



The Workers' Edge

Voice of the Tompkins County Workers' Center

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We're Stronger Together.

As a longtime supporter and member of the Leadership Team of the Tompkins County Workers' Center I get to see behind the scenes many of the struggles—but also the victories which dot our work and fuel us toward our mission of a “more just community and world”. Every week there are more stories coming off of the hotline of people who have been mistreated at work getting support and sometimes even justice. There are collaborations with businesses and visionary organizations regionally and nationally which make me feel hopeful. And of course, there is the local advocacy for fair, dignified work and wages for

all people.

This issue of the newsletter includes a story from a worker who was supported by the hotline; an introduction to the newly revised Restaurant Owner's Manual; stories of workers coming together to change the balance of power at work; and a story of recent changes in state law that will support the rights of people on the job.

Right now, the Tompkins County Workers' Center needs each of us to “stand up for workers' struggles” as we have pledged through our membership and support of the organization. Whatever happens with any struggle,

regardless of who is in power locally or nationally, there is power and support in local solidarity like we find here at the Workers' Center.

TCWC is looking for people passionate about our mission to [join the Leadership Team](#). We're also looking for people to join our fundraising committee and get involved in other ways. Can you lend a hand?

We're stronger together. Thank you for your long-time support. Imagine where we can go from here!
- Jessica Brown, Leadership Team member and longtime TCWC Newsletter Designer

Celebrating Success for New York Workers

We had a PARTY to celebrate some recent workers' rights successes at the State level. TCWC and the Workers' Center of Central New York, Flushing Workers' Center in Queens; the Chinese Staff and Workers Association in Manhattan; and the National Mobilization Against Sweatshops Workers' Center in Manhattan; and the Laundry Workers Center held a joint celebration on the evening of July 10th at the Tompkins County Workers' Center.

The list of victories: Secure Wages Earned Against Theft (SWEAT); Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act (FFLPA); The Driver's License Access and Privacy Act (commonly known as Green Light); Expanded Workplace Sexual Harassment rights. We are also cele-



What GreenStar Members Might Want to Know about GreenStar Workers

Ellen David Freidman



You may have heard some talk, seen social media, or read news, about GreenStar workers organizing union. It's true, and – if you're someone who cares about workers rights – you may want to check into this a bit. Especially if you are a GreenStar mem-

ber-owner, you have a direct stake in the outcome of this union campaign.

A group of Tompkins County Worker Center members have gotten together to learn about, and support, the GreenStar workers in their efforts... and offer some points for you to consider:

GreenStar is a consumer co-op, not a workers co-op...

This means that consumers can join, get a discount, and potentially have a say in how GreenStar is run through the Council or membership votes. But GreenStar workers are just like workers elsewhere... they don't have any meaningful say on important things like their own wages, benefits and working conditions.

Having their own voice is a big motivation for forming a union.

Can workers even have a union at a co-op... Absolutely yes. There are many unionized food co-ops in the US (to learn more: <http://www.geo.coop/story/labor-unions-and-worker-co-ops>). Just like union members in any workplace, GreenStar workers would negotiate a contract with the GreenStar Council (the employer). It's their legal right to choose a union, if they wish to.

Would a union be good or bad for GreenStar's mission...

Some long-term members feel protective of the "mission" of GreenStar and wonder if a union would hurt that. In fact... it would probably be helpful. Many members and customers have been critical of the "corporate culture" that has crept into GreenStar, and the weakening of the members voice in decisions; having the workers organized to once again raise collective values would be a reinforcement of the original mission.

If you are a GreenStar member or customer and want to learn more... feel free to contact Pete Meyers at pete@tcworkerscenter.org or 607-339-1680. You can also pick up buttons to show your support at the Workers' Center.

Success, cont.

brating farmworkers gaining the right to collectively bargain in New York through court action.

At the party we raised a glass to these victories while video-conferencing with our partner organizations across the state. It was a beautiful show of solidarity across New York. Thank you for coming out! More information about the legislation can be found on our website.



Message from the Organizing Committee at Greenstar

The GreenStar Organizing Committee believes that workers at the co-op - and not just its member-owners - should have access to the democratic process through the right to organize a union. As with the majority of workplaces in our country, the average GreenStar worker is governed by rules that they did not vote on, and subject to the authority granted only to managers; in effect are treated like second class citizens. Workers do not have guaranteed representation independent of the organization's internal structure, or the platform to negotiate a living wage. A worker's well-being and livelihood can be threatened by unpredictable factors such as customer complaints and harassment, insufficient staffing and training, or a manager's lack of professionalism - if not outright antagonism. Currently, we do not have the means of collective recourse to address any of these matters.

