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Facebook shuttle drivers vote to form union

by Sandy Brundage

After presenting a petition and holding a rally at Facebook's headquarters in Menlo Park, the 87 drivers who take Facebook employees to and from work voted on Nov. 20 to unionize, according to Teamsters Local 853.

The vote was 43 in favor of unionizing, 28 against, according to the Teamsters.

Facebook, which reportedly refused to accept the petition, has a contract with Loop Transportation to provide the drivers for the shuttles. Local Teamsters political director Doug Bloch notified the City Council in advance of the Nov. 19 rally and said the union was not out to hurt either the social media company or its relationship with Menlo Park, but to improve working conditions.

Although they are paid "decent hourly wages," the drivers work split shifts and are not paid for the six or more hours they spend waiting for the second half of their shift; many live too far from Menlo Park to go home, according to the Teamsters. Mr. Bloch's statement also said the drivers pay \$1,300 a month for "substandard" health benefits.

"The only way that Loop will listen to us is with a union and a collective voice. I'm very relieved that we have that now," said Demaurae Houston, a driver, in a press release from the union.

Union supporters said it's time for tech companies to ensure adequate compensation for all of their employees.

"These drivers are part of the invisible work force that makes Silicon Valley run," said Derecka Mehrens, executive director of Working Partnerships USA, which participated in the rally. "They are members of our communities that work hard every day, but live in poverty, and the business model of tech companies like Facebook counts on that. Tech companies write the checks to subcontractors who hire these drivers and the thousands of other service workers who make these tech giants able to function. They need to set the standards, too, and say 'no' to poverty jobs."

Facebook representatives declined to comment. Other Silicon Valley giants, such as Google and Apple, also hire out for employee shuttle drivers, raising the question of whether the union will grow even further.