

...Clay and Anderson

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big grocery employers, Clay and Anderson have pursued a strategy they call "Unity Bargaining," in which multiple bargaining units negotiate together all at once. Last year, that produced a breakthrough. After a rolling set of strike votes and a six-day boycott, Local 555 won raises of \$1.65 to \$2.70 an hour for about 20,000 Fred Meyer, Safeway, and Albertsons employees in more than 90 separate grocery, meat, and central checkout contracts throughout Oregon and Southwest Washington.

"My members deserved every damn dime of it," Clay says.

For workers who want it, the agreements also guaranteed at least 20 hours a week—the threshold at which health and retirement benefits kick in.

Clay and Anderson have also overseen massive growth. When Safeway and Albertsons came under the same ownership in 2015, company execs agreed to recognize new union units wherever majorities of workers gave written authorization, and gave union organizers access to employee break rooms. Over the next several years, Local 555 added about 5,000 new members at previously nonunion departments and locations, bringing to-

tal membership to 24,000 as of last year.

They've experienced setbacks too. Local 555 supported marijuana legalization, but efforts to unionize the cannabis industry have met with only limited success so far. And a 2017-2018 effort to unionize the New Seasons Market chain sputtered after the company paid union-busters at least \$325,855 to lead anti-union meetings in stores.

But this year, core grocery membership boomed even further, as union grocers added 4,000 new employees amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Meanwhile, Anderson in particular has worked to build the union's political muscle. Before Clay and Anderson took office, Local 555 wasn't very active politically. In 2008, voluntary member donations to the union's political action committee were just \$329 a month. By 2014, that surpassed \$30,000 a month. That made possible \$310,000 in contributions in the 2018 political cycle and another \$37,000 in in-kind contributions. A separate 50-cent per member per month assessment pays for political education efforts among union members. Local 555 also set up an in-house printing operation capable of producing mass mailers for political campaigns.

The union's political strategy has been to help labor allies win office and then push them to pass state and local legislation to deliver wins for workers that are hard or impossible to get employers to agree to in contract bargaining. In 2014, Local 555 won an end to criminal penalties for unintentional sale of alcohol to minors. In 2015, it led the way in passing statewide paid sick leave, after earlier winning in Portland and Eugene. In 2017, it won a first-in-the-nation law aimed at curbing abusive scheduling practices.

Under their leadership, UFCW has also been active in state and local labor federations. Local 555 re-joined the Oregon AFL-CIO in 2014, and has remained its largest local affiliate, with Clay and Anderson serving as Oregon AFL-CIO vice presidents. [UFCW had withdrawn from the AFL-CIO at the national level, but rejoined in August 2013.] Anderson has also served as president of the Northwest Oregon Labor Council since winning election in 2016.

Since March, most of their attention has been focused on protecting their front-line members from COVID-19. No members have died from the disease, but over 120 have been diagnosed. Local 555 has pushed for adequate personal protection, and has called for reinstatement of "hero pay."

"Members are taking on more risks and doing things the rest of society doesn't want to," Clay says. "I think they should be getting compensated for it. ... Everybody says grocery workers are essential, but they feel like they're getting treated like they're disposable. Customers aren't wearing masks, and employers aren't dealing with it."

Next year, contract negotiations will again be the major focus. The biggest group of contracts expire in August 2021. Last time, the contracts made significant progress toward eliminating a gender pay gap that result from lower pay in female-majority occupations. If COVID-19 is still a

major issue, demands like restoring hero pay could also rise to the top.

Anderson and Clay ran at the head of a slate, and all other members of the slate were also unopposed. They interpret that as a sign they may be doing something right.

"I think members see that we are fighting for them," Anderson said.

"Over the last 12 years, we've made consistent steps to improve members' lives," Clay said. "Our members deserve better than they've gotten, and we're going to fight like heck to make sure that they get treated like they deserve."

A Message From

The Labor Roundtable of Southwest Washington

Due to the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19), the Labor Roundtable has made the decision to canceled this year's Labor Awards Banquet.

Instead, we are asking that you donate to one of Labor's endorsed candidates. They all need your support and/or money! Here is a list of Labor's candidates for Washington's general election, as reported by the NW Labor Press:

Congressional District 3 - Carolyn Long

State Auditor - Pat McCarthy

Governor - Jay Inslee

Attorney General - Bob Ferguson

Lieutenant Governor - Denny Heck and Marko Liias

Public Lands Commissioner - Hilary Franz

Secretary of State - Gael Tarleton

Superintendent of Public Instruction - Chris Reykdal

State Treasurer - Mike Pellicciotti

17th Legislative District

Daniel Smith, Paul Harris, Tanisha Harris

18th Legislative District - Donna Sinclair

19th Legislative District - Dean Takko, Brian Blake

49th Legislative District

Annette Cleveland, Monica Stonier, Sharon Wylie

Clark County Council, District 4 - Matt Little

Please stay safe and take care of yourself during these very difficult times! If you have any questions, please contact Roy Jennings (our Treasurer). He can be reached either by email at eboctran@comcast.net or by phone 360- 936-0045.

This year's General Election is extremely important! Please remember vote early, and do whatever you can to get your family and friends to vote early too!

Sincerely,

Edward Barnes

Edward Barnes, Chair

Labor Roundtable of Southwest Washington

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