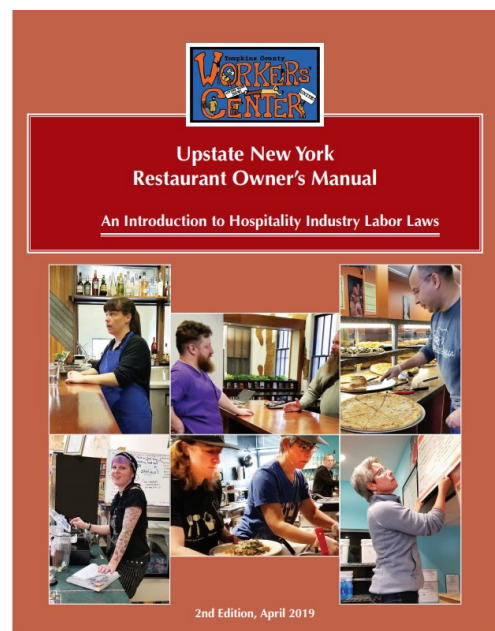


What is different at GreenStar is that member-owners have written the concept of a democratic process into the Co-op's Ends Statement - for themselves. We would like to take that vision farther and set up a more democratic structure for workers, it's blueprint laid out in a union contract. We would like to mutually negotiate a legally binding document with management that workers would vote on, and all parties would operate under. By forming a union, workers could gain better representation in cases of disciplinary action, be supported with a path and tools to hold management accountable when the contract is not upheld, and gain help in bargaining for a clear, just, and progressive pay scale and advancement guidelines to help decrease favoritism and discrimination.

Organizing ourselves at GreenStar means coming together to advocate for our common values as workers: dignity, respect, and to be treated and paid fairly. Forming a union and voting in a contract would be a way to institutionalize and protect these values.

In solidarity, The Greenstar Organizing Committee

Workers' Center Releases 2nd Edition of the Restaurant Owner's Manual



The Tompkins County Workers' Center is proud to announce the release of the 2nd Edition of the *Upstate New York Restaurant Owner's Manual: a guide to hospitality industry labor laws*. As New York Labor Commissioner Roberta Reardon expressed in her forward to the manual, "The New York State Department of Labor and the Tompkins County Workers' Center deeply value the significant contribution restaurants make to the economic vitality of the region, and consider restaurants esteemed cornerstones of the business community," but it remains true that many people enter into owning a food service business without knowing the rights of workers and restaurants sometimes serve up labor violations along with cuisine. The

Workers' Center, thanks to the work of 2nd Edition editors Liam Audet and Nico Hirschl, has expanded the booklet with important information about our newest labor laws and best practices. It's a great resource for any owner, manager, or worker in food service upstate. You can view and download the manual online at http://www.tcworkerscenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/RestaurantManualDigital6_11_19.pdf.

The Tompkins County Health Department will be circulating copies to food service businesses in the county, as it did with the 1st Edition, and we hope folks in other communities around the state will share it with their restaurants too!

SWEAT Bill Closer to Challenging Widespread Nature of Wage Theft in NY

By Sarah Ahn and Pete Meyers

Ten years ago, an owner of a successful deli in NYC that was blocks away from the Cornell Club on E. 44th Street in Manhattan (Evergreen Gourmet Deli), was so successful in the City that he decided to open a similar sort of Deli (called the Green Café) on the border of Collegetown. A year or so later a woman, Ana Ottoson, who worked at the Green Café came to the TCWC to say that while SHE was being paid fairly in her work in the front of the house, a number of her friends who worked in the back of the house, primarily people of Mexican and Central American descent, hadn't being paid for MONTHS.

The owner of the Café housed a number of these workers in a small apartment on Warren Road in Ithaca. When the TCWC contacted the NYS Dept of Labor's Bureau of Immigrant Policies and Affairs, about these claims, NYSDOL opened an immediate investigation of both restaurants. The investigation resulted in judgments over \$1 million in wage theft-\$650,000 in Ithaca and \$350,000 in NYC. Because of a legal loophole that allows an owner of a Limited Liability Corporation (LLC) to avoid responsibility for judgments against the company, this owner was able to close down his two businesses and walk away without paying a penny.

The New York State, Senate and Assembly passed the Secure Wages Earned Against Theft law in June 2019 that will make the minimum wage enforceable for a large swath of workers and give those workers and the government the tools to hold employers to the law. SWEAT, A486/S2844, will stop law-breaking employers from transferring and hiding their assets when they flout our state's laws, and passed with resounding support in the state Senate and Assembly. All the SWEAT Act needs now to become law is to be signed by the Governor, which he has yet to do as of August 2019.

