

# *Stronger Together!*

## **Classified Staff of Oregon State University**

### **SEIU Local 503, OPEU Local 083 at OSU Nov/Dec 2007**

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#### **What a Busy Year This Has Been! —Maggie Neel, President**

What a busy year this has been for our Union! I find it hard to believe that it's already the holiday season. Then when I start thinking back over the year I'm amazed at what we have accomplished in such a short time.

The first half of the year was dedicated to bargaining one of our best contracts yet. This year has a 3% raise with an \$80 floor, next year has 3.2% with an \$85 floor. We once again maintained our health care and secured some excellent language to help us better represent our members.

This contract was achieved by all of our members statewide volunteering their time and showing their support. I thank each and every one of you who supported us. These efforts included lobbying the Oregon Capitol, phone banking, e-mailing your legislators, showing up at rallies and meetings, passing out fliers, talking to your family, neighbors and community members, marching and carrying picket signs.

We were lucky enough to have two MOC's (Member Organizers) Bart Lewis and Linda Sexon assigned to our campus for two months. They really helped with our membership drive and getting out the word on bargaining. We celebrated our contract victory here at OSU with a Bowling Celebration Party.

Jeri Hemmer, associate director of Human Resources, and I have jointly held five contract trainings for OSU staff and managers, to familiarize them with the new contract language. These trainings were held in several locations—our main campus, our Salem Extension offices,

and even one aboard our research ship the *R/V Wecoma* when it was in port.

This is a great example of our improved relations with OSU's Administration. Another is our monthly labor/management meetings we hold with OSU's Human Resources. We are now organizing labor/management meetings for our Food Service Department as well.

Our next step is to continue meeting with OSU's Administration regarding the changes coming with the implementation of the Strategic Plan over the next three years. We have already met with Dr. Ray and others to discuss the proposed service centers and presented your concerns.

This year our fantastic stewards have been very busy representing our members and have done a wonderful job helping them through problems in their work lives.

Let me tell you about the generosity of our group. We have called for and received many donations of vacation time from members to other members for hardship leave, helping co-workers who have medical situations. Our Local has made generous donations to members in need from our hardship fund. Our Local sponsored two young ladies to attend the Rosie the Riveter Camp this summer.

We are now in the middle of our Fourth Annual Charitable Donations Drive, collecting toys, food, cash, and other items to help out those in our area who are in need, through the umbrella of the Community Services Consortium. Each year this has been a bigger and better event organized by our own Larry Bulling and assisted by Deborah Dombrowski and Judy Cochran.

Then there's the generosity of Local leadership's volunteer time. Your officers and stewards put in an amazing amount of their own time to improve the lives of each and every one of you. That's right: the Local officers and stewards are all OSU employees just like you. They are not paid for the union work that they do for you. I am so lucky to be working with this group and proud to be a part of helping improve the lives of working people everywhere. Also a big "Thank you!" goes to our two SEIU staff organizers Mike Huff and Bob Rossi.

We have officer elections coming in February, all positions will be open; we're tired and would appreciate some new people stepping up. Please consider running for one of the offices. Not willing to take on an office? We have many smaller jobs we could use help with. We also have lots of room for new stewards, we are allowed 25 stewards and only have 6 active stewards (no wonder we're tired!) Remember, "If we all do a little, none of us has to do a lot."

In Solidarity, Maggie

## **Words of Thanks, An Office Specialist 2 at OSU**

Earlier this year, when I found myself facing severe problems at my job and with my supervisor, I turned to my Union Steward, Larry Bulling.

Larry stood by me, supported me, and calmly guided me through processes that were new and frustrating but ultimately successful.

I learned that the Union is there for us— and, willing to do ALL that they can to assist and support us—so, when in doubt, call your Union Steward!

## **How Hard Can It Be? —Bob Rossi, Organizer**

This is really easy.

We work in higher education.

Higher education is political: the people who head the state universities are political appointees; the core funding for higher education is determined by the state legislature; the direction

higher education takes is political; tuition and fees are political issues; and the money donated to the state universities often comes with political strings attached. Many of the state legislators and decision-makers are products of the state universities.

Our Union and the state negotiate over our wages, healthcare and retirement options with a budget set by the legislature. Higher ed is political.

How, then, can we avoid being involved in politics?

Politics is our opportunity to do better for ourselves and for higher ed generally. If we elect politicians who support us and higher ed, we'll do better. If the guys who don't support us and don't support education win, we do worse.

We influence politics by voting, but we can also impact the system in a fundamental and positive way by joining CAPE, our Union's political action committee. CAPE works for us by interviewing and endorsing candidates, researching important political issues, tracking the voting records of politicians and giving us the information we need to make informed political choices. The people who join CAPE play a direct and immediate role in who and what our Union supports. And that work impacts all of us every day, and especially so when we negotiate our Union contract and work for funding university programs.

