



# The Workers' Edge

Voice of the Tompkins County Workers' Center

## How About a Higher Minimum Wage in Tompkins County?

**W**inning a living wage for Milton Webb and the other Recycling Center workers is a great victory. But what about the thousands of other retail, food service, health care, education, hotel, manufacturing and agricultural workers that are still paid poverty wages?

Tompkins is really two counties. While a portion of the population thrives, many more face low wages, growing inequality, erosion of middle-class jobs, housing costs through the roof and the institutionalization of a low-wage service economy.

Our Workers' Center has struggled with these problems for years. **There is only one sustainable and sure solution and that is raising the minimum wage to a living wage.** Too many workers in our community cannot get by nor can they support their families adequately on wages that are in many cases as much as one-third less than a living wage.

We are talking about raising the minimum wage to a living wage in Tompkins County for all workers employed in Tompkins County. **If you are now paid \$8.75 or \$9.50 or \$12.00, imagine how much another \$2,000 to \$8,000 a year would mean to your or your family?** That's the additional amount you would get if you actually received a living wage.

We can raise the minimum wage here in Tompkins

County. Will it be easy? Hell no! We will need hundreds if not thousands of workers to come and stand with us. Are you willing to "Get Up! Stand Up!" for a living wage? To sign our petition. To join us at the picket line or at a rally. To speak to your neighbors, friends and family. To speak to your County legislator. To help with mailings. To write letters. **If every one reading this newsletter is willing to do at least one of these things, we can raise the minimum wage to a living wage in Tompkins County.**

We will need the support of our local legislators, and then we will

need to convince legislators in Albany to agree with the will of the people. But why shouldn't they support this? Why wouldn't they want to see all their constituents thriving? Why wouldn't they want to see business booming as the increased wages are spent on food, clothing, housing, transportation, toys, appliances, movies right here in Tomkins County? Why wouldn't they want to see working people taking new pride in their living wage jobs? Why wouldn't they want to see poverty and inequality decline?

Some will say, "It's too complicated" or "It's too difficult." **But you know what is really complicated and difficult? It is trying to live and even perhaps being a good parent on \$10/hour.**

We will get an earful from rich and powerful corporations with operations in Tompkins County that don't

**Tompkins Recycling Workers Successfully Stand Up for a Living Wage!**

**M**ilton Webb and Stanley McPherson, two workers with Tompkins County Recycling, LLC, approached the Tompkins County Workers' Center wondering why they weren't making a Living Wage. They knew that they were doing the business of the County, which is a Certified Living Wage Employer. Unfortunately, "contracted workers" are not covered by the County's living wage commitment. Some workers at Tompkins County Recycling were making less than \$10 an hour. **Cont., next page**

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## Tompkins Recycling Win, cont.

After a campaign that was made possible by the teamwork of many players we are finally celebrating a huge victory: all the workers of Tompkins County Recycling are now making a living wage! This is a big step in the fight to ensure that all Tompkins County 'contracted workers' are paid a Living Wage.

This successful campaign with Casella is a great example of the 'concerted action' of two workers in the workplace acting in solidarity with each other and with the support of a community campaign organized by the TCWC. As Casella (Casella owns Tompkins County Recycling) worker, Milton Webb says: "This was a team effort with the Workers' Center and the Legislature. From the bottom of our hearts, Stanley and I want to say thank you.

Added Webb: " You know, the guys who are working here do a lot of good work, we work hard and we need that Living Wage. For all of us

that are receiving nine or ten dollars an hour and getting bumped up to over \$12.62, we really appreciate this. Everybody at the Recycling Facility is excited about it. We have a Living Wage coming that is going to uplift these workers. They will have the pay that they need and that they deserve. They'll have money to put in the bank. For what we're getting paid now, there is no option for saving money. This will make things better for families, for the economy, for everybody. The money will be spent right here in Ithaca. To all of the people who don't earn a Living Wage because they're employer won't pay a Living Wage, hang in there, it's coming."