Wage theft reached an all time high in recent years. The Economic Policy Institute estimates that close to \$50 billion is stolen from workers each year nationally [<https://www.epi.org/press/employers-stole-at-least-2-billion-from-workers-in-2015-and-2016/>] While low-wage workers are predominantly the victims of wage theft, all kinds of workers

face nonpayment problems. When any worker goes to seek their unpaid wages, employers can pretend to sell or close their businesses to avoid paying. Many workers until now have been left grasping at straws trying to hunt down those employers who cheated them of their wages.

Many will benefit once the Governor signs the SWEAT Bill- high wage and low wage workers, pro-worker advocates, unions, law-abiding employers that cannot compete with unscrupulous businesses that do cheat workers, and even the Department of Labor will benefit from SWEAT. Workers will finally be able to make bosses pay for cheating them of their pay. But the ones who made this legislation possible were working people who organized. Many workers, robbed of tens and sometimes hundreds of thousands of dollars, didn't give up and say, "My boss didn't pay me, so I will find another place to work." They kept fighting, kept pushing, kept exposing how wage law is useless if workers are not even able to get relief. It was these workers who lead the fight for reforms that will hold employers accountable, and ensure that they pay workers the Living Wage they are due.

Sarah Ahn is an Organizer with the Flushing Workers' Center (FWC) in Queens. Pete Meyers is the Coordinator of the TCWC. In early July of 2019, the FWC and the TCWC organized a joint event in NYC and Ithaca highlighting, among other things, the passage of the SWEAT Bill, as well as other labor victories in the State Legislature.





Support our 122 Certified Living Wage Businesses with over 3,263 workers!

Since our last newsletter in Spring 2019 we have certified Emmy's Organics, Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit, and Positively Mystic.

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| Advocacy Center | The History Center of Tompkins County | Sciencenter Discovery Museum |
| Alcohol & Drug Council of Tompkins County | Holmberg Galbraith, LLP | Segal and Sorensen |
| Alternatives Federal Credit Union | Home Green Home | Shade Tree Auto, Inc. |
| Autumn Leaves Used Books | Hospicare and Palliative Care | Shaw & Murphy Law Firm |
| Ancient Wisdom Productions | Human Services Coalition of Tompkins County | Silk Oak/Ithacamade |
| Areti Construction | International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local #241 | Singlebrook Technology, Inc. |
| Avital's Apiaries | International Food Network, Inc. | Snug Planet LLC |
| Better Housing for Tompkins County | Ironwood Builders of Ithaca | Sparks Electric |
| Blue Spruce Painting and Decorating | Ithaca Carshare | St. Catherine of Sienna Church |
| Boyce Thompson Institute | Ithaca Cayuga Optical Service | St. John's Episcopal Church |
| Bridges Cornell Heights | Ithaca Health Alliance | St. Luke Lutheran Church |
| Brightworks Computer Consulting | Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services | St. Paul's United Methodist Church and Nursery School |
| Buffalo Street Books | Ithaca Oral Surgery and Implants | Stone Quarry House |
| Brotherton Construction | Ithaca Urban Renewal Agency | Strawbridge and Jahn Builders |
| Cancer Resource Center of Finger Lakes | IthacaMed | Sunbeam Candles |
| Catholic Charities of Tompkins/Tioga | Ithaca Montessori School | Sunny Brook Builders |
| Center for Transformative Action | Ithaca Teachers Association | Sunny Days of Ithaca |
| Child Development Council | Jewel Box | Sustainable Tompkins |
| Cinemapolis | Jillian's Drawers | Sweet Land Farm CSA |
| City of Ithaca | Julia e Dean Inc/The Clay School | Taitem Engineering |
| Colonial Veterinary Hospital | LaMorte Electric | Temple Beth El |
| Community Dispute Resolution Center | Loaves and Fishes | The Frame Shop |
| Community Foundation of Tompkins County | McBooks Press | The Strebel Planning Group |
| Community Nursery School | Miller Mayer Law Firm | Tiny Timber LLC |
| Community Science Institute | Multicultural Resource Center | Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit Tompkins County |
| Cornell Child Care Center | New Roots Charter School | Tompkins County Public Library |
| Court St. Chiropractic of Ithaca | Northeast Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine | Tompkins County Recycling, LLC |
| Downtown Ithaca Alliance | Nutritional Wellness Center | Town of Caroline |
| Emmy's Organics | OAR – Opportunities, Alternatives and Resources | Town of Danby |
| Family and Children's Service of Ithaca | One World Market | Town of Enfield |
| Feirman Builders, Inc. | Ongweoweh Corporation | Town of Ithaca |
| Finger Lakes Naturals | Park Foundation | TRC Energy Services (Ithaca) |
| Finger Lakes ReUse | Planned Parenthood of the Southern Finger Lakes | Trumansburg Community Nursery School |
| Finger Lakes Running Company | Positively Mystic | United Auto Workers Local 2300 |
| First Baptist Church of Ithaca | Q2 Solutions | Upscale Remodeling Corporation |
| First Congregational Church of Ithaca, United Church of Christ | Reach Medical, PLLC | Village of Cayuga Heights |
| First Unitarian Society of Ithaca | Red Feet Wine Market and Spirit Provisions | Viridius Property |
| Friendship Donations Network, Inc. | Renovus Energy, Inc. | The Watershed |
| Foodnet Meals on Wheels | Schlather, Stumbar, Parks and Salk | Weaver Wind Energy |
| Grayhaven Motel | | Women's Opportunity Center |
| Greensprings Natural Cemetary | | |

