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### Unhappy guards plan 'welcome' for Art Museum chief

**They will state their case for a union, though Timothy Rub will not have arrived.**

By Stephan Salisbury  
Inquirer Culture Writer

On Sept. 6, a welcoming party will be held for Timothy Rub, new head of the [Philadelphia Museum of Art](#) - though he will not actually be there. He doesn't begin his tenure until Sept. 23, after finishing up as director of the Cleveland Museum of Art.

No matter. The gala will take place anyway, though not in the galleries of the temple at the end of the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. Chablis will not be poured. Canapes will not be passed.

This bash will unfold outside, on the museum steps, with the New York Rude Mechanical Orchestra providing entertainment and a number of the museum's security officers explaining the program's substance.

They want a union.

"We want to get at least living wages," said Jennifer Callazo, an Army veteran of the Afghan conflict who has worked at the museum since early summer. Like her colleagues, she is paid \$10.03 an hour. The guards say a promised 25-cent-an-hour raise was canceled in June, deemed too costly in these hard times.

"We just want to be recognized as a union. They're acting like we're trying to blow it up."

Callazo is an employee of AlliedBarton, a private security company based in Conshohocken. AlliedBarton holds most of the major security contracts in the Philadelphia region, supplying about 80 percent of the guards to such city-based institutions as the [University of Pennsylvania](#) and Temple University.

The Art Museum paid the company \$4 million to supply about 130 guards in 2006, according to the museum's 2007 tax return, making AlliedBarton its largest nonprofessional contractor by far.

For more than two years, guards have attempted to organize a local union, the Philadelphia Security Officers Union, to negotiate better wages, affordable health care, and other benefits.

Workers say both AlliedBarton and the Art Museum have been unresponsive.

Rub, currently in Cleveland, declined to comment, and the Art Museum's interim president, Gail Harity, was out of town and unavailable, according to a museum spokeswoman, Elisabeth Flynn.

Flynn wrote in an e-mail, "The Museum is contracted with AlliedBarton, who employs the security guards. It is our understanding that their compensation package is competitive."

In another e-mail, an AlliedBarton spokesman wrote that the company "has always supported an employee's right to choose to be represented by a union through a secret ballot election supervised by the National Labor Relations Board. We have constructive relationships with unions representing some of our officers in a number of locations across the country."

The spokesman also said that AlliedBarton had made no promise to increase hourly wages by 25 cents.

"No such offer was ever made to any AlliedBarton employee assigned to the Philadelphia Museum of Art," the spokesman wrote. "AlliedBarton is proud of the fact that we offer competitive wages, and offer medical, dental and vision plans, partially subsidized by AlliedBarton, and a 401k Plan with company match. We will continue to be responsive to the needs of our employees at the Museum."

Fabricio Rodriguez, an organizer with Philadelphia Jobs With Justice, which is helping the guards' union effort, said museum guards have unsuccessfully sought to establish a dialogue with the museum for some time, finally delivering a letter to Harity in June asking that she sit down with museum guards to talk about their situation.

She responded in a letter last month, Rodriguez said, saying that the museum would not interfere in AlliedBarton's relationship with its employees. Rub has not answered similar requests for meetings, Rodriguez said.

Juanita Love, 54, who works for another security firm, Roman Sentry, which supplies some of the museum's guards, said that the firms "will do whatever the client wants them to do to keep the contract."



Timothy Rub's tenure as head of the museum begins Sept. 23. Gail Harity has been interim president.

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She noted that "the Art Museum pays AlliedBarton and AlliedBarton pays" the guards. Love, who worked regularly at the Art Museum in the past, is now based at a residential complex.

Last fall, she pointed out, museum security officers demonstrated publicly in an effort to get some paid sick days (they had none). Following the demonstration, three paid sick days were granted. Organizers believe museum officials were embarrassed by the publicity and interceded. A similar situation occurred at Temple and Penn, organizers said, when guards' pay was raised last year to \$15 an hour.

Love is active in the museum unionization effort. Like other officers interviewed, she said guards receive low pay and have access only to a health plan that is not affordable.

"It's a really hard job. It's grinding," she said. Turnover is high and hours are not assured.

"They want respect, but the respect doesn't go both ways," she said, calling the Art Museum "the most unprofessional place I've ever worked in my life."

Thomas Robinson, a security guard at the University of Pennsylvania and an organizer of the union, said that a majority of museum guards had signed cards expressing their desire for a union.

"It doesn't matter what site you go to, whether it's UPenn or Temple or PMA, we all see the same issues," he said. "We are all tired of being disrespected by the employer. We are the low man on the totem pole. They viewed us and still view us as replaceable pieces. . . . No one has stood up and fought for us."

Robinson said that under the Employee Free Choice Act, now before Congress, the guards would be able to hold a site-specific union election based on the percentage of sign-up cards already in hand.

Under current law, however, moving forward at this point would be risky, said Rodriguez of Jobs With Justice.

Union organizers have produced a 13-minute video, *Welcoming Change: A Message to Timothy Rub*, directed by David Stuart Randle of the Media Mobilizing Project, in the hope of drumming up support for the union effort. The video has been mailed to 100 local churches and can be viewed at the Jobs With Justice Web site, [www.phillywjw.org](http://www.phillywjw.org).

In the meantime, security officers will continue their union sign-up and educational efforts, they will hold their welcome party, and they will continue to seek a meeting with museum officials, particularly the incoming director, whose security force in Cleveland is unionized.

"We are trying to establish a dialogue," said Callazo. "AlliedBarton has shut the door for us, so let's talk to the client" - the Art Museum.

"We come there to work. The client is allowing this to happen. You want us to protect your art and we want to protect it. I love the art. All we're asking is to be treated fairly."

Contact culture writer Stephan Salisbury at 215-854-5594 or [ssalisbury@phillynews.com](mailto:ssalisbury@phillynews.com).

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