



# The Workers' Edge

Voice of the Tompkins County Workers' Center

## Where's OUR \$2.50?

### Minimum Wage Increase is Great but Upstate Needs a Living Wage Too!

**T**he Tompkins County Workers' Center (TCWC) applauds New York's early April historic decision to increase wages of the lowest paid NYS workers putting them closer to a Living Wage. Increasing the minimum wage upstate to only \$12.50 (in five years), compared to \$15 in the rest of the State, however, is extremely disappointing. It repudiates the promise that Governor Cuomo made to these workers earlier this year and denies them the same chance to approach a Living Wage as all other workers in the state.

The TCWC began its own campaign for a County-

wide Minimum Wage that is a Living Wage (presently \$14.34/hour in Tompkins County) in the spring of 2015. Says campaign Organizing Committee Member, Milton Webb (a recycling worker at Tompkins County Recycling whose leadership helped him and his co-workers win a raise to a Living Wage last year): "Everyone everywhere in New York State needs to be making a minimum of \$15/hour RIGHT NOW! No one can reasonably live on \$9.75/hour."



Photo by Laurie Konwinski

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## Nurses Push Forward for Organized Patient Care

By Rob Brown

**T**he unionization campaign launched by registered nurses at Cayuga Medical Center (CMC) in 2015 is ongoing and building momentum with support from others within the hospital and community. Many private homes and businesses in Tompkins, Cortland, and Cayuga Counties proudly display yard signs supporting the union effort (you too can get one at the Workers' Center!).

Ken Franklin, originally from Ithaca with strong family ties to the community, and organizer with 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East, underscores why

nurses' unions are so important. "When RNs have a voice, patient care and health outcomes improve immensely. CMC's dollars should be spent improving care and defending the health and lives of the community, not fighting a union campaign."

Representatives of the nurses have had speaking engagements about the campaign, and have been interviewed on WRFI Community Radio and by the Cornell Daily Sun – but other regional news outlets have been reluctant to cover the story, leading Nurses for Change and the Labor-Religion Coalition of the Finger Lakes to

circulate a petition to end the media blackout. Hospital nurses have also presented to the City of Ithaca Common Council, whose members submitted a letter of support and asked the hospital administration not to oppose nurses exercising their right to organize.

"Following the behavior of typical corporate America, executives can continue to enrich themselves, even as the organizations they 'lead' suffer financial hits from market forces and poor executive decisions. Members of the CMC Board of Directors have a self-serving financial stake in decisions affecting our

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## Cayuga Medical Center, Cont.

organization,” says Anne Marshall, RN, regarding CMC's 2014 tax return that shows executive compensation increases of 8.2-16.9% and bonuses of up to \$71,000 despite a net revenue loss and 2014 being the first year in decades that the hospital did not give bonuses to front-line employees.

Andrea Levine, union steward for Workers United local #2833 at the Ithaca Health Alliance, a local healthcare charity, describes her union's full support for the nurses' campaign. “We believe and know

from experience that patient care and an environment for healing are improved when health care workers have a voice.”

A public National Labor Relations Board hearing (which may last up to a week) will begin on Monday, May 2nd, at 1 p.m. at the Office of the Ageing (corner of W. MLK Street and Albany St. in Ithaca), regarding alleged Unfair Labor Practices by

CMC against organizing nurses. Check the Workers' Center website for location information once the details are finalized.



## Living Wage Campaign Update, Cont.

“The incredibly high cost of living in Tompkins County translates into many workers falling far short of a family sustaining livelihood even with the increase. The TCWC will continue its efforts for a true Living Wage for all workers in Tompkins County, and will support the right of workers to organize for collective bargaining and against Wage Theft, especially as the minimum wage rises,” said Pete Meyers, Coordinator of the TCWC.

Says Lorie Compton, a Direct Service Professional at the Franziska Racker Center in Ithaca and a mother of two: “I’m very disappointed that the wage isn’t going up higher or quicker in Upstate New York. I make \$11.40 an hour and can barely make ends meet. I have to pay rent. I have to buy groceries. Perhaps management should consider taking a cut in profit rates and excessively high managerial salaries so that other people who are doing the hard work can make a Living Wage, a wage we need just to survive!”

Says Erin Leidy, a longtime worker in various transportation industries, and a resident of the rural Tompkins County community, Dryden, NY: “Any increase is welcome but I think the timelines make the increases much less impactful. Additionally, I’m aware that the overall cost of living is higher in the city than upstate but that is primarily caused by rents. There are parts of upstate (like Ithaca) where the rental markets look more like parts of the city than people think. I feel like I have to live in Dryden because of the cost of rent in Ithaca.”

