



# The Workers' Edge

Voice of the Tompkins County Workers' Center

## On the Edge

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## Celebrating Workers' Voices for a Countywide Living Wage

**I**n the summer of 2015 the Tompkins County Workers' Center (TCWC) had the idea to organize a Living Wage Visioning Contest. We saw it as a way to give voice to and empower the substantial but largely invisible population of workers unable to sustain themselves and their families on pay that is less than a Living Wage. At that time, the TCWC was in the early stages of our campaign to establish the Living Wage as a Countywide Minimum Wage.

With support from Sustainable Tompkins, and the generosity of a few of our TCWC Members, we went forward announcing the Contest to the community this past summer. Entrants were asked to

produce an original creative work that gave artistic voice to their vision of how their life and the life of their family would change if they were paid a Living Wage.

We ended up receiving 18 high quality entries which were brilliant in pulling on the heartstrings of our eleven judges. There were four multimedia and fourteen written entries and overall it was very difficult to choose the top three winners. The awards (\$1,250, \$750 and \$500) were announced at a Community Celebration on October 7th. The Entries can be seen in their entirety at <http://bit.ly/LWContestWinners>.

Leslie Prunty's poster-sized entry: "My World Is Very

Small," received first prize.

Second Prize was awarded to April Krueger and Iain Michael's small booklet fairy tale: "Princess Eloise and the Magical Living Wage".

There was a tie for Third Prize between: Stephanie Harris' "Living Wage and Reclaiming My Humanity"; and Tal Mintz' "Pride". One of the Judges who was Tompkins County Legislator, Anna Kelles, who says: *"It was an incredible honor to be asked to be a judge for this contest, not because I thought it would be easy but because I was being asked to do what we all need to do, be an active witness. We need to open our eyes and see the people who slave away at*

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## NLRB Rules in Favor of Registered Nurses at Cayuga Medical Center

**C**ayuga Medical Center (CMC) has engaged in numerous illegal attempts to thwart its employees coming together as workers and engaging in efforts to democratically represent their interests.

This conclusion was confirmed on October 28th by a Federal Administrative Law Judge whose 83-page decision (which can be found at [bit.ly/NLRBAndCMC](http://bit.ly/NLRBAndCMC)), following hearings held in May in Ithaca, ruled against CMC on several charges brought against the hospital by the National Labor Relations Board.

From L to R: RN Anne Marshall; RN Belinda Howell; TCWCs Pete Meyers; RN David Kraskow; TCWCs Rob Brown; TCWCs Stanley McPherson; and RN Scott Marsland.

Continued next page 1

## CMC, cont.

The Judge confirmed that CMC engaged in “an assortment of unlawful threats, directives, and prohibitions on union activities” including unlawful disciplinary warnings, suspensions, demotions and adverse performance evaluations.

Says CMC Registered Nurse, Anne Marshall: “This is about more than just a campaign or contract. This is about a nurses right to speak up freely and without worry of retaliation from an employer when they have issues regarding patient safety. This is about being held to an unlawful code of conduct that prevents nurses from speaking freely about patient safety. This is about wasteful spending of valuable tax payers money and wasting community resources to fight the nurses trying to protect this community. This is not just a win for the nurses, but a win for the entire community we serve.”

Adds Marshall: “I would request that the Hospital administration agree to set of Free and Fair Election Practices with the nurses, and refrain from incurring anymore expense in fighting the nurses with regards to their federally protected rights.”

The Tompkins County Workers’ Center calls on Cayuga Medical Center to enter immediately into a formal agreement with organizing nurses to uphold the following Free and Fair Election Practices:

- *that the hospital will respect workers’ free speech;*
- *that workers can access union representatives and information at work;*
- *that Cayuga Medical Center and 1199SEIU will present workers with factual information;*
- *That the hospital will not subject workers to mandatory one-on-one anti-union meetings.*

The Nurses are continuing their union organizing efforts.

