

NFFE News



NFFE Local 642 Wins New Organizational Chart for Smokejumpers at Redmond Air Center

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In late April, National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE) Local 642, which represents U.S. Forest Service employees at Redmond Air Center (RAC) on the Deschutes National Forest in central Oregon, approved a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with RAC management to adopt a new organizational chart for the Redmond Smokejumpers. The new organizational chart will now be modeled after the standard 54-person base as recommended in the Forest Service Smokejumper Regional Base Structure Standard.

In January 2023, three NFFE Local 642 RAC smokejumpers – Marcel Potvin, Ben Elkind, and Dan Norskog – along with NFFE Forest Service Council Vice President Erin Kidwell, approached management with evidence of significant deficiencies in the base’s organization compared to similar smokejumper organizations across the Forest Service, specifically the lack of spotters needed for safe jumps. Referencing President Biden’s Executive Order on Protecting the Federal Workforce (EO 14003), which requires agencies to negotiate over the “numbers of employees or positions assigned to any organizational subdivisions, work project or tour of duty,” the team submitted a union proposal to formally invoke negotiations with management to increase the number of personnel at RAC.

After RAC management spent most of 2023 delaying and putting forth arguments that they did not have authority to bargain with the union over the proposed increase in personnel, Local 642 pulled in Katijo Maher, President of NFFE Local 34. Maher had previously been successful in collaboratively working with management on the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest to adopt changes relating to staffing. Ultimately, management agreed to implement the National Standard for a 54-person base for the Redmond Air Center, increasing the number of spotters at the base.

“This MOU shows that there is a light on the horizon and there is a possibility for advancement at RAC and that we do care for employees at RAC,” said Local 642 Steward Marcel Potvin. “This negotiation was a team effort between Ben Elkind, Dan Norskog, myself, and some hard-nosed unionists, Erin Kidwell and Katijo Maher. NFFE National was also key during these negotiations. We had the full support of Deputy General Counsel Yvette Piacsek and National Business Representative Rob Arnold. Without the pressure and expertise of these professional unionists, this negotiation would have stalled.”

“More NFFE locals, both in the Forest Service and across other agencies, will be encouraged to negotiate over numbers, types, and grades of employees now that Local 642 was successful doing so,” said NFFE Deputy General Counsel Yvette Piacsek. “I am heartened the Forest Service is hearing employees who voice their ideas through the union and taking meaningful action based on employee concerns.”

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