



Summer
2015

The Workers' Edge

Voice of the Tompkins County Workers' Center

Low Wage Tompkins County Workers Need YOU!

Full Steam Ahead for a Countywide Minimum Wage That is a Living Wage

The Tompkins County Workers' Center (TCWC) is throwing down the gauntlet on a campaign to create a countywide minimum wage that is a Living Wage. The statewide minimum wage is \$8.75 and our campaign is to create a groundswell to pass a law at the County level to enable EVERY SINGLE WORKER in Tompkins County to make a *real* minimum wage of \$14.34/hour.

For this campaign to be successful, we need a grass-roots movement of people and organizations across Tompkins County. That's where YOU come in.

Here's how you can help:

- ⇒ **Sign our petition** (see copy of petition enclosed in this newsletter) and get your family, friends, neighbors and colleagues to sign it. Encourage the same people to carry the petition themselves! (Please feel free to make copies of the petition to distribute.)
- ⇒ **Write or call your County Legislator** and ask them to support this important move on behalf of those here who who work for **absolute poverty wages** (if you don't know who your Legislator is, contact the TCWC at TCWRH@tcworkerscenter.org or call us at 607-269-0409);

- ⇒ **Testify**, along with others, at a County Legislature meeting in the near future. Legislators need to see that voters are behind a Living Wage. Let us know if you're interested!
- ⇒ **Read our FAQ** (Frequently Asked Questions) sheet online at: <http://bit.ly/1INEYYI>
- ⇒ **Talk the campaign up** with everyone you know. Talk to low-wage workers that you either know or come in contact with in whatever context. Workers need to stand up in this fight, especially those whom would benefit directly by this change;
- ⇒ If you are part of an organization that believes in this campaign, we're looking to **get organizational endorsements** and support. Let us know!
- ⇒ **Sign up as a campaign volunteer** (tabling, petitioning, mailings);
- ⇒ **Donate financially** to our campaign. The Tompkins County Workers' Center is doubling our budget in order to hire more organizers to help make this campaign a reality.

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(((BREAKING NEWS)))

Town of Ithaca Endorses County Living Wage Campaign

On Monday, 8/10, the Ithaca Town Board, by a unanimous vote, became the first governmental agency in Tompkins County to publicly endorse the Tompkins County Workers' Center campaign, to mandate a minimum wage for EVERYONE who works in Tompkins County that is a Living Wage (\$14.34/hour in Tompkins).

Says Ithaca Town Supervisor Herb Engman: "The Town Board realized that the issue today isn't just jobs but jobs that pay wages people can live on. The widening income gap has gotten a lot of attention nationally, and more local governments are taking action to raise the minimum wage, which has fallen over the years in terms of spending power."

Town Board Member, Pat Leary, added: "The affordable housing gap can't be closed by addressing just the housing side of the equation: housing has become increasingly unaffordable because wages haven't kept up. A living wage can help improve the lives of millions of people in many aspects of their lives."

Labor and Sustainability

One of my favorite yard signs is
“IF YOU THINK THE ECONOMY IS WORKING,
ASK SOMEONE WHO ISN'T.”

It makes you wonder.

What should an economy be for anyway? Shouldn't it promote social justice and enable all of us to live with dignity? Shouldn't it diminish inequality and violence while it fosters environmental health and integrity?

We need a new economy that works for us, one that moves away from the vicious agenda of extracting wealth from the earth and from human labor. We can only halt this cycle by furthering the labor movement's essential values of solidarity and mutual support.

Clean energy generates jobs. Last September, the University of Massachusetts Political Economy Research Institute and the Center for American Progress released a report showing that cutting greenhouse-gas emissions 40 percent by 2035 would create 2.7 million more jobs and reduce the unemployment rate by 1.5 percent.

Alliances among labor, civil rights and environmental activists are deepening. For example, the Sierra Club and 1199 Service Employees International Union (SEIU) are partnering with the NAACP march from Selma to Washington DC that began August 1. This Journey for Justice demands “a fair criminal justice system, uncorrupted and unfettered access to the ballot box, sustainable jobs with a living wage, and equitable public education.”

New alliances also include the Labor Network for Sustainability founded in 2009. LNS wants us “to look beyond the cramped rules of the current system” to build a full-employment economy, renewable energy and a just transition for workers, communities, and carbon-dependent regions.

