

# Deal to boost security guards' pay

Union set to vote on landmark contract that increases wages and benefits 40% for workers in L.A.

By ASHRAF KHALIL  
Times Staff Writer

Union officials representing thousands of private security guards in Los Angeles have struck a landmark deal with several property management companies that provide security to 80% of the commercial real estate in Los Angeles County.

The deal results in a 40% increase in overall salary and benefits, according to Faith Culbreath, local head of the se-

curity officers' branch of the Service Employees International Union.

"We're very excited," Culbreath said. "We've achieved all our core objectives."

Culbreath declined to discuss specifics of the agreement pending a Jan. 26 ratification vote before the approximately 4,000 local union members.

Another union official, who was speaking on condition of anonymity, called it "the best contract of its kind in the country."

The agreement concludes seven months of negotiations that culminated in a 24-hour final bargaining session that ended early Saturday morning, Culbreath said. It was to be announced today by Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, who has championed the secu-

riety guards' cause for years and whose aides were deeply involved in the negotiations, Culbreath said.

"Today we have a historic agreement that directly improves the lives of more than 4,000 hardworking Angelenos, and whose impact will be seen in families throughout South Los Angeles," Villaraigosa said Sunday in a statement.

"This agreement has been six years in the making, and I could not be prouder that we were able to help make it happen."

The contract is a major victory for the SEIU, which has campaigned nationwide for years to unionize private guards. The union came to local and national prominence in 2000 after organizing the weeks-long Justice for Janitors

strike against the same property management companies. The strike resulted in a 25% wage increase over three years, and is regarded as a turning point in the local labor movement.

The union won the right to organize guards at properties owned by one of the region's most influential developers, Robert F. Maguire, in 2006. That pact helped launch a broader campaign to unionize security guards.

In the current negotiations, the union sought to bring the guards' hourly pay and benefits in line with those of janitors represented by the SEIU. Currently, janitors working in the same buildings and for the same management companies make up to \$6 per hour more than guards — who average

around \$8.50 per hour with no health insurance, paid vacation or other benefits, Culbreath said.

In November, the union accused the property management companies of bad-faith negotiations. Union members held rallies outside the offices of some of the companies and unanimously voted to authorize a strike, if necessary.

Those actions, combined with a three-day strike by security guards in San Francisco in early fall were "the turning point in our campaign," Culbreath said. "The building owners knew we meant business then."

The private security industry has mushroomed in recent years, particularly after 9/11. Culbreath and other union officials estimate that there are

1 million private security guards nationwide — double the number of police officers.

About 55,000 guards nationwide are currently represented by the SEIU, and union officials hope to use the Los Angeles agreement as a national template. Similar negotiations are ongoing in Minneapolis and Seattle.

Culbreath said she hopes to more than double the local union's membership to 10,000 by the end of this year.

Up to 70% of local private security jobs are filled by black men, and Culbreath said the new deal would bring an estimated \$50 million more per year in wages and benefits, "the vast majority of that going into the black community."

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AL MARTINEZ

## When someone is trapped inside the wrong body

There is a place between reality and make-believe where strangers dwell. They are unable to fully integrate into a world of clear definitions but equally unwilling to pretend that they are something they are not. It's in that gray and lonely place that Meredith lives.

She's a transsexual, and although she says she is comfortable with who she is, the loneliness can become unbearable, because she exists on the fringes of a culture that still considers humans trapped in the wrong bodies as freaks.

Meredith isn't her real name, but I will respect her desire for anonymity. She was born a boy, but sensed from an early age that the true person within her, the one she wanted to be, was a girl. She identified with the Sallys around her, not the Michaels.

She has e-mailed me for years, urging me to publicize the plight of those often arrested by the police and beaten by thugs for very little reason, other than the clothes they wear, the manners they assume and the gender lines they cross. She became more persistent in her demand for attention when Times sports-writer Mike Penner courageously announced in print that he was transsexual and would reemerge as Christine Daniels.

So Meredith and I met for the first time in person at a Santa Monica deli, and I've got to say there's no way she could have gone unnoticed in the world. She is 6-foot-4, with spike heels adding at least another inch to her height, and skinny as a chopstick. Her blond hair is frizzy and pony-tailed, her red blouse partially open to reveal a tattoo near her navel, her ankle-length pants as tight as paint.

Her voice and mannerisms — a head tilt, a flutter of brilliant blue eyes, a giggle — are definitely female, aided by a five-year regimen of estrogen that is altering the nature of her body. She has very little hope of ever being able

to afford the surgery that would make the transition complete.

