

The Workers' Edge

Winter
2013

Voice of the Tompkins County Workers' Center

Ithaca Now a Living Wage Employer

by Carl Feuer

For years, City of Ithaca school crossing guards, DPW seasonal workers and some GIAC and Youth Bureau seasonal staff all had one important thing in common. They were paid less than a living wage. No more!

Under a new agreement with the Workers' Center and with the needed additional funds already budgeted, Ithaca has become our 93rd Living Wage Employer. As a result approximately fifty City employees will now receive a living wage adjustment to their salaries, boosting them at least to the current living wage of \$12.62/hour (or \$13.94 if they work an average of 30 or more hours/week). As per Living Wage Certification guidelines this will not apply to youth employed

only during the summer or to part-time employees who are under 18 years of age, but will apply to all future eligible seasonal/temporary employees upon completion of their 90 day probation period.

This historic agreement was a long time in the making. Shortly after Svante Myrick was elected Mayor in 2011 we approached him about moving the City toward becoming a living wage employer. He immediately agreed and since then he, City HR Director Schelley Michell-Nunn, and various department heads have supported the effort and worked hard alongside the Workers' Center to make this a reality.

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County Living Wage Contingency Fund Set Up

by Anonymous

We might be on the verge of achieving real movement in our fight for a Living Wage in Tompkins County. At its October 21st Legislative meeting, County Legislators Chock and Shinagawa moved that \$100,000 in Tompkins County's contingency fund be specifically earmarked for bringing Tompkins County subcontractors up to Alternatives Federal Credit Union Living Wage standards (\$12.62/hour or \$13.94 for those above 30 hours/week without health insurance). The Living Wage Contingency Fund, which was ultimately passed in the full County budget, owes a lot to the Workers' Center ongoing campaign for a Living Wage.

The Tompkins County Workers' Center has

been pushing the County to adopt a Living Wage standard for subcontractors for a while now. Workers' Center activities have included rallies, organizing large attendances at County Board and subcommittee meetings, organizing a County wide petition (1,157 signatures when presented to Legislature on 10/21) and using media channels to move the Living Wage message across the County.

There is, of course, more to do. We will need to continue to attend and speak at County Legislative meetings as various contracts come up for renewal with the County. I suspect another rally or two might be necessary. Crucially, Workers' Cen-

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Workers' Center members stand at County Meeting to demand Living Wage for all County contracted workers.

Annual Giving Update

As readers of The Workers' Edge will know, we are coming towards the end of our first-ever Annual Giving Campaign as led by our Annual Giving Campaign Chair, Carolyn Peterson, Mayor of Ithaca, 2004-2011.

This campaign marks the TCWC's first 10 years of working in the community for Living Wages and workers' rights to a fair and equitable workplace and society. And it was a campaign that has had several different phases: a Phonthon, where we talked to supporters and which resulted in increased giving and helped TCWC take the pulse of its supporters. For instance, we learned from our supporters who live in other parts

of the country that people lamented the fact that a Workers' Center did not exist in where they had moved (even in larger cities!)

At the time of this newsletter going out, we have reached 70% of our goal of \$65,000 and are confident that we will meet this goal by the end of 2013! We would more than appreciate your assistance in helping us to meet this goal! We would like to increase those of you who are Monthly Sustainers. You can do so by either contacting our office at 607-269-0409, or by going to our website at

www.tcworkerscenter.org and clicking on the Donate button.

We would like to thank all the following people who have played such a critical role in this first-ever TCWC Annual Giving Campaign: Theresa Alt; Becky Bowen; Dave Breeden; Jami Breedlove; Neisha Butler; Clare Grady; James Douglas; George Ferrari; Lawrence Goun; Carlos Gutierrez; Joy Hines; Linda Holzbaur; Judy Jensvold; Laurie Konwinski; Darcey Laine; Mary Loehr; Liz McCheyne; Carolyn Peterson; Edie Reagan; James Ricks; Rich Rose; Tom Seiling; Nate Shinagawa; Zac Sims; Joyce Sirlin-Rand; Cathy Valentino; and Anke Wessels.

Ithaca Now Living Wage, cont.

Since all City regular employees had since 2004 already been covered by union bargaining agreements meeting living wage requirements, the issue was always about getting eligible seasonal and temporary employees (not in the union bargaining unit) up to a living wage.

The City took a major step forward in 2012 when Council agreed with the Mayor's 2013 budget request to include the estimated additional funds totaling \$45,000 needed to move toward the living wage. All future budgets will now include whatever funds are needed to maintain the City's living wage status.