Adil Griguihi, Owner of Casablanca Pizzeria in Ithaca says: “If they give an increase to New Yorkers, it should be the same increase at the same time for everyone. The rent is expensive in Tompkins County; EVE-



Rally at Starbucks in Ithaca—photo by Andrea Levine

RYTHING is expensive here. Even \$15 is not enough. But the State should also be figuring out a way to help small business owners pay this wage. ”

“It’s important for us to remember that a Living Wage is defined at what Minimum Wage should be, on a local level, based on real costs to live,” says Rob Brown, staff person for the TCWC. “While the State’s new three-tier plan recognizes that New York City is an especially expensive place to live, it falls short of acknowledging that the same is true in Upstate communities. Tompkins County has been in the national news this past year for being one of the most expensive places in the US, not just NY, for health insurance, housing, and other costs of living. We need local leaders in the workforce, in business, and in government to stand up and show that we can also lead in making sure our neighbors earn what they need.”

A list of the progress we have made since our last newsletter in December 2015 include:

- ◆ on December 2, 2015, the City of Ithaca passed by a unanimous vote a Resolution in favor of our Countywide campaign for a Living Wage (joining the Town of Ithaca). Approximately 20 people showed up to voice strong support of the Resolution;
- ◆ on February 10, 2016, the Town of Caroline passed, by a 4-1 vote, a Resolution also in favor of our campaign. This brings the total municipal support of our campaign to approximately 53% of the County's population!;

- ◆ the Tompkins County Workers' Center (TCWC) joined together with the Tompkins County Human Rights Commission in their annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Poster Contest that takes place in the winter. See page 4 for this year's winning entry!

- ◆ on December 31st, 2015, fast food workers across the State received their first increase toward \$15/hour. Upstate New York workers went up to \$9.75/hour. Tipped workers went up to \$7.50/hour;

- ◆ on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, January 18th, in 10 degree weather, the TCWC organized 75 local activists to vigil for 90 minutes at FIFTEEN fast food restaurants in Tompkins County (Ithaca; Dryden; Trumansburg; and Lansing) to both advertise

fast food workers increase as well as to increase support for our Countywide campaign;



Photo credit WHCU

- ◆ on March 17, 2016, NYS Lieutenant Governor, Kathy Hochul, paid a brief visit to the TCWC to find out more about what we're doing and to praise our ongoing and visionary leadership of the Living Wage movement in Upstate New York.

## WANT TO PLANT YOUR OWN VEGGIES, SAVE MONEY, EAT HEALTHY FOOD?

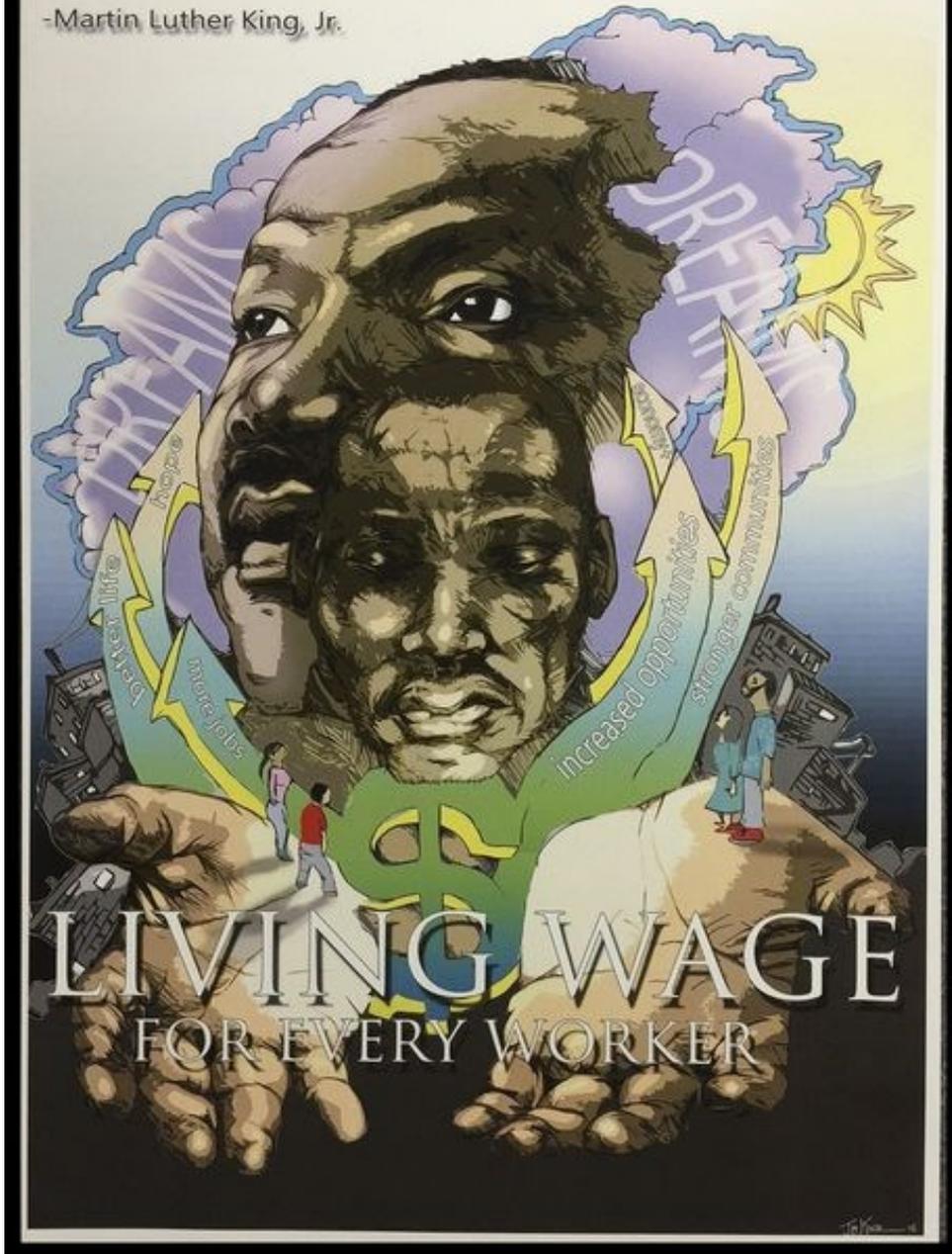
Project Growing Hope: Ithaca Community Gardens has a way you can do this, as part of our mission to serve low-income people.

