



The Workers' Edge

TCWorkersCenter.org

Phone (607) 269-0409

The Voice of the Tompkins County Workers'

RECOGNITIONS AWARDED AT THE 2009 LABOR DAY PICNIC!

The "Friend of Labor" award was given to **Edie Reagan**. Edie is a long time activist, community member, and dear friend. Former Co-ordinator of the Justice and Peace Ministries at Catholic Charities

and Co-Chair of the Tompkins County

Religious Task Force for a Living Wage.

Edie has moved on to the Spiritual Director Position of Hospicare and will be greatly missed!

The "Mother Jones" award was given to **Viola Scott** for her courage and willingness to speak out about being



treated unjustly in the workplace. Viola is a Workers' Center Member and came to us as a result of her employment by an Ithaca retailer that had paid her \$6.00/hour for over a years worth of work (the minimum wage was \$7.15/hour at the time). When the Workers' Center approached the employer, they agreed to a quick financial settlement for \$1,200 with Viola that would be paid in three installments.

The "Joe Hill" award went to **Thomas Lackner** for his courage in standing up to his employer via the Workers' Center, and eventually the NYS Department of Labor. Lackner, who at the press time of this newsletter continues to be a long-time employee of The Rose Restaurant, worked an average of 55-60 hours a week, but was paid for only 40 hours a week for 16 years. This situation is still being adjudicated by the NYS Department of Labor, thus details are not ready to be fully disclosed.

The "Goat of Labor" award was given to **Ithaca College**,. Dave Marsh, business manager of Laborers Local Union 785 (another Workers' Center Coalition partner), says the college has let labor down by outsourcing work on its \$64.5 million athletics and events center to a Rochester-based contractor that uses out-of-state workers. "At a time when we have 10 percent unemployment, it would be nice for these jobs to stay local," he said.

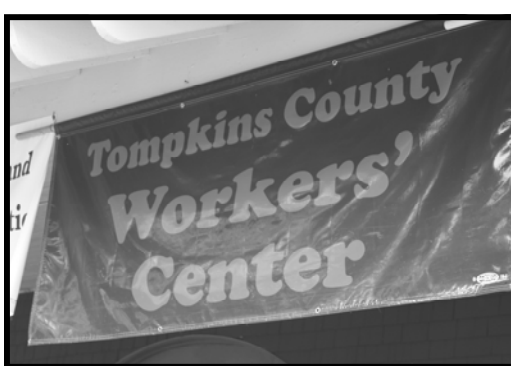


On the Edge...

Fall 2009

Awards	1
The 2009 Labor Day Picnic	2
The 2009 Labor Day Picnic Continued	3
Support our Living Wage Businesses! CFCU, Lhamo Shouse	4
CFCU, Lhamo Shouse Continued	5
From the Desk of The Coordinator	6
What is the TCWC?	7
Become a Member Today!	
From the Desk of The Coordinator Continued	8





Tompkins County 2009 Labor Day Picnic

By Nikki Sayward

A time to celebrate solidarity, community & justice!

The Labor Day picnic was a successful event on September 7, with much food brought to share, and dancing along with the lively music by Tom Seiling, Colleen Kattau, and John Simon. Several awards were given to members of the community to acknowledge both positive contributions and flagrant disappointment. Speakers shared current issues and concerns.

Pastor Rich Rose of the First Baptist Church of Ithaca, a Living Wage employer and a coalition partner, started the day off with a need for a sense of guidance and justice in the workplace. Rich has just recently joined our Leadership Team.

Dave Marsh, the business manager for the Laborer 's Union, Local 589, spoke on behalf of the unions and thanked county legislatures of Tompkins and Cortland County for their support of the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA.)

Up next was **Kate Bronfenbrenner**, who has studied labor movements for a decade at Cornell's ILR school, especially focusing on union and employer relations. She spoke of how workers and unions continue to "face incredible opposition from employers." She also mentioned that the EFCA has passed both the House and Senate but doesn't have enough votes to pass filibuster.



Continued from page 2-

She encourages workers "to keep pushing leaders" and mentioned the need to have "serious penalties" for when workers' and unions' rights get bulldozed, adding, "Whatever we win in EFCA, it's still not enough." Lastly, Kate encouraged unions to organize more efficiently and to resist spending their money, time and energy on politics.

Briggs Seekin, a veteran from Maine who served in Desert Storm, focused on healthcare reform and what that means for workers, as most aren't covered or are underinsured. Pushing for HR676, a bill written by John Conyers, that is "easy to read and understand", Briggs mentioned how the Kucinich Amendment would "save \$3-4 trillion over a decade". One can easily deduce what this means for the finances of workers and small businesses all over, as we become better able and equipped to take care of each other.

