

UNION ORGANIZING



Photo by Russell Sanders, courtesy of Oregon AFL-CIO

Outside Burgerville's locked headquarters building in Vancouver, Washington, members of Burgerville Workers Union say they'll go forward with a first union election.

Burgerville Workers Union files for a union election — at one location

Accompanied by Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain and other union and community supporters, a delegation of about a dozen Burgerville workers paid a visit the company's Vancouver, Washington, headquarters March 26 to deliver a message: Burgerville Workers Union has majority support at Burgerville's Southeast 92nd Avenue and Powell location in Portland, and if the regional fast food chain didn't voluntarily recognize the group within two days, the union will ask for a government-administered union election at that site.

But when they arrived on foot at the headquarters building just after 1 p.m., the delegation found doors locked, desks near the windows unoccupied, and no one to come to the door at first. After talking through a

locked glass door to someone who appeared in the lobby, they taped their demand letter to the front door and departed.

Two days later, hearing nothing from the company, they filed their petition with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB).

Burgerville is a privately-owned regional fast food chain with 42 stores. It promotes itself as local and sustainable, but pays workers at or near minimum wage. Burgerville Workers Union is calling for a \$5 an hour wage increase.

Union activists believe they have majority support at the 92nd and Powell location. This will be their first call for an official union election since they publicly launched the union campaign in April 2016.

But the union's supporters

emphasize that their union exists as an organization of workers, regardless of whether it has the support of a majority. They're asking for a vote because demonstrating majority support in an election administered by the NLRB would obligate the company legally to negotiate with the union.

"We already function as a union," said Mark Medina, a union supporter at 92nd and Powell. "This is just to make the company sit down with us."

Since Feb. 2, Burgerville Workers Union has been calling on the public to boycott the company until it comes to terms with the union. The boycott has so far been endorsed by 19 unions as well as by other organizations and individuals.

—Don McIntosh

No joke: Workers at The Onion satirical content site go union

At the famed humor website The Onion, more than 90 percent of workers have signed union cards. On March 27 they asked their management to recognize their decision to join Writers Guild of America. Of course they did it in their own style, with a letter entitled, "Onion Inc.'s Groveling, Ungrateful Staffers Unionize." But the goals, at least, are serious: To ensure fair wages, hiring practices, consistent benefits, and severance pay, have a say in important decisions that affect them, and to maintain independent oversight of the editorial,

graphical, and video work they produce. The union would include about 100 creative staffers who produce content for The Onion and its sister publications A.V. Club and ClickHole.

A video game workers union?

Video game developers have little job security, earn less than other tech workers, and work insanely long hours — as much as 100 hours a week during what are known as crunch periods.

Could it be time for a union? Supporters of a new

campaign, Game Workers Unite, think so. More than 200 academics, coders, artists, and independent designers have pledged their support for the campaign, which debuted publicly during the March 19-23 Game Developers Conference in San Francisco. It aims to connect



"pro-union activists, exploited workers, and allies ... in the name of building a unionized game industry." They're reportedly looking at the Screen Actors Guild and Writers Guild of America as possible allies.

Guest Opinion

By Bob Tackett, Executive Secretary Treasurer Northwest Oregon Labor Council



Replace NAFTA, don't make it worse

Whether President Donald Trump can deliver on his pledge to stop outsourcing and make trade agreements "much better for American workers" is now being tested as the administration works to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

President Trump must secure a new deal that eliminates NAFTA's incentives to outsource American jobs and levels the playing field by adding strong labor and environmental provisions with swift and certain enforcement to raise wages for all workers. Otherwise, companies will continue to move U.S. jobs to Mexico, pay workers poverty wages and dump toxins, then import the products back here to sell.

The stakes are high for working families in Oregon.

Oregon has lost 12,000 of its manufacturing jobs since NAFTA and other similar trade deals went into effect.

More than 68,000 specific Oregon jobs have been certified under just one narrow government program as lost to outsourcing or imports under NAFTA. These numbers represent a significant undercount of the actual jobs lost, given the program only covers certain types of jobs.

Overall, more than 930,000 American jobs already have been certified by the U.S. government as lost due to NAFTA. Every week NAFTA helps corporations outsource more middle class jobs to Canada and Mexico, including recently at GE, Carrier, and Nabisco.

According to the Department of Labor, manufacturing workers who lose jobs to trade and find reemployment are typically forced to take pay cuts. Two of every five rehired in 2016 were paid less in their new jobs. One in four lost greater than 20 percent of their income. That means a \$7,700 pay cut for the median wage manufacturing worker earning \$38,000.

This is the opposite of what NAFTA boosters promised 23 years ago when the deal was debated by Congress. They promised that NAFTA would improve the U.S. trade balance with Mexico and Canada, and create 200,000 new jobs in each of NAFTA's first five years. Instead we've lost almost one million jobs as a small surplus with Mexico and small deficit with Canada became a massive \$176 billion NAFTA goods trade deficit in 2016. The rate of our service sector exports even slowed.

Meanwhile, corporations have collected more than \$392 million in taxpayer money using NAFTA's "investor-state" tribunals, where corporations can sue governments before panels of three private lawyers to demand unlimited sums of taxpayer funds over our environmental and health laws that they claim violate the corporations' NAFTA rights.

A good NAFTA replacement must ensure imported food, goods and services meet U.S. consumer and environmental standards and eliminate NAFTA's existing terms that drive up the price of lifesaving medicines by giving pharmaceutical companies extended monopolies to avoid generic competition.

Oregon can clearly benefit from trade with NAFTA countries. But a tweak to NAFTA won't cut it. We want a NAFTA replacement we can support, meaning one that raises wages and creates good jobs for people in Oregon and across the nation.

Bob Tackett is the executive secretary treasurer of the Northwest Oregon Labor Council and a 43-year member of United Steelworkers Local 330.