

LABOR SCENE

Menorah nurses retain union as bargaining agent

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On Nov. 20, the area's nurses union gained a victory when nurses at Menorah Medical Center in Overland Park voted to retain their bargaining agent.

The two-day election was a pivotal moment for the local nurses union. The vote was 133-103 to keep the bargaining representation, according to hospital and union officials. The hospital had more than 250 registered nurses eligible to vote.

The local union, now called National Nurses United/National Nurses Organizing Committee, is an affiliate of the California Nurses Association. Earlier this year, the new bargaining group replaced the previous version of Nurses United, which was part of the American Federation of Teachers' health care division.

Last spring, nurses at Centerpoint Medical Center in Independence overwhelmingly voted to oust Nurses United as their bargaining agent. That was followed by the union changing its affiliation to the group formed by the California Nurses Association, the biggest union representing registered nurses in the country.

Despite the change, nurses at Lee's Summit Medical Center in October voted by a smaller margin to remove National Nurses United. However, the union has filed objections to the election results.

But Menorah nurses had a different reaction, retaining their bargaining unit. "We're very happy the nurses at Menorah have decided they want to grow with their new union," said Julie Perry, organizer with the labor group.

More than 30 percent of Menorah nurses had signed a petition in July seeking a union decertification election, the hospital said.

“While we are grateful our nurses had the chance to be heard, we are extremely disappointed with the outcome of the election,” said Steven D. Wilkinson, Menorah’s president and chief executive.

Menorah, Lee’s Summit and Centerpoint are all owned by HCA Midwest Health System, the area’s largest operator of hospitals. Menorah nurses have had union representation since December 2000.

The National Labor Relations Board continues to investigate the union’s objections to the Lee’s Summit election.

Perry said the union would remain the legal representative of about 150 Lee’s Summit nurses during the investigation. The union is hoping for a new election if the labor agency upholds the union’s objections, she said.

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