The City is now the third Tompkins County municipality to become a Living Wage Employer (also the Town of Ithaca and Tompkins County). But what about the other municipalities in Tompkins County? **Danby, Dryden, Trumansburg, Caroline and all the others – where is your Living Wage Certification application?**

Living Wage Contingency, cont.

ter activists need to talk to their County Legislator about the Living Wage. And of course, we always need more involvement from TCWC members; it's solidarity that makes things work; please stay tuned for upcoming events. If you are willing to talk to your Legislator, please call us at the Workers' Center first, so we can coordinate to the best effect (607-269-0409).

For those of us at the Tompkins County Workers' Center, the Alternatives FCU Living Wage is not a universally fair wage or desired wage. Instead, we view the Living Wage as a real minimum wage, based on the real costs of staying alive in a decent manner.



Dairy Farmworkers Win Special OSHA Program to Enforce Health and Safety on NYS Dairy Farm

Carly Fox & Rebecca Fuentes

"We are all human beings. We all live under the same sky. The only thing that is different about us is a piece of paper. The owners of the dairy farms aren't the ones milking the cows. We are milking the cows. We are working overnight shifts, milking hundreds of thousands of cows every day. And we know that the dairy industry in New York State is thriving because of our hard work. All we are asking for is respect." Augusto, dairy farmworker

On July 23, 2013 at the offices of the OSHA Syracuse Regional District a meeting took place. This could have been just another meeting of workers' advocates and OSHA representatives talking about the issues affecting dairy farmworkers in the region: the fatalities, the most recent one in February of this year [in Ithaca], or the countless stories of injuries coming from the workers we were meeting at our OSHA trainings. But this time three dairy farmworkers came to the table with us to speak about their own experiences as injured workers and that of many others. They showed their scars

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Over 400 People Attend 30th Annual Labor Day Picnic

Over 400 community members gathered on September 2, 2013 to enjoy 30th annual free Labor Day picnic at Stewart Park in Ithaca. The event was sponsored by the Midstate Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO, and the Tompkins County Workers' Center.

The theme of this year's picnic was "Workers of the Community Unite!" The theme of united workers was reflected in the Annual Awards which were given to both union and non-union workers for their courage, activism, and solidarity in fighting for workers rights.

Pete Meyers, Director of the Tompkins County Workers' Center said, "This past year has been the most exciting one in the history of the Workers' Center as we saw workers coming through our Workers Rights Hotline successfully organize two unions as a way to address their workplace grievances. We saw two workers from a County-contracted agency take amazing leadership to ensure that County-contracted workers are paid a Living

Wage!

The "Friend of Labor" Award, presented to a member of the community who has spoken out publicly or taken action in support of working people, was given to Leni Hochman for her dedication to the cause of making a living wage a reality for all workers in Tompkins County. Chief Financial Officer for Alternatives Federal Credit Union, Hochman founded, over 20 years ago, the Alternatives' Livable Wage study.

The Mother Jones and Joe Hill awards are presented to people for their activism, organizing, and solidarity with other workers, often at risk to themselves.

This year, the Joe Hill Award was presented to Stanley McPherson and Milton Webb, two workers for ReCommunity Recycling—a County-contractor—for their efforts toward gaining a living wage for all Tompkins County sub-contracted workers.

The Mother Jones Award was presented to Josh Ganger, Gayle Alderman, and

all the members of IUPAT (Painters union) DC 4 Local 11 who successfully

organized a union at the local nonprofit agency, Tompkins Community Action, for their courage and perseverance in working to organize.



Josh Ganger accepts Mother Jones Award

The Goat of Labor is given to an especially egregious offender of workers' rights and/or the value of labor to our common good. This year's awardees were Walmart and GAP for their lack of willingness to mandate safe and healthy workplaces in their apparel manufacturer's workplaces, especially in Bangladesh where a factory fire took the lives of over 1,100 people in early May 2013.

Dairy Farmworkers Win., cont.

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and they spoke with the conviction and credibility of someone whose lives are on the line every day they work with livestock, dangerous machinery and hazardous chemicals. Kevin, a 23-year old worker from Veracruz, Mexico, recounted his experience working at one of the biggest dairy farms in the North Country. He got injured three times, in a span of two weeks. One of his injuries, caused by a chemical that splashed on his eyes, left him blind for half an hour. He was working alone at 3 am without any personal protective equipment. He was so desperate for relief that he used water from the cows' drinking well to apply to his eyes. There was no emergency procedure, no first aid kit, no one to help him. When he could see better he had to take the 45-minute walk alone, still in pain, to his trailer.

