

Union ratifies labor deal with Oak Ridge hospital

By [News Sentinel staff](#)

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OAK RIDGE — Union workers at Methodist Medical Center of Oak Ridge have ratified a labor contract that averts a potential strike.

“It passed by a vote of 92 percent,” said Mark Naccarato, spokesman for the Service Employees International Union, which represents the workers. “This was a higher rate of participation than we had on the last contract vote three years ago.”

Union negotiators and officials from Methodist Medical Center had reached a tentative agreement Wednesday affecting nearly 1,030 workers at the Oak Ridge hospital. Tonight’s vote ends a series of negotiations that have gone on for nearly two months.

“We are happy with tonight’s vote and believe this new two-year contract will enable Methodist to move forward in keeping patient care and employee satisfaction our top priorities,” said Mike Belbeck, Methodist Medical Center president and chief administrative officer. Naccarato said Methodist Medical Center is the only East Tennessee hospital with a unionized work force.

Hospital spokeswoman Crystal Jordan said the hospital’s proposal called for a wage increase “consistent with the market” and a “modest increase” in employee insurance premiums.

Two units are covered by the contract — one for rank-and-file employees that include licensed practical nurses, technicians and secretaries, and the other for registered nurses. Naccarato said about 65 percent of the hospital’s nurses are union members, while 55 percent of the other workers belong to SEIU Local 205.

All told, more than 1,000 people work at the hospital. Negotiations have been under way since early September, and the current contract had been extended twice. The second extension expires at midnight.

More details as they develop online and in Saturday’s News Sentinel.