

Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County

www.livingwagesonoma.org

Spring 2003
Newsletter



LWCSC is a grassroots organization made up of community, labor and religious groups, and concerned individuals

“The dignity of all work demands just wages to meet today’s living costs”

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CONSORTIUM OF GROUPS UNITE FOR ACTION ON SONOMA COUNTY HOUSING CRISIS!

REPORT CALLS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF JOBS-HOUSING LINKAGE FEE AND FORUM ON MARCH 22ND TO LEAD TO NEW AFFORDABLE HOUSING INITIATIVES

For Immediate Release: February 11, 2003

Contact: Paul Carroll, SEIU Local 707, 707-545-7349; Kelly Brown, Greenbelt Alliance, 707-575-3661

Santa Rosa - Calling the delay in implementing the County-wide jobs-housing linkage fee scandalous, a consortium of labor, ecumenical, environmental, housing advocate, business, minority, and social justice groups today announced they would release a detailed report, “Affordable Housing for Everyone,” written by Nari Rhee, Ph.D. candidate in Geography, U. C., Berkeley, and set the date for a ‘Housing Action Forum’ - March 22, 2003. The purpose of the forum is to present the report to the community and to develop a common agenda for action amongst participants.

The Housing Action Forum will be held at the Santa Rosa Junior College Faculty Lounge/Doyle Student Center at Elliott and Mendocino Streets, Saturday, March 22, from 9:00 a.m. until noon. Councilman Larry Barnett from the town of Sonoma will speak about efforts at the municipal level to address the housing crisis and Supervisor Mike Reilly will discuss possible new county initiatives. The public is invited to attend. The admission is free and the facility is wheel chair accessible.

Service Employees International Local 707 (SEIU) and New Economy, Working Solutions (NEWS) sponsored the report, which outlines comprehensive solutions to Sonoma County’s housing crisis. The report recommends implementation of the jobs-housing linkage fee, increasing the amount of redevelopment funding set aside for affordable housing, passing stronger inclusionary zoning ordinances, and establishing a permanent, public financing mechanism for a county housing trust fund. This report is the latest study indicating the magnitude of the crisis, and it is the most comprehensive analysis of potential solutions. Affordable housing advocates hope the report will alert elected officials to the consequences of ignoring the crisis and will lead to meaningful action by local government.

The Housing Action Forum is co-sponsored by SEIU, NEWS, The Faith Based Coalition, The Housing Advocacy

Group, Greenbelt Alliance, the Leadership Institute for Ecology and Economy, the Living Wage Coalition and the Sonoma County Latino Democratic Club. Following the event on March 22nd, a new consortium of affordable housing advocates will take action to demand solutions, including the immediate implementation of the jobs-housing linkage fee in all of the County’s jurisdictions.

“The ‘tool kit’ is full,” said Paul Carroll of SEIU Local 707. “There is absolutely no excuse for the continued study of solutions to our deepening housing crisis. It is time for our elected officials to take immediate action to assist working people to be able to afford to live in the community where they work.”

The report, funded by the UC Berkeley Institute for Labor and Employment, surveys other Bay Area counties and municipalities which have taken housing initiatives that many jurisdictions in Sonoma County have supported in theory, but not in practice.

“This report demonstrates that the solutions to our housing crisis are readily available. All that is necessary is the political will to implement them,” said Ernie Carpenter, former Sonoma County Supervisor. “In fact, two Sonoma County cities, Sonoma and Sebastopol, will be considering and likely implementing a jobs-housing linkage fee in the near future. We want Santa Rosa and the County to follow their lead.”

“We have supported these policies for years,” said Kelly Brown of Greenbelt Alliance. “Environmental groups have long supported the adoption of a job-housing linkage fee and we look forward to forming an action plan. We have the tools to provide housing without hurting our local economy or threatening agricultural land and open space.”

“As a broad based action group on affordable housing

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Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County

EMPLOYEE OF CITY CONTRACTOR HOPES FOR LIVING WAGE

by Tara Treasurefield

Matthew Smith has one wife, three children, and two jobs. He gets up at 4:00 a.m. five days a week, and his long day is finally over when he drops into bed at 11:00 p.m.

The only wage earner in his household, Matthew maintains such an exhausting work schedule because it's the best way he has found to provide his family with food, shelter, and other necessities - both now, and over the long term. Matthew's daughter has just started college, and all three of his children are full time students. He intends to keep it that way, as he doesn't want their lives to be as hard as his. To that end, he's determined to provide whatever level of support his children need to qualify for careers that won't force them to live from paycheck to paycheck, as the Smith family now does.

