

insight

A NEWSLETTER FOR MEMBERS & FRIENDS

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OF PROTEC17 (Formerly PTE Local 17)



**WSDOT members
celebrate opening
of SR-99 tunnel**



On the Cover:

PROTEC17 member Amjad Omar has seen WSDOT's State Route (SR) 99 tunnel project through from beginning to end, including the two-plus years of tunneling using 'Bertha' - the tunnel boring machine (pictured). The tunnel replaces the Alaskan Way Viaduct through downtown and opened to big fanfare in February. Read more on pages 6-7. *Image courtesy of Omar.* ■

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Professional and Technical Employees Local 17

2900 Eastlake Avenue East, Ste. 300
Seattle, Washington 98102
Phone.....206-328-7321
Toll-Free.....800-783-0017
Fax.....206-328-7402
Email.....union@protec17.org
Website.....www.protec17.org

President: Hossein Barahimi
Vice-President: Sean Simmons
Secretary-Treasurer: Cindy Watanabe-Mezs
Trustee: Mary Davis
Trustee: Jessica Garcia
Trustee: Sarah Spotts

Acting Executive Director:
Anthony Davidson
Ext. 121 • anthony@protec17.org

Finance Director: Jackie Miller
Ext. 102 • miller@protec17.org

Operations Director: Anthony Davidson
Ext. 121 • anthony@protec17.org

Union Representatives

- Denise Cobden
Ext. 127 • denise@protec17.org
- Annie Costello
Ext. 120 • annie@protec17.org
- Sarah Lorenzini
Ext. 110 • sarah@protec17.org
- Steven Pray
Ext. 105 • steven@protec17.org
- Ray Sugarman
Ext. 107 • ray@protec17.org
- Shaun Van Eyk
Ext. 133 • shaun@protec17.org
- Brent Wagar
Ext. 131 • lorelei@protec17.org
- Lorelei Walker
Ext. 122 • lorelei@protec17.org
- Rachel Whiteside
Ext. 113 • rachel@protec17.org
- Alexis Young
Ext. 103 • alexis@protec17.org

Union Organizers

- Alisha Gregory-Davis
Ext. 116 • alisha@protec17.org
- Melissa Mafua
Ext. 129 • melissa@protec17.org

Program Directors

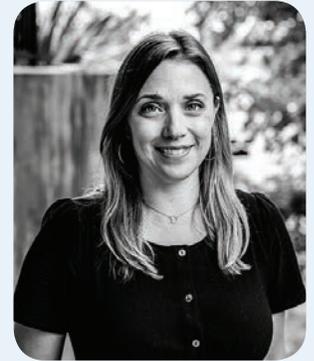
- Communications:** Deidre Girard
Ext. 130 • deidre@protec17.org
- Research:** Elliot Levin
Ext. 128 • elliot@protec17.org
- Strategic Initiatives:** Vince Oliveri
Ext. 108 • vince@protec17.org

Office Staff

- Communications Specialist:** Donna Clarke
Ext. 104 • donna@protec17.org
- Membership Administrator:** Laura Elia
Ext. 123 • laura@protec17.org

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Deidre Girard
Communications Director,
Insight Editor

Going the distance

Here we are, four months into 2019, and it's already been a year filled with great accomplishments and achievements! That's because PROTEC17 members know how to go the distance – to work hard and follow through with driven dedication.

Remember those record-breaking snows in Western Washington back in February? Well, if you live in King County, you can likely thank a PROTEC17 member for helping keep the region safe and moving (p.8). During the unusual two-week period, all hands were on deck, working around-the-clock to ensure that roads were clear, power was turned back on quickly, and emergency crews could get where they needed to go.

Or how about the opening of the new SR-99 tunnel – the two-mile engineering marvel that cuts under downtown Seattle? The dedicated PROTEC17 inspectors at the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) were part of the team that finally brought this eight-year project to fruition in February (p.6-7).

Your union has been working hard on some big issues, too. In conjunction with other unions at the City of Seattle, we recently secured a memorandum of understanding with Mayor Jenny Durkan that expands protections for unions after last year's Supreme Court case dealt a blow (p.12). We also continue to push for worker-friendly legislation and funding for our members' jobs in Salem and Olympia (p.10-11). And we're taking a hard look at what it means to be equitable, and how as an organization we can better address institutional bias to ensure that all of our members feel respected and included in their workplaces and in their union (p.5).

