

For Release: 9:00 AM, 3/27/07

Nursing Home Workers Approve Groundbreaking First Contract Agreement

Members of UFCW (United Food and Commercial Workers) Local 951 who work at the Orchard Grove Extended Care facility in Benton Harbor, Michigan have approved a first contract by a margin of 50 to 2. The ratification vote took place on Friday, March 23. The three-year contract covers 63 workers. The Orchard Grove Extended Care facility is owned and operated by Northpoint Senior Services.

“This is a great day for us, for the patients and for our employer. The Union means being treated with respect and with this contract, we know that if we have a problem, the Union will be there to help. That’s good for everyone,” said Orchard Grove worker Peg Dixon.

“This first contract is not just an accomplishment for Orchard Grove workers,” added UFCW 951 President Marv Russow. “It is also significant because it was achieved with the help and support of many leaders and citizens of the Benton Harbor area who realize that good working conditions contribute to good patient care and to a stronger economy.”

“These negotiations were tough,” Russow continued, “but we appreciate the responsible and respectful approach that was ultimately taken by management. We think this contract sets the foundation for excellent care for patients and growth for the business. We urge those in need of long term care to put Orchard Grove at the top of their list.”

Terms of the new agreement include wage increase for full and part time workers in each year of the agreement. Eligible workers will receive wage increases retroactive to last August. The contract also clarifies overtime rules and procedures, establishes a grievance procedure and a steward system for worker representation. It defines clear rules on seniority and provides for the union and the employer to pursue improved health care benefit options. The agreement defines rights to sick pay, paid vacation, holiday pay and paid bereavement leaves. It provides for a 401(k) savings plan and education tuition reimbursement.

"I am very happy. I think I speak for all of us because this contract gives the workers a voice," said UFCW 951 member and Orchard Grove worker, Shannon Carter.

UFCW 951 represents 31,000 members who work across the state of Michigan at Meijer, Harding’s, Plumb’s, Polly’s, Kroger, Kessel, Rite Aid, Knouse Foods, Fry Krisp, and Dowagiac Nursing Home. UFCW 951 has two offices: a headquarters at 3270 Evergreen Drive in Grand Rapids opened in 2005 and a satellite office in New Hudson, Michigan.