"I have a friend who's a teacher," says Matthew. "He [advised me to] let my daughter concentrate on her studies. He said that once she finds out she can make money [at a low level job], she'll probably think that's going to be enough for her." No one knows better than Matthew that a job that pays less than a living wage is a setup for a life of constant struggle and exhaustion. On the other hand, he'd be delighted if his daughter could accept a recent offer for a part-time position that would use her highest skills, pay her well, and relieve him of the some of the responsibility for supporting her. But there's no way to get to the job site without a car, and Matthew can't afford to buy her one.

The Smith family lives in a two-bedroom apartment. "Our place is like trash," says Matthew. "The carpet is filthy. We asked management to replace it, but they said the rent would go up if they did." Matthew's biggest concern about the apartment is the cramped space. "All three kids share one bedroom," he says. "There's a bunk bed, and the one on the bottom is a double. The two boys sleep together, the girl sleeps on top. Sometimes, one of the kids sleeps on the couch in the living room."

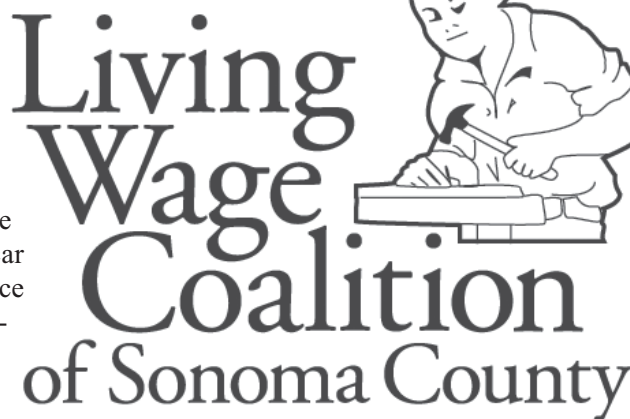
Though Matthew would love to rent a larger apartment for his family, he chooses to keep up with car payments and health insurance coverage for his children instead. That's only one

among many tradeoffs he has to make. He has also given up on the wish to open a savings account, buy his kids new clothes and shoes, and treat them to toys and games. But all his money goes to basic expenses: rent, food, utilities, and insurance. Should he lose one of his jobs, or have his hours cut back, he won't even be able to afford the basics.

Perhaps the most disturbing fact about Matthew Smith's story is that the City of Santa Rosa plays a central role in condemning his family to poverty. As a part-time employee of a company that contracts with the City of Santa Rosa, Matthew earns \$10 an hour. Though this is a good deal more than the California minimum wage of \$6.75, it's far from a living wage. What's more, when Matthew doesn't work, he doesn't get paid, as his employer provides neither vacation time nor sick leave. His benefits "package" consists of minimal dental coverage, paid in part by the employer. Matthew's share of the company's dental plan is \$100 each month.

The Santa Rosa City Council likely will again consider a living wage ordinance sponsored by the Sonoma County Living Wage Coalition. Matthew hopes against hope that they'll approve it. "I would like the city to at least give us a fair deal," he says. "The company is benefiting on everything we do, because the city is trying to minimize paper work. That's why they're using an agency. But if they pay the agency \$15 for every hour we work, they'd save \$3 an hour for each of us if they'd hire us directly for \$12 an hour. I have heard that in Southern California, workers who do the same job I do are direct employees of the city, and they're making \$11 or \$12 an hour. I've been here for six months, and I'm still making \$10. We're not going to get a raise at all. We're stuck at \$10."

Under the living wage ordinance, Matthew would receive \$12.25 an hour with benefits, or \$14.00 without benefits. That's not enough money to solve all his problems, but it would make his life a little easier. "[If the City Council passes the living wage ordinance], I'll be able to cut back on my hours. I'll be able to get more sleep, and to spend some time with my wife and children."



Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County

SANTA ROSA PARKING LOT ATTENDANTS VOTE TO JOIN SEIU LOCAL 707

by Charlotte Shimura, Organizer SEIU Local 707

The Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County proposed a Living Wage Ordinance in the City of Santa Rosa in the fall of 2001. This would have required City employees, including temporary employees, to receive wages and benefits of \$15.00 an hour. Twenty Living Wage Ordinances have been passed in California. Most recently, temporary employees in the cities of Watsonville and Santa Cruz have been covered by ordinances. Unfortunately, in Santa Rosa the majority of the City Council refused to pass the ordinance or even study it.

When it was not considered, SEIU Local 707 began to organize a portion of the City's temporary employees - the Parking Lot Attendants- who work in the booths of five city parking lots.