The United Steelworkers and the Sierra Club forged the BlueGreen Alliance to push for climate and clean energy legislation that would create and maintain family sustaining green jobs and build a stronger, fairer economy. Their Board of Directors represents the largest US labor unions and leading environmental organizations.

These alliances are not without tensions, but those can best be worked out among the grass roots at local levels. Here in Tompkins County, we have the new Coalition for Sustainable Economic Development (CSED). A first for this area!

Representing labor in CSED are officials from the Plumbers and Pipefitters, IBEW Local 241, NE Council of Carpenters and the TCWC. We are eager to participate because it promotes the primary objective of the labor movement – unity of action among all workers for the bet-

By Kathy Russell, TCWC Community Union Organizer in the local environmental and climate justice movement

terment of everyone! Businesses should be able to grow in a way that truly benefits all the people who live here, not just big corporations coming from the outside.

CSED has proposed new policy for tax abatements to the TC Industrial Development Agency (IDA), and it will be represented on the mayor's task force to formulate a new CIITAP (Community Investment Incentive Tax Abatement Program). We have supported the “Ban the Box” Campaign, which seeks to get rid of the box that job applicants are supposed to check stating whether they have ever been convicted. CSED has also supported TCWC's Campaign for a countywide Living Wage.

The unity represented by CSED can be seen at meetings of the IDA, the Common Council and the County Legislature. Allies are calling for genuine, sustainable development that meets rigorous energy efficient standards, created, maintained and operated by a local, diversified work force that is paid a living wage.

After all, in order for buildings to meet sufficiently tough standards of energy efficiency, they must be created by trained, skilled workers, like those who have gone through the sort of apprenticeship programs offered by local building trades unions.

The fight for climate justice and the struggle for the rights and dignity of labor can no longer be separated!

COALITION FOR SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

About Us

The Coalition for Sustainable Economic Development (CSED) is an alliance of environmental groups, social justice organizations, business leaders, labor representatives, faith organizations and elected officials united in recognition of the inextricable connection between economic development, environmental protection and social justice.

CSED advocates for public policies that protect the ecosystem as well as the people who live and work here; policies that enrich the community not just monetarily but also socially, and that are based on a recognition that all life is intertwined and inherently valuable.

We believe we can no longer pursue business-as-usual when it comes to economic development in our county. The problems we face as a community and society are significant: the planet's future health is endangered, economic inequality is worsening, racial and ethnic divisions are still being exploited, and the shared visions that bind us together as humans are threatened.



Focus on Living Wage-Certified Employer: The Frame Shop



Frame Shop Owner Emily Russell
with employee Will King

The Workers' Center certified the 100th Living Wage Employer in the county in July of this year. The Living Wage Employer certification program began in 2006, and this milestone highlights the importance, both morally and economically, of paying a Living Wage. One of our certified employers is Emily Russell, who owns the Frame Shop and has been certified since the program's inception. Ms. Russell offers a unique perspective on the Living Wage, as Living Wage Employers know all the benefits and some of the complications of the Living Wage.

The Frame Shop's commitment to paying a Living Wage precedes the Workers' Center's certification program; Ms. Russell and her mother have operated the store for over 25 years, and they share the personal philosophy of taking care of their employees. Through paying a Living Wage, Ms. Russell says she is able "to support the community and encourage [her employees] to give back as well." Moreover, Ms. Russell has had "lower turnover, increased business, a large applicant pool when we have had to hire, good press, and lots of community support." Ms. Russell prides herself in paying the Living Wage, and both Tompkins

County and her employees have responded. For Will King, an employee at the Frame Shop, receiving a Living Wage allows him "dignity in [his] work and personal life and permits [him] to reach [his] potential beyond

er," and still Ms. Russell highly doubts her competitors offer a Living Wage. Despite the differences in budget and wage, The Frame Shop is able to offer prices which are competitive, if not

On June 26, 2015, Alternatives Federal Credit Union updated its Living Wage standards for itself as an employer as well as for the larger community. The Tompkins County Workers' Center has long used Alternatives FCU's Living Wage standards to guide our work.

