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UNION ORGANIZES PROTEST

Verizon workers allege racism

Rally in Lakewood precedes talks; company calls claims negotiating tactic

By Keith Ruscitti
Staff Writer

LAKEWOOD — With negotiations between union workers and Verizon management on a new collective bargaining contract set to begin Wednesday, more than 200 union members rallied in front of the telecommunication giant's Lakewood office on Monday afternoon, with many complaining about a hostile work environment at several Verizon workshops in the state.

Local 827 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers organized the demonstration on Thursday, according to Eddie Cocliff, the union's business agent. Workers from 10 workshops from as far away as Cherry Hill and Raritan arrived shortly after 5 p.m. for the rally in front of the James Street office.

"I've seen this company go from a good family business to a much more adversarial one," said Cocliff, who started with the company when it was New Jersey Bell in the early 1970s.

A large number of protesters, most of whom were carrying signs, complained about a hostile work environment, intimidation, unwarranted investigations of employees and overt racism at various workshops.

For example, Andre Williams, who works at the Windsor plant in Mercer County, presented photos of racial slurs written at the shop and his work vehicle. He claims management has been apathetic in investigating the graffiti.

"It happened May 18," said Williams. "It's been six weeks now and I've heard nothing."

Verizon spokesperson Lee J. Gierc-

zynski dismissed some of the complaints as a negotiating ploy and said the company is committed to fostering a productive work environment for its workers.

"This isn't really new or even news," said Gierczynski.

"It's common practice for the unions to stage these types of rallies to mobilize the union."

Nonunion workers have complained the union has targeted some midlevel and upper-management personnel for picketing at their homes.

One such incident, which workers confirmed, was a rally staged outside of the Little Silver home of Bob Wolf, a Verizon South Jersey director.

Union members said between 70 and 75 workers attended that rally.

Demonstrators on Monday admitted the rally was timed in part to coincide

with contract talks.

The collective bargaining agreement — three-year deal — is set to expire on Aug. 6.

However, they claim the complaints about the current working conditions are valid. Most of the 20 picketers interviewed said the work environment has begun to deteriorate noticeably within the last year.

"The workers just want to come to work and stop being harrassed," said Robert R. Fuggi Jr., a Toms River-based attorney who represents some of the workers. "All they want is to do their job."

IBEW Local 827 represents about 5,400 workers at Verizon, said Cocliff.

Union membership is down significantly from its peak of about 14,000 members in 2004.

SHADOW LAKE CLEANUP



Austen Canade scoops up invasive hornwort vegetation from Shadow Lake onto the dock in front of his home. Dredging the western portion of the lake will remove water chestnuts but won't fix the hornwort problem, he said. DOUG HOOD/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

CLEANING UP THE MUCK

DWEK INFORMANT IN CASE

Ex-Deal rabbi gives guilty plea

Faces five-year term for money remitting

By Charles Webster
Staff Writer

TRENTON — The former principal rabbi at the Synagogue of Deal snared in a 2009 FBI sting involving FBI informant Solomon Dwek pleaded guilty to operating an illegal money-remitting business that transferred thousands of dollars in checks, authorities said.

Edmond Nahum, 58, of Deal, pleaded guilty in federal court on Monday to operating the illegal business using the bank accounts of the Deal Kupot and Ahavat Haim Vachessed — a pair of Monmouth County charitable organizations he controlled — with the help of Saul Kassin, chief rabbi of Congregation Sharee Zion in Brooklyn and the Magen Israel Society — a Brooklyn-based charitable organization controlled by Kassin, according to U.S. Attorney for New Jersey Paul Fishman.

Nahum faces up to five years in federal prison and as much as \$250,000 in fines when he is sentenced on Sept. 22. He also agreed to forfeit the \$175,381.33 seized from the Deal Kupot bank account during the July 3, 2009