

Bill Miller, Jr.

February 2, 1948 - Feb. 7, 2021

William D. Miller, Jr., a retired business manager of Portland-based IBEW Local 125, passed away Feb. 7, a week after turning 73. Miller was living in Maricopa, Arizona, at the time of his death. An obituary has not been published, and no further information is available.



Bill Miller

Miller, a journeyman lineman in construction, started working as a Local 125 business rep in 1976. He was elected business manager/financial secretary in 1983. He served in that post until his retirement in June 2005.

Miller was deeply involved in helping stop deregulation of the utility industry in the '90s. He also fought to regain 401(k) pension losses for PGE employees following the collapse of Enron. That included providing testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs.

As business manager, Miller hired Elizabeth (Liz) Shuler, first as an organizer, then as communications director and later as a lobbyist. Shuler is now secretary-treasurer of the national AFL-CIO.

Montana labor crushes right-to-work bill

For Montana's labor movement, it was a fight for life. In the Montana House of Representatives, where Republicans hold a 67-33 majority, union foes wanted to pass a so-called "right to work" bill, banning any requirement that workers pay dues to the unions that represent them. Twenty-seven states, mostly in the South and Midwest, have such laws, intended to weaken unions by starving them of resources.

But as the vote neared, hundreds of union members packed Capitol hallways in Helena for two days straight, and filled the gallery when the vote was scheduled. On March 2, the bill went down hard, 38-62, with 29 Republicans joining all 33 Democrats voting no.

In its mines and mills, Montana has a storied union past. Today 10.5% of Montana workers are union-represented, about the same as the national average.

Supporters of right to work say they plan to bring it up again in the 2023 legislative session.

...THE YEAR OF COVID

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tour's next stop in Eugene. The concert was canceled. Local 28 members spent the next year almost entirely out of work.

But they didn't have to face it alone. Solidarity among members and from the rest of the union movement helped them stay afloat. IATSE's international put \$2 million into a fund to make \$1,000 grants for members in hardship. UFCW Local 555 paid six months of office rent for the union. And when Local 28 members faced the maddening chaos of Oregon's unemployment insurance system, Oregon AFL-CIO workforce liaison John Irvine became a personal savior to many, going to the agency's highest levels to troubleshoot their unemployment claims.

"If it wasn't for John Irvine, we would have had people not eating," says Local 28 Business Agent Rose Etta Venetucci.

To observe the one-year mark since the pandemic began, Local 28 members plan to gather at 11 a.m. Saturday March 13 for a procession around the Arlene Schnitzer theater.

It's not clear *when* restrictions on large entertainment venues will be lifted, but there may be light at the end of the tunnel: An off-Broadway production of the musical Jesus Christ Superstar is scheduled to begin at the Keller August 31.

The year the music died

Nearly as devastated as IATSE Local 28 was American Federation of Musicians Local 99. After the Oregon Symphony went dark last March, its 79 union-represented musicians got eight weeks pay thanks to a federal COVID relief paycheck protection loan. And Local 99 eventually negotiated a commitment to return symphony employees to a quarter of their salary while doing some recording work (in exchange for agreeing to a *de facto* pay cut in the 2021-22 season through a reduction in the number of performances.)

When will there be live music again? Members are anxious to know. Oregon Symphony is expected to announce its 2021-22 season on March 8.

"A year ago our worst case scenario was a resumption of concerts by fall 2020," said Local 99 Secretary-Treasurer

Mont Chris Hubbard. "Now our worst case scenario is through end of 2021."

To keep the wolf from the door, some members with side gigs teaching music were able to switch to online or socially distant instruction. But it was an especially tough year for trumpeters and saxophonists: Drums and strings can be played while masked, but not brass and wind, and some employers decided they were too unsafe even for recording.

The Portland Opera, at least, compensated musicians at half pay for canceled concerts.

Hubbard said the sudden closure of music venues exposed one of the weaknesses of the unemployment insurance system: It doesn't cover self-employed workers or independent contractors. "It's shone a light on the fact that these people are not protected," he said.

Scrambling to meet the need

For Eryn Byram, director of Labor's Community Services Agency (LCSA), the COVID year has been a year of seven-day work weeks. Funded by United Way of the Columbia-Willamette and by union fundraising, LCSA helps union members and their families in times of hardship. And LCSA never saw more hardship than

in Year 1 of the coronavirus. LCSA more than tripled its operations in 2020. It partnered with Worksystems Inc. to hold over 60 webinars for out-of-work union members seeking unemployment and other benefits. It distributed \$120,000 in one-time aid to keep union households housed. And it helped about 1,800 families with food boxes and other aid.

Byram says among the hardest hit were the hotel workers of UNITE HERE Local 8, laundry workers represented by Service Employees Local 49, and the theater and music workers of IATSE and Musicians Local 99.

Six months in, she and her staff were feeling trauma fatigue.

"You start feeling numb," Byram said. "It affects your sleep. I remember one staff meeting, all three of us were just crying."

But Byram was also buoyed by the support of unions, big and small, that stepped up to contribute money and volunteers. Thanks to union solidarity, when catastrophic forest fires hit in September, LCSA was able to help 150 displaced families with eight days of hotel stays and food cards, and its first-ever Presents from Partners toy distribution event in Southern Oregon.



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