



The Workers' Edge

Voice of the Tompkins County Workers' Center

Verizon Workers Win Big! Workers' Center Organizes Strong Community Solidarity

The successful Verizon strike in May was due in no small part to strong community solidarity efforts here in Ithaca and throughout the northeast. Here TCWC was able to engage with a fairly large base of our TCWC Membership as well as a number of local unions and community groups, providing regular picket and other support for CWA (Communication Workers of America).

Many thanks to all our members and organizational supporters including: **Cayuga Medical Center Registered Nurses; Cornell Graduate Students Union; Cornell Organization for Labor Action; Ithaca Catholic Worker; Ithaca College Part-Time Adjunct Professors; Ithaca Teachers Association; Labor-Religion Coalition of the Finger Lakes; Multicultural Resource Center; Single Payer NY; TC3 Adjunct Association; TCWC Minimum Wage as Living Wage Organizing Committee; UAW Local 2300**



In late May, as we were completing over two weeks of picket support, we learned that Verizon CEO Lowell McAdam was on the Cornell Board of Trustees and that the Trustees were scheduled to meet here in Ithaca on the 28th. In conjunction with CWA we immediately started planning a massive protest march and rally starting from the Rt. 13 Verizon Store and ending at the Johnson Museum where the Trustees were meeting. We expected 300 CWA members and community supporters to participate.

Not 18 hours before the march was to commence, however, on Friday after-

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Living Wage Visioning Project: Creating our Sustainable Future

What: Original art showing what it would be like if you/we all made a living wage

How: TCworkerscenter.org/LWVisioningcontest or 269-0409 for more info and for entry form

Prizes:
1st Place \$1250
2nd Place \$750
3rd Place \$500

Why: Help us communicate the vision of what it will be like when every person makes a living wage, living with dignity and hope.

**Submission Due:
September 15th!**



If You See Something, Say Something

One could argue that a great deal of the strength of the Tompkins County Workers' Center (TCWC) is its grounding in grassroots community, which is something we've helped to foster since our formal inception in 2003. That is, we have helped to cultivate and enhance within our community a commitment to economic justice in the workplace and a deep 'taking of action' whenever we

identify workers who are being exploited.

A significant part of this is TCWC's Community Union Organizers program which encourages activism both by those most exploited in our workforce as well as by community members who CARE about workers being exploited.

Anna Pollock is a great example. A long time resi-

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Presente, Paula Burke

By Pete Meyers

Paula Burke passed away at the tender age of 36 on June 20th, 2016. Paula, a TCWC Member and Community Union Organizer, was a wonderful soul who was an absolutely instrumental Member of our Minimum Wage as Living Wage Organizing Committee (the campaign that seeks to raise the Tompkins County minimum wage, beyond that presently approved by NY State to \$12.50/hour by 2021, to a Living Wage).



To the left is a picture I took of Paula one day last fall (2015) when Paula and I went petitioning for signatures for our Minimum Wage as Living Wage campaign in the Hanshaw Village Mobile Home Park in Dryden. (Paula did a lot of door-to-door petitioning in the early stages of our campaign!) This particular day, I was feeling particularly sensitive to having doors slammed in my face and got discouraged fairly early on. I told Paula that I couldn't stay much longer. A moment that I will remember for the rest of my life was Paula pulling me up and getting me to shadow her as she continued to knock on doors in the Park.

Paula had a way with people and she will be greatly missed.

Paula hailed from Ithaca where she spent the bulk of her life. Paula had many jobs over the years which included the former Collegtown Wendy's, Wendy's of the Ithaca Mall, Ithaca Tops Deli and McDonald's of Triphammer Road. She often did side jobs such as cleaning and getting apartments ready for new tenants, as well as taking care of her friends' children. In recent years, she and Milton Webb had found an intimate partnership with each other. Milton was an instrumental leader as a worker at the Tompkins County Solid Waste Facility in the successful campaign to push the County to pay all County-contracted workers a Living Wage. In recent months, Paula had become the Sound Director for the Channel 13 Cable Access Show in Ithaca, 'What Matters at the Round Table', as hosted by Milton Webb and Stanley McPherson.

