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COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

UFCW cancels all Kroger contracts after aggressive action by Fred Meyer

After 15 months of unsuccessful negotiations, United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 555 announced Sept. 10 the cancellation of all its Oregon and Southwest Washington collective bargaining agreements with Kroger, which owns Fred Meyer and QFC. The collective bargaining agreements contain a no-strike pledge, so their cancellation frees the union to strike or take other economic action against the company, such as a consumer boycott. Over the summer, members voted by 94% to authorize the bargaining team to call a strike, but the

union hasn't yet said that will happen.

The contract cancellation comes after Fred Meyer stores began posting signs in stores seeking to hire workers to replace its employees if they go on strike. The signs offer would-be strikebreakers \$15 an hour, more than Fred Meyer pays many current employees.

Kroger is one of two grocery giants that bargain together as an employer group; the other is Albertsons, which owns Safeway and Albertsons stores. Safeway and Albertsons haven't taken similarly aggressive ac-

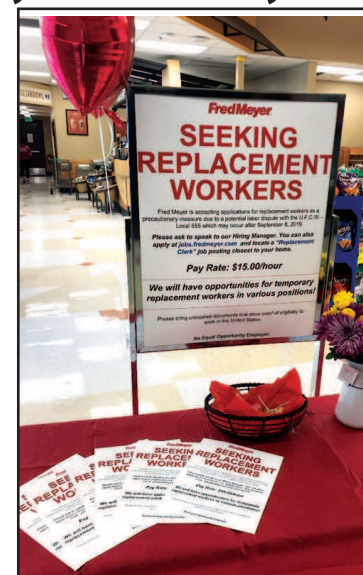
tion, and the union isn't contemplating economic action against them at this time.

In bargaining, Local 555 is calling for big wage increases, and asking employers to address a gender pay gap. Local 555 says women grocery workers at Fred Meyer make \$1.31 an hour less than men on average. There's no reason to assume the gap is intentional, but managers have been assigning women applicants twice as often as men to jobs in a lower-paid "Schedule B" wage scale that covers work in the bakery and deli departments. The employers are pro-

posing annual raises of 30 cents an hour (40 cents for Schedule B) — at a time when the Portland-area minimum wage is rising 75 cents a year.

Even though the contracts are cancelled, under federal labor law Kroger still has to maintain current terms and conditions while bargaining continues. The two sides are scheduled to meet for further negotiations Sept. 26 and 27.

Local 555 said in a Sept. 10 press release that it will release further information on union actions and requests for public support on Sept. 22. -DM



UNION ORGANIZING

Medical techs unionize at hospital in Bend

Defying an anti-union campaign by St. Charles management, a unit of 160 is joining OFNHP.

By Don McIntosh

Medical technologists at St. Charles Medical Center in Bend, Oregon, voted to unionize by nearly three-to-one on Sept. 5. The 90-to-34 vote adds 163 new members to 5,100-member Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals (OFNHP), and gives the workers at St. Charles a way to improve conditions and address ongoing frustrations.

"They were tired of being disrespected," says OFNHP President Adrienne Enghouse.

The newly unionized unit includes technology specialists who work in anesthesia, surgery, nuclear medicine, endoscopy, pharmacy, and with diagnostic technologies like X-ray, ultrasound, and CAT scan. OFNHP, an affiliate of American Federation of Teachers (AFT), represents workers in similar classifications at Kaiser Permanente and the PeaceHealth hospital network.

Enghouse says the St. Charles technologists first contacted the union in 2017. She gave them



Organizing committee members and supporters celebrate the union vote.

tips and an AFT union organizing guide, but they developed the union organizing campaign largely on their own, with some help from her, and since February, newly hired external organizer Chris Johnson.

"I am humbly asking you to vote no in this election."

— Aaron Adams, president, St. Charles hospital

Workers hope through a union to increase wages and address problems with understaffing, as nurses and medical techs elsewhere have done.

"We've seen what the nurses have been able to do with their

union," says Judy Munro, a radiological technologist who works in the cardiac cath lab. At St. Charles, about 900 registered nurses are represented by OFNHP's sister union, Oregon Nurses Association (both are affiliates of AFT), and get regular raises and other union benefits.

Munro — a 36-year St. Charles employee — says being without union up to now has meant she and her fellow technologists have sometimes gone three years without a raise. It also meant they had no say when St. Charles decided to change the definition of part-time. Even though her longtime 30-hour-a-week schedule is



WORK AS A CHECKER ... FOR FREE! (Retailers love you to do their work.)

Initiative to limit self-checkout grocery stations moves forward

The Oregon AFL-CIO is moving forward with a ballot initiative to limit self-checkout machines in grocery stores. On Sept. 5, the union federation turned in the first 1,500 signatures. That starts a process in which the Oregon attorney general writes a draft ballot title — the exact wording that would appear on ballots summarizing the measure. Once the ballot title is set, the Oregon AFL-CIO would need to gather 112,020 valid signatures by July 2, 2020, to qualify the initiative for the November 2020 ballot.

The initiative would limit grocery stores to two self-service checkout stations per location. The rationale for that is laid out in the text of the initiative. Self-checkout stations turn customers into unpaid employees and allow grocery stores to decrease labor costs and customer service, the initiative says. And

their increasing use contributes to social isolation, leaves retail workers feeling devalued, and results in longer lines for customers who want to use check-out stands staffed by a cashier.

"The widescale use of self-checkout machines in our state's grocery stores is part of a deliberate corporate strategy that relies on automation to reduce labor costs and eliminate jobs," said Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain, the chief petitioner on the initiative, in a press statement.

It also inconveniences customers, Chamberlain said, especially seniors and people with disabilities. "That is why we are putting this issue on the ballot, to send a message to corporate America and to let Oregon's voters have their voice heard on how we shop for the goods and commodities that our families rely on."

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