

**UNION DEMOCRACY**

# Sheet Metal Local 16 members elect first-ever female business agent

In balloting that took place in June and July, members of Sheet Metal Workers Local 16 elected their first female business agent in the local's 130-year history, and returned several incumbents to union office unopposed, including business manager Charlie Johnson.

Vanessa Steward challenged incumbent business agent Robert Riehl, and the initial result was an outright tie, 143 to 143, in voting held June 25-28. That led to a July 23-26 runoff election for the office, which Steward won 242 to 218. In both elections, members cast ballots in person at nine locations around Oregon and Southwest Washington.

Steward came to Local 16 as an apprentice in 1996, and be-

came journeyman in 2001. In 2013, she was recruited by former business manager John Candioto to join the staff of Local 16 as a union organizer. Since then she has worked to sign up new contractors and bring non-union members over to the union side.

Johnson, meanwhile, was unopposed for re-election as business manager. He'll serve a second three-year term amid a construction boom that's keeping members fully employed all over the local's jurisdiction.

Local 16 includes sheet metal workers in both construction and production. The production side includes employers like Helser Industries in Tualatin, which makes steel forms for precast concrete, and Thompson

Metal Fab in Vancouver, which fabricates large-scale metal works used in bridges, hydro dams, vessels and in oil and gas industry. On the construction side, Local 16 journeymen earn \$40.82 an hour plus benefits.

The 2,045-member local is currently training nearly 300 apprentices, more than ever before, so many that the Local 16 training center is at capacity.

Johnson says the local has been working to increase union market share and attract more women and minority workers, who haven't traditionally been well represented in the local sheet metal workforce. To encourage the participation and ac-

ceptance of women and minorities in the local, a committee of women and minority members meets before Local 16 general membership meetings begin.

Member involvement has also increased in the last few years, Johnson says. In response to a call from the international union, Local 16 formed a committee of members called the SMART Army to volunteer in the community, build team spirit, and get members more politically engaged. [SMART stands for Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers; it's the name the former Sheet Metal Workers International Association took af-



Vanessa Steward

ter its 2014 merger with the United Transportation Union.] Local 16's branch of the SMART Army has as many as 50 members.

Also elected were:

- **President** Dustin Hysmith
- **Vice president** Devin Hosking
- **Recording secretary** Michael McIntyre
- **Warden** Tom Belezos
- **Executive Board members** Art Himm, Jared Bonney, Steve Stewart II, and Ed Dawes (building trades); and William Willman and Russ Jacobson (production)
- **Trustees** Justin Bigelow, Todd Stevens, Doug Haase, and Eric Clayton
- **Business agents** Joe Harris and Josh McLaughry (building trades) and Shawn Eckelberry (production)

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**UNION ORGANIZING**

## North coast bus drivers unionize

A group of 20 drivers and mechanics at the Sunset Empire Transit District in Astoria and Warrenton Oregon have unionized. The workers drive and maintain buses that connect Astoria to Cannon Beach and parts in between.

In May, Sunset Empire driver Jessie Martin reached

out to Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757. Sunset Empire management reportedly told workers that "hell will freeze over before there's a union," but the decision wasn't up to management. Members signed union authorization cards, and on Aug. 20 the Oregon Employment Relations

Board certified them as members of Local 757.

When contract bargaining starts, they'll have nowhere to go but up: Drivers now earn \$14 to \$16 an hour, and work up to 6 hours without a break. Almost every driver qualifies for food stamps. Several live in tents because they can't afford the cost of housing, and some walk long distances to work because they can't afford a car.

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