

The Mercury News

MercuryNews.com

San Jose Mercury News

November 30, 2006

Section: BU

Food service firm criticized

BAY AREA CAFETERIA WORKERS TREATED UNFAIRLY, UNION REPORT SAYS

By Sue McAllister, Mercury News

Workers in the cafeterias of the Bay Area's high-tech and biotech companies lack sufficient and affordable health care coverage, are frequently underpaid and face intimidation if they seek to organize, according to a report by a union group released Wednesday.

Unite Here -- a merger of two large unions representing workers in the textile, apparel, hotel and food service industries, among others -- wrote the report, titled "A Tale of Two Economies: Food Service Workers in the High Tech-Biotech Corridor."

The report singles out Guckenheimer Enterprises, a privately owned food service contractor based in Redwood City that employs more than 4,000 people across the country. The union is in the midst of trying to unionize Guckenheimer employees in some Bay Area locations. According to the report, Guckenheimer contracts out workers to more than 120 companies in Northern California.

In its report, the union accused the company of offering health care coverage that is too costly for many low-paid workers to afford. The report also includes some Guckenheimer workers' accounts of times they said their managers discouraged them from taking time off work to deal with serious medical needs.

On Wednesday, a Unite Here spokeswoman said the union planned to send copies of the report to Guckenheimer executives today. The Mercury News e-mailed the report to a Guckenheimer executive, who did not respond to the e-mail or to phone calls seeking comment.

The goal of the report, said Unite Here President Bruce Raynor, is to press large companies to adopt a "code of conduct" that, among other things, would require their contractors to be neutral toward worker efforts to unionize. "There's a good chance once they're aware of these conditions, they'll insist" that contractors adopt such a code, he said.

With the codes of conduct in place, large numbers of food service workers are likely to unionize, he said.

Some of the Guckenheimer workers quoted in the report work in cafeterias at Genentech, a large biotech firm based in South San Francisco. Genentech spokesman Geoff Teeter said unionization is "a matter between Guckenheimer and their employees," and that Genentech is neutral on the issue.