Paula, you will be truly missed by the Tompkins County Workers' Center. We are glad to have had you in our midst!

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Above: Paula speaking at the 2015 Annual Labor Day Picnic at Stewart Park about WHY it's so important for workers to make a Living Wage (i.e. just enough to LIVE with dignity).

Left: With fiancé Milton Webb at last year's Labor Day Picnic

'Make the Minimum Wage a Living Wage': Tompkins County's Unreachable Rents

How much do you pay for rent? If you live in Ithaca, New York, and have a family that needs a three bedroom apartment, chances are you're paying 76 percent more than you did ten years ago, but are you making that much more?

Although it's most dramatic in the City of Ithaca, the shockingly fast rise of Tompkins County's rents is one foundation of our skyrocketing cost of living. An \$80 per month increase in “fair market rate” rent from 2012 to 2014 was the biggest rise of any other necessity in Alternatives Federal Credit Union's 2015 Living Wage Study, driving a (minimum) \$1.17 increase in Living Wage in only two years.

At the Tompkins County Workers' Center the reality of people who are priced out of where they live (or struggle to stay) is a daily part of our fight alongside our community to win Living Wages for everyone.

Even at the Living Wage (\$14.34 today) someone has to spend 40 percent of their pay on rent although the Department of Housing and Urban Development defines “affordable housing” as costing no more than 30 percent. The National Low Income Housing Coalition published “Out of Reach 2016: No Refuge for Low Income Renters” earlier this year. In it, they study housing costs around the country, and show that we'd need a minimum hourly wage of **\$20.85** here to achieve that level (or **working 92 hours a week** at current NY minimum wage). New York State's new plan for a \$12.50 minimum wage in upstate NY by 2021 is not nearly enough even for what our community needs right now.

Affordability is only part of accessible housing, of course. The Tompkins County Office of Human Rights (OHR) did an “Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice” for the City of Ithaca in 2015, and found that landlords regularly use exclusionary tactics against potential renters including disability discrimination and discrimination against people who receive housing assistance. Considering that systematic economic discrimination as a whole forces African-Americans, Latinos, woman-headed households and people with disabilities to need housing assistance in greater proportions than other groups, the OHR rightly points out that bias against people with housing subsidies “may also be a pretext for direct discriminatory treatment.”

Constantly having to struggle for stable housing is a crisis, but it can also keep us from putting our time and energy into building self-sufficiency. This reinforces the injustices that create the housing problem in the first place. We can break that cycle.

Call the Workers' Center at 607-269-0409 (or visit us) and join our fight for a Living Wage for everyone. You can also connect with one of our community's groups dealing with the housing crisis or systemic discrimination directly.

Facing Housing Discrimination? Call the Office of Human Rights at 607-277-4080

Looking for Assistance Programs? Call 2-1-1 for Tompkins/Cortland Information and Referral (or 877-211-8667)



These shaded counties are the only ones in NY that are as expensive as Tompkins County for housing.

Say Something, cont,

dent of Ithaca and an alumna of Cornell University where she now works, Anna contacted the TCWC with a concern she had about workers at various businesses she frequents.

Meeting the workers, Anna worried they had been trafficked into jobs here in Tompkins County from elsewhere around the world (via NYC). We referred Anna's concerns to our contact at the NYS Department of Labor (DOL) who found merit in Anna's tell-tale signs. The DOL is now in the midst of conducting a full investigation of the industry in Tompkins County.

"I've been a consumer of this industry for a long time," states Ms. Pollock, a new Member of the TCWC. "It's been a source of comfort for me. But the truth is I've likely had my comfort at the expense of other people's dignity and well-being, and that has become indefensible."

"We're lucky to live in a community where people are open, aware, and generous", Pollock adds. "I frequently see people—strangers, neighbors, friends—helping and offering to help each other, in all sorts of ways. With examples like that, it becomes easier for a person like me to try to take a small step to offer help as well."

