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COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

As hospital strike neared, McKenzie-Willamette settled

For some of the least-paid hospital workers, wages will rise 10 percent in two years

Six days before 415 hospital support workers were set to go on strike at McKenzie-Willamette Medical Center in Springfield, Service Employees International Union Local 49 and hospital management reached agreement on a new two-year contract. Workers ratified it in a Sept. 6 vote.

The new contract contains two annual across-the-board raises of 3%, plus additional one-time increases of up to 4% for housekeepers, CNAs, and dietary workers — jobs where both sides agreed that workers were underpaid compared to their counterparts at other facilities.

Workers also got commitments to address understaffing, which could directly improve patient care: The medical center's nurse staffing committee will add a second certified nursing assistant (CNA) representative. And a labor-management committee will double its membership and now add staffing levels to its mandate.

The medical center also agreed to give CNAs and pharmacy technicians additional credit for related hospital and military experience, so that workers can be hired or move up to a rung in the pay scale that reflects their real experience level, not just their time at McKenzie-Willamette. McKenzie-Willamette's union pay scale has 15 steps, and workers reach top pay for their classification after 20 years.



IN IT TOGETHER: The union bargaining team was prepared to call a strike, but came back with a deal.

Workers did give ground on health insurance, agreeing to accept higher copays and deductibles and increase their contribution to premiums by up to 5% a year. But the premiums are fully paid by the employer for full-time workers who earn less than \$38,000 (up from \$30,000 in the previous contract).

Local 49's bargaining unit at McKenzie-Willamette consists of over 100 occupational classifications, including CNAs, housekeepers, cafeteria workers, clerical support staff, and medical techs. They had announced plans for a three-day strike that

was to take place Sept. 10-12. Instead, they have a new contract that runs through July 31, 2021.

Aaron Green, a CNA who works in McKenzie-Willamette's recovery wing, called the contract a step in the right direction that will help the hospital retain better staff.

"We want to provide the best care possible to our patients," Green said. "The goal is to have lower staff turnover so we're not constantly having to train new people."

— Don McIntosh

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CORRECTION
In a profile of retiring labor leader Tom Chamberlain in our Sept. 6 edition, we failed to catch a typographical error. Chamberlain was appointed by the Oregon AFL-CIO board to replace Tim Nesbitt in 2005, not 2015.

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