Another worker, Salvador, spoke about witnessing how the treatment of cows was more important than the safety of the workers at many of the dairy farms he has worked at in 5 years. "When I started working at one of the farms, they made me sign a paper saying I will never hurt a cow, but I wonder about the animals hurting us, that doesn't matter so much out there."

Prior to the meeting we had educated ourselves about OSHA's "Local Emphasis Programs", which are enforcement strategies intended to address hazards or industries that pose a particular risk to workers. We learned about the 2011 LEP in Wisconsin, that focused on dairy farms the first and only in the country to focus on dairies. The LEP in Wisconsin involved OSHA inspections of randomly selected dairy farms without a complaint or a fatality, which are normally the only two reasons why inspections of workplaces take place.

The three workers spoke about the lack of training and first aid when a worker gets hurt. And then asked OSHA to implement an LEP in the dairy industry in NYS, in the wake of three farmworker deaths in two years, and countless injuries. OSHA agreed to launch one in 2014.

In the months after the July 23 meeting, OSHA has done intensive outreach to dairy farm owners and the organizations that represent their interests to

inform them about how to be in compliance with OSHA standards in preparation for early next year when the inspections will start.

As advocates and organizers we continue to talk to workers about their rights under OSHA and organize with worker leaders to speak up and get many more workers involved in making their workplaces safe. Last month we had a meeting with OSHA staff in which two injured workers talked about the hazards and dangers of dairy farms and the issues they face when they try to change those conditions. There has been several OSHA complaints submitted since July and the Workers Center of CNY has launched an organizing campaign with dairy farmworkers hand in hand with the advocacy and legal services expertise of the Workers Justice Center of NY. We have founded a dairy farmworker advocacy committee comprised of worker justice organizations, farmworkers and researchers who have begun to speak out about conditions on dairies.

As we move forward we recognize this as a shared victory with our sister organizations The Tompkins County Workers Center, the Midstate COSH Foundation and the Occupational Health Clinical Center. All of our efforts have been strengthened during the meetings of the Upstate New York Worker Centers' Alliance and more importantly, the voices and efforts and the risks taken by the workers remind us that we need to always believe in the power of the workers and follow their lead. Like Jose Cañas, one of the dairy farmworker leaders in this effort for workplace fairness and justice like to say "Necesitamos sumar sumar para hacer crecer el movimiento" "We need to add and add to make this movement grow".

When he was asked about his thoughts on the implementation of the LEP Cañas said, "I feel very proud and satisfied to know that OSHA has taken our petition and our preoccupation to this degree to make inspections and not wait for workers make a complaint or a fatality to happen."

Farewell to Linda Holzbaur and Welcome New Staff



It is with regret that the Tompkins County Workers' Center (TCWC) announces the recent departure of Community Organizer, Linda Holzbaur, from our staff as Linda has decided to move on after having been on staff for 4 1/2

years.

Linda was incredibly dedicated to coordinating the Worker's Rights Hotline and did a stupendous job in providing the necessary emotional and strategizing support that most of those who contacted our Hotline needed in order to work through the problems they were bringing.

When four of the TCWC Staff and Board were trained in Marshall Ganz' Public Narrative program in 2010, Linda was the one who very adeptly helped to bring the Public Narrative to our TCWC community as well as to the larger community through workshop presentations.

When it came to workplace bullying (the second highest reason that people contact our Hotline), Linda became especially impassioned. As a result, she spearheaded a five-part series in late 2010 and early 2011 on workplace bullying and became involved with legislative efforts to do something to change the ubiquity of such horrific behavior.

We wish you the best, Linda, in your future endeavors!

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We welcome both Courtney Lawrence as our new Community Organizer, and Deb Clover as our Bookkeeper/Office Manager. Courtney started working with us in early November of 2013, and Deb started her new position in late September 2013.

Courtney began her advocacy work at an early age as a volunteer for Middle Way House domestic vio-

lence shelter/rape crisis center while she was a student at Harmony School in Bloomington IN. She relocated to Boston MA in 1997 where she obtained her BA in Women's Studies and Sociology of the Third World and her MA in Gender/Cultural Studies.

While at Simmons, Courtney worked as the Inside/Outside Women in Prison Project Coordinator for Sojourner the Women's Forum.

In 2001, Courtney began working at the anti-poverty organization Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD). At ABCD Courtney held the position of domestic violence housing specialist for their Safety and Advocacy for Families in Emergency/Transition to Independent Living (SAFE/TIL) Program. In addition to running the domestic violence program, she also represented clients in Boston Housing Court, provided case management for homeless folks who came to the office for services, and those living in singles and family welfare shelters in the greater Boston area. Courtney then moved to Key West, Florida and worked at AIDS Help as their Housing Specialist, responsible for their federal Housing Opportunities for People Living With AIDS (HOPWA) Program.

