

Nursing Home Workers Advance with Better Staffing, New Alliance

It has been a triply successful year so far for SEIU 503 nursing home workers.

- Employees at Avamere King City near Portland became the 23rd group of nursing home employees represented by SEIU 503 to negotiate a contract. Their efforts to unionize were helped by their employer's willingness to remain neutral and allow certified nursing assistants and other employees to decide for themselves whether to join a union.
- New state-mandated staffing ratios prompted by pressure from SEIU 503

Broadcasting. Fittingly she and other members at Menlo Park, who voted to organize in November under the prior alliance agreement, also ratified their contract the day of the news conference. It includes \$2.65 in hourly raises over 31 months (\$1.05 immediately) plus improved medical benefits and other advances.

With the new alliance, the union anticipates organizing workers at 18-24 more facilities in the next 4-6 years, potentially doubling the number of SEIU 503 nursing home members.

The agreement also commits home operators to work with SEIU 503 on three important political goals—state funding to implement further reductions in patient-staff ratios, more training opportunities to increase the pool of CNAs, and improved Medicaid reimbursements for nursing home care to protect the raises SEIU has won and lay the groundwork to win further wage and benefit improvements in the next round of

contracts. The new nursing home standards require day shift assistants to have two fewer people under their care, allowing them to spend more time with residents, adding about 500 to 700 additional nursing assistants across the state by 2010.

"I've had to rush from one patient to the next," Blosser told the Oregonian. "Sometimes I haven't had time to sit with them when they really need someone."

"I'm very attached to all the people I take care of," she explained to OPB, "so it's hard to cut somebody off when they are trying to tell you a story, because you have to go help somebody go to the bathroom or you have to go do something else, but it will be much better now because there will be more people, which means you'll have more time to spend with your residents."

"Everyone in an Oregon nursing home deserves to be safe and treated with dignity and respect," Governor Kulongoski said. "The new staffing rules will mean increased care, increased quality of life for residents, and increased peace of mind for their families."



Certified Nursing Assistant Laura Blosser is interviewed by Oregonian reporter Nikole Hannah Jones at the Menlo Park healthcare facility in Portland following a news conference unveiling new state staffing standards achieved through the efforts of Blosser's union, SEIU 503. On the day of the event, Menlo Park workers overwhelmingly ratified their first contract.

increased the number of nursing assistants employed in Oregon nursing homes, allowing members to increase the level of attention and care they can provide to residents.

- SEIU 503 members across the state ratified a new agreement with five nursing home operators in Oregon that should mean a stronger voice for workers at Evergreen, Prestige, Avamere, Pinnacle, and Eagle facilities.

The staffing standards, recommended by a gubernatorial commission established after SEIU 503 prepared a ballot measure to mandate staffing increases, went into effect in March. They were unveiled in March by Dr. Bruce Goldberg, Department of Human Services director, at a news conference at Menlo Park that included comments from CNA Laura Blosser, a member of the SEIU 503 bargaining committee that negotiated the first contract at Menlo Park.

Blosser's description of how much the standards mean was featured in stories in the Oregonian and on Oregon Public



Privatized Library Workers Win Right to Bargain in Jackson County

Workers represented by SEIU Local 503 at the Jackson County libraries in Southern Oregon have won the right to negotiate a contract with the private firm that reopened the libraries last fall under a five-year contract with the county.

Under terms of a settlement in response to a charge filed by Local 503 in December with the National Labor Relations Board, Library Systems and Services, Inc. has agreed to recognize SEIU 503 as the legal bargaining agent for library employees and begin bargaining upon request of the union.

The county closed its libraries and terminated employees last April following a threatened reduction of federal aid to timber counties. It later rejected an SEIU bid to run the libraries and instead entered into a five-year contract with the company, which is based in Maryland and known as LSSI, to run the libraries. Most of the county library employees returned with reduced benefits and without union protection.

This year the county has agreed to pay LSSI \$3.14 million and allocate an additional \$1.15 million for such services as utilities, facility maintenance, landscaping, telephones, custodial services and computer support.

SEIU 503 contended that the private firm had to recognize the union under the principle of succession and Linda Davidson, officer in charge of the Portland office of the NLRB, agreed. Faced with the prospect of an unfair labor practice complaint, LSSI agreed to a formal settlement recognizing the union and posting a notice affirming the workers' right to organize and bargain collectively.

"It means library employees will have their union back and more of a voice at their work," Pauline Black, a library assistant in Ashland, told the Medford Mail Tribune. "Working for LSSI or any employer where there isn't a union means that you are less free to speak and less free to offer your opinion. I feel a lot more secure."