

# The Workers' Edge

Winter  
2012

The Voice of the Tompkins County Workers' Center



## 2013 Marks Our Ten Year Anniversary Working Together for All Worker's Rights! The Workers' Center Enters its Second Decade

by Pete Meyers

Today we are proudly known as the Tompkins County Workers' Center (TCWC). On January 1st, 2003, the Tompkins County Living Wage Coalition was born as an organization and as a project of the Center for Religion, Ethics, and Social Policy. With a budget of about \$25,000, we had two part-time staff people. Now, as we approach our 10-year milestone, it is clear that we are here to stay and that we are a vital part of the community locally, and also regionally. Our victories have been impressive, especially considering our relatively small budget (this past year, approximately \$125,000).

To serve the increase in workers seeking justice in the workplace and respond to an economy that is spiraling out of control in favor of the wealthiest, the TCWC needs to continue to grow and to grow its financial support through Annual Giving.

Our achievements in the past 18 months are significant:

- Serving over 300 workers a year through our Workers

Rights Hotline.

- Supporting union organizing and/or concerted action that nurtured and supported workers at three employers, all together employing over 200 people.

- Working to ensure a Living Wage for all workers at the multinational Sodexo Corporation that provides food service at Ithaca College.

- Publishing the *Tompkins County Restaurant Owners Manual* to foster legal and fair employment practices throughout Tompkins County. The Manual is distributed by our local Department of Health.

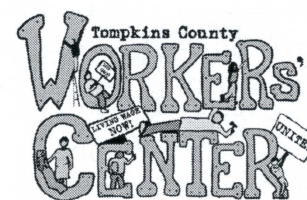
- Guiding newer Workers' Centers being formed in Buffalo, Syracuse, Utica, Rochester and Lyons in the quest for social change, as well as initiating an Upstate NY Workers' Center Alliance with the same organizations.

For the past six years, close to one fourth of our income has come as a start-up grant from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. This support ends in 2013. We will be turning to you, our members and supporters, to ensure that we continue at the same level of

resources, and greater. The ability of our organization to work for social change is in all of our collective hands.

Those of you receiving this newsletter—whether you work in a local retail establishment, or you have helped to sustain us financially over the years—have an incredibly important role as we enter our new decade. We are kicking off a campaign in the coming year which will be vital to our future growth. Our 2013 Annual Giving Campaign will be the time for our members and supporters to play a key role in continuing an activist workers' rights organization in our progressive community and beyond.

We will need financial support, volunteers, more workers standing up for their own rights, and more people reaching out and encouraging one another to take a stand. I hope you will join us as the TCWC embarks on a second decade of service and activism to ensure workers' rights.



[tcworkerscenter.org](http://tcworkerscenter.org)  
607-269-0409

I  
N  
S  
I  
D  
E

Member Spotlight: p.2

Labor Day picnic: p.3

Local Organizing: p.4

Letter to the WC: p.5

Living Wage employers:

p.6

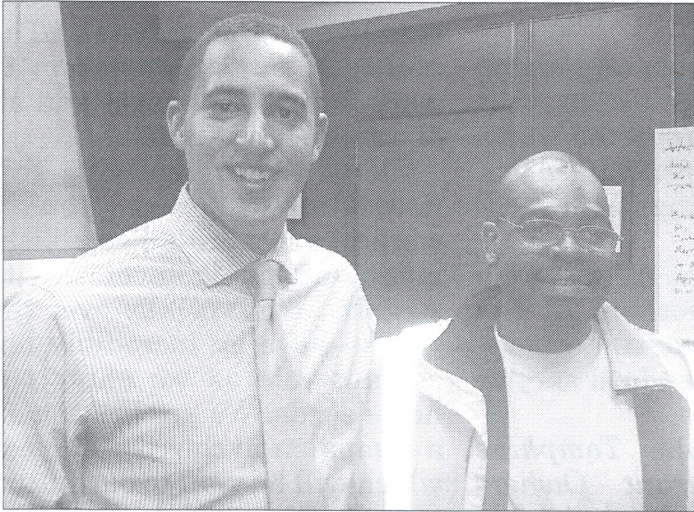
TCWC Wish List: p.8



# Member Spotlight: Stanley McPherson

by Linda Holzbaaur

Stanley McPherson has been in Ithaca for two years, trying to find decent employment while building a supportive community for himself. He loves writing and learning about the law and has taken classes in legal research and journalism. Stanley's dream is to someday have law credentials to take cases to any court.



