

Alice Dale Bids Farewell to Local 503

October 31, 2001, was my last day working as your executive director. It has been a wonderful and remarkable 21 years. Our Union was known as the Oregon State Employees Association when I first



Alice L. Dale

started in September 1978, as a member of the union's legal staff. Two years later we affiliated with the Service Employees International Union, and officially became SEIU Local 503.

In 1980, SEIU was the 4th largest AFL-CIO union (and the fastest growing). We were one of the first

state employee association affiliations with SEIU. Many more followed our lead. Today, SEIU is the largest AFL-CIO union in Oregon and the United States. It is one of the most progressive unions and truly invests in organizing the unorganized and building strong rank-and-file Locals. Our leaders made a good choice with SEIU, over 20 years ago.

Having served as legal counsel and your assistant executive director, I returned from a two-year stint in private law practice to work as your executive director from July 1985 through October 2001. During this time, we had a lot of victories—pay equity for thousands of women workers, building a steward system and a political program that are among the best, if not the best, in the state. We have an external organizing program that leads within the Oregon AFL-CIO like no other union. Our organizing and political program launched a plan to expand collective bargaining rights to 12,000 homecare workers through the initiative process. This successful effort, led to our filing a representation petition, with over 4,000 members, on October 23, 2001. This election will mark the largest union election in the history of our state, public or private sector. Local 503 had two powerful statewide strikes in 1987 and 1995 that changed our union and the public's view of our union. Today we are viewed as a tough, rank-and-file union that gets results.

I feel very privileged to have worked with so many wonderful, committed members. From hundreds of bargaining sessions, to weekend canvasses, to evening phone banks, to housecalls, to leadership trainings, to grievances and arbitrations, SEIU Local 503 shaped who I am as a trade unionist and as a person. I know from experience that workers, united, can improve their lives and the communities in which we live. I know that developing an activist culture—an “organizing union”—is infinitely doable and makes a real difference in the lives of our members.

I have been working as the Trustee of SEIU Local 49 in Portland since January 2001. Local 49 is a 5500 member private sector healthcare and

building services (janitors) Local. It has been riddled with political problems for over a decade and has been unable to develop the collective bargaining, political and organizing program that we have at Local 503. At the same time, Local 49 has a great group of leaders and staff that are ready to change their Local. I hope by working there full-time, with leaders and staff, to be able to bring experience and leadership that allows Local 49 to be a vibrant, organizing Local, like Local 503.

I also hope to continue to work very closely with the leadership and staff of Local 503. I will continue to be a Vice-President of SEIU's International Executive Board and I will be actively involved in the SEIU Oregon State Council. My commitment to healthcare reform is unwavering. I hope that being in a healthcare local, and learning this industry from the vantage point of workers, that

I will be able to be an even more effective advocate for changing our healthcare delivery system, in Oregon and nationally.

My decision to leave was a difficult one. I love Local 503 and I have so many friends in the leadership and staff. At the same time, I was ready for a change and Local 49 was in need of new leadership. The change feels right. So, I leave you with many victories but many challenges still ahead. President Kathie Best, with whom I have developed a great partnership, asked me to assist the Board of Directors in the selection process for my successor. I was honored and I am delighted to do so. By January, 2002, we hope to have a successor in place.

Good luck to you all in the fights ahead. As Mother Jones said, “Don't mourn, organize!”

Union Maid - Song for Alice

Tune: “Union Maid” by Woody Guthrie

There once was a union maid who never was afraid
Of the right-wing hacks or the corporate flaks
Or the muckety-mucks and the games they played.
She'd stand up to the boss when workers rights were crossed.
She'd look 'em in the eye with her head held high
And make 'em pay the cost,

CHORUS: Sayin' you can't scare me, I'm stickin' to the Union,
I'm stickin' to the Union,
I'm stickin' to the Union.
No, you can't scare me, I'm stickin' to the Union
I'm stickin' to the Union till the day I die.

Her name is Alice Dale, and she has never failed
To take a stand for a just demand
Or to see that equity should prevail.
For nearly two decades, she's led our great crusade.
Hey, Alice, you're due a big “thank you”
For the role that you have played....CHORUS.

But now the time has come for Alice to move on.
But please don't grieve, she's not gonna leave.
The union fight she'll carry on.
She's headin' down the line to Local 49.
So give 'em hell, we wish you well,
And let your spirit shine. CHORUS

Lyrics by Paul McKenna October 2001