The TCWC encourages everyone to "be like Anna!" If you experience or witness any workplace issue that feels wrong or unjust, call our Workers' Rights Hotline at 607-269-0409 or e-mail tcwrh@tcworkerscenter.org.

In this regard we are also pleased to note the recent establishment of the Exploited Workers Task Force by the State of New York with a mission to identify and eliminate worker exploitation throughout New York State. (For details go to <http://bit.ly/WorkerExploitation>.)



**Community Member
Anna Pollack**

The Task Force has begun by addressing issues that were discovered based on worker complaints directly to the State and referrals from advocacy organizations such as the Tompkins County Workers' Center (TCWC). Workers are often victimized through wage theft, human trafficking, retaliation, unsafe or unsanitary working conditions, unstable or unscheduled hours and illegal deductions for supplies, training or uniforms.

Enforcement efforts are focusing on 14 specific industries with the highest rates of employer non-compliance and where workers are least likely to come forward, for fear of retaliation. Initial target areas include industries such as: cleaning, farming, home health care restaurants, car washes, retail, nail salons, landscaping, childcare and six others.

Verizon Win,



noon the 27th, we got frantic calls from the New York City CWA office saying: "Stop; stop;

in fact, play a role in the strike having been brought to its conclusion (however large or small,

stop everything you're doing. We have an 'agreement in principle' on a new contract!!"

We at the TCWC have come to learn that our March and Rally did,

the information of the March and Rally **was** known by all at the bargaining table: both CWA, of course, as well as Verizon).

Details of the agreement, can be found at bit.ly/VZStrike. According to the Union: "Striking CWA members have achieved our major goals of improving working families' standard of living, creating good union jobs in our communities and achieving a first contract for wireless retail store workers."

Focus on Living Wage Employer: Snug Planet

One of the first businesses that the Tompkins County Workers' Center certified as a Living Wage Employer is Snug Planet. Inspired by the urgency of climate change the company started in 2006 and sought Living Wage Certification in 2007. It provides services including insulation, weatherization and non-fossil-fuel based heating and cooling as part of its mission to reduce building energy use and improve comfort in ways that make sense for customers and the planet. "Building energy use accounts for about 40% of climate-warming emissions," says owner Jon Harrod, and improving home efficiency can cut these emissions, reduce disastrous fossil fuel extraction such as fracking, and keep money in local economies by cutting utility bills.

Contracting work like this is a competitive business, and the Tompkins County Workers' Center has served many workers in the industry whose bosses cut corners on wages and safety for profit. People who oppose the living wage movement often say that it damages local companies, but Snug Planet has grown from two regular employees in 2007 to 12 in their latest Living Wage re-certification.

Asked about growing a Living Wage business, Harrod says "We've been pleased that we've been able to hire some really awesome people and to improve a lot of houses. There's no question, payroll is by far our single biggest expense. Sometimes we find that we're bidding for jobs against companies that aren't living wage employers and that aren't committed to the same safety or environmental standards. When we're not the 'low bidder,' we have to work a little harder to make the sale, but we've found that our values really resonate with our customers." Those values include the belief that "anyone who does this hard, necessary work deserves to have decent housing, healthy food, and a little pocket money," and that as an employer it's his responsibility to provide a safe, friendly workplace with opportunities to grow personally.

Instead of stunting his business, he sees a Living Wage standard as important to keep a highly engaged and trained staff team, pointing out that it's hard to perform at your best at work when you're always worried about making ends meet. Jon hopes that his team can inspire other companies to commit to living wage principles.

Jon also hopes that they can inspire people to pursue this line of work. He'd like to see more young people consider work in the building trades, especially green building, and more places for women in these professions. "Right now less than 10% of workers in the building trades are women. Women who go into the trades experience all kinds of barriers: discrimination in hiring and pay, constant questioning of their abilities, hostility and harassment. Snug Planet is committed to changing this. We want to lead by example, modeling a healthy, supportive culture in our own company and speaking out whenever we run up against sexism out in the world."