**Stanley McPherson with Mayor Myrick**

Stanley is an involved member of the Baptized Church of Jesus Christ, located on First Street in Ithaca. He can be found there many days of the week: he plays bass or drums every Sunday for worship. He attends prayer meetings at night. He helps out at the food pantry, often unloading trucks of thousands of pounds of food for the pantry after work. He rakes leaves, cuts the lawn—you name it: at his church, Stanley lends a hand. "I was led here," Stanley says.

Although you might think Stanley has no time for any other activities, he squeezes everything he can from his free time. He helps Reverend Benson of the Baptized Church with his weekly Public Access TV show, Hour for Christ. It is a gospel show and Stanley works behind the scenes in production. Recently Stanley began to plan his own Pegasys show, What Matters/Living Wages at the Roundtable, an interview show with local guests. He spends hours writing in order to prepare for What Matters. The message of the show, Stanley says, is "We're working

Last August, the Workers' Center was visited by Stanley McPherson and Milton Webb, two temporary workers hired by the multinational Kelly Temp Services to work at Tompkins County's Solid Waste Facility. They were upset with the fact that they were not making a Living Wage. They made \$8.25/hour when employed by Kelly, \$9/hour when hired later by Casella which has been the subcontractor at the Solid Waste Facility since 2011.

Since that time, the TCWC has been exploring the possibility of a campaign to insure that the Solid Waste Facility—in the past a Tompkins County operation—pays nothing less than a Living Wage to its workers. Stanley and Milton have been phenomenal in wanting to make this happen and are exceedingly committed to doing whatever it takes to make a Living Wage a reality for every worker locally and regionally.

In 2003, at the urging of the Workers' Center, then called the Tompkins County Living Wage Coalition, the County Legislature, itself a Certified Living Wage Employer, passed a Resolution called the Livable Wage Policy. Among other things, this policy stated, 'RESOLVED, That Tompkins County urges all employers to make a good-faith effort to pay all of their employees at least a livable wage. [Email TCWRH@tcworkerscenter.org to get the full text.]

We believe that a campaign targeting both the Tompkins County Legislature, that represents all of us, as well as Casella Waste Systems and Kelly Temp Services would be an excellent campaign that highlights many things about our capitalist economy and the unnecessary 'squeeze' that is put on local governments. The ultimate 'squeeze', unfortunately, is put on the low-wage workers who bust their butts to keep such enterprises afloat.

Please consider contacting your County Legislator today indicating that you want everyone that subcontracts with the County to pay a Living Wage.

*—Pete Meyers*



# Over 400 Attend the Annual Labor Day Picnic We Are the 99%!

The Tompkins County Workers' Center and the Midstate Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO, held the 29th annual Labor Day Picnic on Monday, September 3rd, in Ithaca's Stewart Park. The theme of this year's picnic was "We Are the 99%" to send the message that all our families—working and unemployed, organized and unorganized—need jobs and the vital public programs that support communities, not tax breaks for the rich.

A Special Award of Honor was given to Congressman Maurice Hinchey of New York's 22nd Congressional District. Hinchey is retiring from his stellar 20 years of service in Congress in serving working women and men in a magnificent way! You will be missed, Maurice!

Other Award winners include:

- Friend of Labor: Linda Smith, Cofounder of the Cortland Worker's Rights Board, Assistant to NYS Assemblywoman, Barbara Lifton, former



Representatives of Occupy Ithaca receiving the Mother Jones Award at the Labor Day Picnic.

President of UAW Local 1326 (Pall Trinity) as well as former President of the Midstate Central Labor Council;

- Mother Jones Award: Occupy Ithaca for stimulating conversation on a range of issues related to the 99% locally, regionally, and nationally;

- Joe Hill Award: Cindy Kramer and Liz McCheyne, teachers in the City of Ithaca and South Seneca School Dis-

tricts, respectively, for their work in their school systems to educate young people on labor rights;

- Goat of Labor: the Newfield School District for their malfeasance in not negotiating in good faith their contract with the Newfield Teachers Association.