There's always a lot to do, and sometimes it seems like we're working on our long-game. But through teamwork and by keeping our eyes on the prize, we'll get to where we want to be together.

In unity,

A handwritten signature in a cursive script that reads "Deidre". The signature is written in a dark ink on a light background.

Pierce County leaders gear up for bargaining



Your Pierce County leadership team is gearing up for negotiations with the County starting in late summer. The team consists of PROTEC17 members Aaron Erickson, Troy Lee, Mike Manley and Kirstin Thornton (above, left to right).

Pierce County members should keep their eyes peeled for a contract survey in late April/early May, so that we can prioritize your most important issues. Members can also mark their calendars for upcoming chapter meetings where bargaining issues will be discussed. See the PROTEC17 calendar for the details: protec17.org/events. ■

Professional Development Funds still available

In January, PROTEC17 launched our new Professional Development Fund, designed to support our members as they pursue job-related training and programs. There has been tremendous positive response so far, with over \$5,000 awarded to date – and there is still money left in the 2019 fund for your educational pursuits!

To apply for up to \$200/member, visit protec17.org/benefits. If you have questions about the program, please contact Deidre Girard, Communications Director at deidre@protec17.org or 800-783-0017, ext. 130. ■

PROTEC17 scholarship application now available for dependents of members

PROTEC17 is again offering two \$3,000 scholarships this year to dependents of members. One scholarship is geared towards students who will be incoming college freshmen in the fall, and the other is for students who are continuing their education beyond freshmen year. The application is now available on the PROTEC17 website (www.protec17.org/benefits). In it, applicants are asked to demonstrate their academic achievement, community service, extracurricular activities, and educational goals. They are also asked to write a labor-related essay which is reviewed by outside labor educators.

Since the program's inception in 2011, PROTEC17 has awarded 13 scholarships for a total of \$39,000 towards further education for our members' children.

Last year's winners were Charisma Burrows and Joshua Hanigan. Burrows is the daughter of Brett Burrows – a member at the City of Tacoma. She is studying molecular and cellular biology at Johns Hopkins University and planning to enter the medical field.

Hanigan started at Linfield College last fall. As a freshman, he plays on the football

team and is considering a degree in Sports Management – one of his many passions. He is the son of Pierce County member Jim Hanigan.

In their essays, past winners have highlighted how their parent's involvement with PROTEC17 has taught them the value of working together to solve problems, as well as the importance of unions and the broader worker community.

If you are the parent, grandparent or legal guardian of a child heading off or returning to college, please encourage them to apply. The application is available at: protec17.org/benefits. The deadline to apply is July 31, 2019. Winners will be announced in the September/October issue of *Insight* magazine.

If you have any questions about the scholarship program, contact Communications Director Deidre Girard at deidre@protec17.org or 206-328-7321 ext. 130.

The scholarship program is part of our broader member benefits program, which includes a new professional development fund to help with our members' career advancement, and a discount program – coming soon! You can learn more on the same page of our website. ■



Last year's scholarship winners: Charisma Burrows (left), daughter of Brett Burrows, City of Tacoma; and Joshua Hanigan (right), son of Jim Hanigan, Pierce County.

Learn more about our member benefits: www.protec17.org/benefits

WSDOT SR-99 Tunnel opens to fanfare: Once-in-a-lifetime project for proud PROTEC17 members



Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) Chief Inspector Amjad

Omar is one of the few State employees who had the privilege of seeing the State Route 99 (SR-99) tunnel project from start to finish. The work, which started in 2011, is mostly complete, with the tunnel opening to great fanfare in Seattle in February.

“We finally saw the light at the end of the tunnel,” Omar joked.

The tunnel itself is an engineering marvel. At two-miles long, it cuts under the city, running north-south from Queen Anne to the stadiums in the SODO neighborhood, bypassing surface street traffic. It replaces the Battery Street tunnel and the Alaskan Way Viaduct, which had both

been deemed vulnerable to seismic activity after the Nisqually earthquake in 2001. After years of political debate, the tunnel option was decided on in 2009.

