

JOBS

Eugene Register-Guard outsources its union printing operation

By Don McIntosh

The once-great *Eugene Register-Guard* has seen rapid decline since the newspaper's longtime local family owners, the Bakers, sold it to GateHouse Media in January 2018 for \$14.3 million. Soon after, copy editing, page layout, and ad design were transferred to a centralized operation in Austin, Texas, and local workers were laid off. Reporters—represented by the Eugene Newspaper Guild—have also been let go in waves. In November 2019, GateHouse acquired the Gannett newspaper chain and took the Gannett name. It's now the largest newspaper publisher in the United States, with 260 daily newspapers in 46 states.

But at the *Register-Guard*, layoffs continued. Today just seven reporters and one photographer remain, plus six editors and other local staff. Since the sale, as the paper's quality and size declined, circulation has fallen from over 43,000 to less than 26,000.

Now printing too will be outsourced, and all 49 print shop workers laid off permanently. Starting March 8, the *Register-Guard* will be printed by the nonunion print department at *The Columbian* newspaper in Vancouver and trucked two hours south to Eugene. The *Register Guard* was also printing the *Salem Statesman Journal* and *USA Today*.

"This has been in the works for some time, a slow motion tragedy," says Teamsters Local 206 representative Leonard Stoehr. "For members it's a pretty dire situation."

Stoehr said all but a handful of the workers have been at the *Register-Guard* 20 to 30 years. They're entitled to a small severance package under the union contract, and Local 206 is seeking to negotiate funds for retraining.

The closure leaves just two unionized newspaper printing operations in Oregon, at the *Grants Pass Courier* and the *Medford Mail Tribune*, both represented by Local 206.

Unions worry layoffs could be coming in City permitting bureau

At Portland's Bureau of Development Services (BDS) union-represented workers review plans, issue building permits and inspect buildings to make sure electrical, mechanical, plumbing and other work is done safely and to code. But 98% of their agency's budget comes from fees, and with an anticipated downturn in office and hotel construction, layoffs could be coming.

BDS employs about 400 in all, including about 300 who are represented by Protec17 and the unions of the District Council of Trade Unions (DCTU).

Due to COVID-19 and reduced commercial development activity, BDS anticipates reduced revenue over the next two to three years, says bureau spokesperson Ken Ray. The bureau has substantial reserve funds, but is looking at cutting costs, including personnel costs, to make those reserves last.

BDS expects to cut 12 to 15 nonunion positions in January. But Ray said BDS is holding off any decisions about layoffs for

represented employees until March or April, waiting to see what happens with the vaccine, and whether construction might come back.

Union leaders in the building trades and in city unions are cautioning BDS against layoffs, because that could slow permitting when construction demand returns—and thereby delay the recovery.

"If we're serious about economic recovery after COVID, construction has to be a big piece of it," Columbia Pacific Building Trades Council Executive Secretary-treasurer Willy Myers told the *Labor Press*. "That money circulates within the community."

Ray said BDS and staff at the office of its new commissioner, Dan Ryan, are trying to think creatively about how to deal with the budget shortfall.

"We've learned from the last recession that we need to have staffing to be well positioned to support the construction industry when it picks back up."

DM



Local 555 cement mason competes in Season 2 of Tough as Nails, the highly-rated CBS reality show

By Don McIntosh

Members of Portland-headquartered Cement Masons Local 555 will be tuning in starting Feb. 10 to watch one of their own go steel toe to steel toe with a bricklayer, a steelworker, a travel nurse, pipe welder, electric lineman, and tug boat operator.

Liz Nichols, a seven-year member of the Operative Plasterers and Cement Masons union, is one of 12 contestants on the second season of the CBS show *Tough as Nails*. Cast members tackle

challenges at real-world job sites, including farms, construction sites, high-rise buildings, and fishing boats. The winner, revealed on the series finale, receives a championship belt and \$200,000. The show is co-hosted by Emmy Award-winning producer Phil Keoghan, best known for *Amazing Race*.

Tough as Nails is billed as a celebration of hard-working men and women who aren't afraid to roll up their sleeves and get their hands dirty to do a hard day's work. That ab-

solutely describes Liz Nichols, says Local 555 Business Manager Geoff Kossak.

"She's well respected out in the field," Kossak said. "Everybody wants her on their crew. She's a really good hand." Nichols is also an active member of the local, and serves on its executive board.

The show will air on CBS Wednesdays at 8 p.m. starting Feb. 10. Her fellow union members will be watching.

"We're proud of her," Kossak said. "And hopefully she wins."

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