

UNION DEMOCRACY

# Meet Jeff Gritz, new Laborers district council director

The Oregon and Southern Idaho District Council of Laborers has a new leader and a new crew.

Last September, Jeff Gritz of Hermiston was appointed by District Council delegates to replace business manager Greg Held, who resigned.

Gritz, 46, is a 28-year union member and lives in Hermiston. Since taking the helm at the Laborers District Council, he's assembled a team that he hopes will help the district grow in members and power: Veteran organizer Ben Nelson was brought back to the District Council to lead external organizing, and labor lobbyist Chris Hewitt, a former Oregon AFL-CIO staff member, was hired over from the Oregon Nurses Association to head up the Laborers' political efforts.

Laborers members do many kinds of work. They bring the brawn to construction as hod carriers for trades like bricklaying. They also work as flaggers. And they're a big part of road and heavy highway crews, raking and grading asphalt.

Representing 3,941 members in all, the Oregon and Southern Idaho District Council of Laborers coordinates the work of three locals affiliated with the Laborers International Union of North America (LiUNA) — construction/highway locals Local 737



in Oregon and Local 155 in Idaho, and public sector Local 483 based in Portland.

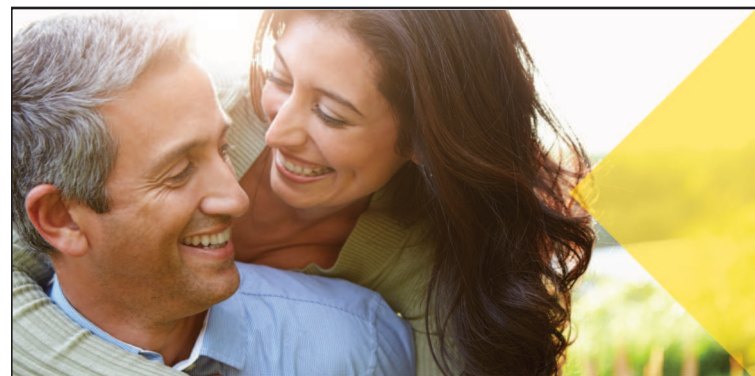
Gritz says his priorities for the District Council include improving relations with other building trades unions, increasing its participation and impact in politics, and growing LiUNA membership. There's plenty of room to grow: Contractors signatory with the Laborers Union face constant competition with non-union employers that pay lower wages and benefits.

Gritz is the third generation in his family to lead the Laborers Union in Eastern Oregon. His grandfather George H. Gritz was business manager of Laborers Local 682, which covered Northeast Oregon, starting in 1953. His father George D.

Gritz followed. Jeff joined the union in 1992 right after graduating from Hermiston High School. He worked as a laborer on the Trans-Canada Pipeline, and on co-generation plants, the BHP steel mill in Kalama and constructing incineration facili-

ties at Umatilla Chemical Depot. After his dad retired in 2003, Jeff Gritz was hired as a union business representative, visiting job sites to enforce contracts. By then Local 682 had merged with a Central Oregon local to become Local 121. Gritz became Local 121 business manager in 2005, and when Local 121 merged with two others to form statewide Local 737 in 2015, he became its Eastern Oregon business rep, and later its assistant business manager. He also serves as a trustee overseeing several pension and health funds.

An avid hunter and fisher, he played an active role around Hermiston in the Little League and 4H organizations, and has served as president of the Pendleton Building Trades council. For now, work means a 2.5-hour drive from Gritz' home in Hermiston and a week spent in temporary lodgings, returning to his wife and family on the weekends. Gritz said he hopes soon to find something more permanent in the Portland area. Gritz expects to serve the remainder of Held's term, which expires August 2022.



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