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COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Nurse pickets go up at Astoria hospital

By Don McIntosh

About 200 nurses and supporters took up picket signs Aug. 20 outside Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria to call for a fair contract and publicize the message that “safe staffing saves lives.”

About 135 members of Oregon Nurses Association (ONA) have been working at Columbia Memorial without a union contract since their previous one expired May 31. Nurses there want an end to high-deductible health insurance and highly erratic work schedules: Part-time nurses can see their hours fluctuate from 20 to 35 in any given week. ONA members also want the hospital to put minimum staffing rules in its collective bargaining agreement, something other hospital employers have done. A state law passed in 2001 requires hospitals to have a minimum staffing plan developed by a joint committee of nurse managers and direct care nurses, but ONA says Columbia Memorial violated that law in its birthing department. The union has a pending complaint about that with the Oregon Health Authority.



Nurse understaffing is a real problem at Columbia Memorial, says ONA rep Amber Cooper: nearly every department has open positions they cannot fill. One of the reasons is wages that are the fifth lowest of any hospital in Oregon. Registered nurses there start at \$34.98 an hour and top out at \$52.48.

“I have nurses saying they

earned more as a bartender and are considering going back to it,” Cooper told the Labor Press.

Columbia Memorial is financially healthy. In 2017, the most recent year for which figures are publicly available, the 25-bed hospital paid its CEO Erik Thorsen \$645,000 and paid for his country club membership.

Raises at Schnitzer scrapyards

A unit of 123 workers at Schnitzer Steel’s North Portland scrap yard has ratified a new contract that raises wages 10 percent over three years, reports field representative supervisor Nate Stokes of Operating Engineers Local 701. Effective July 1, the contract also for the first time provides short-term and long-term disability benefits and life insurance. At the yard located in the Rivergate Industrial District, members operate shredders, burners, and cranes with powerful magnets to process material brought in by truck and barge.

First contract for stationary engineers at Providence

A group of five stationary engineers at Providence Milwaukie Hospital joined Operating Engineers Local 701 late last year, and last month ratified a first contract with raises of up to \$7 an hour, retroactive to January 2019. They’ll also enroll in the Operating Engineers national pension. The contract brings them up to the level of their counterparts at Providence Portland and Providence St. Vincent. Most Local 701 members operate heavy equipment in construction, but the union also represents numerous small units of stationary engineers who operate and maintain building systems.

CORRECTION

The Sheet Metal Workers Local 16 Labor Day advertisement that appeared in the Aug. 16, edition inadvertently left off a name, and transposed two others. The NW Labor Press apologizes for the errors.

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