Every Union member can join CAPE and see that their point of view gets expressed and heard. Everyone who joins CAPE gets an automatic tax credit; in most cases our CAPE contributions are fully refunded at tax time. We basically loan the Union money to defend us and we get the money back later. The cost of joining CAPE is minimal and the rewards can be almost overwhelming.

So, fill out the enclosed membership application if you're not already a Union member and be sure to check the purple CAPE box and send the form in. If you are already a member, check the CAPE box and sign the form and send it in. If you're already a CAPE member, please increase your contribution.

We will have a tough political year ahead of us.

Everyone counts, every voice needs to be heard. Please join CAPE and be a part of the positive solution.

See—this really is easy.

## **Member Interviews: Bryan Feyerherm, Valley Library**

We're starting this new series to give you a chance to get to know members you might not be able to meet in person, and to show how our members' work makes a difference at OSU.

*So, Bryan, tell us a little about yourself--how long have you worked at OSU? Where do you work and what do you do? How does your job serve the students and OSU?*

I have worked for OSU for about 18 years at the Kerr/Valley Library. I am a Library Technician 2 and work in Circulation for the Undergraduate Learning and Library Information Access (ULLIA) department. I do a variety of tasks but spend most time working the Circulation desk in the evenings and weekends. We serve the university and our patrons by providing access to library materials and library building services and are always seeking to improve our ability to serve our patrons. We also work with other library units to give our patrons the best service we can and to allow the library to be as useful and helpful as possible. I consider myself fortunate to work in an academic environment in a library setting and mostly enjoy the people I am able to serve and work with. It is a very dynamic workplace.

*I know you're a Union member and have been active—you were on strike in '95, and you've helped us with our website, you come to rallies and attend meetings, you're a CAPE contributor. How do you feel about the Union or unions in general?*

I believe unions are still necessary in today's world to give a voice to non-management employees. I dislike the "us vs. them" attitude we sometimes see as I think we are all working in the end for the same purpose—to do our jobs well, treat everyone fairly, and serve the state of

Oregon, but of course, there are always issues which tend to divide and still need to be addressed. Management deals with many issues at the same time, and may not always see the needs and concerns of the employees they supervise, and unions can help in this regard. Most staff want to do good work, feel good about what they do, know what is expected of them, have new learning opportunities, have a say in matters that concern them and feel supported and appreciated. High morale makes everyone's job a lot easier and enjoyable. I am sure managers would say the same thing for themselves.

*What would you say to people who are uncertain about becoming Union members?*

Without our Union, we would not have many of the rights and benefits we currently enjoy today and many employees throughout the country and world do not have. So, if you are collecting these rights and benefits, you have an obligation to contribute, even in a minor way, like myself. As with many organizations, a few people do most of the work while the rest of us benefit, and they always appreciate a little help and support.

*I know you're a CAPE (Citizen Action for Political Education) contributor. Can you help people understand why the Union needs to be active in politics and why politics is so important to our members as public employees?*

Simple. If your voice is not heard no one will listen. The political world decides the issues that are important to us and we need to be active to make sure our concerns are heard and acted upon. Most of us do not care for the political process very much, but it is how issues get addressed and acted upon. Without the support, we have less of a voice.

*Thanks, Bryan, for allowing us to interview you, and thank you for being such a good Union member!*

## **Why Join the SEIU Political Action Program, CAPE** **—Larry Bulling, Steward**

I've attended three SEIU lobby days at the Oregon Capitol—visiting Oregon senators and representatives and telling them about OSU and higher education funding problems. My son served this year as an honorary page one day for Rep. Sara Gelser.

While there, I always see lots of guys in suits waiting to see legislators. They're paid corporate lobbyists usually seeking something special for the companies they work for. On the day my son delivered memos on the floor of the House of Representatives, the lobbyists were working hard to prevent expanding the Oregon Bottle Bill to include plastic water bottles.

SEIU has only two or three lobbyists. They work for us; they're our suits. They've helped many Oregonians through regulation of the payday loan (shark) industry, opening Oregon's drug purchasing plan to a wider pool of people, and other measures that benefit a wide range of Oregonians.

SEIU also has the Citizen Action for Political Education program (aka CAPE), which supports the campaigns of politicians who promote pro-worker legislation in Salem and Washington, D.C. CAPE is not just about giving money to worker-friendly politicians. It's also union members serving on CAPE committees that hold face-to-face meetings with the candidates and politicians. The committees sound them out on their plans and policies that will influence our families and workplaces. I can't keep up with all that's going on at the Capitol but I can get good advice on what to keep an eye on and who to vote for by consulting SEIU's CAPE committee's recommendations.

All in all, CAPE is an easy way to keep a finger on the politics—love it or hate it—that directly affects us.

