

Carpenters protest restaurant

Contractor: Carpenters union threatened, harassed restaurant for work

by Luke Holmen
holmen@unm.edu

Labor union Carpenters Local 1505 has protested since Monday outside new, family-owned Asian restaurant Fan Tang, which opened in Nob Hill two weeks ago.

Fliers from the union claim Fan Tang owners hired contractor Lone Sun Builders Inc., which the union alleges does not meet area labor standards, to complete construction on the building. According to the fliers, the contractor does not meet standards for benefit provision to its workers, but when asked, the picketers said they weren't members of the union, and furthermore were making just above minimum wage and had no health insurance.

"No, I'm not a carpenter, I work just right here," said Ernest Griego, who was outside the restaurant holding a sign that read "Shame on Fan Tang" Tuesday. "I don't know anything," Griego said his employers weren't giving him the same benefits for which they were asking Fan Tang. "(I have) no health insurance," he said. "Work might be for a small time or a short time; it depends."

Fan Tang owner Jason Zeng, and Chet Karnas, president of Lone Sun Builders Inc., said the carpenters union is using unethical tactics to



Zach Gould / Daily Lobo

Day laborers picket outside Fan Tang restaurant in Nob Hill Tuesday on behalf of a California-based carpenters union. Workers say they aren't members, have no benefits and aren't paid well by the union that they supposedly represent.

promote its own welfare. They said the union tried to bully the restaurant into using a carpenters union construction company, which Lone Sun Builders Inc. is not.

"They sent me letters before I started construction saying use (the carpenters union), or else," Zeng said.

The union did not respond to multiple phone calls as of 5 p.m. Wednesday. They did, however, hire workers to protest outside Fan Tang with a large sign that said "Shame on Fan Tang," Zeng said.

"This is so shady it shouldn't be legal," he said.

Zeng said no one from the restaurant staff is protesting.

"They make it seem like our internal labor had a dispute with us, and that clearly is not what is happening," he said. "None of our workers are upset."

Zeng said he let companies publicly bid to do the construction work on the new restaurant.

"We put out a bid fair and square," see **Labor Dispute** PAGE 8

right — I mean, that's the American way," he said. "The fact that they couldn't compete isn't our problem."

Chet Karnas, president of Lone Sun Builders Inc., said the claims against his business are ridiculous.

"We pay 85 percent of our employee health benefit and dental plans," he said. "That is a really high amount. For a family of four, the employees only pay \$150 a month and we pay \$850."

Andy Hart, President of Hart Construction, who contracted with Lone Sun to do the carpentry at Fan Tang, said the company treats its workers well.

"Lone Sun's employment package is pretty darn amazing," he said. "I've looked into this and they are not at all paying their employees anything unreasonable. I see the same guys time and time again and they wouldn't be coming back if the wages were low."

Karnas said the employees at his company were satisfied.

"We have a full range of hourly wages, ranging from 16-24 dollars an hour depending on their qualifications," he said.

Karnas has made video and print compilations detailing the unions' activities at lonesun.wordpress.com

"You can see in the videos ... some of the physical assaults they have made on us, and cussed at

us," he said. "What they are doing is abhorrent."

He said the issue reached the national stage this summer.

"I was chosen to testify in Washington D.C. in front of a congressional subcommittee in May to talk about what they are doing," he said. "I have not sued, but they have been the subject of lawsuits in Georgia and Chicago, and they've lost a lot."

The Chamber of Commerce, the Associated General Contractors Association, and Association of Building contractors have written editorials in support of the contractors being picketed against, and against the activities of the carpenters union, but it hasn't stopped the organization, which has picketed across Albuquerque at places like the Tamarind Institute near UNM and Il Vicino.

"I'm a former union member, and I have nothing against unions," Karnas said. "The carpenters union is a rogue union. I have very good relations with other union leaders and people have every right to collective bargaining ... but these tactics are disparaging to themselves ... it's a damn mob of organized crime. They have told me face-to-face (that) they aren't trying to unionize me, they are trying to put me out of business."

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