"I am happy with who I am," she declares without hesitation, showing me a driver's license that identifies her as female. But still there is that loneliness she admits to, an uneasy notion that not everyone else is happy with who she is. "I'm OK with that," she says. "It's all right to be lonely."

At 51, she has been diagnosed bipolar and lives on the edge of downtown's skid row on an \$870-a-month state disability allotment. She supplements that, she admits, with occasional sexual encounters. "I'm not a prostitute," she says, with a nervous laugh, "I'm a whore," meaning she's not a professional, she's just an opportunist.

She has attempted suicide by slashing her wrists, and sought to blur her pain through alcohol and drugs. "There were times," she says, "when I didn't even want to get out of bed." In an effort to reestablish contact with an abusive and alcoholic father, she telephoned him. He swore at her and hung up.

It is only now, after hormones and therapy, that Meredith is able to declare who she is and to be respected by those who know her.

Her mother, who died several years ago, accepted her without condemnation.

Acceptance, Meredith feels, is a question of respect. "I find," she adds, "that if I am gracious to others, they are gracious to me."

Why write now about someone in such an isolated state, living on the fringe of a society that finds transsexuals an anomaly? Because, as members of the human family, they deserve identity. Meredith emphasizes that transsexuals are not transvestites, the men and women who cross-dress. Transsexuals make the change emotionally and often physically. They become, in effect, someone else.

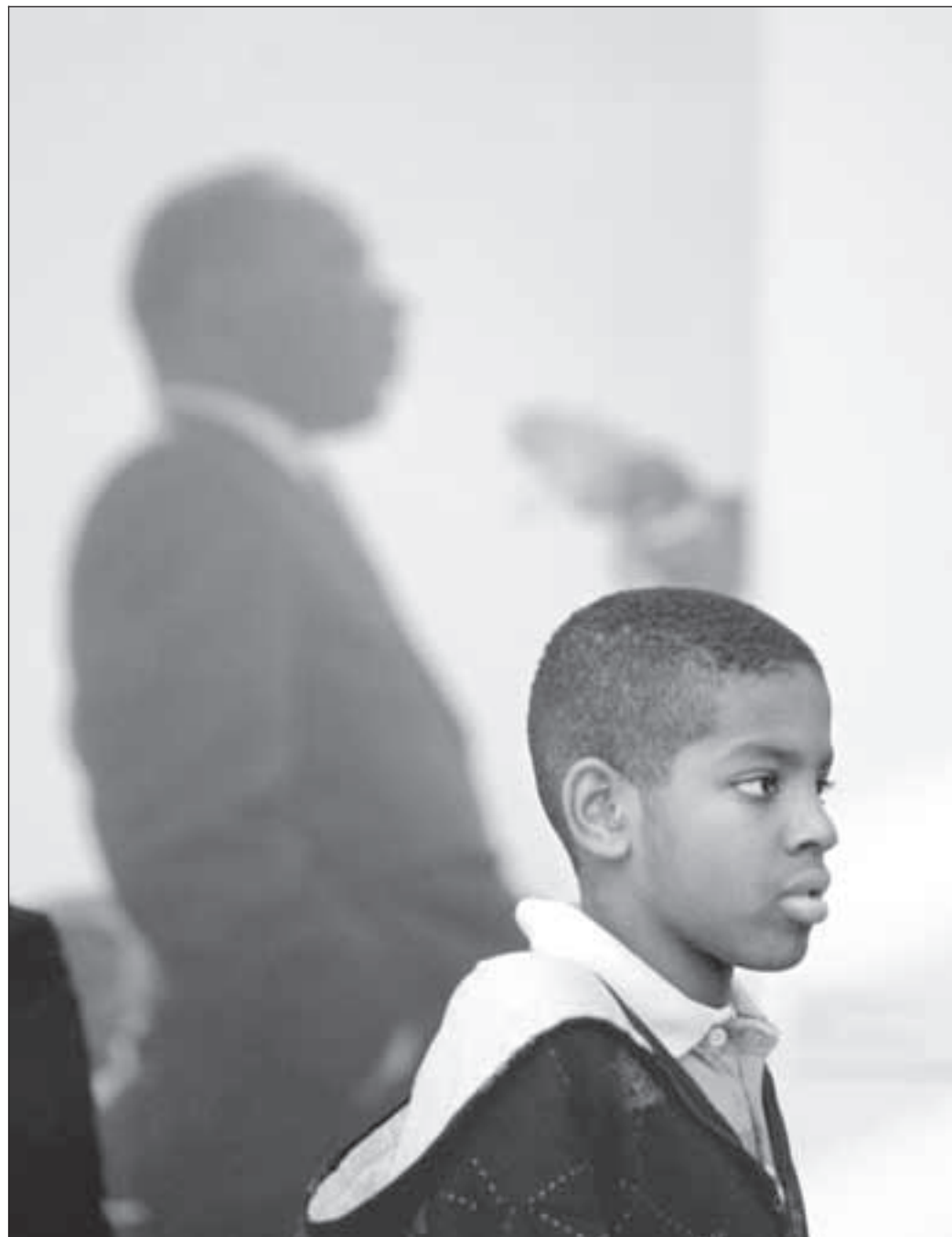
"I have a great body, killer legs and a good face," Meredith says with a flip of a wrist, but these are the pleas of a person still not fully detached from what she had once been, a man who fathered a child with a lover who now shuns the woman Meredith has become. Her son screamed, "I hate you!" when Meredith tried to make contact with him.