For some more articles developments related to the CMC union campaign, see [truthsayers.org](http://truthsayers.org)

## Visioning Contest, Cont.

*minimum wage jobs for endless hours and still can't feed their families, get an advanced education to move ahead, or pay all of their bills.*

*"Each person who submitted an entry took time from what little time and energy they have to share in complete honesty and vulnerability what their lives are like and how earning a living wage would feel like freedom, enough to secure their sense of dignity. **We are entering into what may be even more austere times for our hard working minimum wage citizens and we are going to have to fight even harder in government to protect what safety nets we can and as a community we will need to step up and see that we are all family and we live on the backs of each other.***

*"We need to figure out each for*

*ourselves how much we really need and how much we can share. I think that a lot of people like to write off the lowest class economically. They choose to be there, or they are lazy. What the TCWC has been able to show with this event is what we all know in our hearts to be true: that all of us are the same, all of us have the same desires; all of us have the same ambitions; all of us have the same hope to be treated as a human with respect. These 18 entries express this so eloquently and I hope that everyone take a moment to read them when they are made public and then joins together to take part in a community where everyone has a voice and a place."*

TCWC is developing plans to present these Living Wage Visions at other locales around the County; if you have ideas of a

location that would be open to doing this, please contact us!

In addition, we intend to soon create a compendium of all the entries; stay tuned for your copy!

**We would like to thank all of our eminent judges:** Karen Baer, the Director of the Tompkins County Human Rights Commission; Neisha Butler, TCWC Board Member; Eric Byrd, TCWC Community Union Organizer and Delivery Driver; Christine Johnson, UAW Local 2300 Union Steward; Anna Kelles, Tompkins County Legislator; Joan Lockwood, UAW Local 2300 Staff Person; Pete Meyers, Coordinator of TCWC; Svante Myrick, Mayor of the City of Ithaca; Gay Nicholson, Director of Sustainable Tompkins; Carolina Osorio-Gil, Director of Cultura Ithaca; and artist extraordinaire, Caleb R. Thomas.

# Make a Difference as a Workers' Center Member

**H**ave you ever been exploited or had your rights violated at work? Do you earn enough to afford quality health care, housing, child care, transportation, and

healthy food and water?

**As a movement, we're as strong as the people in it - and we are very strong, together.**

What about the people around you? Who do you know or deal with on a regular basis who isn't respected at work or paid fairly? Every single example you can think of is a reason why you should become a member of the Tompkins County Workers' Center. As members, we are the

Workers' Center, and through it we hold employers accountable, fight for changes that protect our rights and win fair pay, and work with good employers to do

even better every day.

At this moment, many people are

still reeling from the U.S. Presidential election and trying to figure out what it will mean. People are talking a lot about non-establishment candidates and peoples' desperation for change to government policies and business practices that have been leaving huge swaths of our

population behind and getting poorer, and whether this candidate or that one would or will make things better or worse.

As always, the more we focus on individual powerful people the more we give them our own power. **It's not about them.** It's about us, and we're not going to change anything if we wait for someone else to take care of it or go it alone.

As a movement, we're as strong as the people in it - and we are very strong, together. Your membership in the Workers' Center is a real part of changing our community's daily working lives for the better.

## Wage Theft National Day of Action

**F**riday, November 18th was National Wage Theft Day of Action as declared by one of our national partners, Interfaith Worker Justice. The Tompkins County Workers' Center began

- workers not receiving their final paychecks;
- workers having their tips stolen by management;
- payroll fraud through worker misclassification as independent contractors.



**WAGE THEFT IS A CRIME**

Wage theft is an insidious national crime. According to the Economic Policy Institute, workers in the United States have an estimated \$50 billion in wages stolen from them each year. That's more than three times the \$14 billion lost in burglaries, larcenies, stolen cars, and robberies.

Stopping wage theft can only happen if people report it!

If you are ever the victim of Wage Theft, know of SOMEONE ELSE who might be the victim of Wage Theft, or suspect that a particular industry of workers at a specific worksite are the victims of Wage Theft (If You See Something, Say Something), please consider reaching out to us at our Hotline, 607-269-0409. You can also send an email to [TCWRH@tcworkerscenter.org](mailto:TCWRH@tcworkerscenter.org)

its Workers Rights Hotline in the spring of 2003. A full 20% of the people that we've encountered through the Hotline have come to us as a result of Wage Theft happening to them in their workplace. The TCWC has won wage theft judgments of more than \$1,300,000 for 350+ workers.

