

Walmart getting rid of greeters; disabled workers worried

By **MICHAEL RUBINKAM**
Associated Press

As Walmart moves to phase out its familiar blue-vested “greeters” at some 1,000 stores nationwide, disabled workers who fill many of those jobs say they’re being ill-treated by a chain that styles itself as community-minded and inclusive.

Walmart told greeters around the country last week that their positions would be eliminated on April 26 in favor of an expanded, more physically demanding “customer host” role. To qualify, they will need to be able to lift 25-pound packages, climb ladders and stand for long periods.

That came as a heavy blow to greeters with cerebral palsy, spina bifida and other physical disabilities. For them, a job at Walmart has provided needed income, served as a source of pride and offered a connection to the community. Now Walmart, America’s largest private employer, is facing a backlash as customers rally around some of the chain’s most visible and beloved employees.

Walmart says it is striving to place greeters in other jobs at the company, but workers with disabilities are worried.

Donny Fagnano, 56, who has worked at Walmart for more than 21 years, said he cried when a manager at the store in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, called him into the office last week and told him his job was going away.

“I like working,” he said. “It’s better than sitting at home.”

Fagnano, who has spina bifida, said he was offered a severance package. He hopes to stay on at Walmart and clean bathrooms instead.

Theresa Sours, an 81-year-old greeter with heart failure, said she desperately needs her Walmart job to help pay for her medicine and mortgage. Sours, of Stuart, Florida, who’s worked for the chain for more than 18 years, said her manager told her they had no other openings suited to her ability.

“I never thought they would do this. I feel like I’m thrown to the wolves,” Sours said. Her sister-in-law, Cecilia Appleby, was even more blunt: “They’ve done her wrong. They’ve done her absolutely wrong. They just

don’t like the handicapped.”

Walmart greeters have been around for decades, allowing the retail giant to put a friendly face at the front of its stores. Then, in 2016, Walmart began replacing greeters with hosts, with responsibilities that include not only welcoming customers but helping with returns, checking receipts to deter shoplifters and keeping the front of the store clean. Walmart and other chains have been redefining roles at stores as they compete with Amazon.

The effect of the greeter phase-out on disabled and elderly employees — who have traditionally gravitated toward the role as one they



Rachel Wasser

Greeter John Combs works at Walmart in Vancouver, Wash.

were well-suited to doing — largely escaped public notice until last week, when Walmart launched a second round of cuts.

As word spread, first on social media and then in local and national news outlets, outraged customers began calling Walmart to complain.

Tens of thousands of people signed petitions. Facebook groups sprang up with names like “Team Adam” and “Save Lesley.” A second-grade class in California wrote letters to Walmart’s CEO on behalf of Adam Catlin, a disabled greeter in Pennsylvania whose mother had written an impassioned Facebook post about his plight. Walmart said it has offered another job to Catlin.

In Galena, Illinois, hundreds of customers plan to attend an “appreciation parade” for Ashley Powell on her last day of work as a greeter.

“I love it, and I think I’ve touched a lot of people,” said Powell, 34, who has an intel-

lectual disability. She once rescued a 3-year-old boy who’d wandered into the parking lot and led him back to his parents at checkout.

In Vancouver, Washington, John Combs, 42, who has cerebral palsy, was devastated and then angered by his impending job loss. It had taken his family five years to find him a job he could do, and he loved the work, coming up with nicknames for all his co-workers.

“What am I going to do, just sit here on my butt all day in this house? That’s all I’m going to do?” Combs asked his sister and guardian, Rachel Wasser. “I do my job. I didn’t do anything wrong.”

Contract: Coalition plans to put contract to operate center up for bid this year

Continued from Page A1

Sarah Nebeker, the commission’s chairwoman, said afterward, adding that the commission is being responsible.

County staff was also careful not to link the bidding with any concerns about Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare’s performance.

“This isn’t driven by any particular thing other than it’s good due diligence on our part,” said Michael McNickle, the county’s public health director.

County staff did include requirements for bidders that reflect past frustration over a lack of transparency at Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare.

Providers must agree to make quarterly reports before the Board of Commissioners, and a county representative must be allowed to attend regular meetings of a provider’s governing board.

The coalition behind the crisis respite center, which includes the county, also plans to put the contract to operate the respite center up for bid this year.

Card not required in Albertsons

SHOP NOW, PLAY TODAY!
& play online for
TWO MILLION
more chances to win!

MONOPOLY
Collect & Win Game
OVER **\$250 MILLION**
in prizes and money saving offers

MONOPOLY © 1935, 2019 Hasbro. All rights reserved. Hasbro is not a sponsor of the promotion. Series MON-12. See store or online at www.ShopPlayWin.com for official rules & odds chart. Online orders do not qualify for MONOPOLY game participation except for online orders for pick up at participating stores that offer Drive Up & Go™. Effective 2/6/19 - 5/7/19.

clip or **CLICK!** just for **U** Valid 2/27/19 thru 3/5/19

\$10 OFF \$50 or more*

Save on your next grocery purchase of \$50 or more* with your Club Card & this Savings Award.

*Use this Savings Award on any shopping trip you choose at any Oregon Safeway or Albertsons store and S.W. Washington stores serving Clark, Wahkiakum, Cowlitz, Skamania, Walla Walla and Klickitat counties by 3/5/19. This \$10.00 Savings Award excludes purchases of Alcoholic Beverages, Fluid Dairy Products, Tobacco, US Postage Stamps, Trimet Bus/Commuter Passes, Money Orders, Container Deposits, Lottery, Gift Cards, Gift Certificates Sales, All Pharmacy Prescription Purchases, Safeway Club Savings, Safeway or Albertsons Store Coupons and Sales Tax. One Savings Award redeemable per household. COUPON CANNOT BE DOUBLED. Online and in-store prices, discounts, and offers may differ.

clip or **CLICK!** just for **U** Valid 2/27/19 thru 3/5/19

Oven Baked Cookies
18 to 20-ct.
Selected varieties.

1.99 ea
Club Price

Limit 2

*This coupon must be presented at time of purchase at Safeway / Albertsons. Offer valid with Card and Coupon. COUPON CANNOT BE DOUBLED or combined with digital coupon. Coupon valid 2/27/19 - 3/5/19.

Prices in this ad are effective 6 AM Tuesday, February 26 thru Tuesday, March 5, 2019 (unless otherwise noted) in all Safeway or Albertsons stores in Oregon and S.W. Washington stores serving Wahkiakum, Cowlitz, Clark, Skamania, Walla Walla and Klickitat Counties. Items offered for sale are not available to other dealers or wholesalers. Sales of products containing ephedrine, pseudoephedrine or phenylpropanolamine limited by law. Quantity rights reserved. SOME ADVERTISING ITEMS MAY NOT BE AVAILABLE IN ALL STORES. Some advertised prices may be even lower in some stores. On Buy One, Get One Free (“BOGO”) offers, customer must purchase the first item to receive the second item free. BOGO offers are not 1/2 price sales. If only a single item purchased, the regular price applies. Manufacturers’ coupons may be used on purchased items only — not on free items. Limit one coupon per purchased item. Customer will be responsible for tax and deposits as required by law on the purchased and free items. No liquor sales in excess of 52 gallons. No liquor sales for resale. Liquor sales at licensed Safeway or Albertsons stores only. © 2019 Safeway Inc. or © 2019 Albertsons LLC. Availability of items may vary by store. Online and in-store prices, discounts and offers may differ.