

UNION ORGANIZING

The only union shop around: Tube Art Group sign installers join IBEW 48

After a nearly 40-year hiatus, there's once again a union signatory sign installation company in the Portland metropolitan area.

Workers at Tube Art Group (TAG) voted 7 to 1 last December to join IBEW Local 48 in an election held by the National Labor Relations Board. They ratified their first contract last month and signed official union membership cards Aug. 23.

Sign installers put up all sorts of signs, from intricate lighted signs like the iconic Portland sign downtown on Southwest Broadway Street to simple placards on school bathroom doors or directional signs in hospital hallways.

It's a specialized craft that in Oregon requires a special sign electrician license. Workers also must be certified to operate a crane, weld, perform rigging and hoisting, and have a commercial drivers license.

From the mid-1940s to the early '80s, unions represented the majority of sign installers in all aspects of the trade, including fabrication, installation, and maintenance. Local 48 had a full apprenticeship training program for the industry, and its Neon



IBEW Local 48 President Wayne Chow (right), and union rep Scott Zadow (center) welcome new union members from Tube Art Group. The recently-organized sign installers are from left: Joe Cohara, Ben Baker, David Jones, Jeff Turner, and Scott Yankee. TAG installed the IBEW sign they are standing next to, and the Portland sign (left).

Tube Sign Unit was active and strong within the local. But a year-long strike in the early 1980s ended up destroying the unit and the contract they worked under, said Local 48 president Wayne Chow.

Ed Barnes, then president of the Local, says as the strike dragged on, many installers crossed over and got licenses to work in construction, and stayed there. Former business manager Jerry Bruce was one of those workers.

Until the December union vote, the only unionized sign installation company in the Pacific Northwest was a TAG unit in Seattle represented by IBEW Local 46.

Chow has been trying to reorganize the industry in Oregon for nearly four years, and worked with Local 48 staff Scott Zadow, Tim Foster, and Lillian Killen to organize the Portland-area Tube Art Group.

"This was a 100% bottom up campaign," Chow said.

The campaign was helped by Scott Yankee, a senior installer with over 30 years at TAG. Yankee has history with Local 48. His father is a retired member of the local who was once chair of the Neon Tube Sign Unit. Yankee himself was a member of the union.

"Some of the guys didn't know much about unions, and they were scared," said Zadow, a business agent for Local 48. "Yankee helped to ease their fears."

Chow said the company initially wasn't happy that its workers joined the union.

"Negotiations were tough, but the company was fair and respectful," Chow said. "I think they have come around. They realize that we want to work with them to help grow their business."

Now that the company is unionized, TAG will have the inside track on numerous projects that are financed with union pension funds, or that fall under project labor or community benefits agreements. Those agreements usually contain language that either requires union signatory contractors on their projects, or at least gives union shops top priority.

Tube Art Displays was founded in 1946. It changed its name to Tube Art Group in 2009. It offers a wide range of services, which include the fabrication of architectural signs, electric signs, scoreboards, and advertising displays. TAG works on mixed use, retail, hotel, healthcare, public use, and corporate projects. Its Oregon office is located at 4243-A SE International Way, Milwaukie. Fabrica-

Union asks for funds to help family of road worker killed in accident

Oregon AFSCME is calling for donations to help the family of a member who was killed on the job. Peter Neuman, a Benton County road maintenance worker and member of AFSCME Local 2064, was working on a paving project Aug. 9 on Hells Canyon Road, in a rural area southwest of Corvallis. He was killed when his machine went off the road and rolled over down a hillside. Investigators from Oregon OSHA are working to determine what led to the incident.

Neuman, 59, had been a union member and employee of Benton County Public Works since 2001. He leaves behind his wife of 31 years and two adult children. Funeral services were held Aug. 20. A GoFundMe page is raising funds to help with funeral and other expenses. The fund has raised over \$9,000 so far, including a \$2,500 contribution from Local 2064. The page is gofundme.com/f/1pzvgvdc2o.

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