Throughout 2013, Webb and McPherson lobbied the Tompkins Legislature and larger public saying that no one that contracts with the County for services should be making less than a Living Wage. In the fall of 2013, the TCWC urged the Legisla-



**Milton Webb, on the left, and Stanley McPherson, on the right win a living wage for workers at Tompkins County Recycling.**

ture to set aside funds to boost contracted workers up to a Living Wage, which the Legislature did by creating a \$100,000 Living Wage Contingency Fund in November of 2013.

County Legislator Nathan Shinagawa says, "We made it a top goal to make sure we use this money to uplift workers. We now pay a living wage to the workers of Food Net (Meals on Wheels) and, in the new budget, we passed a Living Wage for the workers of the Suicide Prevention Center and The Literacy Volunteers."

## It's Official: NYS Dept of Labor Increases Wages of 'Tipped Workers' to \$7.50!

The New York State Department of Labor announced on February 24th, 2015 that the wages for all 'tipped workers' in New York State will be increased to \$7.50/hour as of 12/31/15.

In response to the victory, Erin Leidy, a pizza delivery driver in Ithaca and member of TCWC, said: "It's just good economic sense to put money into the hands of the people who are working hard and will be spending it all over their communities to get the goods and services they need. There are few other single acts that will posi-

tively affect so many constituents and by extension the economy of the entire state."

Thank you to everyone who signed the petition and spoke out with tipped workers. We think that tipped workers deserve an even higher rate. Onward!

**Make  
Minimum Wage  
A Living  
Wage!**

**Make a statement! Pick up your yard sign today!**

# Ithaca Health Alliance Workers Organize a Union!

By Valarie FitzRandolph in behalf of the Ithaca Health Alliance Workers' Union: Rob Brown, Andrea Levine, Linda Knewstubb and Abby Gilbert.

**O**n a day in late November of 2014 the hourly paid staff of the Ithaca Health Alliance (IHA) voted unanimously to form a union. With the help of the Tompkins County Workers Center (TCWC) Workers Rights Hotline, we joined the Rochester Regional Joint Board, Worker's United, SEIU. In early December of 2014 the Ithaca Health Alliance Board of directors voluntarily recognized the union.

The hourly staff of the IHA decided to form a union because we believe this is the only way to gain a voice with the IHA board. The board has become increasingly isolated and closed to input from the community. We care deeply about the mission of the IHA, its special historical role as a truly democratic organization, and the people we serve and work with.

The union at IHA wants to ensure a voice for all stakeholders in the IHA including staff, volunteers, patients, donors and the community at large. It is our desire to have an open, inclusive

agency that is responsive and responsible to stakeholders, where everyone is treated with dignity and respect. Our goal is to better serve our community.

Additionally the staff wants to address fundamental issues of fair treatment in the workplace including but not limited to job duties, job security, wages and benefits.

As a union we have a voice in the IHA and how it affects our lives, families and community. We want to offer resources and support the struggles of those impacted by systemic inequalities in health care, an economic injustice inseparable from the other struggles of workers. We seek to unite with and support other workers in Ithaca and Tompkins County.

Shortly after our union formed, collective bargaining sessions began, the start of our effort to obtain a contract. It is now early April and after 5 bargaining sessions the employees still do not have a contract. The union members worked many hours to

develop what we view as a fair, reasonable and comprehensive proposal. We started out with hopefulness and guarded optimism but have become concerned about management's rigidity in bargaining critical sections of the contract.

If you care about the Ithaca Health Alliance and the vital work it does in the community please stand with us in our unionization effort, to have a voice and obtain a fair contract. You can make a secure, online donation in honor of our union and IHA's good work. Visit <http://ihaunion.peaksmaker.com/> to contribute to IHA's "30 Days to Spring for Health" Fundraiser.

If you would like to volunteer to help us get the IHA board of directors to respect our rights as a union please contact the TCWC. We want to thank TCWC for their ongoing support of and belief in our campaign.

## About the Ithaca Health Alliance

Founded in 1997, our mission is to facilitate access to health care for all, with a focus on the needs of the uninsured. With the help of over 100 volunteers and only 4 paid staff (and 2 are part-time), the Ithaca Health Alliance has created a sustainable model of community-oriented, community-driven solutions to the ongoing healthcare crisis.

## Higher minimum Wage in Tompkins County, cont.

want to see this happen because every dollar less in wages or benefits paid is a dollar more in their pocket.

