

Living wage jobs scarce in Central Oregon

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Says Searching for Work That Pays: 2007 Job Gap Study

When it comes to finding a good job in Central Oregon, the numbers just don't add up. For every job opening that pays a living wage in Oregon, there are as many as 20 job seekers. These are the findings of the annual study *Searching for Work That Pays: 2007 Northwest Job Gap Study*, released today by the Northwest Federation of Community Organizations (www.nwfco.org).

The study compares the number of available living wage jobs to the number of job seekers and calculates the percentage of available living wage jobs, using data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The organization defines a living wage as a wage that "allows families to meet basic needs such as food, housing, utilities, transportation, health care, child care, clothing and other personal items, some savings, and taxes--without public assistance. It also provides some ability to deal with emergencies and plan ahead."

In Oregon, 84 percent of open jobs pay less than a living wage for a household of three, a single adult with two children. A living wage for this household is \$23.40 an hour. Seventy-two percent of open jobs pay less than a living wage, \$18.48 an hour, for a working adult with one child. Only 59 percent of open jobs pay a living wage, \$11.38 an hour, for a single worker with no dependents.

"When families are unable to earn living wages, says the report, "many are forced to make impossible choices between adequate health care, balanced nutrition, and paying bills."

Or, in the case of Bend Area Transit (BAT) employees, they vote for union representation to improve their living standards, says Michael Funke, organizer for Central Oregon Jobs with Justice, a labor-community coalition of 20 unions and community groups and over 250 members.

"Many BAT workers have families to support," Funke notes. "But their wages top out at about \$13 an hour--well below the living wage needed to support a family. That's one of the reasons a majority of BAT employees voted to join Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757, which represents public transit workers in communities across Oregon."

More information about the Job Gap in Oregon is available at www.nwfc.org, the web site of the Northwest Federation of Community Organizations. Facts specific to Deschutes County are available here.

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