

Union vows to beef up organizing drive

By Barry Witt

Mercury News

January 30, 2007

Tapping the star power of activist actor Danny Glover, a service workers' union said Monday that it was stepping up its campaign to organize cafeteria employees in Silicon Valley, promising protests at companies that use a contractor that has resisted unionization efforts.

“These companies make enormous profits,” Glover said before a labor rally at Antioch Baptist Church in San Jose. While the companies pay their own workers good wages and benefits, “they have to bear witness to the fact that the men and women who serve them, who work for the agency they contract with to serve them, are given less than enough to live on.”

The union, Unite Here, has been trying to organize employees at Redwood Shores-based Guckenheimer Enterprises for about a year. In November, the union launched a campaign accusing the company of forcing workers into taxpayer-paid health care by offering low-wage workers company-sponsored plans at prices they can't afford.

The union is asking more than 50 Silicon Valley employers who contract with Guckenheimer to sign a “code of conduct” that would request its contractors to provide affordable health care and allow union organizing efforts without management interference. The union plans to hold its first rally targeting an employer at Broadcom's San Jose campus Feb. 28.

In a written statement, Guckenheimer executive vice president Frank Lapetina denied the union's charges that its health care plan is not affordable. While a Guckenheimer cafeteria worker said at the union rally that he was paying \$360 a month for family care, Lapetina said the current cost to employees was \$197 and that figure would drop to \$125 on March 1 as a result of “negotiations with our insurance providers.”

“We are committed to creating an excellent work environment, pay scale and benefit plan for our staff, and we believe we are doing just that,” Lapetina said.

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