You can put your name on the list for new gardeners now and thus be guaranteed a plot this year. To reserve a plot either go to [ithacagardens@yahoo.com](mailto:ithacagardens@yahoo.com) or write to Project Growing Hope PO Box 606 Ithaca NY 14851. Be sure to include your name, postal mailing address and phone number. **We have financial assistance that can reduce the cost to \$15 per season.** We are centrally located off route 13 near the farmers market. We provide water, tools, and compost. There are also always some seed and plant donations.

If you want more information about this, please contact TCWC Member, Judith Barker, at 607-272-1897 or [barker@ithaca.edu](mailto:barker@ithaca.edu).

"WHATEVER YOUR LIFE'S WORK IS, DO IT WELL. A MAN SHOULD DO HIS JOB SO WELL THAT THE LIVING, THE DEAD, AND THE UNBORN COULD DO IT NO BETTER"

-Martin Luther King, Jr.



## Congratulations

to First Place Poster Winner: Jason Kinsey in Tompkins County Human Rights Commission Poster Contest: What Would MLK Say About a Living Wage in Tompkins County? (pictured left)

## Visioning a Living Wage Visioning Project: Creating Our Sustainable Future'

Stay tuned in early May for a formal announcement about an upcoming contest sponsored by the Tompkins County Workers' Center (and supported by the Sustainable Tompkins Mini-Grant program) called the 'A Living Wage Visioning Project: 'Creating Our Sustainable Future '

We will be asking low-wage workers to envision how their lives and their family's lives would change if their pay was increased to a Living Wage (presently \$14.34/hour) and to translate this vision into an original creative work of prose, art, music, dance, or video.

Prizes will be: \$1,250, First prize; \$750, Second prize; \$500, Third prize.

# Towards Women's Equality in NY State

by Andrew Curtis

**I**t is important for all workers to understand that injustice to one worker is an injustice to all. It simply does not make sense to be fighting one struggle, whether for wage increases, steady hours, or a greater collective control over one's workplace, while paying little attention to the struggles of a different group of workers who are still disproportionately affected by workplace discrimination. Fortunately, during the recent 2015 legislative session in New York State, nine out of ten bills that make up the "Women's Equality Act" were passed by both the Assembly and Senate. Together, they promote a wide range of women's rights but with most provisions regarding the strengthening of rights of women in the workplace.

