

LEARN MORE ABOUT SUBSCRIPTIONS

Up to 15 gunshots reported during carjacking of Illinois Sen. Kimberly Lightford an...



Column: Flossmoor bids farewell to once lavish home of former NBA star Ken...



Daily hor  
13, 2022 

ADVERTISEMENT

BUSINESS

# Art Institute employees win vote to form Chicago's first major museum union

By **ROBERT CHANNICK**

CHICAGO TRIBUNE | JAN 11, 2022



Listen to this article



Employees at the Art Institute of Chicago have successfully voted to form a union, achieving certification Tuesday from the National Labor Relations Board and ushering in a new era for hundreds of nonmanagement workers at the museum.

FEEDBACK

The results were announced Tuesday, formally recognizing the Art Institute of Chicago Workers United. The first major museum union in Chicago will represent 266 Art Institute employees including art installers, curators, custodians, librarians and retail workers.

ADVERTISEMENT

“Winning our union means a voice in our workplace and a chance to improve working conditions for ourselves, our colleagues and those who will follow us for generations to come,” museum archivist and union member Anna Feuer said in a news release.

The final museum vote was 142 employees in favor of unionizing and 44 opposed, with an additional 20 ballots cast but not counted because the Art Institute challenged the eligibility of those employees, the union said.

ADVERTISEMENT

FEEDBACK



Employees from the Art Institute, teachers from the School of the Art Institute and supporters gather outside the Art Institute to advocate for unionization on Sept. 9, 2021, in Chicago. (Armando L. Sanchez / Chicago Tribune)

A unionization vote at the associated School of the Art Institute is being tabulated, with the results expected Wednesday. If successful, 249 academic advisers, administrative assistants, mailroom workers and other school employees would join the nascent union under a separate bargaining agreement.

[\[Most read\] Up to 15 gunshots reported during carjacking of Illinois Sen. Kimberly Lightford and her husband »](#)

The Art Institute is challenging the eligibility of 49 school employees, which may delay finalization of the school results, if those contested votes would be necessary for majority approval, the union said.

FEEDBACK

ADVERTISEMENT



The union will be part of American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, which represents 10,000 workers at 91 museums nationwide and more than 25,000 library workers at 275 public and private libraries, including the Chicago Public Library.

In recent years, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles have formed unions with AFSCME.

“Earlier today, museum employees selected to be represented by AFSCME Council 31,” Art Institute spokeswoman Kati Murphy said in an emailed statement Tuesday. “As promised from the start, we fully respect our employees’ decision to join a union. The museum intends to enter into good faith bargaining with AFSCME to negotiate an initial collective bargaining agreement that best meets the needs of all parties involved while allowing us to continue to deliver on our mission.”

The [unionization movement](#) at the Art Institute gained traction in September, with organizers holding rallies and collecting signature cards that garnered majority support among the more than 500 eligible employees at the iconic South Michigan Avenue museum and nearby school.

[\[Most read\] Ask Amy: Picking up the tab is wearing thin »](#)

FEEDBACK

The employees are seeking higher wages and better working conditions, which

were exacerbated by layoffs and furloughs during the pandemic. The Art Institute **[laid off 76 people](#)** between April and June 2020, **[and furloughed 109 employees](#)** last year between January and April.

The National Labor Relations Board will certify a union to represent workers in collective bargaining if the union is backed by a majority of employees. An employer may voluntarily recognize the union when presented with evidence, such as a majority of employees signing authorization cards. If not, a formal election will be held.

“We asked them for voluntary recognition, but the Art Institute said they wouldn’t do that,” union spokesman Anders Lindall said Tuesday. “They wanted to force an election.”

Founded in 1879, the Art Institute of Chicago is one of the oldest and largest art museums in the U.S., with a collection of nearly 300,000 works of art, including such famous paintings as “American Gothic” by Grant Wood, “A Sunday on La Grande Jatte” by Georges Seurat and “Nighthawks” by Edward Hopper.

Beyond the unionization of its employees, the Art Institute is dealing with fallout from its decision in September **[to dismiss more than 100 docents](#)** — volunteer educators who help visitors navigate the museum. The docents received a letter from Veronica Stein, the Woman’s Board executive director of learning and public engagement, announcing the end of the “current iteration” of the 60-year-old docent program.

The Art Institute plans to redeploy nine full-time educators and has begun training six newly hired part-time employees to fulfill the duties formerly performed by the volunteer docents, Murphy said.

FEEDBACK

**[rchannick@chicagotribune.com](mailto:rchannick@chicagotribune.com)**

## **New Cadillac's Finally On Sale**

All Things Auto | Search Ads | Sponsored

---

## **Buick's Stunning New Lineup Has Arrived**

Luxury SUV Savings | Sponsored

---

## **New Acura's Finally On Sale**

All Things Auto | Search Ads | Sponsored

---

## **Unsold 2021 SUVs Now Almost Being Given Away: See Prices**

SUV Deals | Search Ads | Sponsored

---

## **If You Need To Kill Time On Your Computer, You Have to Play this Village Game. No Install.**

Forge Of Empires | Sponsored

---

## **The New KN95 Mask Is Taking Missouri by Storm**

KN95 | Sponsored

---

## **These Cars Are So Loaded It's Hard to Believe They're So Cheap**

Luxury SUVs | Search Ads | Sponsored

---

FEEDBACK

## You May Like

Sponsored Links by Taboola

### What Rice Does to the Human Body

Gundry MD Total Restore Supplement

### The most relaxing farm game of 2021. No Install

Taonga: The Island Farm

### The Most Powerful Hearing Aids of 2022 (See Why)

Ear Today

### Missouri: Say Bye To Expensive Solar Panels If You Own A Home In Kansas City

EnergyBillCruncher

ADVERTISEMENT

## CONNECT



## TRIBUNE PUBLISHING

FEEDBACK

New York Daily News

Orlando Sentinel

The Morning Call of Pa.

Daily Press of Va.

The Baltimore Sun

Sun Sentinel of Fla.

Hartford Courant

The Virginian-Pilot

[The Daily Meal](#)

[Studio 1847](#)

**COMPANY INFO**

[Careers](#)

[About us](#)

[Help Center](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Terms of Service](#)

[Archives](#)

[Contact us](#)

[Local print ads](#)

[Manage Web Notifications](#)

[Chicago Tribune Store](#)

[Media kit](#)

Copyright © 2022, Chicago Tribune

**FEEDBACK**