

# Emerson alumna supports Boston-wide hotel worker union strike



**Stefania Lugli** • 4 weeks ago

Alumna Nicki Morris '15 helped organize UNITE HERE Local 26 hotel workers on strike in front of Sheraton Boston Wednesday morning.

Demonstrators orchestrated seven simultaneous strikes at Marriott hotels across the city beginning at 6 a.m. More than 1,500 Marriott International hotel workers in Boston walked out of their places of work to strike in the midst of a six-month-long discussion for contracts, according to a union press release.

Local 26 is Boston's hospitality workers' union and includes the college's food service workers. They serve as the local branch of UNITE HERE, a labor union in the United States and Canada with more than 265,000 active members.

Brian Lang, the president of UNITE HERE Local 26, said this is the [first major hotel strike](#) in Boston's recent history.

Morris works for the union's communications department. She walked in and out of the throng of hotel workers, shouting along with them or placing a comforting hand on their shoulders.

Morris said the union's demands are simple—livable wages, more time

with their families, money for retirement, and the ability to retire. She declined a full interview with the Beacon, emphasizing the focus on the union's efforts.

"I don't want the spotlight," she said. "I want the focus to be on the workers themselves."

Mei Leung, a housekeeper at Sheraton Boston, has worked at the hotel near the Prudential Center for more than 30 years. She works five days per week, eight hours per day, and cleans 15 rooms each shift.

"For me, I need the retirement. I'm 71 years old. I still have to work. That's no good," Leung said. "An old woman, still working. It's so hard."

She said she hopes the union will succeed in finalizing a new contract so she can lessen her struggle in paying for her husband's high blood pressure medicine.

Morris did not support union workers in their fight for a fair contract for the first time on Wednesday.

In 2012, Morris founded Emerson P.R.I.D.E., a club dedicated to uniting students against sweatshops and labor abuse. She helped organize a contract between Emerson's food service workers and administration from 2014 to 2015.

The food service, or dining hall, workers joined UNITE HERE Local 26 in Fall 2014 after a campaign promoted by Emerson P.R.I.D.E., which eventually helped them win their first union contract in April 2015. According to an [update](#) on the union's website, the four-year contract with former food service provider Sodexo locked in hourly wage increases for all workers of 75 cents a year.

As cars repeatedly honked their horns in solidarity while driving past the union workers on strike in Back Bay, another group of strikers in the Theater District marched in front of the Ritz-Carlton—directly across from the Equipment Distribution Center.

Senior Samantha Mangino said she walks by the Ritz-Carlton almost every day on her way to class. She found the images of workers instead of the usual wealthy-looking guests in front of the hotel powerful.

“As a student, this is in my neighborhood. It was powerful to see that not everything is great that’s happening in the neighborhood,” she said.

Her journalism feature writing class went to the strike at the W, a hotel chain owned by Marriott International, around noon. She said the protest at the property ended when workers moved to join another strike at the Ritz-Carlton.

“Everyone there striking was willing to talk and be open about what they were doing,” Mangino said. “This was a part of an overarching theme of workers’ rights issues. The common theme was ‘one person should only have one job.’”

Boston’s Local 26 includes food service workers at Harvard University, Lesley University, Northeastern University, and other colleges within the city.

“Hotels are nothing but bricks, mortar, glass, and chrome if it wasn’t for the workers that provide excellent service,” Lang said.

When asked about next year’s re-negotiations for Emerson’s food service workers, Lang referenced similar Local 26 contracts as a standard for the college to look to, including neighboring campuses such as Harvard University, Northeastern University, and Simmons

College.

“There’s a standard that’s been set for food service workers’ campuses,” he said. “We would hope that the Emerson administration would recognize the standard in the Boston area and encourage their food service contractor to fall in line with those at the other campuses.”

Morris reflected on her past success with union contracts amid dozens of hotel workers clutching picket signs and chanting “no contract, no peace,” in front of the Sheraton.

She said she plans to return to Emerson’s food service workers’ aid in 2019 for contract renegotiations.

“It feels good to fight and win,” Morris said.

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