon and other states on companies that “consider their impact on society and the environment in their business decision-making.” That status is meant to shield corporate directors from legal liability if they take actions based on factors besides shareholder value. Nearly 1,300 Oregon corporations are currently listed as benefit companies. New Seasons isn’t one of them.

New Seasons’ emailed PR statement also notes that the company was named one of the 100 Best Companies to Work For by *Oregon Business* magazine. That ranking is based on an online survey, administered by the magazine, that must be filled out anonymously by at least 10 percent of a company’s workers to be valid. It’s true: New Seasons was ranked Number 17. That was in 2011. But New Seasons participated in the survey again in 2012, and failed to make the top 100 list. It hasn’t taken part in the survey since.

New Seasons Workers United asked the company to respond within three weeks, by Nov. 21. Two weeks have passed since then, and they’ve received no official reply.

## UNIONIZED GROCERY STORES

FRED MEYER  
SAFeway  
ALBERTSONS  
QFC  
FOOD FRONT

GARTNER’S COUNTRY MEATS  
BALES MARKETPLACE (Cedar Mill  
and Farmington stores)  
ST. HELENS MARKET FRESH  
NAP’S THRIFTWAY (Newberg)

## THE NONUNION COMPETITION

WALMART  
WHOLE FOODS  
GROCERY OUTLET  
ZUPAN’S  
WINCO

MARKET OF CHOICE  
CASH & CARRY  
COSTCO  
UWAJIMAYA  
TRADER JOE’S

# ...Big election night for Washington labor

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gan Irwin defeated Democrat Nate Lowry in District 31. In House District 7, Republican Jacquelin Maycumber defeated labor-endorsed Susan Swanson.

Meanwhile, union member Teresa Mosqueda, who is the Political and Strategic Campaign Director of the WSLC, outpolled Jon Grant 61.5 percent to 35 percent to win a seat on the Seattle City Council. Mosqueda is a member of Office and Professional Employees Local 8, and a graduate of the labor-backed Path to Power program that trains union members to run for political office.

In addition to Mosqueda, 10 other union members were

elected to local government bodies throughout Washington. They included: Larry Brown, Machinists, Auburn City Council; Matthew Hepner, IBEW, East Wenatchee City Council; Clint Bryson, IBEW, Montesano City Council; Karl de Jong, IATSE and the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades, Sedro-Woolley Council; Anne Backstrom, Teamsters, Silver Lake Water & Sewer District Commission; Chris Roberts, United Auto Workers, Shoreline City Council; Chris Beale, United Food and Commercial Workers, Tacoma City Council; Zak Idan Tukwila Education Association, Tukwila City Council; Anna Trenouth, International Association of Fire Fighters,

Whatcom Fire Commission; and Clark Gilman, Carpenters Local 129, Olympia City Council.

The Southwest Washington Central Labor Council helped elect Anne McEnerny-Ogle as the first woman mayor of Vancouver. The labor council also successfully backed Alisha Topper for Vancouver City Council; Wendy Smith for Vancouver School Director, Position 3; and John Spencer for Port of Camas-Washougal commissioner, District 1. The labor council fell short in three races, including Kris Greene for Port of Vancouver commissioner; Megan Miles for Evergreen School Board; and Damion Jiles for Ridgefield School Board.

## UNIONIZATION → SEP-OCT 2017

The following are Oregon and Southwest Washington workplaces where workers have decided whether to be represented by a union. The thumbs-up symbol means workers will be union-represented. Thumbs-down means they’ll be on their own. “Decert” means a decertification election, where union-represented workers voted whether to remain union. The information comes from the National Labor Relations Board and the Oregon Employment Relations Board.

### Union election results

Employer (Location) Union	Yes-No	
Dyno Nobel (Deer Island) Assn. of Western Pulp and Paper Workers	8-1	👍
■ 9 shipping department employees at a Dyno Nobel fertilizer plant		
Precision Castparts (Portland) Machinists District Lodge W24	54-38	👍
■ 100 rework welders and rework specialists at facilities in Portland, Clackamas, and Milwaukie		
Dakavia nursing homes (Tigard & Portland) SEIU Local 503	36-10	👍
■ 61 CNAs, cooks, and other support staff at Fernhill Estates and Pacific Health and Rehabilitation		

### Unionization by majority signup

Employer (Location) Union
Lane County (Eugene) Oregon AFSCME
■ 9 primary care doctors