And there will be many small business people who work long hours and sometimes themselves barely get by who will be fearful of the unknown. But is it really unknown? Remember in the last two years the state minimum wage has gone up about 10% each year, helping working people without any loss of jobs. Our Tompkins County living

wage will also be phased in so it's more manageable.

The bottom line is that we as a community and we as a country can no longer accept wages that leave some unable to support themselves or their families, while many others flourish and become rich. The time to make the minimum wage a living wage in Tompkins County is now.

## **TC3 Adjunct Professor Campaign Continues Unabated**

**T**he TC3 Adjunct Association's campaign to win union recognition continues. Last semester a majority of adjunct instructors signed cards stating their desire for union representation. The college could have recognized us voluntarily at that point, but chose not to, claiming doubts of our majority and so we submitted the signed cards to the Public Relations Employment Board (PERB) asking them to confirm our majority status and certify our union.

Now the Administration's new objection is that they do not want to have to deal with a 4th union at TC3 (currently administrators, support staff and full time faculty all have separate union locals). The College claims we should be included in the full time faculty union, an idea that doesn't make sense to us given our very different levels of job security and compensation. But we know this objection is the same strategy that Cayuga Community College adapted to delay or block their adjunct faculty's union drive and it is clear that TC3's administration is following Cayuga's lead. There will be a PERB hearing in June about this matter, but the College would likely appeal any decision in our favor which could drag a final decision out until 2016 or later.

Last week President Haynes held an open meeting on the budget to announce that the college faces a deficit of more than 300K due to less than adequate state aid and declining enrollments. Discussions are underway about how and where to cut costs and it looks like layoffs are coming.

We will continue to press the Administration that expending resources on a lengthy legal process to delay recognition for our union is a bad idea financially and ethically. In the meantime we also continue to organize the TC3AA – on the agenda for this semester are officer elections, the first issue of a newsletter, and surveys and forums as ways to provide opportunities for all TC3 adjunct instructors to raise their issues and concerns in preparation for future negotiations.

For more information on how you can support our efforts please contact us at [tc3adjunctassociation@gmail.com](mailto:tc3adjunctassociation@gmail.com)

-Cindy Coleman  
Adjunct Instructor,  
Tompkins Cortland Community College

## **Be One of the Good Guys: Get Certified!**

### **What is a living wage in Tompkins County?**

Currently, as of May 3, 2013, in Tompkins County the living wage is \$12.62/hr (with health insurance. Without is \$13.94). This number will be updated in May of 2015 by Alternatives Federal Credit Union (to see details, go to <http://alternatives.org/livable.html>)

### **Are you a Certified Living Wage Employer?**

By providing every employee a living wage, you show your integrity and leadership in the community. You create a positive image in the minds of current and potential customers. You strengthen relationships between staff members and management, and you raise employee morale and productivity and encourage employee loyalty.

Check out the current list of Living Wage Employers on page 6.



# Graduate Student Labor and the Story of *Cornell Graduate Students United*

By Shane Lancer

[Editor's Note: Shane Lancer has been a stellar intern at the TCWC since the fall 2014 semester.]

Over the past year graduate students Cornell University have joined together to form a labor union, Cornell Graduate Students United (CGSU).

Why have the graduate students organized? Well, a fundamental reason is to give students a voice on campus and advocate for improvements in wages and conditions for the over 2,500 graduate students who also work as teaching and research assistants. One way to achieve this is to fight for formal recognition, legal and otherwise, so Graduate Assistants are considered 'employees' of the university. To date, graduate student assistants at private universities have been subjected to a high-stakes game of political ping-pong with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) – rulings that have both granted students the right to organize (*NYU v. UAW* 2000), and then stripped those rights away (*Brown v. NLRB* 2004). As a result, grad students at Cornell have had to struggle to uphold basic conditions – after a laboratory accident in 2014, CGSU banded together to ensure the university complied with New

York State labor law and provided adequate workers' compensation for the injured student.