Omar, who has been a WSDOT employee and PROTEC17 member for 31 years, worked with 12 of his fellow inspectors at WSDOT to oversee many aspects of the project, including making sure contractors were following the specifications outlined in the plan, and that all work was in compliance with State and Federal law.

The inspectors regularly tested materials and audited random components of the project to ensure that contract work was safe and to-code. They also worked with personnel at the Seattle Department of Transportation, Seattle Public Utilities, Seattle City Light, and King County to

coordinate the vast amount of municipal infrastructure that needed to be accounted for in building the tunnel and demolishing the viaduct.

According to Omar, the reception since the tunnel has opened has been overwhelmingly positive. He said that recently, he and some colleagues were standing outside their office - which is located right at the southbound exit of the tunnel near the stadiums - when a driver coming out of the tunnel rolled down his window, gave them a thumbs up, and yelled ‘good job!’

“Everyone loves it,” said Omar.

Another one of Omar’s duties during the project was to give tours to other State employees and engineers from all over the world who came to see the massive tunnel boring machine affectionately nick-named

WSDOT employees at the groundbreaking ceremony for the tunnel project with former Governor Christine Gregoire. *Courtesy WSDOT.*



Bertha (see cover photo of Omar with Bertha in the background). There was also an office on-site called “Milepost 31” where the public could get information about the tunnel and sign up to take a tour.

At the time of the digging, Bertha was the largest tunnel boring machine in the world. Omar is proud to have been a part of this unique project.

“This kind of project happens maybe once in a career,” he said. “It’s been so rewarding to see the fruits of our labor after working on this project from beginning to end.”

On February 2 and 3, WSDOT held a grand opening party, where the public could walk the two-mile tunnel before it opened to car traffic, and also walk on the viaduct before it was slated for demolition. The event included information booths, a fun run and bike ride, artists, food trucks and other family-friendly fun. Over a 100,000 people were in attendance.

Now that the celebration is over, the focus of the project has shifted to the demolition of the viaduct. Crews will work on three to five blocks at a time, using massive equipment, jackhammers, and specialized tools to slice through the concrete and rebar.

Omar and the other inspectors continue to oversee the viaduct demolition and the remaining finishing touches on the tunnel entrances and exits. The project is slated to be fully wrapped up by spring of 2020.

Funding for the \$3.3 billion Viaduct-replacement project came from a variety of sources including state, federal and local sources, the Port of Seattle, and a new tolling system on drivers using the tunnel, which will start as early as summer 2019.

Once WSDOT is finished with their portion of the Viaduct, the City of Seattle will take over the rebuilding of the waterfront district. After this multi-year project, the waterfront is expected to look quite different, with more greenspace, bike and walking paths, improved surface streets, new businesses, and more. You can visit waterfrontseattle.org to learn more.



PROTEC17 member Amjad Omar in the control room for Bertha – the largest tunnel boring machine at the time of construction for the SR-99 tunnel.

Some of Omar’s favorite things about working for WSDOT include the variety of interesting projects he gets to work on, and the opportunities for advancement. He started his career with the State as a non-permanent Transportation Technician 3 in Olympia in the late 80s, and has worked his way up through the ranks to a Transportation Engineer 3, the highest engineering classification represented by PROTEC17.

Omar also appreciates being a member of a union.

“Unions protect employees and are a resource to solve problems when they arise,” he said. “Not everyone can negotiate for themselves.”

While the tunnel project was an eight-year long endeavour, most of the other dozens of projects Omar has worked on over the years generally last a year or two. One of his other most memorable projects involved working on another engineering marvel – the Interstate 90 floating bridge rebuild in the 1990s.

Omar is proud of his long career at WSDOT and of all of the exciting work he’s had the opportunity to be involved in.

“This kind of project happens maybe once in a career. It’s been so rewarding to see the fruits of our labor after working on this project from beginning to end.”

Amjad Omar,
PROTEC17 member and Quality
Verification Supervisor, WSDOT

When asked what’s next on the horizon, he says he’s looking forward to his final project – retirement – in about three years.

