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# LOCAL NEWS



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## Art Museum guards petition to unionize

By Stephan Salisbury  
Inquirer Culture Writer

Security guards at the Philadelphia Museum of Art have formally petitioned the National Labor Relations Board to allow them to unionize as members of the Philadelphia Security Officers Union, an independent group.

Union representatives said yesterday that organizers submitted a petition to the NLRB late Thursday calling for certification and signed by nearly half of those museum guards who are employed by AlliedBarton.

Conshohocken-based AlliedBarton supplies security guards nationwide and holds numerous institutional contracts in Philadelphia. It provides about 130 guards to the Art Museum, for most of the 150-member security force.

The NLRB will determine if the petition is appropriate, with a hearing to be in about 10 days, a board spokesman said. Assuming everything is in order, a formal union certification election would be held about 35 days after that.

Eduardo Soriano-Castillo, organizer with Philadelphia Jobs With Justice, a labor organization assisting the effort, said union representatives were confident they would prevail in an election.

Union representatives and security guards have sought to meet with museum leaders for more than two years, he said, to discuss wages, benefits, and working conditions, but have not been successful.

In July, Gail Harrity, acting head of the museum, told organizers in a letter that the museum was loath to interfere in relations between a subcontractor and its employees.

"We want them to understand that the guards are standing up for their rights as workers," Soriano-Castillo said.

A spokesman for AlliedBarton said yesterday that the company had not seen the filing and had no comment at this time.

Officials at the Art Museum have not seen the petition either, said museum spokesman Norman Keyes.

"The museum respects the freedom of workers to organize in accordance with labor laws and to vote in an NLRB-conducted election," Keyes wrote in an e-mail message.

"The museum greatly appreciates the services provided by AlliedBarton and all of its employees who are assigned to duties at the museum," Keyes continued, adding that "the employer-employee relationship that exists between AlliedBarton and its workforce is one that we respect. We do not wish to interfere with that relationship or to meet with AlliedBarton's employees."

Fabricio Rodriguez, Jobs With Justice executive director, said the 45 days leading up to the election could resemble "trench warfare."

The museum soon will see a changing of the guard. Timothy Rub, currently director of the Cleveland Museum of Art, will assume his duties as the new head of the Art Museum on Sept. 23.

Cleveland museum security guards are unionized. Philadelphia museum guards were unionized municipal workers until the early 1990s, when then-Mayor Ed Rendell privatized security services as a cost-saving measure. The city owns the Art Museum building and provides a subsidy of more than \$2 million annually.

Tomorrow, the guards plan to hold what they are calling a "welcoming party" for Rub on the Art Museum steps. The New York Rude Mechanical Orchestra will appear, and guards will pass out material on their unionization effort.

Jennifer Callazo, a union supporter and museum security guard, said the NLRB filing was necessary: "We're the working poor."

Guards make \$10.03 an hour. According to the museum's tax returns, AlliedBarton received \$4.6 million in fiscal 2008 for security services - by far the museum's largest nonprofessional contract.

"AlliedBarton is getting money from the Art Museum," said Callazo. "But we're poor. We're going to stay poor. This [union effort] is for basic human rights as workers."

Juanita Love, a security guard and union supporter, said she was encouraged by the large percentage of guards who signed union-recognition cards - the union submitted cards signed by 58 of the 130 AlliedBarton museum guards. The NLRB contends that 30 percent of a firm's employees should sign in order to demonstrate a necessary "significant interest." The 58 guards represent about 45 percent of AlliedBarton museum employees.

"That's good," Love said, "because there is a lot of fear here."

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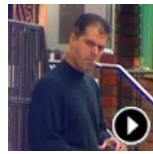
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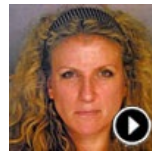
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