
GUILD LEADER

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Providence Newspaper Guild TNG-CWA Local 31041- June 2, 2011

11 Lose Jobs in Advertising

The Providence Journal laid off 11 Guild members in the advertising department Wednesday.

More than half of the losses were from the department's sales assistants, but promotions, billing and the porters lost co-workers as well. Some in the group are eligible to bump into other positions, but it wasn't clear Wednesday who would invoke their bumping rights or what jobs they might bump into.

Although Wednesday was their last day at work, the 11 will remain on the payroll through June 18. On that date they will have to decide if they want to take the contractually required two weeks severance pay and remain on a recall list or accept ten weeks severance and give up recall rights.

Besides the Guild layoffs, the company announced that it plans to privatize the circulation department, affecting as many as 35 non-union employees.

The company cited declining revenues —our members in advertising estimate the Journal could be as much as \$2 million behind this time last year — as the reason for the layoffs.

Unlike 2008-09, the Guild received no advance notice of the layoffs. When informed of the details at a meeting Wednesday morning, Guild representatives observed that two months ago, the Journal's parent company A. H. Belo, said business was doing so well that it was able to dole out more than \$2 million in raises and bonuses to the top three corporate officers.

CEO Robert Decherd did especially well, seeing his compensation jump from about \$500,000 in 2009 to \$1.87 million in 2010.

Guild representatives pointed out that had Decherd found a way to get by on just \$300,000 more in 2010 (\$800,000 for the year, or \$15,000 a week) Belo would have saved nearly twice what it is getting by laying off 11 Guild members. And the paper would have had 11 more employees to help it improve service to customers and build shareholder value.

"Time and again during our contract talks, we heard about the dire condition of the newspaper, how sacrifices were needed to literally save the company," Guild President John Hill said. "Guild members responded, agreeing to forgo raises and pay significantly more for our health insurance."

The thanks we got?

An orgy of corporate gluttony and 11 of our people laid off.

The best kind of leadership leads by example, with deeds that match words. Belo's words say shared sacrifice but the message of their deeds is louder: I got mine, you get lost.

"That's the message we'll remember the next time we have to sit through one of their poor-mouth lectures," Hill said.

The members of the Providence Newspaper Guild know the challenges the Journal faces. We know that with sacrifice and hard work, we can adapt to the new information economy and save our newspaper.

We just aren't sure who can save it from the greed of its owners.