Living Wage for a Single Person in Tompkins County (note that the Living Wage figures for the community are utilizing the Excellus Silver Plan that an individual can purchase on the NYS Exchange, as contrasted to the AFCU health insurance). Details as to how Alternatives FCU comes to these figures can be found at www.alternatives.org/livable.html

Amounts for one person:

Rent:	\$943/month
Transportation:	\$191.95/month
Food:	\$225.65/month
Healthcare	\$281.81/month
Savings:	\$65.83/month
Recreation:	\$110.06/month
Communications:	\$68.74/month
Miscellaneous:	\$121.50/month
Taxes:	\$476.66/month
Total:	\$2,485.20/month
	\$29,922.42/year
	\$14.34/hour

the basic needs."

Despite all of its advantages, it has been difficult for Ms. Russell as a small business owner to continuously pay a Living Wage. "The Frame Shop is in direct competition with big box stores which have a huge advertising budget and better buying pow-

cheaper, than those offered by box companies; Ms. Russell attributes this to her egalitarian outlook and "not paying a huge CEO salary." Ms. Russell is committed to "trying to offer our employees a great place to work and mak[ing] sure they are compensated so they can afford to live in this community." With expenses like "health insurance premiums, freight, and material costs" constantly increasing, Ms. Russell has had to "figure out other expenses to cut, [use] smarter purchasing, and find new ways to grow the business." Although this seems like extra work, Ms. Russell makes the Living Wage a priority because is it the right thing to do and The Frame Shop's success is dependent on the hard work of the employees.

We'd like to thank Mrs. Russell for her continuous commitment to paying a Living Wage. The time is now for every employer to take responsibility and pay their employees what they deserve: a Living Wage!

Alex Fox is a TCWC Intern this summer and soon to be a Junior in Cornell University Industrial and Labor Relations Program.

New Union at Ithaca Health Alliance Formed, Contract Signed

Administrative staff at the Ithaca Health Alliance (IHA) has formed a union, and the union and IHA have successfully completed negotiations of their first collective bargaining agreement. Both the employer and the union signed the new agreement several weeks ago.

Rob Brown, Administrative Coordinator at IHA, said, "we are all unified in our desire to make the Ithaca Health Alliance as effective as possible." Brown, the first employee hired by IHA, has been with the agency for ten years.

Executive Director Abbe Lyons observes "every day, the Ithaca Health Alliance employees bring tremendous creativity, dedication to health care as a human right, and striving for excellence to the important work of the Health Alliance." Kelly White, IHA Board President, adds "one of the pillars of the Ithaca Health Alliance is the empowerment of individuals, whether they be the patients we serve, members of the general public who benefit from our educational and other outreach efforts, or members of our staff. The board greatly values our staff and voluntarily recognized the Union in a unanimous vote on December 3, 2014. We are pleased to have a signed contract and look forward to continuing to work together to further the mission of the Ithaca Health Alliance."

When the staff decided to form a union, they received support from the Tompkins County Worker's Center (TCWC) and from Workers United Rochester Regional Joint Board, which is affiliated with SEIU. Pete Meyers of the TCWC commented that, "too often in Tompkins County we practice progressive values towards everything except labor/management relations. I want to congratulate the IHA workers' union and the IHA Board for working together to craft this agreement."

The union joined with the Tompkins County Worker's Center in a unique partnership to conduct a joint union/community campaign. "This is consistent with the union's belief in community ownership of unions, and I believe that the national labor movement could benefit from similar partnerships," Meyers said.

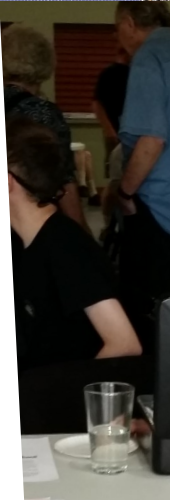
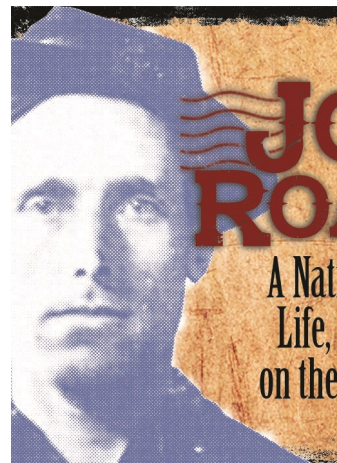
According to Gary Bonadonna, Jr., Assistant Manager of Workers United Rochester Regional Joint Board, "The workers at IHA put so much work into forming their union and negotiating a contract. I am very happy for them and honored they chose to work with our union. We also look forward to working with other Ithaca workers to help them make improvements at their workplace and achieve a voice on the job."