Broken down, the Women's Equality Act consists of these main parts:

Equal pay for equal work – Women in New York State still receive 83% of what men earn. The law closes previous legal loopholes and ends workplace

wage secrecy in order to close this gender discrepancy and to ensure that all workers, regardless of gender, are compensated justly;

Ending sexual harassment – Sexual harassment is now illegal in every New York State workplace. Previously small workplaces, with four employees or less, were exempt;

Ending single mother discrimination – Single mothers are less likely to be hired or acquire a promotion due to discrimination in New York and although legal safeguards are currently in place for housing and credit, this did not yet apply to hiring;

Ending pregnancy discrimination – The Women's Equality Act would require employers to provide, "reasonable accommodation to pregnant workers," including rest from heavy lifting, standing, and allowing for frequent restroom breaks

without being coerced into taking unpaid leave;

Increased protection of breastfeeding rights – Workplaces now must ensure that their employees are aware of their breastfeeding rights and that they have the space and time required to do so;

The "Women's Equality Act", in effect since January 2016, marks significant progress in women's rights and serves to highlight that a victory for working women is also a victory for the working class. If you think your employer is violating any these rights recently passed into law, or any other rights in general, contact the Tompkins County Workers Center for help.

Additionally, the specifics of the legislation can be found the NY Women's Equality Coalition's website or at [governor.ny.gov](http://governor.ny.gov)

## Welcome, Rob!

### TCWC Hires Office Manager/ Development Associate

**A**s a non-profit administrator, Rob Brown enjoys financial management and operational systems design and is passionate about the principle that organizations must be accountable and responsive to the communities they serve in order to be effective and relevant. A lifelong advocate of and activist for a just society, Rob has worked to secure civil rights and equal access to workplace, educational and cultural opportunities for LGBT communities, people of color and women. He has also campaigned for equitable access to health care and social services, environmental conservation, and sustainable local economies.

Originally from rural Illinois, Rob has lived in Tompkins County since the early 1990s. Rob's academic background includes studies of premodern history with a focus in gender and economics during the European Middle Ages at the University of Minnesota and Cornell University, and of clinical herbalism at the Northeast School of Botanical Medicine in Ithaca and the Southwest School of Botanical Medicine in Bisbee, Arizona.





# Support our 106 Certified Living Wage Businesses with over 3119 workers!

Since our last newsletter in December 2015, we are pleased to welcome four new employers: The History Center of Tompkins County; International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local #241; Sweet Land Farm CSA; Town of Enfield.

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|--|--|---|
| Advocacy Center  | Foodnet Meals on Wheels                                    | Schlather, Stumbar, Parks and Salk                    |
| Alcohol & Drug Council of Tompkins County                      | Friendship Donations Network, Inc.                         | Segal and Sorensen                                    |
| Alternatives Federal Credit Union                              | Holmberg Galbraith, LLP                                    | Shade Tree Auto, Inc.                                 |
| Ancient Wisdom Productions                                     | Home Green Home  | Shaw & Murphy Law Firm                                |
| ASI Renovations  | Hospicare and Palliative Care                              | Silk Oak/Ithacamide                                   |
| Autumn Leaves Used Books                                       | Human Services Coalition of Tompkins County                | Singlebrook Technology, Inc.                          |
| Avalon Homes   | International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local #241 | Snug Planet LLC                                       |
| Blue Spruce Painting and Decorating                            | International Food Network, Inc.                           | Sparks Electric                                       |
| Boyce Thompson Institute                                       | Ironwood Builders of Ithaca                                | Sprague & Janowsky                                    |
| Brightworks Computer Consulting                                | Ithaca Carshare  | St. Catherine of Siena Church                         |
| Buffalo Street Books   | Ithaca Cayuga Optical Service                              | St. Luke Lutheran Church                              |
| Cancer Resource Center of Finger Lakes                         | Ithaca Health Alliance                                     | Stone Quarry House                                    |
| Catholic Charities of Tompkins/Tioga                           | Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services                       | St. Paul's United Methodist Church and Nursery School |
| CFCU Community Credit Union                                    | Ithaca Oral Surgery and Implants                           | Strawbridge and Jahn Builders                         |
| Child Development Council                                      | Ithaca Urban Renewal Agency                                | Sunbeam Candles                                       |
| Cinemapolis  | IthacaMed  | Sunny Brook Builders                                  |
| City of Ithaca   | Ithaca Teachers Association                                | Sunny Days of Ithaca                                  |
| Colonial Veterinary Hospital                                   | Jewel Box  | Sustainable Tompkins                                  |
| Community Dispute Resolution Center                            | Jillian's Drawers  | Sweet Land Farm CSA                                   |
| Community Foundation of Tompkins County                        | Julia e Dean Inc/The Clay School                           | Taitem Engineering                                    |
| Community Nursery School                                       | Loaves and Fishes  | Temple Beth El  |
| Community Science Institute                                    | Mama Goose/Mimi's Attic                                    | The Frame Shop  |
| Contemporary Trends, Inc.                                      | McBooks Press  | The History Center of Tompkins County                 |
| Cornell Child Care Center                                      | Miller Mayer Law Firm                                      | The Strelbel Planning Group                           |
| Court St. Chiropractic of Ithaca                               | Namaste Montessori School                                  | Tompkins County                                       |
| Crown Construction, Inc.                                       | New Roots Charter School                                   | Tompkins County Public Library                        |
| Downtown Ithaca Alliance                                       | Northeast Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine               | Tompkins County Recycling, LLC                        |
| Family and Children's Service of Ithaca                        | Nutritional Wellness Center                                | Town of Caroline                                      |
| Finger Lakes Naturals  | OAR – Opportunities, Alternatives and Resources            | Town of Danby   |
| Finger Lakes ReUse   | One World Market   | Town of Enfield                                       |
| First Baptist Church of Ithaca                                 | Ongweoweh Corporation                                      | Town of Ithaca  |
| First Congregational Church of Ithaca, United Church of Christ | PPM Homes, LLC   | TRC Energy Services (Ithaca)                          |
| First Presbyterian Church of Ithaca                            | Quintiles Biosciences Inc. LLC                             | Trumansburg Community Nursery School                  |
| First Unitarian Society of Ithaca                              | Red Feet Wine Market and Spirit Provisions                 | United Auto Workers Local 2300                        |
|  | Renovus Energy, Inc.                                       | Upscale Remodeling Corporation                        |
|  |  | Viridius Property                                     |
|  |  | Weaver Wind Energy                                    |

