

Stern's Keynote Sets Tone for 2008 General Council

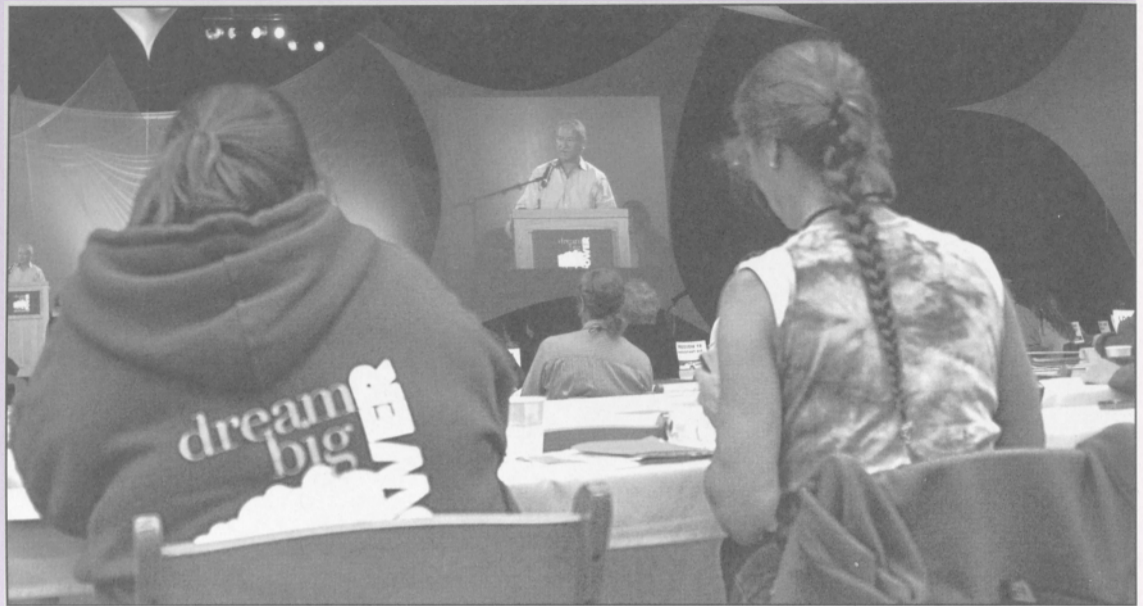
"With your enormous contribution in the last 12 years," International Union President Andy Stern told cheering delegates, volunteers, staffers and guests at the 2008 SEIU 503 General Council, "SEIU organized as many workers as it did in its first 75."

Stern's rousing keynote speech stressed national themes that also resounded during three days of deliberation by Local 503's chief governing body on a range of local issues — gaining strength in political action, responding to member needs, organizing more of the workforce, raising standards for all workers and making service quality a byword.

"Quality must be our passion and our guide," the one-time Pennsylvania social worker said, "and it happens to also be the only practical pathway to protect and improve the pay and benefits our members need."

Stern spoke at the close of the first full day of proceedings at Lane Community College in Eugene in August, then participated in a panel on a strategic plan outlining the local's goals for the next five years and beyond.

On the floor of the council and in committee sessions, delegates engaged in typically spirited debate and took some key actions outlined on these pages. One of the most significant was their vote to expand the Member Resource Center, which now serves Homecare and Child Care providers, to include everyone the local represents. Proponents said the MRC will provide more immediate assistance to workers, further inform and empower stewards, and free staff organizers for more worksite visits and other outreach.



General Council delegates were inspired by SEIU President Andy Stern's keynote speech.

Other highlights of the council included a workshop on storytelling as an organizing tool, a panel on organizing in Oregon and across the country, an awards presentation to volunteer organizers at a banquet at the Hilton workers' rights celebration in memory of activist Lucy Lahr, and passage of the 2009-10 budget.

Delegates had no shortages of suggested improvements for the next General Council in 2010, commenting on everything from the need to reduce redundant floor debate to provide more comfortable seating. But generally they gave the council high marks for productivity and insight, and new delegates seemed especially impressed if not awed. "This was a first-time experience for me," said David Judkins, an

information specialist at the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, "and I know 1,000 percent more than when I came here."

"I've gained a tremendous appreciation for what the union does and the amazing and accomplished people in our union," added Nancy Diamond, an office specialist at Portland State University. "And how much work needs to be done! The process is far more complicated than I had ever imagined. It has been very empowering and encouraging for me."

"Just learning about the political process was wonderful," said Janet Ginther-Storer, a family childcare provider from Redmond.

Faces in the Crowd in Eugene

