



Union presents PMMC with petition for fair contract

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POTTSTOWN — The union representing workers negotiating for a contract at Pottstown Memorial Medical Center arrived at a hospital board meeting Monday night with a 400-signature petition calling for a fair contract.

Under the headline "quality care and quality jobs at Pottstown Memorial Medical Center," the petition asks for "quality, affordable healthcare, secure retirement and a fair wage increase."

According to a release from SEIU Healthcare, the petition was presented at the board meeting by about 70 workers and members of the community, including Mayor Sharon Valentine-Thomas.

Debra L. Bennis, director of marketing and community relations, released the following prepared statement in response when contacted by The Mercury:

"Pottstown Memorial Medical Center is currently engaged in contract negotiations with SEIU. Because the hospital respects the collective bargaining process, we believe discussions with the union should take place strictly at the bargaining table. We will not discuss specific details of these negotiations; however, we remain committed to good-faith bargaining, we respect all of our employees whether represented by a union or not, and we sincerely hope a mutually acceptable agreement will be reached soon."

The union represents 285 hospital workers and the current 30-month contract was ratified in 2007 and expired on Aug. 31.

However, it has been extended as negotiations continue.

The hospital is owned by Brentwood, Tenn.-based Community Health Systems, which purchased the former public hospital for \$80 million in 2003.

The union has been active in making public its positions on the negotiations and last month held a rally Wednesday at Sunnybrook Ballroom, across the street from the hospital,

In a release sent out last month, the union noted that "CHS made \$218.3 million in after-tax profits in 2008 and their earnings were up 24 percent in the second quarter compared to the same period one year ago."

That release also noted, "Community Health Systems has proposed increasing health care costs for their Pottstown employees by as much as 400 percent at a time when millions across the country are struggling with health care costs, a leading cause of bankruptcies."

Currently, employees contribute about 10 percent of the cost of health care premiums. Dollar costs differ depending on whether employees are insuring a family or a single individual.

The next negotiation date has been set for Nov. 3.