For more information on the SR-99 tunnel and viaduct project, visit: wsdot.wa.gov/Projects/Viaduct. ■

Coldest, snowiest February on record in Western Washington kept King County members busy

The snowstorms in Western Washington this February were absolutely unprecedented. For nearly two weeks, the Puget Sound region was slammed with storm after storm, breaking temperature and accumulation records.

In the typically mild Seattle-metro region, PROTEC17 members in the King County Roads Services Division worked around-the-clock to keep people safe in the snow and ice.

“The Roads Services Division has a robust plan for snow and ice that is thoroughly reviewed in the fall of each year,” said PROTEC17 member Brandy Rettig, who has been with King County for 19 years.

As a Customer Service Administrator, Rettig develops communications for the



PROTEC17 Engineers Jun Wang and Dieu Quach pose for a photo outside of the snowy King County building. *Photos courtesy of member Brandy Rettig, King County.*



PROTEC17 member Jeremy Ferguson assessing storm damage.

“Nearly every single employee of the Roads Division had to switch focus in order to respond as successfully as we did to this event.”

Brandy Rettig,
PROTEC17 Member and Customer Service Administrator, *King County*

division and is responsible for providing accurate and timely information to the public. And with over 1,500 miles of roadway and 182 bridges in the County, there is a lot of ground to cover.

During the two weeks of stormy weather, the helpline received over 7,000 calls – which is astounding when compared to the usual 1,500 calls per month. Callers were reporting power outages, downed trees, and impassable roads.

Then there were the plow drivers and utility workers who worked long hours – in 12-hour shifts for nearly two weeks straight. Also, PROTEC17 Engineers, like Dieu Quach and Jun Wang and, Maintenance Managers, like Jeremy Ferguson, spent their days assessing storm damage and prioritizing workflows.

“Nearly every single employee of the Roads Division had to switch focus in order to respond as successfully as we did to this event,” said Rettig.

The response was coordinated across King County divisions and other agencies too. For example, King County Parks and Solid Waste diverted their trucks and other

equipment to haul salt and necessary supplies. There was also coordination among King County emergency operations and Metro, as well as external agencies like the National Guard, city governments, and neighboring counties.

Rettig, who has also been a PROTEC17 Steward for 17 of her 19 years at the County, is proud of her public service work and the good work her colleagues do everyday for their community.

“In addition to the truly outstanding people I have the honor to work with here at King County, serving the public through local government service fulfills my personal need to contribute to the community in tangible, meaningful and truly beneficial ways,” she said.

Whatever the weather, PROTEC17 members at King County – and all of our members in our other units – go above and beyond to serve the public. Thanks to all of you for keeping us safe during the stormy weather, as well as throughout the year! ■

PROTEC17 members at City of Seattle answer the call when you have questions about your utility bills

More than 2,000 calls come in to the City of Seattle everyday with questions about utilities and city services, and the 84 PROTEC17 members that staff the contact center are the friendly voices on the other end of the line.

The Utility Account Representatives (UARs) are the front line to answer Seattle residents' questions and to resolve issues with electricity, water, sewer, garbage, and more. As customer service experts, they are adept at diffusing difficult situations and directing people to the resources they need.

"Sometimes customers will call in and initially they're really upset," said PROTEC17 member Gina Kim, who has been a UAR 2 for five years.

"Our job is to maintain a level of professionalism, act with empathy and educate our customers. The call often ends with the customer appreciative of the service they received."

The UARs have up to eight calls an hour, depending upon how complicated the question or issue, and average about 37 calls per day - but can have up to 50.



Above: PROTEC 17 members Carol Wellman, Wayne Brandon and Gina Kim in the contact center at the City of Seattle. Below: PROTEC17 member Todd Brown at the walk up window at the Seattle Municipal Tower.

PROTEC17 member and UAR 1 Wayne Brandon likes to think of each call as a 'complicated puzzle' - whether that be helping a customer figure out which size compost bin they need, tracking power outages, or connecting low-income residents with utility assistance programs.

"The best part of my job is finding resolution for my customers," said Brandon, who has been with the City for seven years.

One of the things that PROTEC17 member and UAR 1 Carol Wellman likes best about her job is being able to "make someone's day." Wellman is one of the UARs who answers written communications, including emails and letters.

