

Open Hand goes union-bargaining under way

TL stalwart latest major nonprofit to join the SEIU

By MARK HEDIN

AT PROJECT OPEN HAND on Polk Street, representatives of about 100 newly unionized staff are sitting down with the nonprofit's management to hammer out a contract for their work of providing "meals with love" to seniors and people in poor health.

Staff serve and deliver hundreds of thousands of meals each year, and provide groceries and other services. In November, they voted more than 4-to-1 to join SEIU Local 1021, aligning with more than a dozen other Tenderloin nonprofit organizations and institutions, including the Asian Art Museum, in opting for SEIU 1021's union representation.

It's the latest example of a labor movement that, in the Bay Area at least, calls to mind Mark Twain's famous line: "Reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated."

SEIU officials told The Extra that the union is regularly approached by workers at both profits and nonprofits, hopeful that union organizing and negotiation assistance will bring them a better deal. The union gets "a handful of calls a week at least," said SEIU first contract organizer Jacqueline Carvallo.

Besides Project Open Hand, Carvallo reported,

over the past five years, SEIU 1021 has organized Larkin Street Youth Services, Baker Places' relief workers, Bayview Hunters Point Foundation, Mission Hope, and Asian Community Mental Health Services and Child, Family and Community Services' Head Start, both in the East Bay.

These seven complement an SEIU roster of District 6 nonprofits that include: Hyde Street Clinic, Westside Community Services, ARC of San Francisco, Catholic Charities, Community Housing Partnership, Huckleberry Youth Programs, Horizons Unlimited, Tenderloin Housing Clinic, Progress Foundation, Family Service Agency, Conard House and dozens more throughout the Bay Area — for instance, the Exploratorium, YMCA, Native American Health Center and AIDS Project of East Bay, to name a few more.

And Hamilton Family Services workers have been represented by the Office & Professional Employees International Union, OPEIU Local 3, since 2014.

These are the region's big human services nonprofits with seven- to eight-figure budgets and more than 100 employees. They are the sturdy fabric of the safety net, and many marshal cadres of committed volunteers.

Another category of institution is going union: not-for-profit colleges. California College of the Arts, Dominican University of California in Marin County, Mills College in Oakland, the San Francisco Art Institute and St. Mary's in Contra Costa are all SEIU shops, too, and two more are about to vote on joining up, Carvallo said.

Project Open Hand's roots go back to the early days of the AIDS epidemic, when founder Ruth Brinker, after observing a

"The people on the front lines really have the perspective."

Jesse Hunter
BAKER PLACES

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Remembering the early days in S.F.

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CENTRAL CITY



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NEIGHBORHOOD POWER



LISE STAMPELLI

Mike Miller, founder of the influential Mission Coalition Organization in 1968 who trained with America's premier progressive organizer, Saul Alinsky, reads from the "People Power" book about Alinsky's work that Miller co-edited, which prompted the reunion March 3 at the Laborers International Union Hall in the Mission District.

BACK TO THE ROOTS

Old guard of '70s organizers reunite with eye on future

By LISE STAMPELLI

PROGRESSIVES WHO CUT their community organizing teeth on 1970s issues discovered March 3 that their tactics not only are still viable but can be models for much younger people wanting to tackle contemporary concerns with citizen armies.

The event — part reunion, part book celebration for "People Power, the Community Organizing Tradition of Saul Alinsky," edited by Aaron Schutz and Mike Miller — was held at the Laborers International Union Hall in the Mission District.

Former organizer and now political consultant Tony Fazio introduced Miller, 79, to the more than 60 gathered progressives, young and senior. Native son, graduate of Lowell High School, Noe Valley resident, Miller remains, said Fazio, "an amazing resource" and the West Coast authority on community organizing.

Miller began organizing fellow undergrad students at UC Berkeley in the late 1950s, and in '66 in graduate school he met Saul Alinsky, the community organizing patriarch. Alinsky later mentored Miller, who went on to form the Mission Coalition Organization and directed it from 1968-71.

Miller has lectured on political science and urban studies at Berkeley, Stanford and San Francisco State, and authored or edited three books before the new "People Power," a commentary and collection of interviews and period essays

on Alinsky's teachings and organizing efforts from 1955 to 1980. Alinsky had begun his work in poor Chicago neighborhoods in the 1930s and in 1940 created the Industrial Areas Foundation, a national network to train community leaders still operating today.

And, especially through Miller, Alinsky has put his stamp on community organizing efforts in San Francisco.

Miller, a natural storyteller, told his audience, "No need to take notes." He'd compiled and distributed a one-sheet, the essentials of an Alinsky primer: Democracy works best when informed by the social justice teachings of the world's great religions; self-governing multi-issue, diverse organizations are more powerful than any one member and can challenge any established power, city hall, corporation or state capital.

Miller illustrated the process, playing to the local crowd, by describing the founding of the Mission Coalition Organization. Residents had defeated a city-sponsored urban renewal program for the Mission in '67, fearing it would destroy the character of their neighborhoods and social ties built over generations, only to be faced with the federally funded Model Cities project the following year.

The residents met with Alinsky to discuss how to become an official Alinsky-directed project, as they believed it was their best bet to stop Model Cities. First they were required to raise three years of operating expenses, the time it took, Alinsky said, to optimally build an organization. The community couldn't raise the funds, but Miller, at the time working as an Alinsky organizer in Kansas, agreed to return to his hometown to lead the project.

It became, Miller said, the project he is

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