What some see as a person with a cultural deformity, I see as a vulnerable victim of nature's caprice, a mismatch between the brain and body that confuses the sexuality of an embryo and results in the anguish of indecision. I have admiration for those who, as adults, decide and declare who they are — even though I know that they probably will always be uneasy with themselves, always a part of the lonely places we create in the world we know.

"This," Meredith says, referring to her own status as a man who evolved into a woman, "allows me to see life from both sides. It's an opportunity that few are granted."

Then she crosses the street to wait at a bus stop, tall and regal in the physiology that will forever set her apart.

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Photographs by STEFANO PALTERA For The Times

## A PARTY FOR KING

The California African American Museum in Exposition Park in Los Angeles celebrates Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday Sunday, a day before the official holiday. Georgina Brown-Wallace, 69, top, checks out a doll exhibit, and Joshua Brown, 12, above, walks past one of the many photo and video displays of the civil rights leader. The usual soft museum voices are replaced by H.B. Barnum's Life Choir as members live things up with a performance. Festivities continue today with the Kingdom Day Parade in South L.A.



Sources: ESRI, TeleAtlas  
Los Angeles Times



## Border Patrol attacks rising

Agent's death Saturday highlights a rise in aggressive behavior by smugglers battling tighter U.S. security.

By RICHARD MAROSI  
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**IMPERIAL SAND DUNES** — The off-road enthusiasts were revving their dune buggies and all-terrain vehicles Saturday morning when a brown Hummer suddenly cut into the campground. The man at the wheel, a suspected drug smuggler, was heading to Mexico, fast.

U.S. Border Patrol Agent Luis Aguilar, the only person in the way, threw a spike strip in front of the car. The Hummer sped up. "It looked like the man swerved and hit the agent intentionally," said one witness.

Aguilar, struck by the Hummer going an estimated 55 mph, died within minutes.

On Sunday, officials released more details about the attack in the Imperial Sand Dunes recreation area, which came amid a surge in assaults against federal agents in many areas along the border in recent months.

U.S. authorities said the suspect drove over the dunes back to Mexico along with another vehicle. The FBI, which is handling the investigation, said Mexican authorities are assisting in the probe.

Aguilar, 32, a six-year veteran, was part of an anti-smuggling team patrolling the scenic landscape of sand dunes and trailer-dotted campgrounds in southeast California. On weekends, when the dunes fill with riders, Mexican smugglers slip across the open border, trying to blend in with the other off-road vehicles.

Authorities suspect the Hummer was carrying drugs. The suspects had been driving west on Interstate 8, but when they saw the Border Patrol following, they turned off the freeway and started speeding back to Mexico.

On an access road to the Buttercup campground, just two miles from the border, Aguilar was waiting for them at an intersection. Authorities said it was unclear whether the suspect intentionally ran over the agent, or swerved to avoid the spike strip.

At the intersection Sunday, visitors left flowers and a card, and erected an American flag. Many campsites flew their American flags at half-staff. "It's horrible, but not surprising," said James R. Broxholme, a vendor of dune buggy parts. He said Border Patrol pursuits are a regular occurrence at the campground, about 15 miles from the Arizona border.

Nationwide, assaults against Border Patrol agents rose from 752 in 2006 to 987 in 2007. Authorities say clashes are likely to continue as smugglers respond to beefed-up border security with more aggressive measures.

"I think it was just a matter of time. Agents are getting assaulted every day," said Jeremy Schappell, a Border Patrol spokesman.

Aguilar, originally from El Paso, Texas, was married with two children, Schappell said.

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