While they are housed under Seattle Public Utilities, a large percentage of the contract center is funded by Seattle City Light. After City Light switched to automated meter-reading a couple of years ago, there were many more calls and questions about electric bills. Now that the

"The best part of my job is finding resolution for my customers."

Wayne Brandon, PROTEC17 member and Utility Account Representative I, *City of Seattle*

new system is in full swing, the number of contacts has leveled out a bit, and the usage data that is collected is more robust, making it easier to answer people's questions.

After each call, customers are asked to take a survey about the service they received. Most often, the feedback is very positive.

"One time, a customer even tweeted about the great customer service I provided," said Brandon. "That was pretty cool."

Kim summed up the sentiment of our hard-working members in the contact center: "At the end of the day, we're here for our customers - no matter what." ■

Have a story you'd like to share? Contact: deidre@protec17.org

Public Health Legislative Education Day gives WA legislators a glimpse of current issues; regular session ends April 28

 n March 6, Public Health employees and students from across Washington state – including many PROTEC17 members – met in Olympia to help educate their representatives about the important work they do everyday to keep us safe and healthy.

The Washington State Public Health Association (WSPHA) – an organization connecting public, private and community groups to Public Health funding and education issues – organizes the annual event, which PROTEC17 has supported for many years.

While Public Health Legislative Education Day is not a day for public health professionals to directly ask for funding, it is an important opportunity to give legislators – who are often far removed from public health work – a sense and scope of the most important health issues that are affecting the state. From trying to track and contain the measles outbreak in Southwest Washington, to tackling mental health and homelessness issues, to making sure our food and water is safe for consumption, the



PROTEC17 member José Romo (left) with public health students and Representative Bill Ramos (center) who represents the 5th District in Olympia.

work of Public Health often goes unnoticed, yet impacts our lives on a daily basis.

PROTEC17 member José Romo, who has attended the event for many years, said:

“The real success of this day is getting to talk with our State Representatives about the amazing work done by public health members everyday.”

Thanks to our PROTEC17 members from Seattle-King County Public Health and Snohomish Public Health District who shared their stories with their legislators, making this another successful education day.

Meanwhile, the regular session of the legislature is slated to wrap up on April 28 (after this issue went to print). As part of the Public Health Roundtable – a collective of organizations advocating for public health funding and policies – PROTEC17 supported several health-focused legislative priorities, including securing continued funding for core public health services, and creating policies that address e-cigarettes, gun violence and the opioid crisis.

In the last budget biennium (2017), the legislature allocated a one-time \$12 million for core, or foundational, Public Health

services after a successful campaign called *Public Health is Essential*. This year, the ask for on-going core public health services was \$100 million, and the legislature is doing its best to find a way to get public health the funds it needs to do its important work, though funding is likely to fall far short of this figure in the final budget.

Public Health funding is just one of the PROTEC17 priorities this year. Another big priority for our members this year is the approval of funds for the 2019-2021 state employee contract. At the time of this writing, the contracts, as ratified, had been approved by both the House and Senate to be included in the budget, but the entire budget was not ready for the Governor’s desk just yet. Other priorities this session include HB 1575 – a policy bill that protects union dues deduction, post-Janus. As this went to print, it had passed the House and was awaiting approval in the Senate.

If lawmakers need to continue to finalize the budget past April 28 – the last day of the regular session – a special session is likely to be called. Visit our government affairs page on our website to learn the latest: protec17.org/government-affairs. ■



Worker-friendly bills progressing through Oregon legislature

April 9 marked the deadline for bills to progress to work sessions in their respective chambers during the 2019 Oregon legislative session. This deadline provides some protection against surprises later in the session, though there can still be significant changes to legislation in the coming months.

There are several key subjects that PROTEC17 is closely tracking:

PERS Reform Attempts

Maintaining the Public Employee Retirement System (PERS) is a central concern during any legislative session. Several bills have been introduced that would significantly alter the PERS system, including bills to redirect the Individual Account Plan (IAP) and create a new tier of benefits that more closely resembles a 401k defined benefit plan than the current defined contribution model. PROTEC17 continues to closely monitor these bills and participates in the Oregon PERS Coalition in order to defend the benefits that our members rely on for their retirement.