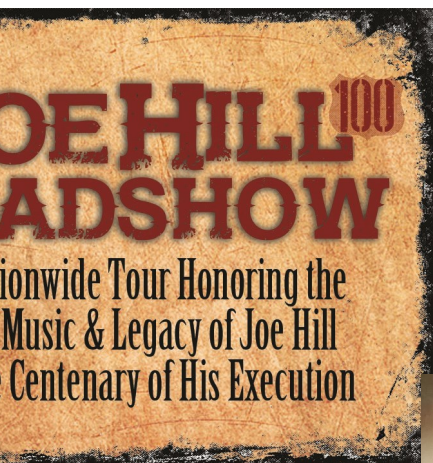
About the involved organizations Since 1997, the Ithaca Health Alliance has been facilitating health care for all with a focus on the needs of the uninsured and under-insured. The Alliance's three programs — Ithaca Free Clinic, Ithaca Health Fund, and Community Health Education, are based on the principle that health care is a human right. www.ithacahealth.org

The Ithaca Health Alliance Workers' Union was recognized in December 2014, and believes in and will fight for a just world, dignity in the workplace, and a world where all people are respected and everyone's health is provided for regardless of race, gender, sexuality, class and ability. www.facebook.com/IthacaHealthWorkersUnion

Founded in 2003, the mission of the Tompkins County Worker's Center is to stand up with all people treated unfairly at work. They will support, advocate for, and seek to empower each other to create a more just community and world. www.tcworkerscenter.org

For over 100 years the Rochester Regional Joint Board (RRJB) has been making a difference in the lives of workers and their communities. RRJB is an umbrella labor union/organization, affiliates with other unions such as Worker's United and SEIU. They represent workers from virtually every cultural, ethnic, racial and religious background — workers who came to the area from more than 50 countries. Locally, nationally and internationally, RRJB and Workers United are vocal advocates for the working person. <http://uhrrjb.org>

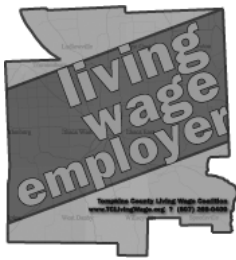




Workers' Center Welcomes Joe Hill Road Show

This concert, hosted by Tompkins County Workers' Center, was part of a national concert tour honoring the centenary of famous Wobbly/IWW singer/songwriter Joe Hill's execution, and featured classic Labor and Folk Songs. The concert supported the TCWC's campaign to Make the Minimum Wage a Living Wage in Tompkins County!





Support our 101 Certified Living Wage Businesses with over 3060 workers!

Since our last newsletter in April 2015, we are pleased to welcome the following five newly-Certified Living Wage Employers: Ironwood Builders of Ithaca; McBooks Press, Inc; Namaste Montessori School; Strawbridge and Jahn Builders; Tompkins County Public Library

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
 Ironwood Builders of Ithaca
 Jewel Box
 Jillian's Drawers
 Julia e Dean Inc/The Clay School
 Loaves and Fishes
 Mama Goose/Mimi's Attic
 McBooks Press
 Miller Mayer Law Firm
 Namaste Montessori School
 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/Ithacemade
 Singlebrook Technology, Inc.
 Snug Planet LLC (Home Performance Contractor)
 Sparks Electric
 Sprague & Janowsky (Accountancy)
 St. Catherine of Siena Church
 St. Luke Lutheran Church
 Stone Quarry House (Bed and Breakfast)
 St. Paul's United Methodist Church and Nursery School
 Strawbridge and Jahn Builders
 Sunbeam Candles
 Sunny Brook Builders
 Sunny Days of Ithaca
 Sustainable Tompkins
 Taitem Engineering
 Temple Beth El
 The Frame Shop
 The Strebel Planning Group
 Tompkins County
 Tompkins County Public Library
 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

SAVE THE DATE — Labor Day Picnic
Monday, September 7st 2015
11am-3pm @ Stewart Park

Large Pavilion

Music by Richie Sterns and Friends

Bring a dish to pass

**Free burgers (meat and veggie!)
and hot dogs**

The Mother Jones and Joe Hill Awards

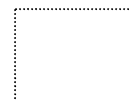
Goat of Labor Award

Everyone Welcome!

More info at tcworkerscenter.org or on Facebook



TC Workers' Center
115 The Commons
Ithaca, NY 14850
TCWorkersCenter.org



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