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## Graton Casino Workers Vote to Join Union

by Matt Brown

Larry Smith gave a cheer as he signed his union card Tuesday in a conference room at the Graton Resort and Casino.

Smith, who has worked as a porter in the maintenance department since the casino opened just outside of Rohnert Park in November, said unionizing will result in labor practices that are more equitable.

"We want to speak with one voice," he said. "A lot of people are scared to take sick days. We don't want to feel scared."

About 600 gambling, maintenance and food and beverage workers at the new casino, one of Sonoma County's largest service employers, are deciding this week whether to join a union.

Representatives from Unite Here, which represents 100,000 workers at gambling sites in the U.S. and Canada, explained the benefits of the union to off-duty employees Tuesday.

"We help to protect their jobs," said Wei-Ling Huber, president of Unite Here Local 2850 of Oakland. "You want to have transparency, fair rules, security for the long term. When given the choice, people overwhelmingly choose to be represented."

The organizing drive is the result of a deal struck between the union and the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, which owns the casino. Tribal chairman Greg Sarris, who is pro-labor, made the right to unionize a part of the gaming compact he signed with the state and the management agreement with Las Vegas-based Station Casinos.

"I'm very happy to see that the agreement I made is now being fulfilled," Sarris said. "Unions are there to ensure my dream of a more equitable society."

Station Casinos referred questions about the organizing drive to the tribe.

Union reps said that casinos often intimidate employees who try to organize, or discourage them from unionizing. Organizers sometimes have to meet with casino workers in secret, they said.

Overall, about 1,200 people work at the Rohnert Park gambling complex, managed by

Las Vegas-based Station Casinos.

Labor officials said the successful organizing effort is the product of a positive relationship with the Graton tribe.

“This victory is the result of years of work by Sonoma County union members and community leaders, and of the leadership of the Graton Federated Tribes, who have been committed from day one to operating a casino where workers have the freedom to decide about union representation without interference,” Wei-Ling Huber, president of Oakland-based Unite Here Local 2850, noted.

## **UNITE HERE! Local 2850**

East and North Bay's Union for hotel, foodservice, and gaming workers

Dear friends,

Great news - Graton Casino employees have voted overwhelmingly to become union members in an organizing drive aimed at raising standards for workers in Sonoma's lucrative tourism industry.

Workers began signing union cards on June 17; on Friday, July 18, an arbitrator counted the cards and certified that a majority of the employees had voted to join UNITE HERE Local 2850. The union will represent about 600 Casino workers – janitors, waiters, cooks, and gaming workers; over 70% of those workers voted for unionization.

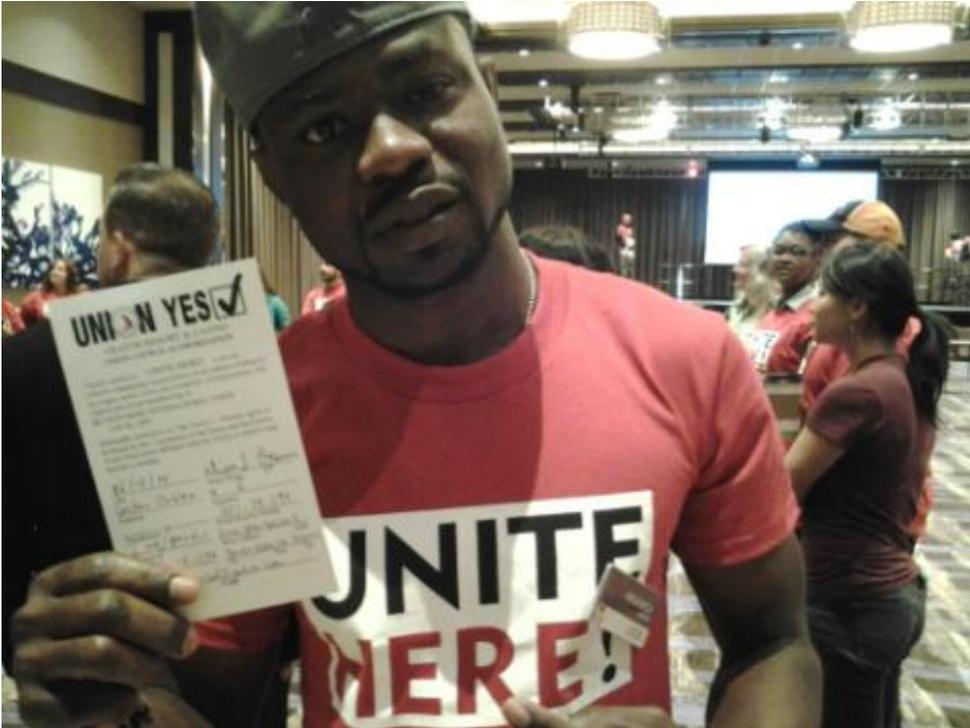
“Tourists spend a lot of money at casinos and restaurants herein Sonoma, but often the workers are living in poverty. We're joining the union because we want to turn that around,” said Graton porter Kathy Winifield. “We need secure jobs that pay decent wages and benefits so we can support our families. It was great to see so many of my co-workers come together to share in that dream.”

The vote occurred under the terms of an agreement between UNITE HERE, a national hospitality and food service workers' union, and the Graton Federated Tribes, who own the casino. The agreement allowed workers to choose freely whether to become union members, without interference from the employer.

“This victory is the result of years of work by Sonoma County union members and community leaders – and of the leadership of the Graton Federated Tribes, who have been committed from day one to operating a casino where workers are have the freedom to decide about union representation without interference,” said Wei-Ling Huber, President of UNITE HERE Local 2850.

The workers and their union representatives will now begin negotiating a first contract

with the Casino. ¡¡¡Si se puede!!!



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