Courtney moved to Ithaca in 2005, bringing her experience as a housing advocate to Offender Aid and Restoration (OAR), where she was employed as a Client Service Worker. Because of her commitment to social justice she became employed at the community development credit union Alternatives FCU in 2007. While at AFCU she worked closely with members to mitigate the adverse effects of the recent economic downturn.

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Deborah Clover is a lifelong resident of Central New York. Strongly influenced by her parents' commitment to community service, she began her own activism and organizing as a teenager, working as a peer counselor for a crisis hotline and organizing a guerrilla theater group which

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**Together these businesses employ over 3000 workers.
Thank you, local businesses, for taking a stand!**

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Aigen Financial Group, LLC	First Presbyterian Church of Ithaca	Renovus Energy, Inc.
Alcohol & Drug Council of Tompkins County, Inc.	First Unitarian Society of Ithaca	Segal and Sorensen
Alternatives Federal Credit Union	Friendship Donations Network, Inc.	Shade Tree Auto, Inc.
Ancient Wisdom Productions (Web Designer)	Gadabout Transportation Services	Shaw & Murphy Law Firm
ASI Renovations	GreenStar Cooperative Market	Significant Elements, A Program of Historic Ithaca, Inc.
Autumn Leaves Used Books	Home Green Home	Silk Oak/Ithacemade
Black Box Computer Consulting	Hospicare and Palliative Care	Singlebrook Technology, Inc.
Blue Spruce Painting and Decorating	Human Services Coalition of Tompkins County	Snug Planet LLC (Home Performance Contractor)
The Bookery	International Food Network, Inc.	Sparks Electric
Boyce Thompson Institute	Ithaca Carshare	Sprague & Janowsky (Accountancy)
Bridges Cornell Heights	Ithaca Cayuga Optical Service	St. Catherine of Siena Church
Buffalo Street Books	Ithaca Health Alliance	St. John's Church
Catholic Charities of Tompkins/Tioga	Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services	St. Luke Lutheran Church
CFCU Community Credit Union	Ithaca Urban Renewal Agency	Stone Quarry House (Bed and Breakfast)
City of Ithaca	IthacaMed	Sunbeam Candles
Colonial Veterinary Hospital	Ithaca Teachers Association	Sunny Brook Builders
Community Dispute Resolution Center	Jewel Box	Sustainable Tompkins
Community Foundation of Tompkins County	Jillian's Drawers	Taitem Engineering
Community Science Institute	Julia E. Dean Pottery	Taughannock Aviation Corporation
Contemporary Trends, Inc.	Loaves and Fishes	Temple Beth El
Cornell Child Care Center	McNeil Music of Ithaca	Ten Thousand Villages Ithaca
Crown Construction, Inc.	Mama Goose/Mimi's Attic	The Frame Shop
Day Care & Child Development Council of Tompkins County	Michael May Construction, Inc.	The Strebel Planning Group
Downtown Ithaca Alliance	Multicultural Resource Center	Three Tier Consulting, Inc.
Energy Tec	New Roots Charter School	Tompkins Community Action Tompkins County
Family and Children's Service of Ithaca	Northeast Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine	Tompkins County Public Library
Finger Lakes Naturals	Nutritional Wellness Center	Town of Ithaca
Finger Lakes ReUse	OAR - Opportunities, Alternatives and Resources	TRC Energy Services (Ithaca)
First Baptist Church of Ithaca	Ongweoweh Corporation (Pallet Mgmt)	United Auto Workers Local 2300
First Congregational Church of	PPM Homes, LLC	Upscale Remodeling Corporation
	Red Feet Wine Market	

Welcome New Staff, cont.

performed extensively during the early 1970s.



Deb went on to a long career which combined administration, management, and finance work with community organizing, training and technical assistance. She has worked at Cortland County Family Planning Clinic, Cortland Community Action Program, Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services, the communi-

ty-built playground firm of Leathers & Associates, New York Folklore Society, Cortland and Tioga Arts Grants Programs, Cornell University, and as a consultant for the New York State Council on the Arts, Neighborhood Reinvestment, School to Main, and a number of historical, cultural and community-based organizations. Deb holds an A.S. in Social Sciences from TC3 and a B.A. in Folklore from Empire State College. She is passionate about issues of social justice and cultural equity and has a deep commitment to "living my life in a way which fosters equality, diversity and respect for all people."

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 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.

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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.

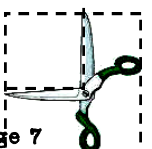
I'LL BE THERE...

...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



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**TC Workers' Center
115 The Commons
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TCWorkersCenter.org**



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