

UNION DEMOCRACY

New leadership at CWA Local 7901

By Don McIntosh

Communications Workers of America (CWA) Local 7901 has new leadership after several months of turnover. The local is made up of about 635 workers at CenturyLink, AT&T, and a handful of non-profits, including KBOO, Free Geek, and Portland Jobs With Justice. Its president serves as a half-time staff person and is the local's only employee.

When Local 7901 held union officer elections July 8, Portland Jobs With Justice organizer A.J. Mendoza and CenturyLink employees Tony Hayden and Richard Warren ran for the local's number two office, executive vice president. Hayden was elected. Then Local 7901 president Celeste Jones left office Aug. 23 to work as a union representative for Oregon AFSCME. Under the local's bylaws, Hayden became acting president, but then he too resigned several weeks later. At that point the local was placed in receivership by CWA's national organization, and CWA District 7 representa-



From left, newly installed CWA Local 7901 executive vice president Travis Christian, president A.J. Mendoza, and CenturyLink division vice president Richard Warren. All ran unopposed for offices which were vacant.

tive Lisa Avila arrived to take responsibility for negotiating and enforcing collective bargaining agreements.

Local 7901 took nominations Sept. 30 to fill the vacant officer positions. Mendoza was the only nominee for president, and was declared elected by acclamation. Travis Christian was unopposed for executive vice

president, and Richard Warren for vice president representing Centurylink.

Mendoza, 28, grew up in Gladstone, Oregon, earned a degree in political science and history from George Fox University in Newberg, and worked at Oregon Student Association and Basic Rights Oregon before arriving at Portland Jobs With

Justice. Since 2018, he's served as Local 7901's legislative chair.

"My goal is make us an organizing local again," Mendoza told the Labor Press. One target would be local mission-driven non-profits.

Local 7901's core membership is in telecommunications, but its membership has shrunk by nearly two-thirds since 2000 thanks to call center closures, automation, and the decline of employment in landline telephone operations.

Local 7901 also moved its headquarters in May to the Oregon Labor Center, the union office building run by the Oregon AFL-CIO at 3645 SE 32nd Avenue.

The new Executive Board met for the first time Oct. 24. Besides Mendoza, Christian, and Warren, its other members are secretary-treasurer Erich Bambei and vice presidents Mike Yourn (AT&T), Mike Bray (staff union at Service Employees International Union Local 503), and Justin Norton-Kertson (non-profits).

Union-made pizza!

In September, all 13 workers at Scottie's Pizza at 2128 SE Division Street in Portland signed a petition announcing their decision to unionize with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). On Sept. 22, half of them delivered the petition to owner Scottie Rivera ... and found that he was happy to recognize the union. It wasn't a big surprise: When he opened the parlor in 2015, Rivera won acclaim for paying employees at least \$15 an hour. Walls in the restaurant's tiny dining area are covered with political posters and framed photos of lefty luminaries.

"The general attitude among workers in the restaurant industry is that it's impossible to have a union," says Scottie's employee David Adams. "But we think workers need to be represented and have a voice in decisions that are made in the restaurants where they're living their lives."

Rivera and the workers expect to negotiate a first collective bargaining agreement in the coming months.

...Docs unionize

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That doesn't leave a lot of time to go to union planning meetings. At OHSU, Hum says the union campaign began over the summer and spread via long text message conversations. House officers determined they wanted to unionize, and reached out to AFSCME because it represents similar units elsewhere. Oregon AFSCME assigned two organizers to help.

OHSU is one of the last teaching hospitals on the West Coast where house officers hadn't unionized. At schools like UCLA and University of Washington, house officers unionized and won improvements like increased living stipends, meal money, and payment of licensing fees.

In union contract bargaining, OHSU house officers may push for those things and more, like on-call rooms that are closer to where they practice, and better health insurance: Hum says their current high-deductible plan can make it hard to afford routine medical care.



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