*Newfield School Board finally reached a contract within days of their 'award.'*

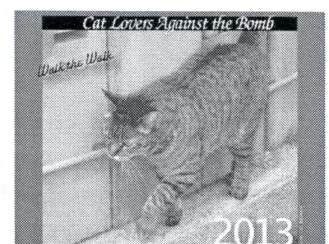
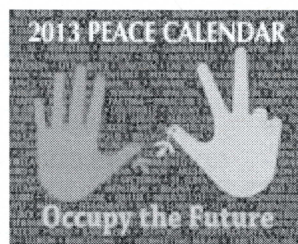


Buy your holiday gifts at TCWC and support the work for economic justice in your community.

20% discount for TCWC members



## 2013 Calendars Are Here!



from left: Syracuse Cultural Workers Women Artists Daybook and Peace Calendar, Nebraskans for Peace Cat Lovers Against the Bomb.



# Local Organizing Efforts

by Linda Holzbaur

What is concerted action? In labor terms, concerted action refers to a group of employees working together to better their workplace, making it more fair. It implies cooperation, looking out for your coworkers, struggling together for the good of all.

In the past few months, the Workers' Center has been helping several groups of local workers exert their protected right to engage in concerted action. All these workers feel that they are being treated unfairly on the job or have no voice in creating a successful future for their workplace. Since a full time worker spends half of their waking hours during the week on the job, unfair treatment can affect a worker's mental and physical health, both at work and in their private and family life.

tee concrete rights on the job, unionization is one of the only options in cases where the unfair treatment is not actually illegal treatment.

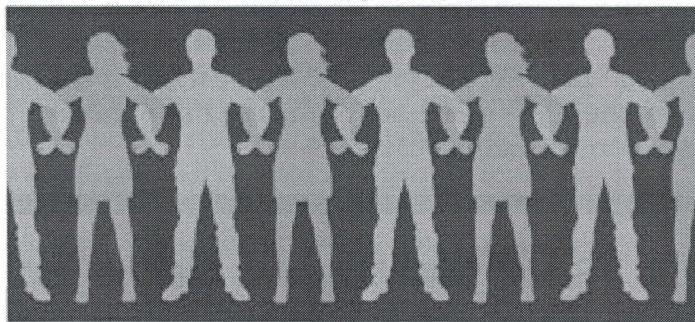
Many people assume that workers who are trying to unionize only want a raise. While that is true in some cases, it is not what we have seen in the local groups that are organizing now. These workers are joining together to improve conditions in the workplace; to gain a clear, respected voice in decision making; and to insure that they can give their absolute best to their place of employment. Because one thing the workers at all these workplaces have in common: they believe wholeheartedly in and are dedicated to their work's mission. They believe the only way to successfully fulfill that mission is to have a legal contract that protects each and every employee on the job.

Cornell, with almost 10,000 employees and hundreds of departments, has more complaints than TCA with 120 employees. Many of the TCA calls have included descriptions of harassment.

Bullying, or harassment, is one of the most common problems in the workplace. But unless the harassment can be proven to be based on discrimination or crosses over into violence, workers have no legal protection against it. Imagine going to work day after day, dreading public humiliation, sabotage of your work (for instance, a supervisor withholding necessary tools or information so that you are bound to screw up), whimsical firing or transfer to a work location far away that makes it impossible to pick up your kids on time or care for an aging relative, watching your coworkers taunted and mocked in front of everyone. Sometimes workplace bullies use their power of hiring and firing in order to control worker's off-the-job time, dictating who can attend personal events like weddings or baby showers. While this is illegal, an out-of-control bully with the power to hire and fire is a fearsome person to cross.

The employee groups we've met with recently, including the union organizing at TC Action, Tompkins Community Reaction, have learned that their power exists in working together. Even though many of them fear illegal retaliation, they are willing to be the voices and the bodies that fight for the rights of their coworkers. Let's all Get Up! And Stand Up! With them.

## WE ARE UNSTOPPABLE



## ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE

Concerted action sometimes leads to unionization, either affiliation with an established union or the creation of a more independent union that exists only in one workplace. Since there are few laws that guaran-

The most public current example of concerted action is the group working together at Tompkins Community Action (TCA). Over the years, a surprising number of workplace grievances at TCA have been reported to our hotline. Only



# A Letter to the Workers' Center

*One ordinary day, we received a letter in the mail that we just had to share with our members. Thank you, Tracey Roth, for standing up!*

Dear Workers' Center,

Last week I came into the bookstore and came upon your display. I signed your petition and brought home your newsletter to read.