Wage Theft includes:

- violations of minimum wage laws;
- non-payment of time-and-a-half overtime pay;
- workers being forced to work off the clock;

# Explosion of Labor Organizing in Tompkins County

**T**here has been an explosion of worker organizing taking place in Tompkins County! Over the last few years workers have been actively organizing new unions; those new along with existing unions are meeting regularly and organizing themselves into a powerful collective voice for workers; and workers are also joining with TCWC in our Countywide Living Wage campaign.

To take a few examples of this heightened organizing:

- Workers from various low-wage industries are coming out of the woodwork to join our community movement to create a Countywide Minimum Wage That is a Living Wage. This TCWC-initiated movement received a nice shot in the arm from the large number of workers participating in our Living Wage Visioning Contest which came to a conclusion last month;
- Workers from a local cab company are working with the TCWC and Workers United (SEIU affiliate) to unionize;
- **Three adjunct and contingent faculty unions** at Ithaca College and Tompkins-Cortland Community College are in various stages of their struggles to unionize and/or negotiate a first contract where they have already



**Students, organized labor, the Ithaca College and larger Tompkins County community gather outside IC Board of Trustees meeting to protest the Board's unwillingness to give more to IC Contingent Professors.**

unionized. They are not paid a living wage and the colleges are desperate to keep them as a low-wage faculty workforce.

- While the Registered Nurses Organizing Drive has certainly had its challenges in the past year, partially due to the Unfair Labor Practices being committed by their employer, Cayuga Medical Center (see front page), it continues to move on;
- With initiative from TCWC a new Tompkins-Cortland Labor Committee has been meeting regularly since June and includes about 20 unions. One early impact of this new work was our very exciting and well attended Labor Day Picnic. Another is the strong support a number of participating unions lent to the IC adjunct faculty union at a large rally October 19<sup>th</sup> in support of their contract campaign.

kins/Cortland Labor Committee are working together to build a local labor movement that brings both organized and unorganized workers together as a unified community movement. Internal organizing is taking place both within non-union workplaces as well as to more strongly mobilize already unionized workers. Stay



**Members of the Worker Justice Center of NY and the Workers' Center of Central NY alongside Members of the Tompkins Workers' Center and the Mid-state Council on Occupational Safety and Health after receiving the Joe Hill Award.**

tuned!

TCWC and the fledgling Tomp-

# Where Labor and Civil Rights Meet: Over 500 People At 33rd Annual Labor Day Picnic!

**M**ore than 500 people attended the Tompkins County Workers' Center and Midstate Central Labor Council's 33rd Annual Labor Day Picnic at Ithaca's Stewart Park on Monday, September 5th. The Picnic organizers focused on the theme "Labor Rights are Civil Rights" highlighting the Black Lives Matter movement locally. Guest speaker Russell Rickford, a professor at Cornell University and a leader in the Black Lives Matter Ithaca movement, spoke about people fighting for their rights in groundswell movements. Incredible music was provided by Colleen Kattau and Mike Brant (Dos XX), and Ithaca-based rap artist, Sammus, also a leader in the Black Lives Matter Ithaca movement.

Three organizations received the Joe Hill Award:

- The Member Farmworkers of the Workers' Center of Central New York and the Member Farmworkers of the Worker Justice Center of New York for the workers and advocates of the respective organizations' efforts to support and organize farmworkers; for facing adversity and challenges from those who would deny workers their lawful right to join together in the struggle against injustice, and for proving once again that workers united will never be defeated;
- The Communication Workers of America, Local 1111 based in Elmira, NY (responsible for the area including Tompkins County)

for their leadership in the recent and successful 'strike' against Verizon that achieved tangible gains for both present Verizon workers, and opened up new possibilities for organizing workers in non-organized call centers and cell phone stores.

Two organizations received the Mother Jones Award:

- Cornell Graduate Students United for their stellar organizing to create a union for graduate students at Cornell University—a possibility made all the easier in late August by the National Labor Relations Board decision to consider grad students as employees at all universities;



Professor Rickford talking about how "a rebellion is beginning to take hold in the laboring class as workers begin to fight for a living wage, from farm workers in Afghanistan to laborers in India. Where this intersects with movements like Black Lives Matter, Rickford said, is in the intrinsic motivations of why activists are pushing for their stances." (Photo: Alex Fox)

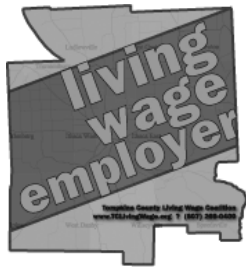
- The Full-Time Contingent Faculty at Ithaca College, for quickly organizing a union of their own, following the lead in 2015 of the Ithaca College Part-Time Contingent Faculty doing the same in 2015.

