

'Stronger Together' Bargaining Conference December 6

Preparations for the largest single bargaining year in SEIU 503 history will move into high gear in Portland December 6 when member leaders from across Oregon gather for a day-long "Stronger Together" bargaining conference at the Doubletree Hotel.

About 90% of SEIU 503's 45,000-member workforce will bargain to improve the quality of our jobs and services in 2009. Contracts are up for negotiation at state agencies, on university campuses, and in the homecare, childcare, or adult foster care sectors.

To capitalize on that confluence, the December 6 bargaining conference will bring union leaders — bargaining delegates, officers, stewards, Contract Action Teams, and Board members — together across sectors. Attendees will spend most of the day in breakouts by employer, but will also meet across sectors to celebrate the strength of a union that has doubled in size during this decade and explore avenues of effective mutual support. Attendees will be guided by bargaining surveys that have been submitted by thousands of members.

This follows a July statewide gathering of more than 160 leaders representing units of the Oregon Department of Administrative Services and the Oregon University System.

Members started with a look back at successful aspects of the 2007 campaign. Sarah Cochran (Gresham Human Services) and Randy Davis (Oregon State Hospital) reviewed actions that led to increased staffing in Child Welfare by restoring the Social Service Assistant positions and opened the door to bargaining over institutional safety and staffing.

Dana Margosian (Bend Human Services) and Belinda Melindez (Southern Oregon University) described successful worksite actions. Peggy Salas (Revenue) stressed the importance of keeping our actions fun! And John Hess (Administrative Services custodian) received a standing ovation when he thanked one and

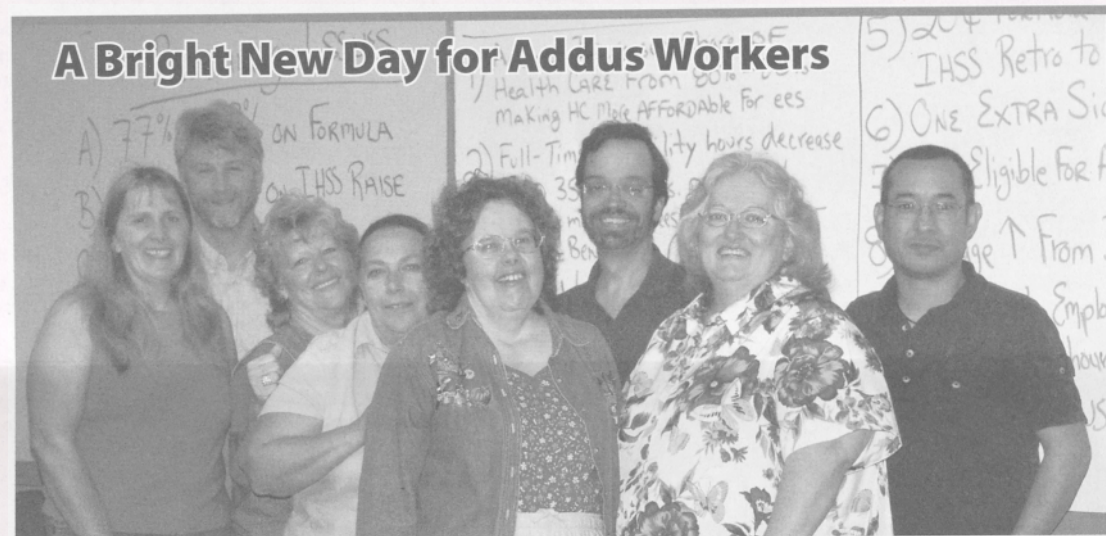
all for standing with the custodians against a proposal to reduce their wages.

Cameron McGinnis (Transportation) shared his experience organizing Colorado state workers. Kathleen Lamar (Justice) and Donna Glathar, Salem Field Coordinator, announced that the new DAS bargaining team would deliver petitions on behalf of office workers. Marc Nisenfeld (PSU) and organizer Molly Malone shared ways to use bargaining surveys to our advantage in recruiting new members.

Then attendees had their turn, discussing views of the coming statewide bargaining from the floor for

nearly an hour. Some common themes included the need for better oversight over contractors and reduced privatization; health care; increasing CAPE contributions; adequate cost of living adjustments to wages (COLAs), stopping misuse of limited duration employees and temporary workers; and a longer-term contract.

