



# The Workers' Edge

Voice of the Tompkins County Workers' Center

## Steady March Toward a Living Wage for ALL of Tompkins County: Campaign Updates & Strategy

**O**ur mission is critical to working people. According to an Economic Policy Institute Family Budget Calculator from 2015, Tompkins County is the EIGHTH most expensive place to live in the United States. Without a Living Wage too many of our neighbors cannot support themselves or their families. This is **unfair** to these workers, **unjust** in a society filled with wealth, and **immoral** in a community that values and supports families.

**So we rally.** Close to 100 people attended our most recent rally in front of the Health and Human Service Committee. We proposed Legislation that the minimum wage in Tompkins County become a Living Wage.

**We organize.** On June 14th, the Town of Enfield became the 5th municipality in Tompkins County to formally urge the County to enact a Living Wage Minimum Wage. Enfield joins the Towns of Dryden, Caroline, and Ithaca as well as the City of Ithaca as Tompkins County municipalities that support the move to a Countywide Living Wage. These five local governments represent 71% of the County's population.

**We build coalition.** The TCWC is presently organizing a working groups workers and of County Legislators, nonprofit representatives, business people, and other community leaders to look at practical solutions to the concerns of

some employers (like nonprofit/caregiving organizations) about their ability to meet a county minimum wage that is a Living Wage.

### And we need you.

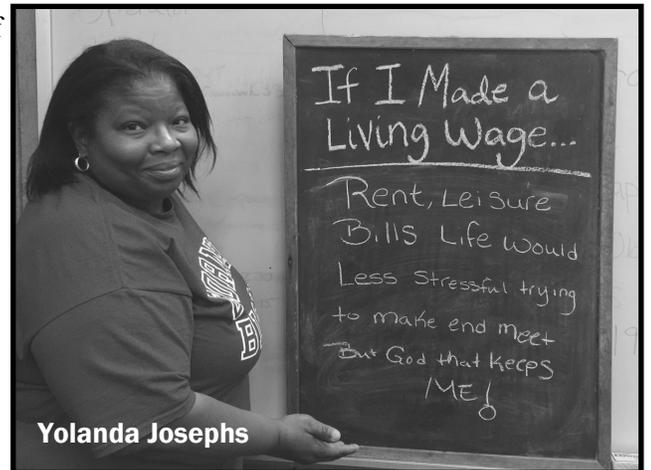
Consider getting a yard sign in support of the campaign. Please contact the TCWC by or calling our office at 607-269-0409, or by dropping by the TCWC during business hours. Also, please become a member of the Workers Center. See page 7 to sign up.

**Make Minimum Wage A Living Wage!**

## Living Wage Updated for 2017

**O**n August 18, 2017, Alternatives Federal Credit Union announced the results of its newest Living Wage Study for Tompkins County, which it conducts every two years. This study examines real costs of living in the County to determine how much it costs **a single person living a frugal lifestyle** to meet the basic cost of day-to-day life. The Living Wage is how much someone needs to earn per hour to afford to live in the County if they work full time. Part-timers need

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Yolanda Josephs

## Gimme! Coffee Baristas Organize First Barista Union in the Country! Seek Next to Organize Hospitality Industry in the County

by Korbin Richards, a lead organizer

**I**'m giddy with disbelief and the smell of greasy snack from the food truck behind me. Two pals gesture in conversation on my left, beers in hand, and one of them sits on the picnic table, his cowboy boot square on the bench's seat. It's oddly chilly for a night on May 31st, and the patio crowd at The Westy is sparse. Sam Mason hands out our union buttons to a group at another table, and they raise their glasses in a congratulatory toast. We raise ours back at them. As I sip, I can't stop smiling. We won. We won the right to unionize.

A couple hours before, myself and three other baristas met at the State Street Gimme! Coffee after hours. Alongside our CEO Kevin Cuddeback, Pete Meyers from TCWC, and Richard Bensinger, our Workers United rep, we filed into the lab and witnessed the National Labor Relations Board Field Agent count the votes that would decide whether or not we would be the first successful barista union in the nation. We won by 94%.

Since that night, we've been asked many times who we are. Obviously we're baristas

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## Gimme!, cont.,

employed by Gimme! Coffee, and we service the Tompkins County community with high quality caffeine. We've all invested time in our craft, obsessively tasted and discussed espresso, burned ourselves on steamwands, and have unique callouses on the inside of our index fingers from locking and unlocking portafilters. We've celebrated and commiserated the life that is customer service and at times are grimly reminded what society thinks of food service workers; disposable, unskilled labor.