Howard Botwinick, an economics professor at SUNY Cortland, discussed the legal side of wage theft and unfortunately, how much a part of American history this is. He cited our national anthem as evidence of centuries of workers' benefits going to others. He mentioned the current condition of deteriorating wages and how this will pan out economically. With "80% of wages stagnating", he encouraged taking inspiration from South American countries with examples of people-based reform.

With the major issues of wage theft, outsourcing and healthcare reform touched upon, the Labor Day Picnic helped remind many of the issues workers face in Tompkins County area.



Support these Certified Living Wage Businesses



Advocacy Center
Alternatives Federal Credit Union
Ancient Wisdom Productions
Autumn Leaves Used

Books

Black Box Computer Consulting
Blue Spruce Painting and Decorating
Boyce Thompson Institute
Buffalo Street Books
Catholic Charities of Tompkins/Tioga
CFCU Community Federal Credit Union
Colonial Veterinary Hospital
Community Foundation of Tompkins County
Contemporary Trends, Inc.
Custum Construction
Day Care & Child Development Council
Downtown Partnership
First Baptist Church of Ithaca
Finger Lakes ReUse
First Presbyterian Church of Ithaca
First Unitarian Society of Ithaca
Green Clean
GreenStar Cooperative Market
Home Green Home

Hospicare and Palliative Care
Human Service Coalition of Tompkins County
Ithaca Carshare
Ithaca Downtown Partnership
Ithaca Health Alliance
Ithaca Neighborhood Housing of Tompkins County
Ithaca Urban Renewal Agency
IthacaMed
Jeffrey Feirman Building & Renovation
Jewel Box
Jillian's Drawers
Loaves and Fishes
Money with a Mission
Morris' Men's Wear and Morris Too
Multicultural Resource Center
Northeast Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine
Offender Aid and Restoration
Ongweoweh Corporation (Pallet Mgmt.)
PPM Homes, LLC
Renovus Energy
Shade Tree Auto
Significant Elements, A Program of Historic Ithaca
Singlebrook Technology
Snug Planet LLC (Home Per-

formance Contractor)
Sparks Electric
Sprague and Janowsky (Accountants)
St. Catherines of Siena Church
St. John's Church
St. Luke Lutheran Church
Stone Quarry House (B and B)
Sunny Brook Builders
Taitem Engineering
Taughannock Aviation Corporation
The Frame Shop
Temple Beth El
The Strebel Planning Group
Tompkins Community Action
Tompkins County
Tompkins County Public Library
Town of Ithaca
United Auto Workers Local 2300
Upscale Remodeling Corporation



Lhamo Shouse

Member ' s Persistence Pays Off for Living Wage

By Mary Loehr

When TCWC member **Lhamo Shouse** went to do her banking at the **COMMUNITY FEDERAL CREDIT UNION** , she asked if employees were paid a living wage. No one seemed to know.

“ Well, I MUST know,” she answered. “ I will only do business with people who pay a living wage. ” Each time she went back, she asked about it again, and told them, “ You all should be receiving a living wage.”

Continued on page 5,

The Tompkins County Workers' Center is a Project Partner with the CRESP Center for Transformative Action

She was told to speak to the manager, who advised her to write a letter, which she did. No response. She wrote another letter. And then the next time she went in to do her banking, it had been done! CFCU was paying a living wage to all of its employees!

"We tend to excuse ourselves for inaction, thinking that to change our society we have to do something spectacular," she says. "This was not spectacular. It was very simple. Everybody can do it. It takes no huge effort and as in this case it often makes everyone concerned proud."

CFCU has 150 employees, and according to Jill Ciccone, who works in Human Resources there, two people's salaries went up as a result of Lhamo's actions. The Branch Manager, Craig Leska, who helped facilitate the process, says, "Living in a town like this with such a high cost of living, anything we can do to help, we want to do." Ciccone says that the reason CFCU wanted to become a living wage employer was so that employees could make ends meet, and to stay competitive.

Shouse lived in the Himalayas for 30 years, and became an activist and advocate while living there. She started a health clinic, then "our recovering patients insisted that we start a handcrafts cooperative," she says. "Our cooperative generated pride as well as more income for the workers and helped support our growing health clinic."

"In working with the poorest people in the Himalayas, the first need was good health and immediate excellent medical care and follow-up; then to keep them healthy, a livable wage was essential." So becoming a member of the TCWC tied in directly to the work she had been doing all of her adult life. She encourages all Workers' Center members to ask businesses that they patronize if they pay a living wage.

