

## Teams control budgets; decide by consensus

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cess. The teams have nothing to do with discipline and discharge. However, they participate in the hiring process of a new employee who will become part of their team up to the point of signing off on the personnel action.

The teams build and control their own budgets. Decisions are made by consensus.

The self-directed team enables the people to take initiative," said **Mary Gustafik**, a Mental Health Associate 2 in Friendship House.

The number of teams has grown from five to 24. When a team is formed, the workers are required to take some training; additional training may be requested.

Problems that arise within the teams, the formation of a new team, and issues involving more than one team come under the authority of the Self-Directed Teams Planning Committee, made up of equal numbers of Union and management people.

"It is really, really important to have the Union involved," said Reese. "It's important so that we on the teams know the Union is with us."

The Self-Directed Team Planning Committee in the Health Department is a refinement of the labor-management committees that have existed throughout Marion County for a number of years.

The performance self-directed teams will be reviewed annually by the Health Department administrator and OPEU Local 294 President **Chris Lord**.

The self-directed teams are recognition that workers on the frontlines know what is needed to do the work and are most adaptable to change within the organization. They are in a position to more quickly recognize and respond to the changes necessary to meet the changing needs of clients or the public.

"From the workers' perspective, the self-directed teams are the opportunity of a generation to take control of our work lives and to gain the respect to which we have always been entitled," said Schneider.

## A joint OPEU, Department project

# Employment mediation training will tackle workplace grievances and relationships

In an effort to get a resolution to nettlesome problems that may not be covered by the contract, and to resolve workplace issues before they become difficult problems, the Employment Department and OPEU Local 471 have recently sponsored training on mediation.

"This is some of the best training I've had," said **Margaret Neill**, a Union activist in the Employment Department's Beaverton office. "I'm on the labor-management committee in the local office; this will make me more effective there."

Mediation gives people a way to get at problems that may be disruptive to the workplace, but may not be contract violations. And, since private mediators are expensive, the Union and the employer decided to conduct training in-house and develop a cadre of workers and supervisors who would be trained in its techniques.

In 1992, during interest-based bargaining, the Union and the Employment Department agreed to train a number of employees, both Union and management, in mediation skills. The Union and the Department jointly chose the trainer and jointly chose the participants.

One of the criteria established for this program was to have participants who genuinely wanted to make the workplace better. Eventually, 26 participants were chosen; about 80% came from the bargaining unit. Soon, they will be credentialed as mediators by the trainers.

"The four-day training was like living in a pressure cooker," said OPEU Local 471 Secretary **Dave Cleveland**, also of the Beaverton office. "But, I worked hard to get myself chosen for the training."

"This training gave me the techniques and the tools, the questions to ask, that can be used outside the mediation process," Cleveland said.

"The mediation training was in keeping with the idea of problem solving and the parties' interest to

communicate more effectively," said OPEU/SEIU Local 503 Organizer **Helen Moss**. "The key is, the mediation won't work unless people are willing to try it."

"I learned how to resolve disputes and improve the relations," said OPEU member **Bob Clark**, of Employment's Klamath Falls office.

"Mediation will help problems get resolved before they escalate into grievances," said Neill. "It will also give line workers more control. We'll be more like a partner."

Neill also thought the skills she has learned will be useful to her

when she volunteers in the family court.

There are some important rules that pertain to the mediation process and grievable issues:

- All discussions in mediation are confidential. In other words, information gleaned in mediation cannot later be used in the grievance procedure; you can't go through mediation and use information gathered there against either of the parties in the grievance process.

- If the mediation doesn't work out, you start all over at the beginning of the grievance procedure.

## OPEU Water Resources president's new job makes her first in the field

"My Union work has afforded me the opportunity to hone my leadership skills that I might not have gotten anywhere else," said OPEU Local 690 President **Bernadette Williams**.

Those leadership skills have now helped Williams become the first and only woman Water Resources employee regulating water in the field. She is continuing to strengthen her leadership skills as a Member Organizing Committee (MOC) member first assigned to the Secretary of State organizing drive.

Working with watermaster and OPEU/SEIU Local 503 steward **Vern Church** from a base in Baker City, Williams will be regulating water distribution, enforcing water laws, administrative rules and agency policy, settling water rights disputes, re-mapping irrigation districts, and conducting dam safety inspections.

"Water is a big issue in Oregon's future," Williams said. "Sometimes overlooked on a rainy day in western Oregon is that the state is in the midst of a multiyear drought."

"All of this great sunshine (in



**Bernadette Williams**

late January and early February) can become a regulatory hell for people in the field," she said.

Previously, in her two years with the Water Resources Department, Williams has worked with the Department's water use reporting and pump test programs, resource management planning, surface water availability group, and most recently volunteered her time and energy to work on a water rights backlog.

"It's important to know how much water there is in the streams throughout the state," said Williams. "We need certain levels to protect the fish, certain levels for recreation, as well as enough for irrigation, livestock, and domestic uses. We must assure that there is maximum beneficial use of that water."

"I've worked hard at my job," Williams said, "but my Union activities made my work more visible and didn't detract from my opportunities within the agency. Working with management as a Union president and steward has given me the chance to show my leadership skills."