So who are we? We're a group of idealists who insist on rehabilitating our country's attitude and treatment of hospitality workers. We're activists who rally behind workers who have been abused by their management. We're artisans who take great pride in our craft, and we believe that unions are the tool with which to redirect our economy that rewards exploitation and benefits off the suppression of workers' rights. This is why we organized. We are Unionistas.

Fighting the worker/management power structure is no easy undertaking. After all, it's no coincidence that we're the first *successful* barista union in the country; using a combination of money, intimidation tactics, and rhetoric that invalidates unfair treatment, management often thwarts attempts to unionize. We are fortunate to have a crew of baristas who are passionate about labor rights and a capable and committed staff at our local Tompkins Workers Center. With their experience, we flew through the first steps

of unionizing, and together we have big plans for the future.

Imagine an entire county where food and beverage workers are paid above living wage, have fair and reasonable benefits, and are respected for their work. An entire county of unionized hospitality workers. Sound impossible? We don't think so. That's why, starting with our own workplace, the Tompkins County Workers Center and the Gimme Unionistas collaborated to create a more holistic workplace where we insist power should be shared more laterally between workers and management. We believe that workers can reclaim their autonomy and dignity through unions, and it's in our reach to create a network of unionized hospitality workers in Tompkins County, or, rather than a network, a community.

The Unionistas are here to tell you this is possible. We're here to invite you into our community, and if you see us at The Westy or Watershed or Workers' Center joking and discussing a labor movement, come say hello.

*{Editor's note: Gimme! Coffee CEO Kevin Cuddeback honored baristas' democratic right to decide in a fair vote among themselves whether to form a union by declaring his neutrality early in the process.}*

## Living Wage Update, cont.



TCWC Rally for a Living Wage  
Photo: Kelsey O'Connor, Ithaca Voice

combined work at the Living Wage equal to full-time work to live self-sufficiently; even at the Living Wage some part-time work still qualifies people for poverty-based programs through which County, State, and Federal dollars may pay part of some of these bills. Healthcare expenses are some of the trickiest parts of

the Living Wage, since costs can change based on whether someone gets insurance at an employer's business rate with some of the cost paid by the employer, or by income.

The basic Living Wage is the amount a single needs to earn to cover health insurance premiums purchased on the New York State of Health Marketplace and out-of-pocket healthcare expense with no money left over or owed because of income-based assistance with no benefits from their employer.

2017 Tompkins County Living Wage		
Factor	Annually	% Change over 2015
Housing	\$11,244.00	(-0.64%)
Food	\$2,673.00	(-1.0%)
Transportation	\$2,195.40	(-4.7%)
Communication	\$920.88	(+11.6%)
Health care (median silver metal plan for public, with subsidy.)	\$4,351.18	(+20%)
Recreation	\$1,340.72	(+1.5%)
Savings	\$798.84	(+1.1%)
Miscellaneous	\$1,613.50	(+10.6%)
<b>Net Pay</b>	<b>\$25,137.52</b>	(+0.9%)
Taxes	\$6,291.28	(+1.1%)
<b>Gross Pay</b>	<b>\$31,428.80</b>	(+0.9%)
<b>Hourly 40 hours/week, 52 weeks/year</b>	<b>\$15.11</b>	
Addendum: Childcare		
Infant	\$14,412.72	(+6.2%)
Toddler	\$13,560.00	(-0.7%)
Pre-school	\$12,892.80	(+6.0%)

# Organizing the Organized

by Jason David, President -- UAW Local 2300

[In May, Jason was elected President of UAW Local 2300, the largest union in Tompkins County representing service and maintenance workers at Cornell as well as TCAT bus drivers, TCPL staff and others. One of the reasons for the decline of trade unionism in the United States, some say, is that too many unions have depended on a "servicing model" rather than an "organizing model." In this recent article originally published in Local 2300's newspaper, "Bear Facts," Jason describes importance of the Organizing Model. The difference is not only relevant in a Union context. What about our own Workers' Center? Do we focus too much on 'service' and not enough on 'organizing'?]

I had the chance to take a step back for a week this month. I spent most my time off in the woods and I let several deer pass as they were not what I was looking for; maybe in another year or two.

## What have we accomplished?

While sitting up in my tree, I asked myself, *what have we accomplished in the last six months? The obvious things came right to mind.*

We negotiated a couple contracts; we protected members' right against such things as Personal Improvement Plans (PIPs); we clarified that "comp" time or double-time-and-half is the member's choice; we settled grievances and got people back to work.

