

Unifor members stage friendly rally in front of local retirement home



By Brian Lockhart

Unifor, the union representing workers at several Chartwell Retirement Residences, held what they called a 'friendly rally' in front of the Chartwell Montgomery Village Retirement Residence in Orangeville on Monday, March 4, to bring awareness to what they consider unfairly low wages paid to employees at the retirement residence and several other facilities owned by the company.

'Caregivers are vital in providing a safe and enjoyable living environment for seniors in retirement homes,' said Katha Fortier, assistant to the Unifor national president. 'Chartwell's track record of paying workers poverty wages makes it difficult for workers and residents to receive the adequate care they deserve and pay for.'

Several union members gathered at the entrance to the Montgomery Village Residence on Riddell Road waving flags and holding up posters, but did not disrupt any traffic entering or leaving the property.

Many motorists passing by honked their support when seeing the group.

'This is not a strike action,' said Danny Price, second vice president Unifor local 1285. 'We represent thirteen Chartwell residences across Ontario. In seven of those we've been in contract negotiations for various amount of times. This one right here, we're coming up on a year. The company refuses to come to the bargaining table. They try all these stalling tactics where they've taken us to the Labour Board where they've applied for HILDAA (Hospital Labour Disputes Arbitration Act) which is essentially so they could fall under being called a hospital which makes it an essential service and you don't have the right to strike. They were successful in being awarded to fall under the HILDA act ? this facility here was just about three weeks ago.'

One of Unifor's main complaints is the fact that when the minimum wage was raised last year, Chartwell wanted the wage to freeze at \$14 for workers until 2020.

'You wouldn't believe the responsibility that these staff members have,' Price said. 'There's 150 residents in this facility. From the hour from around eight o'clock or nine o'clock until six in morning there's two staff members in charge of the entire building. The staff members care so much about the residents ? they don't pay overtime but they're not allowed to leave until the next person comes into relieve them.'

Staff members range from personal support workers to cleaning staff and dining room staff and servers.

The group has created a billboard that is being installed on Highway Nine and County Road 11, to bring awareness to their campaign.

Chartwell Retirement Residences failed to provide a response to the Citizen before press time.