Utility bills pile on top of other high housing costs to make having a home even more expensive, and energy improvements can be a long-lasting way to cut a monthly budget. The EmPower NY program, for which Snug Planet is a contractor, provides no-cost energy upgrades to households earning below 60% of the state median income (\$51,790 for a family of four) and the Assisted Home Performance program provides up to \$5000 in matching funds for households earning below 80% of the area median income (\$67,504 for a family of four in Tompkins County).

For NYSERDA EmPower NY contractor information visit <https://nyserda.energysavvy.com/contractors/>

Explore Possible Careers in the Construction Trades!

Get an introduction to a trade and the networking contacts you need to apply.

The Skilled Trades Diversity program introduces workers to the construction trades by meeting with representatives from several trades (like carpentry, electrical work, masonry, plumbing, and more), showing them what each trade does, and introduces participants to the contacts at each trade to apply for employment or apprenticeship.

The program runs from January to March. You can apply until December, 2016. Participants also earn an OSHA 10 hour safety card, First Aid & CPR Training, and Flagging Certification. Applicants get some hands-on experience to help them get a feel for the work each trade does. The class goes to each trade's training center to see where they would attend apprenticeship training should they pursue a career.

People of color and women are strongly encouraged to apply! Applications are available at the Tompkins County Workers' Center.



Support our 95 Certified Living Wage Businesses with over 2779 workers!

Since our last newsletter in Spring 2016, we are pleased to welcome two new employers: Planned Parenthood of the Southern Finger Lakes and Multicultural Resource Center.

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

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



Town of Dryden Endorses Push for a Countywide Living Wage

The Dryden Town Board, by a unanimous 5-0 vote, since our last newsletter was printed, on 4/21, called on the Tompkins County Legislature to move toward establishing the Living Wage as the Minimum Wage for all employees working within the county borders.

The Town of Dryden is the fourth local government body to heed the call of the TCWC, which has been organizing to mandate the county's Living Wage of \$14.34 as the new Minimum Wage. Both the Town and the City of Ithaca as well as the Town of Caroline previously also voted to also endorse a County Living Wage. Together these locales who support this measure comprise approximately 67% of the County's population.

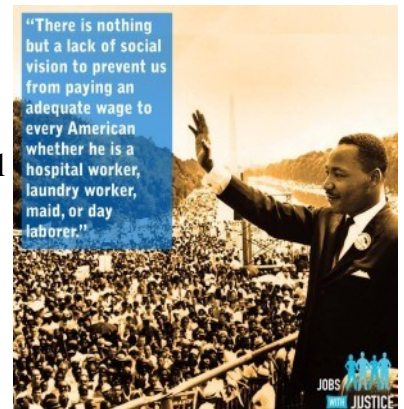
"A lot of the work I do in my law

practice is to work with the working poor", said Jason Leifer, Dryden Town Supervisor. "There are many people working 30-40 hours a week and they are not able to meet their family's needs and they're still getting services from the County. The current minimum wage enables big companies to get away with not paying people what they should and the public side has to make up the difference. Had I grown up in Dryden, I would've been one of the 46% that received free and reduced lunch in the Dryden Central School District."

Said Dryden Town Board Member, Deborah Cipolla-Dennis: "There's a large amount of children in Dryden that qualify for free and reduced lunch and that has continued to go up. When we have a really low minimum wage that puts quite a burden

on government and requires additional services to people so that they can just meet their basic needs."

Dan Lamb, Dryden Deputy Town Supervisor, had this to say: "The minimum wage has NEVER been enough. What I like about what the Workers' Center is doing here is that you're redefining the concept of what people should be paid, and it should be a Living Wage."



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Labor Day Picnic

September 5th, 2016 11-3pm
Stewart Park Large Pavilion

dish to pass if you're able
burgers and dogs included (veggie too)
ice cream

Guest Speaker: Prof. Russell Rickford on
links between economic justice and the Movement for
Black Lives

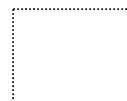
Musical Guests:

Gringa Grooves from the Heart, **Colleen Kattau**

Sammus rap artist, producer, activist



TC Workers' Center
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