## Solidarity Needed

**These are all great things, but they do not help with solidarity. Therefore, I asked myself what have we done to lead our brothers and sisters toward solidarity?**

We have recruited eight new stewards; I have visited many time clocks (and many more to come); I have asked the Zone Reps to take the third Thursday completely off work to go out into the membership.

## The Service Model

The main thing we have identified is that we have been operating from a service model. A service model is not all bad, but it is only part of the equation.

A service model means you (the member) pay dues, and whenever something comes up we come out and "service" that issue for you. It is no different from me paying Time Warner Cable and them providing me with cable TV.

*Is that what a union is about?*

## Organizing the Organized

The service model disconnects the membership from the leadership, from the union itself. The union becomes a separate entity instead of something you belong to.

We are launching a campaign called **Organizing the Organized**. This campaign seeks only to bring all of us members back together in solidarity as a family. We are moving from a service model to an organizing model.

The key to shaping an organizing model is to identify issues we as members can organize around, and then make sure we have the ability to organize around each issue.

It takes structure. That is why the number one goal of mine is to recruit as many stewards as possible, and subsequently provide them with top-notch training.

## For Instance...

An instance of the organizing model happened recently when we were denied a separate check for Cornell workers who received retroactive pay and ratification bonus in one check. Also, our ability to change our deductions for dependents was not available online in Workday.

I got on my [UAW Local 2300 Forums](#) on Facebook and requested members go into Payroll and change their deductions manually.

Members flooded the Payroll office; Payroll called us asking why this was happening. Within a week, the ability to change deductions was back on Workday.

**I had people thanking me, but it was not me.**

***We showed solidarity.  
It was US standing together;  
it was us organized,  
and it was solidarity.***

***The power of the organizing model was evident.***

More than mere power, organizing brings us together — and that is what this leadership wants. This is a huge undertaking as it changes the fundamental way we operate, but in the coming years look for it, get involved in it.

**I promise you will love being a part of it because it is UNION.**

# Tompkins County Workers' Center and Tompkins County Immigrant Rights Coalition Align in Deeper Collaboration

The Tompkins County Workers Center (TCWC) has established a new collaboration with the Tompkins County Immigrant Rights Coalition (TCIRC) by becoming TCIRC's non-profit fiscal sponsor, to expand and enrich its work with respect to immigrant workers' labor rights. Tompkins County exists in a unique context where many immigrant workers from diverse subcultures (farmworkers, restaurant workers, service folks, educators, students) work within both the City of Ithaca and the County's more rural communities. The Workers' Center's roots are in the County's many communities and it works to create a world where all people are treated fairly at work.

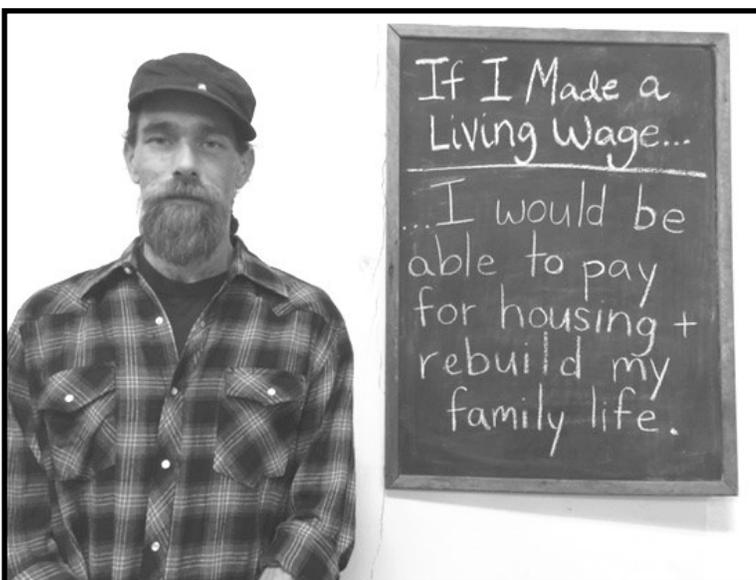
The TCIRC is an independent volunteer organization with people from diverse backgrounds and multiple affiliations. TCIRC's goals are to inform migrant communities and non-citizens of their rights and how to navigate the detention and deportation system, if and when needed; to educate and bring awareness among community members more broadly; to work in and build coalitions; and to educate our community about how U.S. foreign policies contribute to the roots of migration. TCIRC is currently creating a Rapid Response Network throughout the County to document and provide follow up for communities that are under the brunt of deportation policies, exploitation, and de-

humanizing political climates. A few members are currently seeking to be accredited immigration advisors (non-lawyers) to people coming before immigration agencies such as USCIS, ICE and Immigration Courts, with training from the NY Immigration Coalition.

