

Pro-union hourly workers picket Rivers Casino

Written by Administrator
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Hourly workers at Pittsburgh's Rivers Casino marched closer to forming a union on Thursday, as they picketed outside the North Shore property and attempted to deliver a petition to top executives.

After two years of efforts, the Steel City Casino Workers Council said it has collected signatures of more than two-thirds of the casino's roughly 800 hospitality employees. Members of the organizing committee said they slipped copies of the petition beneath locked doors outside the casino's executive offices.

"The message is there," said Hannah Taleb, 26, of the North Side, who has worked for nearly three years as a slots attendant.

Patrons using valet service arrived to find on their left the casino, with its main entrance cloaked in large signs reading "Voted Best Place to Work" from a 2014 employee survey conducted by the Pittsburgh Business Times. To their right, around 100 protestors carried pickets and chanted in unison.

Joining off-duty Rivers workers in the protest were other local labor unions, including Unite Here, Teamsters and Steelworkers, local pro-labor community groups and workers from Rivers Casino Des Plaines outside Chicago and SugarHouse Casino in Philadelphia.

City Councilwoman Darlene Harris also marched.

"When the casinos wanted to come to Pittsburgh, they promised the moon and green shoes," Harris said. "These people have a right to organize. They deserve fair wages and hospitalization."

"Rivers Casino is proud to have been voted one of Pittsburgh's 'Best Places to Work' by our team members, and we respect their rights to choose whether to be represented by a union," said casino spokesman Jack Horner. "So far, the majority of our team members have chosen to

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remain independent.”

This was at least the fourth picket outside Rivers since Steel City Casino Workers Council formed in April 2013 in an effort to create a labor union for hourly employees that provide hospitality services – a group that includes food and beverage staff, cashiers, valets, janitors, maintenance workers and others.

Their effort does not include management, table-game dealers or security personnel. Rivers employs around 1,700 people; it calls them team members.

About two dozen maintenance workers last month became Rivers' first unionized workforce. They elected Greenfield-based International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 95, as their collective-bargaining representative, according to the National Labor Relations Board.

No such elections are on the horizon for the Casino Workers Council, said spokesman Jon Scolnik.

“It's time for this casino to make a choice – to either respect workers' rights or to continue this conflict,” Scolnik said. “We are going to keep fighting. But overall, things are not moving in the right direction.”

The NLRB's Pittsburgh Regional Office scheduled a hearing for June regarding allegations that a manager in November interrogated and threatened employees about their union membership.

In 2011 and 2013, NLRB officials cited Rivers for other issues involving unionization attempts.

For Taleb, the slots attendant, forming a union means making Rivers a better place to work by creating more equitable pay, improving workplace policies and establishing job security.

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“I am a good employee,” Taleb said. “But the reality about Rivers is that anyone could lose their job any day.”

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