

## Workers at Pistoresi Ambulance Ratify First Contract

Some 45 first responders at Pistoresi Ambulance in Madera, Calif., last week ratified a first contract after more than two years of hard bargaining.

The new unit, which will join Local 12-911, represents full- and part-time paramedics and EMTs. The group began organizing in September 2015, looking for improvements to wages and working conditions.

“It’s a little company,” said Kenny Contreras, who served on the bargaining committee and has worked as a paramedic at Pistoresi for more than 16 years. “They didn’t have policies or procedures for anything. We had to start from scratch.”

The biggest concern was inconsistency over the way the company handled pay, Contreras said. “We had no set pay scale. You’d go in and ask for a raise, and they’d give it if they felt like it.”

Pistoresi also decided to change from a 72- to a 60-hour work week without any adjustments to pay to make up for the lost income. This was the last straw, Contreras said, and motivated many in the

unit to seek union representation.

The new contract sets a 12-step wage scale to regulate raises and addresses the loss in annual pay created by the shortened work week. It also creates an extra holiday and makes accommodation for bereavement pay.

The company is also making small improvements to working conditions that make a big difference for morale: Wi-Fi, fans and new TVs, as well as repairs to potholes outside the station.

The negotiations were difficult, said Contreras, but the unit remained united in its commitment to getting a fair deal. In fact, the unit overwhelmingly rejected the first contract it voted on because the company insisted on trying to slot four long-time employees well below the top pay grade.

Bringing in a mediator finally broke the gridlock.

“Without him we wouldn’t have gotten a contract,” Contreras said. “Finally it seemed like the employer just wanted to get it done.”

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