TCWC and TCIRC, with Midstate Council for Occupational Safety and Health, collaborated on the forum 'Milk Cows, not Workers' on July 31st, 2017, featuring a presentation of the 'Milked Report' prepared by the Central New York Workers' Center and the Worker Justice Center of New York and local dairy farmworkers from Central America. The farmworkers told of the labor injustices and housing-related abuses they face, and of how they have been organizing to have rights and protections non-farm workers have, and for the right to unionize. More than 100 people attended the event, and increased the hope that broader coalitions can be strengthened regionally.

At a time in the U.S. and in the world when it is critical to draw attention to immigrant and human rights, respect for and protections of these rights and of human dignity, this collaboration seeks to broaden inclusion and connections, and build a shared vision of the world.

## What would a Living Wage Mean for You? Ho



If I made a Living Wage [...] I would find housing, pay old power bills, take care of my health, and see my children. The cost of traveling one hundred miles to see my three younger kids would no longer be unbearable. These have always been major goals of mine, but they seem impossible unless workers like me start getting paid more.

**Pete Ryerson**

# Work Doesn't Have to Make You Sick!

**I**f you work, the chances are you spend much of your waking life on the job, exposed to different hazards based on your career. In 2015, 4,836 people died on-the-job in the United States, not to mention the many thousands more who were hurt or got sick. Some dangers are obviously scary, like equipment that can crush or maim us, customer violence, and improperly disposed drug syringes that can make even bathroom cleaning risky. Other hazards are more subtle like stress, repetitive motion injury, mold spores, or chemical fumes. The Tompkins County Workers' Center's Occupational Safety and Health program provides training for workers of all backgrounds on things like Your Occupational Safety Rights, how to identify and control hazards, and workplace organizing for health, in cooperation with partners at Midstate Council for Occupational Safety and Health and SUNY's Occupational Health Clinical Center.

## Want safety training?

Call TCWC: 607-269-0409 or email [carlos@tcworkerscenter.org](mailto:carlos@tcworkerscenter.org)

## Has your job made you sick?

Call the Occupational Health Clinical Center at 315-432-8899 or toll-free at 800-432-9590



The Occupational Safety and Health Act makes clear that *employers are responsible to provide a safe and healthy work environment*, but not all employers understand safety issues well and the worst outright don't care. When we know our rights and how to name and control hazards in the workplace, we can take action to change things for the better. While it is illegal for an employer to retaliate against you for raising health and safety issues, it's still intimidating and a lot of folks expect that "the boss is going to get away with anything anyway." You don't have to go it alone: your co-workers, the Workers' Center, and others can back you up.

## Workplace Safety Solutions in Action

- Gimme! Coffee management, the baristas of Workers United local 2833, and TCWC are working together to build ongoing safety resources and training for the business.
- Despite the risks, a group of workers at a regional farm followed up on OSHA work with TCWC to stand together and demand safety changes – or else they'd quit.

## How Would Life Be Different?

**Brian**

The unpredictable bus schedule currently prevents me from working more hours, but a living wage would allow me to afford a place closer to work and take on more hours.



I'm working towards earning my GED and starting a career, but for now my income is insufficient for me to live. [...] If I were paid a living wage, that additional money would go to childcare and solving problems that I have now with transportation. My son's mother and I are working on our relationship--it would be nice if I could buy her a coffee or take her to see a movie sometimes.

**Mike**

**Tell us! Find us on Facebook or at [TCWorkersCenter.org](http://TCWorkersCenter.org)**



# Support our 107 Certified Living Wage Businesses with over 2906 workers!

Since our last newsletter in April 2017, we are pleased to welcome: Ancient Wisdom Productions; Feirman Builders, and the Park Foundation.