Fortunately, the NLRB has signaled that it may reverse, yet again, its position on the status of graduate workers after students at Columbia University (GWC-UAW Local 2110) launched an organizing drive and petitioned the Board for formal recognition. This could be good news for CGSU given that a decision permitting grads to organize under the National Labor Relations Act could create a fresh precedent. However, graduate students at Cornell have decided to mobilize regardless of the Columbia outcome. And there are other paths to recognition – last month the NYU Graduate Student Organizing Committee (GSOC-UAW Local 2110), finally secured a five-year contract with the NYU administration after the administration agreed to voluntary recognition outside the NLRB process. The uprising at NYU provides a positive example of what a voluntary recognition campaign might look like in Ithaca and across Cornell's other campuses.

This graduate student organizing drive is not a first for Cornell. In 2002, during the brief window when NLRB precedent supported graduate student unionization, students mobilized under the CASE-UAW banner, but significant internal and external opposition resulted in a lost secret ballot election. Now, over ten years later, the organizing climate on campus is far more positive. CGSU is drawing deep support from scores of departments campus-wide. Graduate students are joining together to speak freely about their working conditions and to make their voices heard inside an otherwise opaque, and sometimes undemocratic, private institution.

***If you would like to learn more about CGSU or find out how you can support Cornell Graduate Students in our organizing drive please contact us at [cornellgsu@gmail.com](mailto:cornellgsu@gmail.com); [facebook.com/cornellgsu](https://www.facebook.com/cornellgsu); on Twitter @CornellGSU; and on our website at [cornellgsu.org](http://cornellgsu.org).***



607-269-0409





# Support our 96 Certified Living Wage Businesses with over 2985 workers!

Since our last newsletter in November 2014, we are pleased to welcome the following eight newly-Certified Living Wage Employers: Cancer Resource Center of the FL; Cinemapolis, Schlather, Stumbar, Parks & Salk; Tompkins County Recycling, LLC; Town of Caroline; Trumansburg Community Nursery School; Viridius Property; Weaver Wind Energy

Advocacy Center  
Alcohol & Drug Council of Tompkins County, Inc.  
Alternatives Federal Credit Union  
Ancient Wisdom Productions (Web Designer)  
ASI Renovations  
Autumn Leaves Used Books  
Avalon Homes  
Black Box Computer Consulting  
Blue Spruce Painting and Decorating  
Boyce Thompson Institute  
Brightworks Computer Consulting  
Buffalo Street Books  
Cancer Resource Center of FL  
Catholic Charities of Tompkins/Tioga  
CFCU Community Credit Union  
Child Development Council  
Cinemapolis  
City of Ithaca  
Colonial Veterinary Hospital  
Community Dispute Resolution Center  
Community Foundation of Tompkins County  
Community Nursery School  
Community Science Institute  
Contemporary Trends, Inc.  
Cornell Child Care Center  
Court St. Chiropractic of Ithaca  
Crown Construction, Inc.  
Downtown Ithaca Alliance  
Family and Children's Service of Ithaca  
Finger Lakes Naturals  
Finger Lakes ReUse  
First Baptist Church of Ithaca

First Congregational Church of Ithaca, United Church of Christ  
First Presbyterian Church of Ithaca  
First Unitarian Society of Ithaca  
Foodnet Meals on Wheels  
Friendship Donations Network, Inc.  
Home Green Home  
Hospicare and Palliative Care  
Human Services Coalition of Tompkins County  
International Food Network, Inc.  
Ithaca Carshare  
Ithaca Cayuga Optical Service  
Ithaca Health Alliance  
Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services  
Ithaca Oral Surgery and Implants  
Ithaca Urban Renewal Agency  
IthacaMed  
Ithaca Teachers Association  
Jewel Box  
Jillian's Drawers  
Julia E. Dean Pottery  
Loaves and Fishes  
Mama Goose/Mimi's Attic  
Miller Mayer Law Firm  
New Roots Charter School  
Northeast Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine  
Nutritional Wellness Center  
OAR – Opportunities, Alternatives and Resources  
One World Market  
Ongweoweh Corporation (Pallet Mgmt)  
PPM Homes, LLC  
Quintiles Biosciences Inc. LLC

