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Hired picketers hold up a sign in front of Il Vicino restaurant at Alameda and Corrales Road on Feb. 18. The Southwest Regional Council of Carpenters is behind the banner protests that have been seen around town. Carpenters Local 1319 is listed on fliers handed out by protesters.

BLASTING THE BANNERING

Carpenter's union 'Shame On' picket campaign refuses to explain its actions or how it picks targeted businesses

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Journal Staff Writer

It remains unclear what's behind a carpenter's union "Shame On" banner campaigns around Albuquerque for the past year, but more trade organizations and businesses are standing up against what

they are calling "divisive" tactics that are a "black eye on our entire community."

The Los Angeles-based Southwest Regional Council of Carpenters acknowledges it is behind the "Shame On" banner campaigns but has little else to say.

The union hires workers to hold up signs reading "Shame On" followed by the name of a hotel, restaurant,

store or other business and to hand out fliers depicting a rat in a house eating an American flag. The fliers say Carpenters Local 1319 is behind the campaign and list a name and number for each business or entity being called out, urging people to phone to "see that area labor standards are met."

The same council, which is building a \$20 million

training center at I-25 and Comanche NE, has remained silent on its reasons behind the protests and maintains the training center project is unconnected.

"We are the same entity but they are not related," Justin Weidner told the **Journal**. Weidner is chief of staff for the organization, which represents 65,000 members in

Union campaign irks community

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five Southwest states: Nevada, Arizona, Utah, California and New Mexico,

Repeated messages for Carpenter's Union Local 1319 President David Barber were not returned, but the message was eventually referred to Weidner in Los Angeles.

Union: "No comment"

Asked what was behind the protests, Weidner said, "I have no comment on that."

Chet Karnas, president of Lone Sun Builders Inc., became so angry after the union targeted his company at several job sites in Albuquerque and Santa Fe that he counter-protested the union at the St. Francis Hotel in Santa Fe last summer. He also created a blog with video clips, news links and more dedicated to fighting the protests. He's also been active in bringing the issue to the attention of business organizations and recently to lawmakers in Santa Fe.

"This is a black eye on our entire community," he told the **Journal**. "There's 22 to 28 percent unemployment in the construction industry. This is doing nothing to help the construction unemployment rate. It's a visual blight. It's divisive to labor relations and business relationships."

Karnas said the information contained in fliers handed out at sites that target Lone Sun are "slanderous," saying he offers higher-than-union wages and a full line of benefits to his employees. He said the union is trying to beef up its membership through its campaign.

"They tend to target good businesses because they want dues," he said.

Il Vicino's newest location at Alameda and Corrales Road has been a recent target of carpenter's union protests and general manager Javier Rocha says it has hurt business.

"I know some people have turned away because of that," he told the **Journal**. "We have some people that are real supportive and we have people who don't really understand what's



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Rick Thaler, owner and president of OGB Architectural Millwork has joined the fight against the Carpenter's Union "Shame On" banner campaign by putting up a banner of his own at his company near Paseo del Norte and Jefferson NE.

going on."

He said he has had some tense moments with the carpenter's union because of the protests — including an incident where carpenter's union protesters were asked to move vehicles from parking spots in the shopping center where Il Vicino is located.

Nasty confrontations

"The union person that checks on them got really nasty with me one time," Rocha said. "He started calling us bottom feeders, kept cussing, being real irate, and was giving us the bird from across the street."

The incident was witnessed by customers and people driving by, he said.

Rick Thaler, owner and president of OGB Architectural Millwork, is trying to turn the banner tables on the union. He is hoping people see his sign reading "Shame On Carpenter's Union" when they drive by his business near Paseo del Norte and Jefferson NE.

He wants all contractors and subcontractors to do the same, telling the **Journal**, "We need to send these guys home."

"We need a union that will behave like a union, not like a bunch of thugs," he said.

Roxanne Rivera-Wiest, president of the Associated Builders and Contractors of New Mexico, said many businesses are starting to feel their reputations being threatened by the protests.

"The public thinks there is something going on that is not right, but, in truth, these contractors are being targeted simply because they are not union contractors," she said. "It's bad for owners, bad for contractors. It's just bad for the business community at large."

The association condemned the tactics used by the carpenter's union in an opinion piece published in the **Journal** in December.

Two other trade organizations have taken a public stance against the union protests, including the American Subcontractors Association of New Mexico, which called the Carpenter's union tactics "unprofessional, unproductive and divisive" in a news release sent to the **Journal**.

Union campaign divisive

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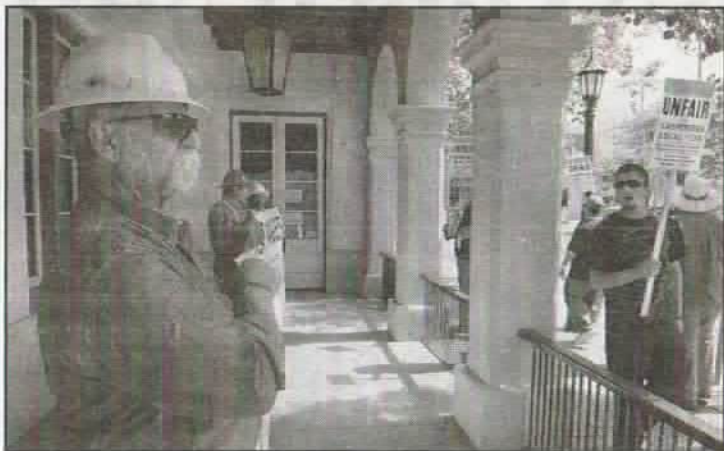
"The American Subcontractors Association of New Mexico ... will not endorse behavior that results in a negative image for the construction industry in our state," the release states.

"It's hurting business"

Elizabeth Price, executive director of the group that represents union and nonunion members, told the **Journal** the demonstrations are not "business friendly."

"It's hurting businesses," she said. "There's general contractors who don't want to have anything to do with union members because of what's going on, and we have businesses who will only hire union members because of what's going on."

The Greater Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce is also looking at the issue and has formed a task force to look into it. Don Kawal, who retired as president of



JOURNAL FILE

Benjamin Lutes, left, of Lone Sun Builders stages a counter-protest at Santa Fe's St. Francis Hotel on June 4, 2009.

Klinger Constructors LLC two years ago, is heading up the committee.

"First of all, what has happened is the banners have appeared at neutral employers. Those banners are directing their signs, etc., to a business that doesn't have a direct relationship with the carpenter's union," he told the **Journal**. "What happens is that impacts the

businesses. It does affect the particular business. The other thing in a broader spectrum, it's not an asset when it comes to economic development in our community."

Weidner, with the Southwest Regional Council of Carpenters, said he had no comment when asked about the divisive nature of the protests.

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A BIT MORE COMPLICATED

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