The reason it caught my eye was that I am working hard at my job for minimum wage at one of those businesses like the list that is in your article on the front page of the Spring newsletter. [*Increase the Minimum Wage* by Carl Feuer referred to bigbox stores and hotels employing workers minimum wage or only slightly above.]

It is my opinion that several factors come into play here: 1) corporate America feels, possibly rightly so, that we feel stuck/trapped and won't leave for another job, so we'll be satisfied to make minimum wage. 2) we cannot ignore our collective thinking of being 'less than.' 3) Some also have the belief that life is a struggle and we attract those low paying/hard working jobs to fulfill that belief.

I know, because I think I have those beliefs within me.

When I took time to look at the minimum wage dilemma, of which I am involved, I tried to look at all sides, including myself. I just recently changed jobs to be closer to home. The first day I was there, I saw the same pattern as the job I had right before this one.

It is hard work, serving in an assisted living home. The work expected is so time consuming that to get it done, corners have to be cut. The quality of work is not there. It brings on an attitude from the workers. There's no motivation to do better and no pride in ones work. Because of my moving to a different job, but seeing the same situation, causes the minimum wage situation to be an epidemic. Yes, an epidemic.

We are down, we are tired, our morale is low.

The answer is possibly two-fold. With raising the minimum wage to a living wage AND raising our self-confidence, our worth, thinking more of ourselves. Actually, finding the power within us and applying it in our everyday lives.

With making minimum wage, the standard of our work is low and, depending on the type of business, that could be dangerous. We need to

feel that what we do is important, that our work is valued, that we are valued. Valued as workers as well as monetarily.

Thank you so much for your efforts to bring awareness and ultimately making minimum wage a living wage. Maybe the first thing to do is get rid of the 'minimum wage' label. That is negative within itself.

Just working on changing our thoughts, our belief system, raising the vibrations, and believe in ourselves. It goes hand in hand with raising the living wage.

Sincerely,  
Tracey D. Roth



**Tracey Roth**  
photo provided

*When we asked Tracey if we could reprint her letter, she answered, "I would be honored if you would print my letter in your newsletter. I wrote that when I had started yet another job that was brutally hard for minimum wage. On the 4th day, I went to my boss and the administrator and told them "I'm worth more than that." Did that ever feel good. Now, I am launching a dream that I've had for forty years to open a fitness/health/wellness/healing arts studio to teach what is similar to ecstatic dance/movement to music. I am becoming a member since I took the step & quit both of my minimum wage jobs. Sounds crazy, but feels so very empowering."*

*It doesn't sound crazy, Tracey: we are inspired and proud!*

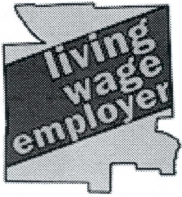
**www.TCWorkersCenter.org**  
**607-269-0409**



# Support our 85 Certified Living Wage Businesses!

Together these businesses employ 2,440 workers. Thank you, local business, for taking a stand!

We welcome our newest certified Living Wage employers: Bridges Cornell Heights, Community Science Institute, Energy Tec, Family & Children's Services, Ithaca Cayuga Optical Services, Nutritional Wellness Center and Ten Thousand Villages.



**Advocacy Center**  
**Aigen Financial Group**

**Alcohol & Drug Council of Tompkins County**  
**Alternatives Federal Credit Union**  
**Ancient Wisdom Productions**  
**ASI Renovations**  
**Autumn Leaves Used Books**  
**Black Box Computing Consulting**  
**Blue Spruce Painting & Decorating**  
**The Bookery**  
**Boyce Thompson Institute**  
**Bridges Cornell Heights**  
**Buffalo Street Books**  
**Catholic Charities**  
**CFCU Community Credit Union**  
**Colonial Veterinary Hospital**  
**Community Dispute Resolution Center**  
**Community Foundation of Tompkins County**  
**Community Science Institute**  
**Contemporary Trends, Inc.**  
**Cornell Child Care Center**  
**Day Care & Child Development Council of Tompkins County**  
**Downtown Ithaca Alliance**  
**Energy Tec**  
**Family & Children's Services**  
**Finger Lakes ReUse**