For more information on CAPE, see our Local 083 web page at <http://www.seiu503.org/local083/capeintro.cfm>

## **Your Most Important Right** **—Mark Uhden, Chief Steward**

What is the most important right a worker should know to protect him or her self? Weingarten rights! What are your Weingarten rights, you ask?

If you are called into a meeting with a management representative and you have reason to believe that disciplinary action against you may result, you have the right to have a steward present during this meeting. To request representation, read the statement below to the management representative, and contact your steward immediately:

“I request to have a union representative present on my behalf during this meeting because I believe it may lead to disciplinary action being taken against me. If I am denied my right to have a union representative present I will refuse to answer accusational questions and any I believe may lead to discipline.”

Employees sometime confuse the Weingarten rules with the Miranda rules. However there is a big difference between the two rules—under Weingarten employers have NO obligation to inform their employees of their rights to union representation. The employee must ask for union representation in such meetings.

An investigatory interview occurs when:

1. Management questions an employee to obtain information and
2. The employee has a reasonable belief that discipline or other adverse consequence may result from what he or she says.

Not every discussion with management is an investigatory interview. For example, a supervisor may speak to an employee about the proper way to do a job. Even if the supervisor asks the employee questions, this is not an investigatory interview because the use or possibility of discipline is remote.

However, a routine conversation changes character if a supervisor becomes dissatisfied with an employee's answers and takes a hostile attitude. If this happens, the meeting becomes an investigatory interview and Weingarten rules apply:

**Rule 1:** The employee must make a clear request for union representation before or during the interview. The employee cannot be punished for making this request.

**Rule 2:** After the employee makes the request, the employer must choose from among three options. The Employer must either:

- a. Grant the request and delay questioning until the union representative arrives and has a chance to consult privately with the employee.
- b. Deny the request and end the interview immediately.
- c. Or give the employee a choice of:
  - Having the interview without representation (usually a mistake or the wrong choice) or
  - Ending the interview (your best choice if no union steward is coming)

**Rule 3:** If the employer denies the request for union representation, and continues to ask questions, it commits an unfair labor practice and the employee has a right to refuse to answer. The employer may not discipline the employee for such a refusal.

So remember, if you're called to a meeting with management that you think may result in discipline, read the following statement to management before the meeting starts!

"I request to have a union representative present on my behalf during this meeting because I believe it may lead to disciplinary action being taken against me. If I am denied my right to have a union representative present I will refuse to answer accusational questions and any I believe may lead to discipline."

And call your steward!

## **And Your Other Important Rights —Read All About It!**

Our former Chief Steward, Rod Davidson, used to say that we should read the Contract like a novel because behind each Article there was a human story. Think of Hardship Leave (Article 40, sect. 8)—members donating their paid leave to help other members in need. Think of the Layoff language (Article 48)—crafted over the years to help people whose positions have been eliminated. Think of Bereavement Leave (Article 41)—three days of paid leave to help members out during their saddest time.

There's also language about Jury Duty (Article 43)—you get paid to fulfill this obligation of citizenship. Personal Leave Days (Article 39)—three paid days you can use for anything you feel like! Pre-Retirement Counseling Leave (Article 45)—three and a half paid days to "pursue bona fide" counseling for those lucky ones close enough to plan retirement. Differential Pay (Article 20), Contracting Out (Article 13), and then of course there are the old standbys—wages, hours and working conditions, so dear to us all—in your Contract.

And remember, your Contract is a result of hard bargaining by our fellow workers—members elected by members to represent us all at the Bargaining Table. Our Bargaining Team works their hearts out to get the best raises and the best language they can.

So check out your Contract—it's full of your rights and protections! If you don't have a printed copy of the Contract, check the Salem Headquarters website: [www.seiu503.org](http://www.seiu503.org). Click on Contracts in the A–Z list and then choose the Oregon University System Contract. You might be surprised at the human drama behind the language. Take a gander at your Contract and read all about it!

## Union Website Knocks ‘Em Dead!

Thanks to Larry Bulling, Local 083’s Web Worker, our website is the talk of the town! Check it out at <http://www.seiu503.org/local083/>

You’ll find the Local’s calendar of events, items of special interest, officers and stewards, links to other websites, the latest information on CAPE (don’t know what CAPE is? Read the articles in this newsletter and check the web page!) and much, much more.

## Join Us!

Local 083 at OSU represents all Classified OSU employees. We are part of a higher education Union bargaining coalition which includes classified employees working at all other higher education campuses in Oregon. We are also part of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Oregon Public Employees Union (OPEU).

SEIU Local 503, OPEU represents workers in most State agencies, public higher education, a number of county and city governments, private non-profits, and homecare workers.

Special Union trainings, political activities, membership and leadership meetings and social activities are regularly scheduled. All meetings are open to all members. Please check our website for the calendar. And if you haven’t joined us yet, please call one of us and we will get a member application to you! And welcome!

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