

Shaw's Strike Ends

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About four months after more than 300 warehouse workers at Shaw's Supermarkets Inc. walked off their jobs, they have reached an agreement with the supermarket chain over pay and health benefits.

Workers at the Shaw's Metheun distribution center have ratified a four-year contract that effectively ends the strike that began March 8, a day after workers rejected a contract that they say would have resulted in the loss of \$28 per week, or about \$1,456 annually for people on the family health insurance plans.

The workers' union, the United Food & Commercial Workers Union, Local 791, could not immediately be reached for comment.

Shaw's spokeswoman Rebekah Fawcett said the agreement includes wage increases and higher contributions to the employee health plan from workers and the company, but said that she could not release the new figures. Fawcett said retirement benefits would not change under terms of the agreement.

She said the company was working with the union to determine when the employees who went on strike would return to work, but that the workers would return in a "phased approach" that will probably begin in the next couple of weeks.

The workers went on strike, picketing 16 local stores, largely over rising health care costs. Shortly after the strike began, Shaw's, which is owned Supervalu, cut off the workers' health benefits and hired replacement workers to operate fork-lifts and process orders in the 34-degree warehouse.

Since that time, the union has planned all kind of strike events to get the public's attention, including rallies. The union also organized a 5-day, 60-mile march in May from the distribution center in Metheun, along Route 28, to Shaw's stores and Cambridge City Hall, among other stops, and ending at the a rally a the Prudential Center Shaw's.

Meanwhile, support for the workers had grown. Senator John F. Kerry, Representative Michael Capuano, and nine other Massachusetts congressional leaders sent a letter to the chief executive of Shaw's and Supervalu, urging them to go back to the bargaining table. And the UFCW International Union called for a boycott of Supervalu stores across the country.

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