

BUILDING COMMUNITY

This year's SAG awards watch party will raise money for a union actor who's fighting for his life

Every year, the union performers in the Portland SAG-AFTRA local gather at the Lake Theater in Lake Oswego to watch their union's televised annual awards event. This year, the event is open to all local union members and supporters, and is doubling as a fundraiser for local SAG-AFTRA president Robert Blanche, who's fighting for his life after a double lung transplant.

Blanche, 56, has been a television actor since 1994, frequently playing law enforcement officers in TV crime dramas, like Sergeant Franco on NBC's Grimm. In 2011, he was diagnosed with hypersensitivity pneumonitis, an inflammation in the lungs. In August, he received a double lung transplant, but he's still struggling to overcome complications from the procedure. Blanche is a father of five, including two small children, and has been unable to work because of his medical condition. Friends and coworkers in SAG-AFTRA have raised



Robert Blanche

over \$35,000 to support his family, but with Blanche having spent over four months in the hospital, the funds are spent and his family is in need of further help. Supporters hope to raise another \$30,000 through this fundraising drive.

They'll raise funds with event tickets (\$25 for union members, hors d'oeuvres and a drink ticket included), a silent auction, and a raffle. Prizes will include season passes to Portland Center Stage and possibly visits to film and television production sets. The fundraiser will run through

Valentine's Day.

Mary McDonald-Lewis, a voice actor and member of SAG-AFTRA's national board, described Blanche as a beloved figure within the local union: "He's always been an ambassador for SAG-AFTRA, and mentored young actors as they became ready to join."

SAG-AFTRA members nominate and select the winners of the Screen Actors Guild Awards, which honor SAG-AFTRA members for outstanding individual, cast and ensemble performances on both film and television. The award ceremony will be broadcast live on TNT and TBS at 5 p.m. Pacific Time Jan. 27.

- **Time:** Sunday, Jan. 27, 5 to 8 p.m. (doors open at 4:30 p.m.)
- **Place:** Lake Theater and Cafe, 106 N State St, Lake Oswego, Oregon
- **Cost:** \$25 for union members, \$30 for all others (hors d'oeuvres and a drink ticket included)
- **RSVP:** shellea.allen@sagaftra.org

Charter bus firm would rather give up contract than operate union

When drivers voted to unionize, MTR Western terminated its contract to run Columbia County's CC Rider transit service

\$1.50 and illegally refused to recognize their union, at least initially.

CC Rider provides bus service between the communities of Clatskanie, Rainier, St. Helens, Scappoose, and Vernonia, as well as trips from Columbia County to downtown Portland, PCC Rock Creek, and Kelso/Longview, Washington. With drivers facing layoff and the riding public facing a loss of service, Local 757 is calling on the county to take on operation of the service directly; it already owns the vehicles and the bus yard. Alternately, some or all of the service could be picked up by the adjacent Sunset Empire Transportation District in Clatsop County, where workers unionized last August.

A unit of 22 bus drivers for Columbia County's "CC Rider" transit service joined Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757 in a Sept. 27 vote, but just days later, their bus contractor employer — MTR Western — gave notice it would end its contract with Columbia County effective April 2019. Coincidence, or a violation of federal labor law? Seattle-based MTR, a non-union charter bus operator, outbid an incumbent union contractor last July to win a bus contract with the City of Corvallis. It then slashed driver wages

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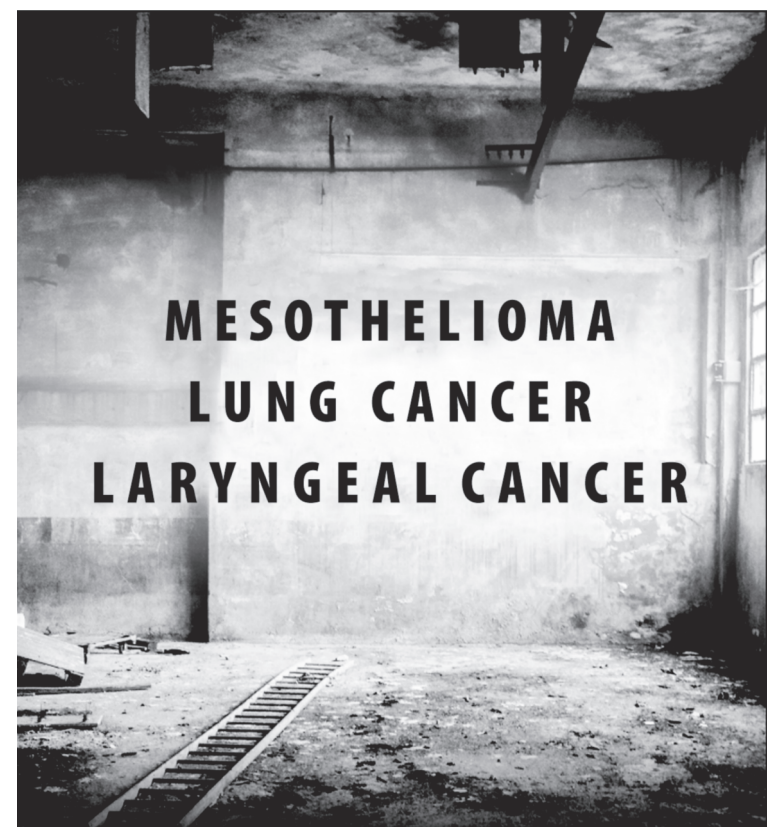
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