



Leadership Column

by Kathie Best

SEIU Local 503, OPEU President

An Impressive Past, An Exciting Future

Dear Fellow Members,

As most of you know, Alice Dale, our Executive Director for the past 16 years resigned her position at Local 503. Following a farewell dinner in her honor, Alice assumed her duties as the new Executive Director for Local 49 in Portland on November 1, 2001. Over the years, Alice helped build OPEU into a strong and formidable voice for workers and was instrumental in Local 503 becoming the largest AFL-CIO affiliated Union in Oregon, with over 26,000 members. Although Alice will be missed tremendously, her leadership at Local 49, a unit of approximately 5,000 healthcare and janitorial workers, will benefit all of us by strengthening their contracts and organizing new workers in the private sector. We look forward to their success and working together to build the labor movement. A national search is underway to find a new Executive Director. Terry Cavanagh, our Assistant Executive Director, has graciously agreed to act as Interim Director until that process has been concluded, hopefully sometime in January 2002.

Congratulations to all our members who recently ratified collective bargaining agreements. Negotiations have been particularly difficult this time around due to the huge increases in health insurance costs and we can all breathe a collective sigh of relief that we were able to reach a number of settlements without the need to strike. Special thanks to those who negotiated and supported these contract settlements.

As we were building toward a strike in two of our units, Higher Ed and Marion County, we learned of the horrific events of September 11th. Our ability to process and deal with this tragedy, the terrorists' attack on America, has certainly been a test to our faith and solidarity as a nation and as a union. At Local 503, it became a factor in decisions made by both bargaining teams on whether or not to proceed with a strike if warranted by contract negotiations. I salute both units for their courage and dedication to the collective bargaining process and their foresight to stay focused on the critical task at hand, a fair and equitable contract for our members.

The attacks of the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, DC, as well as threats of chemical and biological warfare have certainly overshadowed much of our work. We mourn for the victims of these attacks and all those affected, and they remain in our thoughts and prayers. The feeling of uncertainty that these abhorrent acts have left us with is unsettling.

Although there seems little we can do from such a great distance away, union brothers and sisters across the country are heeding the call for help and finding ways to aid the victims and their families. Thousands of emergency services and medial workers are conducting rescue and aid missions in New York and suburban Washington, DC. Union volunteers are contributing their skills, food, blood and funds to the effort. On the home front, the SEIU Local 503, OPEU Board of Directors approved a \$10,000

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contribution to the relief fund. SEIU International has collectively contributed over a million dollars. We must move forward, being mindful of those we’ve lost. We’ll continue to fight the good fight. We must refuse to accept the tyranny and inhumanity levied on us by these terrorists. If we stand together and become stronger from it, we will prevail in the end. Stand with me, my brothers and sisters, in strength and unity!

Some important issues facing our members and identified during the New Strength and Unity campaign are the healthcare crisis, funding quality public services and our public image. Due to the addition of funds through the implementation of NSUP, we have formed three new member committees to address these important topics: Healthcare, Quality Public Services and Communications. Improving our public image is part of the charge

assigned to the Communications Committee. Committee members will work in conjunction with staff to analyze, identify and determine strategies to deal with these issues. More information about the NSUP committees can be found on our www.seiu503.org website.

I am excited about the upcoming SEIU 503 gubernatorial candidate videoconference scheduled for December 2, 2001. The person elected as governor of this state will play a pivotal role in the lives and livelihoods of our members. It is imperative that we are actively engaged in selecting, and then supporting the right candidate. The videoconference will give many of our members across the state the opportunity to participate in the candidate interviews, as well as have input into the decision-making process of this Union.

The anticipation of a Special Legislative Session in January is certainly one of our primary concerns. The possibility of program cuts, whether they’re agency specific or across the board, will be devastating for many Oregonians. Rather than making cuts, we need to promote increasing revenue, whether it’s by using some of the tobacco settlement funds, a tax surcharge, new excise taxes, reclaiming the “kicker” or delaying the implementation of Measure 88. We are in the process of formulating a number of strategies for consideration. Budget solutions shouldn’t be done through cuts to necessary and important programs. We must call our legislators and urge them to leave revenue solutions off the table in a Special Session.

We have a great deal to accomplish in the New Year. There are the time honored political fights, the governor and legislative races, healthcare reform, finding ways to fund quality public services, as well as the transition of bringing thousands of new members into our Union through the homecare election and bargaining their first contract. Now more than ever, we need to join our collective *voices and votes* to ensure our future is full of hope and promise.

In Strength and Unity,