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Shoe Mania workers get new union contract

Paid vacation and raises are among the provisions in contract that took three years to negotiate.

[Adrienne Pasquarelli](#)

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After three years of negotiations, 50 employees at three Manhattan-based Shoe Mania stores have signed a new union contract that provides annual pay raises and guaranteed leaves of absences.

On March 25, the majority of Shoe Mania store workers ratified the contract, which evolved from a labor dispute regarding wage violations in 2009. As part of the contract, hourly workers will receive annual commission raises and pay raises and, for the first time, paid vacations. Commissions for workers at the footwear chain will start at 5% and increase to a maximum of 8%.

The guaranteed leave clause was also a big victory for the workers, as 49 of the 50 were born outside of the U.S. Now, they can return to their native countries for several weeks at a time every other year without losing their jobs in the process.

"I'm happy with being able to take a month off to go visit my country and not have to worry about [losing my job,]" said Djika Toure, a Mali, Africa-born stock manager at Shoe Mania's Union Square location who has worked for the retailer since 2005. Mr. Toure was part of the original class action lawsuit in 2009, in which 150 current and former Shoe Mania workers demanded \$3 million in damages for violations of the Fair Labor Standards Act. The lawsuit was settled last year, with workers receiving an unspecified seven-figure settlement.

Union officials were pleased with the outcome of the case and the new contract.

"We combined strong legal cases and strong organizing efforts to win unprecedented gains for Shoe Mania workers and open up new paths to unionization for other retail workers," said Stuart Appelbaum, President of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union.

Peter Montalbano, a union organizer who was involved with the contract negotiation and lawsuit, noted that such a contract is the first of its kind.

"This is the first step," he said. "We're going to do everything we can to springboard off of this."

A manager for Shoe Mania's Broadway store declined to comment on the lawsuit or the contract.

"All sides are happy—it resulted in a mutually satisfactory agreement," said Neil Greenberg, the retailer's attorney in the lawsuit, noting that both parties negotiated in good faith.



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