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Ground Workers at Continental Airlines Vote to Join Teamsters

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DALLAS (AP) — Ground workers at [Continental Airlines](#) voted to unionize in the [Teamsters](#), airline and union officials said Friday.

The Continental fleet service employees were among the largest groups of nonunion workers in the industry, according to labor officials.

“This is a big victory,” said James Hoffa, the president of the Teamsters. “It proves there are people to organize out there.”

Mr. Hoffa said the union won by generating excitement with big rallies at Continental’s hubs in Cleveland, Houston and Newark, and by reaching into the airline’s smaller bases where previous organizing campaigns had failed.

The Teamsters will represent a group that includes baggage handlers and cargo agents in bargaining with Continental over wages and other contract terms. The union already represents mechanics at the airline.

Continental’s senior vice president of labor relations, Mike [Bonds](#), said, “We respect the choice our co-workers have made.” He promised that the airline would focus on working together.

According to the National Mediation Board, 4,102 Continental workers voted to join the Teamsters and 27 wrote in the names of other unions. With 7,603 workers eligible to vote, the Teamsters won by 300 votes.

In 2008, the [Transport Workers Union](#) fell 314 votes short in a bid to represent the same workers.

Richard Gritta, a finance professor at the University of Portland in Oregon who studies airlines, said the

industry's financial problems and immense job cuts helped the Teamsters.

Airlines "are cutting capacity and that means jobs, which angers workers," he said. "It's scary for them."

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