

Grocery stores respond to epidemic: Sneezeguards, raises, bonuses, and a hiring spree

By Don McIntosh

Grocery companies that own Fred Meyer/QFC and Safeway/Albertsons will provide up to two weeks of pay for workers who are diagnosed with COVID-19 or required to self-quarantine, without drawing down their accrued sick leave or other paid leave, United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 555 announced March 20.

Both companies are adopting that policy nationwide at both union and nonunion stores.

Albertsons Companies—which owns Safeway, Albertson, Haggen and other chains—also announced a temporary \$2-an-hour pay increase from March 15 through at least March 28. About 230,000 union and nonunion workers will receive what the company called “appreciation pay,” including e-commerce pickers and drivers, and workers at distribution centers and manufacturing plants. The company also announced it will be installing Plexiglas

“sneeze guards” in checkout lanes in all 2,200 stores over the next two weeks—as a protective barrier between customers and checkers. It’s waiving pharmacy delivery fees. And it’s pausing self-service operations like soup and salad bars, making cart wipes and hand sanitizer stations available, and reserving special times for seniors and other vulnerable shoppers.

Kroger Company—which owns Fred Meyer, QFC, and other chains—announced its own one-time “appreciation bonus” of \$300 per full-time employee and \$150 per part-time employee (less than 30 hours). The bonus, to be paid April 3, applies to every hourly grocery, supply chain, manufacturing and customer service worker, both union and nonunion.

Nonunion Walmart, meanwhile, announced that it plans to hire 150,000 new employees in its stores and distribution centers through the end of May, a nearly 10% increase in its

work force, and pay \$365 million in cash bonuses to hourly workers in the United States on April 2.

UFCW Local 555 is also calling on the State of Oregon to designate grocery workers as essential personnel akin to first responders like Minnesota, Vermont, Michigan have done. That could make them eligible for state-paid childcare, and would give them permission to move freely in the event of roadblocks, curfews and stay-at-home orders. It could also prioritize grocery workers for COVID-19 testing and protective gear.

“In this crisis, we see the grocery line as the front line,” said Local 555 Secretary-Treasurer Jeff Anderson.

MORE
UFCW Local 555 has up-to-date recommendations and info on coronavirus protection at ufcw555.org/covid-19-information.

Daimler closes truck plant in Portland, laying off 700

By Don McIntosh

In response to the COVID-19 epidemic, Daimler Trucks North America closed its Western Star and Freightliner truck plants in Portland, North and South Carolina March 26, with plans, for now, to reopen April 6. Daimler previously closed its auto factories in Europe.

In Portland, the closure impacts roughly 700 members of four unions: Machinists Local Lodge 1005, Teamsters Local 305, Sign Painters & Paint Makers Local 1094, and Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 49. Representatives of the four unions learned of the closure in conference calls March 22.

The closure comes as public health officials recommend people maintain six feet of distance to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Workers can’t always do that at the truck plant, because some jobs require two people working in close quarters.

In the weeks leading up to the closure, Machinists District Lodge W24 rep Dwain Panian said the Portland plant had deployed extra janitorial crews to do multiple daily cleanings of rest rooms and frequently-touched surfaces like hand rails, light switches, and time clocks.

“They’ve been really proactive in trying to maintain the health at the plant,” said Panian, working from home.

Panian said he hasn’t heard of any cases of COVID-19 among workers at the plant so far. But he did hear from a number of members who thought the plant should close to prevent the spread.

The previous week, General Motors, Ford Motor and Fiat Chrysler announced auto plants would close for at least a week after the United Auto Workers pressured them to do so to protect workers. Honda, Toyota and Nissan announced temporary closure of their North American plants as well.

INDEPENDENT RETIREMENT LIVING

Westmoreland's Union Manor

6404 SE 23rd Ave.
Portland 97202
503-233-5671

Kirkland Union Plaza

1414 Kauffman Ave.
Vancouver 98660
360-694-4314

Manors Make the Difference

- Studio and One-Bedroom Apartments
- Affordable Rent includes Utilities (EXCEPT PHONE AND CABLE)
- Planned Events, Clubs, and Activities
- Ideal Locations offer easy access to Bus Lines, Shopping, and Entertainment
- No Costly Buy-In or Application Fees
- Federal Rent Subsidies Available (MUST QUALIFY)



KIRKLAND UNION PLAZA
Opened in March of 2002



LABOR LEADERS IN THE PORTLAND BUILDING TRADE MOVEMENT ORGANIZED THE UNION LABOR RETIREMENT ASSOCIATION IN 1962, WITH THE SOLE PURPOSE OF PROVIDING HOUSING FOR THE ELDERLY.

“We believe that everyone earns the right to retire, free from pressures of earlier years.”

Kirkland Union Manors
3530 SE 84th Ave.
Portland 97266
503-777-8101

Marshall Union Manor
2020 NW Northrup
Portland 97209
503-225-0677

WWW.THEUNIONMANORS.ORG

Bakers Local 114

YOUR UNION CATERER

Union-Catering.com • 503-730-7040 • steve@spinpdx.com

Proud Partners
Teamsters Local 223 & 58

“Saving Lives Together”

(In emergencies, please dial 911)