Unfair Labor Practices at Ithaca Coffee Company

By P.J. Arroyo

I was an employee at Ithaca Coffee Company (ICC) for 2 ½ years. The general sentiment among my coworkers was that we were underpaid, overworked, underappreciated, and generally unhappy, especially if the employees had been there a long time. I had seen many miserable coworkers come and go, and the most common solution was to quit. Instead of bouncing from one terrible job to another, my friends and I decided the best thing to do would be to organize. If I had entered the company as a new worker and learned I could join a union, I would have been more invested and felt like I had a voice. Instead, I felt like an expendable cog in a machine. Our organizing committee wanted to lay the groundwork for future workers even if it didn't work out for our benefit. The goal was to improve our work situation and that of our coworkers, and this meant taking a stand in our community to show that we wanted better from Ithaca.

Our first step was to meet with the Tompkins County Workers' Center where we got valuable advice and made us feel that we weren't crazy for being unhappy with our work situation. We wanted to make sure we were much more organized than the previous union effort many years ago. This led to our partnership with the union, Workers United. We had meetings with their representative about drafting a letter to the owners. The heads of our committee attended the weekly Community Union Organizer (CUO) meetings held at the Workers' Center.

We got advice about how to reach out to our coworkers with union cards, handwritten letters, and information about how the company could retaliate. After many months of planning and building a base of support with our coworkers, we went public with our union on April 17, 2019. The company responded by trying to subvert the union, leading to what's called Unfair Labor Practices.

First, my coworkers and I were accosted by managers and the owners. I was accused of causing the business to close down and there were some vague threats about how the union effort would mirror what had happened when a past group of employees had attempted to unionize (they lost their jobs). These comments were illegal for management staff to make. The owners of ICC also tried their best to dissuade workers from joining the union, and the atmosphere pressured union leaders to quit. It became a very toxic place to work which is what they wanted because they had to be tactful and not outright fire us. The union effort ultimately failed. I had my hours unlawfully adjusted so that I couldn't make a living. This led to an investigation from the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to determine whether the company was breaking the law. The founding members of the union organizing committee have since left ICC but the fight goes on. We've recently heard back that ICC is being charged with Unfair Labor Practices by the NLRB.

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 \$11.10 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



Worker Gets Paid Back \$3K in Wage Theft Case; Takes Action to Help Other Workers

In January of 2018, an immigrant worker came to the Tompkins County Workers' Center because she couldn't afford to pay her bills on what she earned at the restaurant where she was all of cook, server, and delivery driver depending on whatever the business needed. Advocates for the Workers' Rights Hotline discovered that she was only being paid straight time, not time and a half for overtime despite clocking ten hour or longer days Monday through Saturday every week. The Workers' Center's advocates talked to her about her rights and she went back to work to tell her boss that she had overtime rights. They didn't pay (they mocked her, actually) and the Workers' Center helped her submit a complaint to the New York State Department of Labor. Although her records weren't perfect, the worker

had done herself a big favor by taking pictures of her time sheets and weekly pay. While NYSDOL conducted its Wage Theft investigation, she became a familiar face around the Workers' Center – bringing in other restaurant workers facing issues, getting info so that she could do education on workers' rights with others, and serving as an interpreter. Her case was one of



several wage theft judgments settled by NYSDOL with workers connected to TCWC this summer, getting her \$3000 for unpaid overtime.



Monday Sept. 2nd 11-3pm
Stewart Park large pavilion

Please join us at the Labor Day picnic! Bring your own plate/
silverware and a dish to pass if you're able. We'll have hamburgers &
veggie burgers as well as a raffle, fun, and solidarity!

Tompkins County
WORKERS' CENTER
UNITE
NOW!

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



Return Service Requested

