



Engineers Seeking To Unionize At Foxwoods

Food workers could be next to try and organize

By [Patricia Daddona](#) Published on 10/2/2007

Following the lead of the United Auto Workers, the International Union of Operating Engineers is trying to organize about 200 workers into a union at Foxwoods Resort Casino.

The union, which has a Local 30 branch in Stamford, has been focused for the past month or so on collecting signatures on union-authorization cards from maintenance engineers at Foxwoods, said Rich Bonzani, the union's director of organizing for the Northeast region. He hopes to file a petition for an election with the federal government in another month's time, he said.

The United Auto Workers union on Friday petitioned the National Labor Relations Board to hold a vote on a union of as many as 3,000 table game and poker dealers at Foxwoods, citing declining wages, benefits and raises that didn't fully materialize.

Bonzani says the Foxwoods engineers have expressed the same concerns as the dealers.

If successfully organized, the group would include "stationary" engineers at Foxwoods, including locksmiths, plumbers, electricians, painters, maintainers of heating and cooling units and the like, said Bonzani. Construction engineers would be excluded.

"The spirits are high and we are building momentum," said Bonzani. "The UAW petition shows the employees (that) other people in the same workplace are interested and see the need for a union. (As) Foxwoods has become a big business they've forgotten about their employees. It's time for employees to have a voice on the job."

In February, a federal appeals court ruled labor laws apply to the nation's Indian tribes.

The Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation, which owns and operates Foxwoods, maintains federal labor laws do not apply to the tribe, which is recognized as a sovereign nation by the federal government. Tribal Spokesman Bruce MacDonald said Monday the tribe doesn't believe it needs a third party to negotiate employer-employee matters.

“We've heard rumors that there might be interest on the part of other unions, but this is the first indication that someone is indeed making an attempt to organize another block of workers besides dealers,” Mac Donald said. “We stick to our position and we don't feel a union is needed here. We feel we're an employee-friendly place.”

Bonzani said workers initially contacted the UAW, which referred the matter to the IUOE.

Workers “wanted us to get involved because the maintenance workers are all skilled workers and without them the casino does not keep going day to day,” he said.

Bonzani hopes to file not only the necessary 30 percent of signed authorization cards calling for an election, but as much as 65 percent, he said.

“That just shows strength in the union,” he said.

Brian Petronella, vice president of the Local 371 United Food & Commercial Workers International Union, said Friday he would soon join the UAW in its organizing efforts by starting to unite food workers at Foxwoods.

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