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



Young Workers' Center members enjoying the incredible music of David Rovics and George Mann at the March 26th Benefit Concert in support of our minimum wage as a Living Wage campaign  
-photo by Gina Lord

## STAND UP and Say it:

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

**GET INVOLVED!**

## Balance of Work and Life for a Living Wage Employer

By Joan Lockwood

Imagine a thriving small business that pays its employees a living wage, schedules with respect to workers' lives, provides benefits and continual training. This business encourages employees to use their interests, talents and skills -- and recognizes them. Stop in at Red Feet Wine Market & Spirit Provisions to meet owner Dewi (pronounced Day-wee) Rainey, Wine Merchant to the Ithaca area.

Dewi and her partner came to Ithaca from Boulder, CO in 1998 and opened Maxie's Supper Club in 1999. Dewi started studying wine on the side, taking two or three classes a week, traveling as needed. She developed a passion for wine. After seven and a half years, Dewi sold her half of Maxie's to her partner. Research showed a need for a store with high touch customer service, a range of changing selections, and a focus on high quality wines at a variety of prices. "There was room for me. So I did that!" said Dewi. About a year later, she opened Red Feet Wine Market.

"We were already paying a living wage at Red Feet," said Dewi. "I had an employee who said check out this organization - the Workers' Center. And I'd read in the Ithaca Journal every year about the living wage. We didn't need to make much of an adjustment to be a Certified Living Wage Employer." Red Feet provides a range of benefits to its workers, prorated on hours worked and specific employees' needs.

Work at Red Feet is life- and family-friendly. This was very important to Dewi, who has an elementary-school child. "We put a lot of thought into our staff's needs. We do the schedule a month at a time and every month is different."



**Empar Sicroff at work at Red Feet Wine Market & Spirit Provisions**

Dewi's management philosophy includes encouraging employees' interests. One employee has graphic design skills; another is good at marketing, for instance. They do work for Red Feet with these skills and are entitled to a higher wage. The arrangement benefits both employer and employee.

It costs a lot of money to hire and train a new person, says Dewi. It takes at least six months and up to a year for someone to get comfortable. "It's a headache when I think of it. That's one of the things about a living wage -- low turnover," she said.

Congratulations to Certified Living Wage Employer Dewi Rainey and Red Feet Wine Market & Spirit Provisions!

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# Please join us for:

## A Day's Work

a May Day movie showing  
**SUNDAY, MAY 1, 4:30-6:30 - CINEMAPOLIS  
ITHACA COMMONS.**

Program will include a discussion with the filmmaker, an OSHA representative and the audience. Sponsored by the Midstate COSH and the Workers Center – suggested donation \$10, no one turned away for lack of funds, movie passes available at the Workers' Center.

“90 minutes before he was killed on his first day of work as a temporary employee, 21-year-old Day Davis texted a picture of himself to his girlfriend, excited for their future. Now Day's sister, 17-year-old Antonia, searches for answers. An investigation reveals the troubling issues that led to Day's death and how the \$100 billion temporary staffing industry is putting millions of American workers at risk.”



**“It doesn't add up. The story doesn't add up to me. Period.”**





**TC Workers' Center**  
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TCWorkersCenter.org



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