

NORTHWEST Have A Happy Holiday! LABOR PRESS

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Santa's Union Backers in Southern Oregon



Labor's Community Service Agency (LCSA) took its Presents from Partners "Labor of Love" holiday program on the road to Medford, Oregon, where the Southern Oregon Labor Chapter (SOLC) distributed toys, clothes, food boxes, and gift cards to several hundred union households that have been devastated by summer wildfires and COVID-19. For several months, union members in Portland collected more than 900 toys, 150 parent gifts, 150 holiday treats, hand-made Christmas stockings, stocking stuffers, and warm clothing. On Dec. 4, several volunteers loaded the items on to a Teamsters semi-truck and an Oregon Laborers Apprenticeship and LiUNA Local 737 van. Gene Blackburn and Duane Adams of Teamsters Local 206 and Rick Ohmie of Laborers 737 then drove the goodies to the Oregon Education Association headquarters in Medford. There, Amanda Sager, president of IATSE Local 154 and chair of SOLC, coordinated with more union volunteers to sort and select toys and goodies for 200 union families. Volunteers pictured above are, from left: Sager, Kathy McUine, IBEW 659; Sara Bristol, OSEA; Kirsten Giroux, community volunteer; Kip Bartlett and Val Lawrence, IATSE 154; and Christopher Salazar, Actors' Equity Association. On Dec. 10, those selected families drove to the OEA parking lot for contactless pickup of the gifts. LCSA has hosted the "Labor of Love" party in Portland for more than two decades. There's no party this year, but LCSA volunteers will hand deliver gifts on Dec. 19. More photos on Page 11.

Construction coalition plans campaign to end on-the-job harassment of women, minorities

By Don McIntosh

Culture change is coming. At least, that's the goal of a broad construction industry coalition that's begun to meet monthly to talk about ending racial and sexual harassment on Portland-area construction job sites.

Conceived last summer after a noose incident on a downtown Portland construction site, the Safe From Hate effort brings together union leaders, general contractors, public agency construction project owners, trade groups, and pre-apprentice training program leaders. More than 60 of them took part in a Dec. 3 Zoom meeting, the group's third monthly summit, and firmed up a steering committee with representatives from each sector. The goal—outlined in a jobsite culture pledge—is to cultivate a respectful workplace, safe from hate, racism, sexism, discrimination, harassment, and bullying.

Construction has historically had an overwhelmingly male and white workforce. In recent years, many local unions have been working to recruit women and minorities into the building trades as apprentices. But coalition members say that work can't bear fruit if the industry doesn't also do more to retain them once they get onto the job.

"We invest in preparatory training," says Worksystems Inc. project manager Kelly Haines, who administers funds to develop the construction workforce. "If we're sending people to a hostile industry and they can't stick around for more than a couple weeks, then it's a lost investment."

Construction union business managers—elected to defend members and promote job opportunities—say when members mistreat other members, that violates the oaths they took when they joined. Unions want

members to take pride in their work, set the industry's highest standards for professionalism, and treat fellow members like brothers and sisters.

The idea with Safe From Hate is to repeat the culture change success that the construction industry earlier achieved with safety. Several decades ago, taking safety precautions could be seen as cowardly; today, it's a top priority of every union apprentice training center, and proper use of safety harnesses, respirators, and other tools is seen as a sign of professionalism. As a result, accidents and fatalities on construction sites have dropped dramatically in the last few decades.

Nooses, casual use of the "n" word, and sexual assault may not be everyday occurrences on construction sites. But they're not rare, either.

In September, swastikas and

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WORKERS' RIGHTS

Portland Airport implements new \$15 wage floor

Wages rise above \$16.55 for 900 service workers in January 2022. Too little too late, says SEIU.

By Don McIntosh

Starting next July, a new wage floor at Portland International Airport will raise pay for as many as 900 low-paid service workers, including cabin cleaners, baggage handlers, caterers, de-icing workers, security guards, and wheelchair assistants.

Port of Portland chief operating officer Dan Pippenger outlined the new minimum wage mandate at the Dec. 9 meeting of the governor-appointed Port of Portland Commission. The wage floor will start at \$15 an hour July 1, 2021, and then rise Jan. 1, 2022, to match the City of Portland's minimum wage mandate for its contracted service workers (currently

\$16.55, rising annually according to the consumer price index.)

Pippenger estimated the first set of raises could cost airlines \$500,000 and the second set \$4 million. The raises would also cost the Port \$100,000 and \$630,000 respectively. Workers covered by the policy are employed by contractors hired by airlines and by the Port itself. The policy would cover about 900 workers once air travel picks up again. [The week of Thanksgiving, air travel was down 69% compared to last year, because of the pandemic.]

Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 49 represents about 400 airport service workers, says Local 49 Executive Director Maggie Long. Union members include

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JOBS

TransAlta shuts first of two coal-fired power plants in Centralia

The first of two 670 megawatt coal-fired electric plants in Centralia, Washington, will close permanently Dec. 31. The closure means the layoff of 64 employees, including 38 members of IBEW Local 125. The second coal plant will close in 2025. That's 10 and 15 years earlier than the expected useful life of the two plants.

The closures are part of an effort by the State of Washington to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The state had wanted to close both plants in 2015, but a December 2011 agreement between the state and Canadian coal plant owner TransAlta delayed the closures, giving TransAlta an opportunity to recoup its investments and committing the

company to set aside \$55 million for a Coal Transition Fund to cushion the blow for workers and the community.

Workers laid off now, and those who remain until the 2025 closure, will get a lump sum payment from the fund of about \$44,000.

"It's an unfortunate situation," said Local 125 Assistant Business Manager Jake Carter. "We negotiated the best we could for our members."

John Grove, a control foreman and a Local 125 union steward at the plant, said at least 18 of those to be laid off Jan. 4 volunteered for it, mostly senior employees who are close to retirement.

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