In a relaxed, extended conversation, she wondered aloud if another bank where she does business pays a living wage and then said, "I guess I'll have to ask." She's off to the next Workers' Center venture, and encourages us to be also! As Lhamo's simple actions show, it's up to each of us to change community consciousness, to help create a social contract about working conditions and dignity in the workplace. It's all of us together who make the Workers' Center.

There are currently 65 businesses in Tompkins County that are living wage certified. To find out more, or to get more involved, call 269-0409, or check our criteria and LW Employer Certification application at www.TCWorkersCenter.org.

Workers ' Center Struggles and Successes Summer 2009 Report

by Pete Meyers

Starting with this issue of *The Workers ' Edge*, we will give quarterly reports on recent actions the Workers ' Center has been taking, to give you a picture of what goes on here, and the struggles and successes we 're involved in.

At the end of January we finished a seven month campaign that brought serious attention to abuses in the local restaurant industry, specifically two restaurants that were forced to return \$29,000 to workers (because of overtime violations; days of week working violations; tip misappropriation, etc.) The TCWC played a very significant role in coordinating with the State Department of Labor (DOL) in this case, which has demonstrably had a great affect on the community about restaurant labor standards.

The Workers ' Center is presently working with the DOL to unveil its new Wage and Hour Watch program upstate, in Tompkins County. Three days after a May visit from the new Bureau of Immigrant Workers Rights Director, Maritere Arce, we found out that the DOL had engaged in a ' sweep ' of 30 potential Wage and Hour violators, specifically restaurants, in Tompkins County. We are still awaiting the results of this ' sweep' .

In late May, we helped the Cornell Organization for Labor Action -- one of our 54 Coalition partners -- organize to support service workers at Cornell who are part of the United Auto Workers bargaining unit. We helped organize and attended a May rally on campus and conducted a successful email/fax campaign (over 500 generated with the help of many of you!!) to Cornell Administrators urging a fair contract with a Living Wage. The Service workers settled the contract favorably with the Cornell Administration.

Whether or not a new proposed luxury hotel, the Hotel Ithaca, should receive sales and mortgage tax abatements for over \$1 million is an issue that the Workers ' Center is presently right in the middle of. We are challenging the Tompkins County Industrial Development Agency (IDA) to ensure that such abatements should not be given unless a Living Wage can be guaranteed to be paid to its workers. (IDA 's in New York are in place, ostensibly, to improve economic conditions in their respective areas, attempting to attract, retain and expand businesses within their jurisdictions through the provision of financial incentives to private entities.)

The Workers ' Center' s traditional involvement with the Labor Day Picnic has morphed into our being a full partner with the Midstate Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO. In fact, at this past year 's Labor Day Picnic on September 7th, we announced our affiliation (only the 11th of its kind nationally) with the national AFL-CIO via our relationship with the Labor Council. At this year 's Picnic, we announced jointly, with the Labor Council four awards.

What is the Tompkins County Workers' Center?



What does being a mem- ber of the Workers' Center mean?

The Tompkins County Workers' Center is composed of a group of low and middle income residents of Tompkins County.

Our Mission is to stand up with all workers treated unfairly at work or faced with critical poverty, racial, housing, health care or other social and economic issues.

We will support, advocate for, and seek to empower each other to create a more just community and world.

A member is someone who be-
lieves:

1. In helping each other to make our community a better place to live.
2. We all deserve to have good jobs with good wages so we can live decently.
3. We all deserve rights and fair treatment as workers.
4. Healthcare is a right—everybody should have affordable access to it.
5. We all deserve a livable neighborhood and affordable housing.

I Want to Get Involved in the Fight for Workers' Rights!

\$_____ Individual Annual Membership
Due = One Hour's Wage or \$7.25 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. Please contact me with Rapid Response Alerts.

Signature _____

Your Name (please print)

Home Street Address

City

State

Zip

Phone (s)

Email

Send to: TC Workers' Center, 115 The Commons, Ithaca, NY 14850

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

_____ is a member of the
Tompkins County Workers' Center (TCWC)

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

TC Workers' Center, 115 The Commons,
Ithaca 607-269-0409 www.TCWorkersCenter.org

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 a better economic future for all of us.

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

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

Continued from page: 6

Economic Human Rights are the rights guaranteed to all human beings as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Pertinent articles include:

*Article 23: Right to a job with just and favorable conditions of work, a living wage, and the right to form and join trade unions.

*Article 24: Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.

*Article 25: Right to well-being of a person and their family (food, housing, clothing, medical care, child care, guaranteed income for those who can 't work or are unemployed, among other social services.

Need Help?

Try the Workers' Rights
Hot Line!

(607) 269-0409



get up, stand up

807.269.0409 / www.TCWorkersCenter.org

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