

Hospital Union Members Scheduled To Vote This Week On Proposed Three-Year Pact at Watsonville Hospital

Hospital Officials Back Off Previous Decision To Withhold Some Financial Records From Union Representatives

by Mary Bryant

On March 10, a federal mediator met with representatives from Local 250 and Watsonville Community Hospital to assist members of the respective bargaining units in reaching a contract settlement. Three days prior to the all-day session, members of Local 250 authorized their bargaining unit delegates to issue a 10-day strike notice, a notice that is required by federal law

in the case of labor stoppages at acute-care facilities. Local 250 represents hospital laboratory, pharmaceutical, medical and surgical technicians working at Watsonville Community Hospital. Local 250's membership at Watsonville Hospital does not include registered nurses.

Local 250 labor representative Ed Brown characterized the on-going talks as becoming "increasingly bitter" in a press release issued after a flood-drenched press conference produced a no-show by most

local media. However, after the hospital negotiators put their final offer on the table late in the evening on March 10, Watsonville Hospital Spokeswoman Cory Allen said that members of the Local 250 unit might want to take another look.

"At the end of the evening, the hospital presented its final offer to the union which consisted of 12.75 percent economic package over three years. That included across the board increases with some special wage adjustments for certain job

classifications," said Allen.

Allen said the wage adjustments included increasing the set pay rates of some select categories of employees beyond the "across the board" wage increases.

Among the categories of employees receiving special adjustments are surgical, emergency department and pharmaceutical technicians.

Allen added that she believed the hospital's offer was particularly competitive in a community where unemployment runs 24 percent and health care industry layoffs are common.

Butch Cole, a Local 250 member and hospital worker said that the unit's members were scheduled to vote on the offer on March 23. Cole reported that the unit's negotiators were not recommending Local 250 workers accept the offer, and instead were advising hospital union members to vote to authorize their negotiators to continue talks. To date, hospital and union representatives have met on seven occa-

sions.

Cole remained "optimistic" that his group would reach a settlement in advance of any labor action.

Watsonville Hospital's Allen also reported that the hospital's president had decided to release public records on employee compensation to union members. An earlier refusal to release the full contents of Internal Revenue Service Form 990 had provoked written protests to the IRS by Local 250 members, along with an attempt to convene a press conference citing the hospital's refusal to release the public document as evidence of an unresponsive attitude among hospital executives when it came to bargaining.

As part of the hospital's not-for-profit qualification with the IRS, hospital staff must keep on file and make public upon request specific information about hospital's financial activity including the annual salaries of the top paid hospital employees. □