



STICKING TOGETHER When vaccines became available in May, TriMet's Sam Desue Jr. and ATU 757 president Shirley Block got COVID shots together.

Labor peace at TriMet?

An era of antagonism between TriMet and its union may have come to a close. On June 16, TriMet's Board announced that it picked Sam Desue, Jr. to be the transit agency's new general manager. Desue is a U.S. Army veteran and TriMet's first Black general manager, and he comes to the job 27 years after starting his transit career as a bus operator in Alaska. After serving in transit management in Kansas City and the Seattle area, he came to work for TriMet in 2019 as chief operating officer, and was named interim general manager on March 6, 2021 when his predecessor Doug Kelsey retired.

Coincidentally, the announcement of Desue's appointment came the same day ballots were counted in officer elections for Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757. Members returned incumbent Shirley Block to a third term as Local 757 president.

Block had only positives to say about Desue. Soon after Desue became interim general manager, he dropped his prede-

cessor's plans to get rid of TriMet's bus mechanic apprenticeship program, and worked to reach agreement by April 1 on a new union contract. In May, Block and Desue got their first COVID shots together at TriMet in a show of solidarity. They also met jointly with a TriMet bus operator who was injured by a stray bullet, and with several light rail operators who were at the controls when people committed suicide by leaping in front of their trains. Block says she and Desue next plan to work on revamping the way TriMet handles customer complaints to get better outcomes for both operators and passengers.

"We want to build a better relationship," Block said. "We're all here to help the community, so we should be working together."

Another possible sign of future harmony: TriMet labor relations director Laird Cusack—who's blamed by the union for creating some of the bad feeling—is retiring as of July 9. —DM

PEOPLE

Closing the book on decades of involvement



By Don McIntosh

Belinda Reagan, 70, retired June 30 as president of Portland Federation of School Professionals, AFT Local 111. Local 111 represents about 1,400 clerical and teaching support staff at Portland Public Schools (PPS), and Reagan has been its full-time top officer since 2009.

Reagan grew up in Portland, and graduated from Lincoln High School in 1967. In 1998, she was looking to get back to work after raising two sons as a stay-at-home mom. At the suggestion of her friend Becky Wright she got a job as a library assistant at Smith Elementary School, and found that she loved it. Wright, a speech pathologist at the district, also encouraged Reagan to get involved in the union, and she did, in a big way.

"It made me angry when I would hear things

that the district was trying to do to the classified employees, and I'm pretty vocal," Reagan said.

Soon she was taking part in bargaining, serving on committees, producing a union newsletter, and volunteering in the union office. When Smith closed in 2006, she transferred to Fernwood Middle School, now called Beverly Cleary. She was elected to the union board, and in 2007 was hired as a field representative.

"I realized that my one greatest attribute was that I'm a loud mouth, and that old adage about the squeaky wheel could be put to use," Reagan said. "I sat in front of the school board regularly and complained about the caste system and the treatment of classified employees."

For years Reagan found she had to battle with district higher ups, and especially with combative PPS labor relations chiefs like Steve Goldschmidt and Laird Cusack.

Those bad old days appear to be history; Reagan says today's top brass is the best she's seen at the district in her years in the union. Superintendent Guadalupe Guerrero—hired by the district in 2017—meets with regularly with union leaders, and always took Reagan's calls on his cell phone when the union had an issue to address.

After the Supreme Court's antiunion *Janus* decision in 2018, Reagan and others worked hard to get more represented employees to become full dues-paying members of Local 111, and succeeded in raising membership levels to over 71%, compared to 50% before *Janus*.

In retirement, Reagan expects she'll volunteer in the community. As union president, she is succeeded by Local 111 field rep Michelle Batten, who was elected by acclamation in March.

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