

New Multnomah County Courthouse: Built by union labor

By Don McIntosh

The new Multnomah County Courthouse opened Oct. 5 on a foundation of justice. Constructed substantially union by workers earning family wages and benefits, the four-year, \$324.5 million project both set and met goals for the participation of women and minority workers and contractors.

Located on the corner of SW Madison St. and First Ave., the new courthouse is 17 stories high, with 44 courtrooms and 464,700 square feet of space in total. It features rooftop solar panels, radiant floor heating, and courtrooms with natural light.

It replaces the old courthouse at 1021 SW 4th Ave. Completed in 1914, the old courthouse was too small for current needs and couldn't meet modern building standards for earthquake survival. The old courthouse sold for \$28 million to Portland-based NBP Capital, which plans to upgrade it for commercial use.

Facilitated by the Columbia-Pacific Building Trades Council, Multnomah County signed a project labor agreement committing to use union labor on the project, and local labor unions pledged their help to meet targets for participation of women and minorities. A generation ago, women and minorities found it hard or impossible to join the high-wage, high-skill world of union construction, but in recent



Photo by Motoya Nakamura, courtesy of Multnomah County

years, local unions have made serious efforts to recruit, train and retain women and minority workers. The county courthouse — which took close to 1.5 million hours of work to complete — proved to be a big opportunity for apprentices to gain work experience toward becoming jour-

neymen. General contractor Hoffman Construction used the project to test out a program called Green Dot, which trains workers to intervene when they see bullying, harassment or hazing on the job. Hoffman also worked with unions to meet and exceed the goals for women and

minority participation, measured in work hours:

- **Minority male journey-level workers**
Goal 20%; result 27.9%
- **Women journey-level workers**
Goal 6%; result 6.8%
- **Total apprentice opportunities**
Goal 20%; result 30%.
- **Women apprentices**
Goal 25%; result 20.5%
- **Minority male apprentices**
Goal 20%; result 28.8%
- **Local workforce**
Goal 15% county residents, result 24%
- **Minority, women-owned and emerging small businesses**
Goal 20% of contract dollars; result 34%

To memorialize their contribution, the names of all the workers employed on the project are engraved on a wall in the lobby.

"I believe this is a great springboard for what's coming," said IBEW Local 48 representative Bob Carroll at the July 22 final meeting of the committee that tracked progress on the workforce diversity goals. "There's billions of dollars of work coming down the pike in the public sector."



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