The Friend of Labor Award

- The Friend of Labor Award was given posthumously to a member of the Tompkins Workers' Center's Minimum Wage as Living Wage Organizing Committee, Paula Burke, who passed away in late June of 2016 at the age of 36. Paula was instrumental in our campaign and worked tirelessly to ensure that EVERYONE who worked in Tompkins County was paid a Living Wage (which is presently \$14.34/hour).

The Goat of Labor Awards were given to:

- Cayuga Medical Center who clashed with nurses earlier this year over the nurses' right to form a union amid claims that under-staffing was leading to safety issues.
- The second "Goat" award went to Syracuse based Hayner-Hoyt construction, who engaged in conduct designed to exploit contracting opportunities reserved for service-disabled veterans.



# Support our 96 Certified Living Wage Businesses with over 2,787 workers!

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

# Don't Pay to Have your Taxes Prepared

**A**lternatives Federal Credit Union's Free Tax Preparation program is available to community members, regardless of where they bank. Single people and families who earned less than \$54,000 in 2016 can make an appointment and have their taxes prepared for free. The goal of the Free Tax Preparation program is for area workers get their full refunds and all tax credits to which they are entitled, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, and American Opportunity Tax Credit, without paying the fees that paid preparers charge.

Alternatives has been offering this free service to local taxpayers since 2003. Part of the IRS' Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program, Alternatives became interested in joining because of its mission to build wealth through services like financial

counseling, student credit union, individual development accounts, and an entrepreneurship and business development program.

In addition to the main site downtown, Alternatives manages 12 satellite sites in Tompkins and Cortland Counties. For 2015 Tax Year, 83 volunteer preparers filed 3,120 returns, bringing \$5.2 million in refunds and tax credits to local workers. Each return is prepared by a volunteer and reviewed by a Quality Reviewer who is certified at the advanced level and has at least five years of experience in tax preparation.

The program opens Tuesday, January 17. Volunteers at Tompkins County Information and Referral Services will begin taking appointments the week prior. Call 2-1-1, or (877) 211-8667.

## Focus on LWE: Buffalo Street Books

**B**uffalo Street Books is a co-operative bookstore. The store has been a certified Living Wage Employer (LWE) continuously since 2009, under private ownership, through the Ithaca community's massive collective buy-out to keep the store going as a co-op. Asha Sanaker, general manager, talks honestly about how paying a living wage while competing against businesses that don't share a commitment to workers can be difficult. "Just from a numbers perspective it doesn't make sense necessarily. Not in the short term," she says, but challenges that kind of short-term thinking.

Better wages can change both people and the places they work. So many people have never felt valued at work that not putting in effort at work in return becomes only natural. Having reasons to

stay and know the business, offer better customer service, and invest in success can be a game-changer. "It's a huge cultural shift for many employees and a significant growth in skills for employers" that Sanaker thinks the City of Ithaca and Tompkins County need to support in meaningful ways through wage reform and resources to help employers improve their practices.

"Purely according to the numbers, the better money people on the bottom end of the wage scale make the more they spend locally," says Sanaker. "LWEs that do a good job of engaging openly with their employees about what it takes to manage living wage do tend to also engender a higher commitment on the part of their employees to support LWEs as often as they can. A county-wide ordinance would only enhance

that reality. There's no way it wouldn't."

These are some of the reasons why she and Buffalo Street Books support a minimum wage that is a living wage in Tompkins County. "It's better for all businesses if a county-wide ordinance goes into effect because it levels the playing field. Not just between local businesses, but between local and non-local businesses, which is the more important thing."



# 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 \$9.70

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

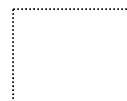
...organizing working families to take strong action to secure better economic future for all of us

...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



**TC Workers' Center**  
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