Advocacy Center	Human Services Coalition of Tompkins County	Shaw & Murphy Law Firm
Alcohol & Drug Council of Tompkins County	International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local #241	Silk Oak/Ithacamide
Alternatives Federal Credit Union	International Food Network, Inc.	Singlebrook Technology, Inc.
Autumn Leaves Used Books	Ironwood Builders of Ithaca	Snug Planet LLC
Ancient Wisdom Productions	Ithaca Carshare	Sparks Electric
Avital's Apiaries	Ithaca Cayuga Optical Service	St. Catherine of Sienna Church
Blue Spruce Painting and Decorating	Ithaca Health Alliance	St. John's Episcopal Church
Boyce Thompson Institute	Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services	St. Luke Lutheran Church
Brightworks Computer Consulting	Ithaca Oral Surgery and Implants	St. Paul's United Methodist Church and Nursery School
Buffalo Street Books	Ithaca Urban Renewal Agency	Stone Quarry House
Cancer Resource Center of Finger Lakes	IthacaMed	Strawbridge and Jahn Builders
Catholic Charities of Tompkins/Tioga	Ithaca Teachers Association	Sunbeam Candles
Center for Transformative Action	Jewel Box	Sunny Brook Builders
Child Development Council	Jillian's Drawers	Sunny Days of Ithaca
Cinemapolis	Julia e Dean Inc/The Clay School	Sustainable Tompkins
City of Ithaca	Loaves and Fishes	Sweet Land Farm CSA
Colonial Veterinary Hospital	McBooks Press	Taitem Engineering
Community Dispute Resolution Center	Miller Mayer Law Firm	Temple Beth El
Community Foundation of Tompkins County	Multicultural Resource Center	The Frame Shop
Community Nursery School	New Roots Charter School	The Strebel Planning Group
Community Science Institute	Northeast Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine	Tiny Timber LLC
Cornell Child Care Center	Nutritional Wellness Center	Tompkins County
Court St. Chiropractic of Ithaca	OAR – Opportunities, Alternatives and Resources	Tompkins County Public Library
Downtown Ithaca Alliance	One World Market	Tompkins County Recycling, LLC
Family and Children's Service of Ithaca	Ongweoweh Corporation	Town of Caroline
Feirman Builders, Inc.	Park Foundation	Town of Danby
Finger Lakes Naturals	Planned Parenthood of the Southern Finger Lakes	Town of Enfield
Finger Lakes ReUse	Q2 Solutions	Town of Ithaca
First Baptist Church of Ithaca	Red Feet Wine Market and Spirit Provisions	TRC Energy Services (Ithaca)
First Congregational Church of Ithaca, United Church of Christ	Renovus Energy, Inc.	Trumansburg Community Nursery School
First Unitarian Society of Ithaca	Schlather, Stumbar, Parks and Salk	United Auto Workers Local 2300
Friendship Donations Network, Inc.	Sciencenter Discovery Museum	Upscale Remodeling Corporation
The History Center of Tompkins County	Segal and Sorensen	Village of Cayuga Heights
Holmberg Galbraith, LLP	Shade Tree Auto, Inc.	Viridius Property
Home Green Home		The Watershed
Hospicare and Palliative Care		Weaver Wind Energy
		Youth Farm Project

# 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 \$9.750 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**



## YOU Power Workers' Power

Everything the Tompkins County Workers' Center does is because **You** stand with us and with all people treated unfairly at work. When you donate or become a TCWC member,

- You fight to make sure you and everyone else earns a Living Wage, to live self-sufficiently with dignity.
- You help more than 30 people a month create a plan to improve problems at work, or seek justice for wage theft, discrimination, harassment and other abuses.
- You connect groups of workers with the means to form their own union.
- You create a place where other people who care about workers' rights can come together, become (better) organizers and leaders, and stand up at work and in our communities.
- You organize actions that make sure businesses and institutions Put People First.
- and You make sure that your Workers' Center stays grounded first and foremost in the grass-roots, accountable most of all to the community we share.

Create the world we want to see, where all people are treated fairly and paid fairly at work.  
Make a contribution of any amount - Become a Member

Build for the future with your Monthly or Quarterly Donation or consider a bequest to Tompkins County Workers' Center

Want to talk more about how you can support us or get more involved? Contact us!

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# 34th Annual Labor Day Picnic

September 4th, 2017 11-3pm  
Cass Park Pavilion (near Children's Garden)

**NOTE:**  
Location Change!

Hotdogs & Hamburgers  
(veggie too!)  
Bring a dish to pass if you can  
Mother Jones Award  
Joe Hill Award  
Friend of Labor Award  
Goat of Labor Award



Music! Fun! See you there!



**Tompkins County  
WORKERS' CENTER**  
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TCWorkersCenter.org



**Return Service Requested**