Red Feet Wine Market and Spirit Provisions  
Renovus Energy, Inc.  
Schlather, Stumbar, Parks and Salk  
Segal and Sorensen  
Shade Tree Auto, Inc.  
Shaw & Murphy Law Firm  
Silk Oak/Ithacamide  
Singlebrook Technology, Inc.  
Snug Planet LLC (Home Performance Contractor)  
Sparks Electric  
Sprague & Janowsky (Accountancy)  
St. Catherine of Siena Church  
St. Luke Lutheran Church  
St. Paul's United Methodist Church and Nursery School  
Stone Quarry House (Bed and Breakfast)  
Sunbeam Candles  
Sunny Brook Builders  
Sunny Days of Ithaca  
Sustainable Tompkins  
Taitem Engineering  
Temple Beth El  
The Frame Shop  
The Strelbel Planning Group  
Tompkins County  
Tompkins County Recycling, LLC  
Town of Caroline  
Town of Danby  
Town of Ithaca  
TRC Energy Services (Ithaca)  
Trumansburg Community Nursery School  
United Auto Workers Local 2300  
Upscale Remodeling Corporation  
Viridius Property  
Weaver Wind Energy

# Are You a Member of the Tompkins County Workers' Center?

**I want to Get Involved in the Fight for Workers Rights!**

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Individual Annual Membership  
Due= One Hour's Wage or \$8.75 if not working

During the next year, I'LL BE THERE at least five times for someone else's fight, as well as my own. Contact me for Rapid Response Alerts.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Name (Please Print):

Home Address

City/State/ZIP

Phone

Email

Mail to: TC Workers Center

**115 The Commons/ E MLK St. Ithaca, NY 14850**

You'll receive a laminated card in the mail. Great to have you with us!

Is a member of the  
Tompkins County Workers' Center

During the year, I'LL BE THERE at least five times for someone else's struggle as well as my own. If enough of us are there, we'll start winning.

I'LL BE THERE...

...standing up for our rights as working people to a decent standard of living

...organizing working families to take strong action to secure better economic future for all of us

...fighting for secure family-wage jobs in the face of corporate attacks on working people and communities

...supporting the right of all workers to organize and bargain collectively in the workplace



**Has your job made you sick?**

## **Occupational Health Clinical Center Can Help!**

- **Are your symptoms work-related?**
- **Have you been exposed to substances on the job that might make a person sick?**
- **Have you recently left a job (through retirement, lay-off, termination, etc.) that caused your symptoms?**

**Call to find out how we can help you.... Occupational Clinical Health Centers are staffed by a team of health professionals actively working to support worker health and safety in 26 counties in New York. Occupational illnesses and diseases are highly preventable, and we can help.**

As a medical practice, we focus on Medical Services including medical and occupational history; physical exam and diagnostic testing, referral and social work services.

Prevention of Occupational Illness and Disease, including screening and monitoring; education and workplace safety assessment; data collection; public policy advocacy; worker/patient empowerment, including risk mapping, workers' rights to health and safety at the workplace; navigating the Workers' Compensation system, support groups and popular education related to the impact of worker health on public health.

Convenient locations in Binghamton, Syracuse and Canton

**Call OHCC at 315-432-8899 or toll-free at 1-800-432-9590**

# WORKPLACE HEALTH & SAFETY TRAINING:

## INTRODUCTION TO OSHA RIGHTS

This interactive workshop is for anyone who works for a living! Workplace hazards include: cleaning materials exposure, construction hazards, workplace violence, stress at work, repetitive motion work tasks....

PLUMBERS LOCAL 267 HALL, 701 W. State St., Ithaca  
WORKERS' MEMORIAL DAY\*, Tuesday, April 28, 7-9pm

Training presented by the Tompkins County Workers Center and Midstate Council for Occupational Safety and Health. For further information and/or register for the workshop call 607-269-0409 or 607-275-9560 or email [TCWRH@tcworkerscenter.org](mailto:TCWRH@tcworkerscenter.org)

\*Workers Memorial Day is the international day to remember those who have suffered and died on the job from workplace injuries and diseases.



**Tompkins County**  
**WORKERS' CENTER**  
115 The Commons  
Ithaca, NY 14850  
TCWorkersCenter.org



**Return Service Requested**