**First Baptist Church of Ithaca**  
**First Congregational Church of Ithaca, United Church of Christ**  
**First Presbyterian Church**  
**First Unitarian Society of Ithaca**  
**The Frame Shop**  
**GreenStar Coop. Market**  
**Home Green Home**  
**Hospicare and Palliative Care**  
**Human Services Coalition of Tompkins County**  
**International Food Network**  
**Ithaca Carshare**  
**Ithaca Cayuga Optical Services**  
**Ithaca Health Alliance**  
**IthacaMed**  
**Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services**  
**Ithaca Urban Renewal Agency**  
**Jewel Box**  
**Jillian's Drawers**  
**Loaves and Fishes**  
**McNeil Music Of Ithaca**  
**Mama Goose/Mimi's Attic**  
**Michael May Construction**  
**Morris Men's Wear & Morris Too**  
**Multicultural Resource Center**  
**The New Roots Charter School**  
**Northeast Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine**  
**Nutritional Wellness Center**

**Opportunities, Alternatives and Resources (OAR)**  
**Ongweoweh Corporation**  
**PPM Homes, LLC**  
**Red Feet Wine Market & Spirit Provisions**  
**Renovus Energy Inc.**  
**Shade Tree Auto**  
**Shaw & Murphy**  
**Significant Elements**  
**Single Brook Technology**  
**Snug Planet LLC**  
**Sparks Electric**  
**Sprague & Janowsky**  
**St. Catherine of Sienna Church**  
**St. John's Church**  
**St. Luke Lutheran Church**  
**Stone Quarry House, B&B**  
**Strebel Planning Group**  
**Sunbeam Candles**  
**Sunny Brook Builders**  
**Sustainable Tompkins**  
**Taitem Engineering**  
**Taughannock Aviation Corp**  
**Temple Beth El**  
**Ten Thousand Villages**  
**Three Tier Consulting**  
**Tompkins Community Action**  
**Tompkins County**  
**Tompkins County Public Library**  
**Town of Ithaca**  
**TRC Energy Services (Ithaca)**  
**United Auto Workers Local**  
**Upscale Remodeling Corporation**



## Member Spotlight: Stanley McPherson

Continued from Page 2

hard; give us the wages."

Stanley's first call made us aware of the situation of both temps and subcontractors in the County's operations. Temp workers are a growing segment of the US economy, usually making low wages and receiving no benefits or job security. Some companies (the Marietta/Altla factory facility in Cortland is one example) are using so-called temp workers almost exclusively to staff their operations, throwing thousands of employees into near minimum-wage jobs. This is a trend that we must challenge in the coming months and years in order to make the economy work for all of us.

Recently, WC staff and Stanley visited Mayor Svante Myrick to talk about how hard it is for workers like Stanley who are hired by temp companies but are doing County work. Although the city is not the owner of the facility, the Mayor, who supports the concept of living wage jobs and has influence with County legislators, will be a strong asset in this struggle.

We are happy to say that Stanley has joined the WC's Community Union Organizers group to help other people learn how to stand up for their right to fair jobs and fair pay.

*The Food Pantry at*



*Baptized Church of Jesus Christ, 412 First Street, Ithaca is held every Wednesday from 10-12:30 and on the 3rd Saturday of the month, same hours. Call 607-272-1984 for more information.*

*Reverend Benson's show, Hour for Christ, is broadcast on Cable Access Channel 13, Tuesdays at 6:30pm. Stanley's show will be aired on the second and fourth Tuesdays at 7:30pm. Both shows repeat throughout the week; check with Pegasys for times.*

### 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. Contact me with Rapid Response Alerts.

signature

Your name (please print)

Home street address

city

state

zip

phone(s)

email

Send to: TCWorkers' Center, 115 The Commons / E.MLK Street, 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](http://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 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.



# Tompkins County Workers' Center Wish List

- \$12 will provide two reams of copy paper;
- \$20 for one hour of staff time to mentor a Community Union Organizer to create and organize a TCWC campaign;
- \$25 for the printing of 10 Minimum Wage as Living Wage yardsigns;
- \$50 will buy one hour of Technical Assistance to enhance our ability to evaluate our programming;
- \$80 to purchase 100 newsletters that get mailed to TCWC Members and Supporters;
- \$180 for a weekly ad in Tompkins Weekly for an entire year advertising the Workers Rights Hotline;
- \$700 for new office computer that holds all of our databases.

Questions? Try the Workers' Rights Hotline! 607 269-0409

## TC Workers' Center

115 The Commons / E. ML King Street  
Ithaca NY 14850

[TCWorkersCenter.org](http://TCWorkersCenter.org)

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