Revenue Discussion

Reforming Oregon's revenue model has been a topic of conversation both in the legislature and at the ballot box for many years, and the 2019 legislature is taking another hard look at the issue. Most often discussed is the method by which corporate and business taxes are distributed. Current conversations revolve around the details of what kind of businesses would bear the most of any reform. PROTEC17 supports changes to the Oregon revenue system that would more equitably spread the burden of taxation to large companies that still pay the lowest corporate tax rate in the country, and we believe that this can be accomplished without cutting benefits to public employees.



Changes to the Public Employee Collective Bargaining Act (PECBA)

Following the Janus Supreme Court decision, many legislatures across the country have taken steps to protect and enhance unions' access to public employees in the workplace. In Oregon, House Bill (HB) 2016 recently passed through the House and is now headed to the Senate. Amongst other things, it would guarantee access to new employees, provide for reasonable paid time for stewards to carry out union duties, and provide for confidential communications between employees and their union representatives. PROTEC17 supports the changes in this bill and hopes to see the Senate move it quickly to the Governor's desk.

Workplace Fairness Act

Oregon currently has one of the shortest statutes of limitations in the country for pursuing legal action against an employer for discrimination or harassment. Senate Bill (SB) 726 seeks to address this, while also restricting an employer's ability to discriminate against new hires who have made such claims against previous employers.

PROTEC17 believes that every Oregonian has a right to work in a workplace free of harassment and we support efforts to make it easier to enforce laws against such behavior.

Prescription Drug Price Controls

Several bills continue to move through the legislature to address the increasing price of prescription drugs and the burden this puts on working families.

Two bills that may move shortly would allow prescription drug importation from Canada mirroring a program that the Vermont legislature adopted last year, and a bill that would require drug companies to give 60 days of notice before significant drug price increases in order to allow providers, insurers, and patients the opportunity to explore other options.

PROTEC17 has supported efforts, including the successful passage of 2018's HB 4005 to address the problem of ballooning prescription drug costs which have taken an ever-increasing amount of scarce public employer benefit dollars in recent years.

PROTEC17 is committed to advocating on behalf of workers' rights and supporting policies that will provide economic fairness to all Oregonians, and we look forward to continuing to work with the Oregon Legislature this year.

For more information updated throughout the legislative session, visit www.protec17.org/government-affairs. ■

For more information, visit: protec17.org/government-affairs

Did you move?
Let us know! 800-783-0017

Labor Victories

Seattle Mayor signs Memorandum of Understanding that better protects unions and union members at the City

Last June, the Supreme Court overturned a 40-year precedent with its ruling in *Janus v. ASCFME*, allowing employees in union-represented positions to opt-out of paying the dues that cover the cost of negotiation, administration and enforcement of union contracts, while still requiring unions to provide representation services.

After the decision, unions across the country worked together to push for state laws that would better protect unions and their members - including in Washington state.

At the City of Seattle, PROTEC17 has been leading a coalition of unions in bargaining additional new language to protect union members, and on April 2, Mayor Jenny Durkan signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), adopting and vastly expanding the pro-union legislation that the Washington State legislature enacted last year.

While state statute now mandates public employers must provide for 30 minutes of paid time for union orientation within



the first 90 days of hiring, the MOU negotiated by PROTEC17 with the City goes much further. The agreement not only allows PROTEC17 to present at all new employee orientations, it also guarantees 30 minutes of additional paid time within the first 30 days of employment for union orientation.

In addition, the City has committed to enforcing PROTEC17's membership cards in exchange for indemnification if the Freedom Foundation or others challenge the validity of the cards. Most importantly, PROTEC17 has secured a full day of paid release time each year for training and

development for stewards and member leaders. The agreement allows for the paid release of the greater of three members or two percent of PROTEC17's members per each City department.

This agreement represents a major victory for PROTEC17 as it modernizes and adapts to a new post-*Janus* world. And, it's a major win for the dedicated PROTEC17 members who work hard every day to serve the public, and who proudly stand together to make sure their co-workers benefit from union membership! ■