

# **Pabst Theater Group workers say union push will improve job security, safety**

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Employees of Pabst Theater Group in Milwaukee say their union organizing is helping to improve job security and safety in the hospitality and tourism industry.

Connor Erickson, an event lead with Pabst Theater Group and union advocate, discussed organizing efforts yesterday during a virtual panel organized by UW-Madison's Center on Wisconsin Strategy. The discussion came several days after Labor Day and the release of COWS' annual State of Working Wisconsin report, which explored trends in wages, employment and labor union participation in the state.

"For us, organizing was a huge step towards creating job sustainability in an unreliable and deeply insecure industry, with growing frustration over issues such as lost hours with no compensation, and a lack of voice in the decisions that ultimately decide our safety within our workplace," Erickson said.

He explained union organizing began over two years ago, prior to the pandemic-related shutdowns and layoffs, though the push toward certification came to a head in the spring of this year. According to Erickson, 84 percent of the workers in the bargaining unit signed authorization cards to request their employer voluntarily recognize the union.

In response, Pabst Theater Group requested a National Labor Relations Board-certified election in which 92 percent of workers voted in favor of forming a union, according to Erickson.

James Stapleton, an events staff member with the theater group, is hopeful forming a union will result in a "much more fair power balance" between management and workers. That includes box office and hospitality staff operating five concert venues and two wedding venues in the Milwaukee area.

“As soon as I learned we were organizing a union at Pabst, I was like, ‘yes, get me on that,’ because every worker deserves the right to good wages ... and to have a voice in their workplace,” he said. “At the end of the day, it’s us, the workers, who are making it all happen.”

Contract negotiations have been ongoing since the election in June, he noted. Erickson said Pabst Theater Group employees are getting support in this process from the Milwaukee Area Service and Hospitality Workers Organization.

“It’s something we’re very proud to be a part of and we feel like we’re making a big change in the entertainment industry, not just in Milwaukee but in Wisconsin and the greater Midwest,” he said.

In an emailed statement, Pabst Theater Group CEO Gary Witt said: “Since being notified of our employees’ desire to unionize in the spring, the Pabst Theater Group has worked cooperatively with both the NLRB and the Milwaukee Area Service and Hospitality Employees group and is currently in negotiations on an initial collective bargaining agreement.”

See more on the COWS report here:

<https://www.wisbusiness.com/2022/cows-report-shows-progress-in-reducing-wage-disparities/>

*-By Alex Moe*