

LABOR PAINS

STRIPPERS ON STRIKE NO MORE: STAR GARDEN DANCERS GET THEIR UNION RECOGNIZED IN MAJOR VICTORY

The 15-month strike has ended with a settlement and hope for the future

By CT JONES

MAY 17, 2023



Supporters join strippers for a rally outside the Star Garden Topless Dive Bar on Aug. 19, 2022, in North Hollywood, California.

FREDERIC J. BROWN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Star Garden Toppers Dive Bar. But on Tuesday, the dancers became the only unionized strippers in the nation, with what Actors' Equity is calling a "complete victory." On Thursday, the votes were counted and the union was confirmed by the National Labor Relations Board.

The strippers first went on strike on March 18, 2022, following repeated (and ignored) demands for a safer and cleaner workspace. They blocked the sidewalk, dancing and performing to prevent people from entering the bar, which eventually had to close. They also filed for a union election with the Actors' Equity Association— a union that typically represents actors and stage performers.

Following months of legal negotiations, the owners of the venue agreed to recognize the dancers' union in a settlement hearing. In addition to negotiating the strippers' first contract within the next 30 days, the owners have also rehired strippers who were fired during the drawn-out conflict and are in discussions to reopen the bar.

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unique, they are essentially performance artists, and have a lot in common with other Equity members who dance for a living,” Actors’ Equity Association President Kate Shindle said in a statement Tuesday. “Every worker who wants a union deserves a union. The Star Garden dancers have been absolute warriors throughout this long process, and I’m thrilled that we’ve won recognition of their rights to safety and democracy in the workplace and representation at the bargaining table.”

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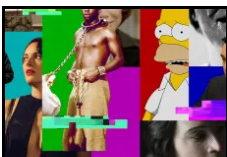
Reagan, a stripper who has been dancing for more than 14 years, tells *Rolling Stone* that the strippers’ “supportive and community-based culture” that helped them last on the sidewalk started in the dressing

money, working at Star Garden started to feel collaborative instead of solitary.

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“When we started this fight, we had no idea what we were really in for,” Reagan says. “Honestly, we thought that a petition might lead to a conversation and some changes around the workplace. We were not anticipating a 15-month-long legal battle and eight months of picketing on the sidewalk. But we really took it all in stride. It makes me really proud of how we have managed to work together and give each other grace and made sure everyone felt they had a place in the campaign.”

down the line. In the next 60 days, bargaining groups will work with the

Star Garden owners to determine the union's contract. Reagan says she's optimistic about their future, and hopes their win can mean more positive change for sex workers around the country.

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"This is such a powerful victory for the narrative of sex work in this country. As strippers, we are very privileged members of the sex-work industry. But there is a lot of exploitation in the industry at large, and what we are fighting for is just the legitimacy of the legal avenue of stripping. After being fired illegally, shaking [the owners'] hands across the bargaining table was life-changing. It has totally been a revelation about the power and the beauty of compromise, in the sense that you can take two groups of people who have very different goals, and you can find a path forward."

This story was updated on 5/18 at 3:25pm ET with the NLRB's recognition of the union.

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