The afternoon was devoted to coalitions. The DAS team presented the OUS team with signed pledges of solidarity to fight together to win the tenth step in the salary scale for OUS members.



The dynamics of bargaining can prove unpredictable. Just ask the team from SEIU 503's 300-member unit at Addus, a private-sector homecare agency. With contract renewal talks collapsing last August, bargaining chair Sherriel Stiles and her team decided to give it one more try — and won a settlement on a three-year agreement the very next day. Improvements include increased employer contribution for health coverage with a lower eligibility threshold, an extra sick day, increased mileage reimbursement, wage increases, a longevity bonus. (L-R) Coleen Lawson, Bill Uehlein, Charlene Morgan-Stewart, Debbie Crenshaw, Lorna Burnell, Andy Boeger, Stiles and Sam Davila.



There Is No Union Without "U"

Joe DiNicola, President

Four years ago, in November 2004, SEIU Local 503, OPEU members faced a number of challenges. Looking back, it was a time of crisis. As your newly elected statewide union President, it was clear to me that for workers to win, each and every member would need to step up in the fight for dignity and respect.

- State and Higher Ed workers were in the middle of a two-year wage and step freeze.
- The Governor members helped elect had gone back on his promise to protect pension benefits and instead pushed 2003 legislation to take away pension benefits from tens of thousands of public employees.
- Tight budgets threatened every local government and private non-profit agency.
- Homecare providers could not count on continued funding for programs their clients need. And unlike every other SEIU Local 503 represented worker, Homecare members still had to negotiate workers' comp coverage.
- Workers at only one nursing home facility in Oregon had union representation rights.

Members joined together to face these challenges head on. In every local in every part of Oregon, members stepped up like never before. In the last two state and university contract campaigns, members ended the wage freeze, fought for and won added steps, raised wages across the board and moved closer to a living wage for low-paid workers.

Homecare workers won the guaranteed right for workers' comp coverage. Homecare expanded health insurance to cover vision and dental for the first time, and while wages are still far too low, no hourly Homecare provider now earns less than \$10.

Members made the case that affordable health care isn't just a good idea for the public sector; it's a good idea for everyone. In contract after contract, local government units won better wages and held the line or improved benefits.

Members from every part of Oregon stepped up at the Capitol and changed the face of the Oregon legislature. On issue after issue, SEIU Local 503, OPEU members took the lead. Members fought for dignity and respect, expanded workers' rights and pushed for adequate funding for quality public services. Members also put an end to predatory "payday loans."

In both Oregon and federal court, members stood firm against devastating PERS retirement take-backs. While not 100% successful, several court challenges won back a significant portion of promised pension benefits.

Members recognize the power in numbers and helped organize thousands of workers. Childcare providers, Adult Foster Care providers and Nursing Home workers became members and along with Homecare, have transformed this union. It may be fair to say that SEIU Local 503, OPEU is no longer exclusively a public employee union. Today, about half the members of this union do not work for a state or local government employer.

Despite many past victories, as SEIU Local 503, OPEU moves forward, new challenges confront every member. Here are just a few specific issues that need to be resolved:

- Childcare providers won a contract, but still do not have health insurance benefits.
- Adult Foster Care celebrated a contract victory, but more work is required to maintain funding for quality care for every resident.
- Homecare, Childcare and Adult Foster Care providers all need the long-term security of a pension.
- State workers face another round of contract negotiations with health insurance benefits on the chopping block.
- Higher Ed members need to regain parity and win the extra step raise already granted to other state workers.
- Nursing Home workers may anticipate benefits from SEIU Local 503 partnership agreements with facility owners, but must remain vigilant and make sure those agreements always protect both workers' rights and quality care.
- Members must always be ready to stand up for dignity and respect for each other.

As this issue of the 503 VOICE goes to press, the outcome of the November election will still be in your hands. Make no mistake, you have the power to choose candidates and approve or defeat ballot measures that will shape your future and the future of your co-workers, friends and families. Please vote. It's your chance to protect your community and your union rights.

Each SEIU Local 503, OPEU elected statewide union President, Vice President or Secretary Treasurer is limited to two terms of office during any five or six year period. As my second term draws to a close, please join me and congratulate the newly elected officers. You elected them to represent every union member. But always remember, no officer can do that job alone, because there is no union without you.