

Contract Workers in Vermont and California Make Big Gains in New Union Agreements

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Laguna Niguel, CA and St. Albans, VT



Local 208 and 1008 representatives at a bargaining session in Vermont, from left: Greg Wright, Joe Holmes, Dawn Rabideau, Noemi Dickerhoff, Henri Tran, Bentley Derr, Jeanette Weiland and Lisa Stenta.



At a negotiating session in California, Locals 1008 and 208 were represented by, from left, Bentley Derr, Henri Tran, Kim Lawson, Thuy Nguyen, Bill Crisp and Joe Holmes.

cards in an overwhelming majority and sent a representative to the bargaining table to demand recognition. The contracts include union shop language.

The members of Local 208 and 1008 have made big gains in their second round of contract bargaining since they organized into UE in 2008. The new four-year agreements are the first since a change of employers in April. LongView and FedConsulting now operate, as a joint venture, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service Centers in St. Albans, Vermont and Laguna Niguel, California, replacing Stanley Associates and other subcontractors.

The five-year agreements with LongView and FedConsulting bring 2.5 percent raises each year, plus annual incentive bonuses of 1 percent at LongView and .5 percent at FedConsulting. Workers on night shifts will also receive a 77-cent hourly shift differential.

Included in the settlement are expanded rights for those workers at the Vermont center who do not yet have a union. This provision clears the path for a quicker NLRB election if workers want to join the union. Through the bargaining process the union also added more than 50 formerly-unrepresented employees to Local 1008 in Laguna Niguel. These workers signed union

Workers with one year of service or more can contribute to a 401(k) account and receive an employer match as follows: If the employee contributes 3 percent of wages the employer matches 3 percent of wages; employee contributes 4 percent, employer matches 3.5 percent; employee contributes 5 percent, employer matches 4 percent.

Paid time off provisions protect and guarantee the existing five paid sick days annually and allow carryover of 40 hours to the next year. Sick leave can be used for the employee's illness or that of a child or others designated by state law, or for doctor and dental appointments. It can be used in one-hour increments. The new agreement also guarantees one paid personal day a year, which can also be taken in one-hour increments. The contract maintains the existing vacation schedule and allows rollover of vacation time into the next years. Vacation can be taken in half-day increments. Also maintained is the existing provision for three days bereavement leave, with the option for the worker to take vacation time if additional bereavement time is needed.

Seniority is defined as the worker's length of service at the service center. In a reduction in forces the employer must lay off temporary and probationary employees first, then regular employees in reverse order of seniority. The contract allows limited bumping, and provides up to one year recall rights. The employer must post job openings and fill them on the basis of qualifications and seniority. In cases of temporary assignments to another facility, the employer will first ask for volunteers, and then select employees in reverse order of seniority.

No employee can be disciplined or discharged without just cause, and the contracts include a good grievance procedure and a provision allowing stewards to represent workers on paid work time.

The contracts specify which employee benefits are paid with health and welfare allotments and which are optional, and requires the companies to maintain benefits "substantially" the same during the term of the contract, or bargain with the union over any proposed changes.

The new contracts protect leaves of absence under state law, and military, jury duty and union leave. On a case-by-case basis employees may be permitted to take unpaid leave, with the employer required to apply a standard of "reasonableness" to such requests.

As reported in the previous issue of the UE NEWS, the union achieved an important breakthrough when the new employers agreed to negotiate the Vermont and California contracts together, and to alternate bargaining sessions between the two locations, with a union bargaining committee composed of representatives of both locals. But membership support was very important throughout the process. Members in California were especially involved, with a "UE Solidarity Committee" active on all three shifts. Members wore union T-shirts on designated days with the slogan "Solidarity Coast to Coast - Locals 208 and 1008." There were also sticker campaigns with the slogans "Worker Rights Are Human Rights", "Respect Our Rights", and "Fair Contract Now." Delegations of workers visited the bargaining table, and the company was particularly surprised when a large group of swing-shift workers showed up around midnight at the final, late-night negotiating session. Workers on that same shift in California also mounted a very effective petition drive against an abusive boss, which resulted in the boss being removed from their shift.

"It is a good contract," says **Jeanette Weiland**, Local 208 president. "We got off to a slow start but thanks to the perseverance of our negotiating committees and the company's willingness to compromise, we reached a good four-year contract." **Greg Wright**, Local 208 chief steward and bargaining committee member, added, "We're proud of our contract and we are looking forward to the day our co-workers join us in UE."

Dawn Rabideau, a bargaining committee member from Local 208, added, "Thanks to the UE and the entire negotiating committee on both the east and west coast, we have an outstanding union contract with yearly raises, 401(k) match, and sick and personal time for the next four years. We also have the protection of just cause and the grievance procedure. Everyone I have talked to at work is very pleased with our results."

"Everybody is happy with the contract," says **Thuy Nguyen**, a Local 1008 bargaining committee member. "LongView is better than the old company. Our committee was very good. We worked together well, and I learned a lot from negotiations."

The union bargaining committee included, from Local 208, President Jeanette Weiland, Greg Wright, **Joe Holmes**, Dawn Rabideau, and **Lisa Stenta**; and for Local 1008, President **Bentley Derr**, **Henri Tran**, **Naomi Dickerhoff**, **Bill Crisp** and Thuy Nguyen. They were assisted by International Representative **Kimberly Lawson** and Field Organizer **Fernando Ramirez**.