Parking Lot Attendants are approximately between the ages of 63 and 85. Even though some of them have worked in the lots for 10-20 years, they are still considered temporary employees with no paid holidays, benefits or sick leave. Until 2002, they had worked for minimum wage for decades. As of May 2002, when the Union organizing began, they were earning \$7.30-\$8.10 an hour. It is highly likely that pressure from the Living Wage Coalition embarrassed the City into giving them a slight increase in pay in early 2002.

Some Parking Lot Attendants work to keep active or to save for a vacation; many work to meet their basic expenses. Though exact statistics are not available, some attendants - those who retired a number of years ago - have full or partial pensions (some from former union jobs) while others have mainly Social Security plus whatever they can earn. The Attendants are loyal, mature, and use good judgment in dealing with the public and problems in the lots. They are, in short, excellent customer service and public relations for the City of Santa Rosa. Recently they were trained in using computers in their booths.

In an informal survey sent to all Attendants by SEIU Local 707, they were asked what improvements they would like to see in their job. Higher wages, dignity, and respect were what they wanted most. They reiterated their frustration with management who didn't ask their opinion and didn't listen to them when they suggested how the lots could be run more efficiently and actually make more money for the City. (Until the Union organizing campaign began, the City had not met with them for four years!) They also wanted a grievance procedure.

After many meetings, house visits, calls and one-on-one conversations with Lot Attendants, a majority of them signed Union cards. This was all that was legally required; however, the City refused to "accrete" them into Local 707's already existing City Bargaining Units, such as Transit Workers or Maintenance Workers (with the same management chain of command). The City and Local 707 then agreed that if a Union election was held and the Attendants voted for Union representation they would constitute their own independent bargaining unit.

On January 6, 2003 ballots were mailed to all 30 Parking Attendants. Twenty-seven ballots were returned with 19 "yes" votes and 8 "no" votes - a 70% yes vote! This was a decisive victory and also a milestone because it set a precedent for organizing other temporary workers!

Union recognition will be approved by the City Council Tuesday February 25, 2003. Bargaining will begin in the spring. Stewards and a bargaining team have already been elected from amongst the Parking Lot Attendants.

Thanks to members of the Living Wage Coalition who spent so much time and effort on making this possible. It would not have happened without them. Special thanks to Tim Wiese, Marty Bennett, Sharon Boyce, Dick Latimer, Jim Gibson, Marvin Rogoff, Ed and Yusef Hayes, Paul Kaplan and Monique Lusse, who worked on this campaign directly.

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issues, we will press our current elected officials on implementing the recently updated housing elements in all of the jurisdictions. We will continue to make providing affordable housing an issue in future elections." said Margo Merck of the Housing Advocacy Group.

"The time has come. Future studies are unnecessary. Instead of burying these solutions in committee meetings, we plan to help our elected officials to take action, or they should explain why they will not provide housing for working people, seniors, and those unable to get into housing in the community where they live," said Stephen Harper, President of the Faith Based Coalition. "The Forum on Housing will be our jumping off point. Either our elected officials want to be part of the solution or part of the problem."

For more information please contact Kelly Brown at (707) 575-3661; or Paul Carroll at (707) 545-7349. To download a copy of the executive summary or full report go to, after March 1, 2003, <http://www.seiulocal707.org>

Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County

WATSONVILLE LIVING WAGE VICTORY!

by Sandy Brown, Coordinator, Santa Cruz Living Wage Coalition

The Watsonville City Council voted Tuesday, Sept. 10th, to adopt a living wage law. Tuesday night's historic vote was the culmination of the work of a committee of dedicated volunteers, who have been building a community coalition in Watsonville and working with City Council Members to get support for the living wage proposal. Council Members Chuck Carter, Richard de la Paz, Ramon Gomez, Rafael Lopez, and Ana Ventura Phares supported all elements of the ordinance, while Mayor Bobeda and Council Member Doering-Nielsen supported only some of the elements. A final ordinance reading is scheduled for Tuesday, September 24th. The ordinance will take effect 30 days following final passage, making Watsonville the third living wage jurisdiction on the Central Coast!! The ordinance package will:

- Set the Watsonville living wage rate at \$11.50 for workers with health benefits and \$12.55 for workers without health benefits.
- Cover service contractors with contracts greater than \$10,000.
- Include labor peace and labor relation neutrality, worker retention and responsible contractor provisions.
- Establish a seven-member advisory committee to oversee implementation of the living wage law and make policy recommendations.
- Provide clear direction for staff to return within six months with recommendations regarding coverage of nonprofit health and human service providers and recipients of economic development assistance.
- Affirm the right of temporary workers to unionize and improve their wages, in order to improve their wages and working conditions through collective bargaining.

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST ENDORSES LIVING WAGE CAMPAIGN

The First Congregational United Church of Christ in Santa Rosa endorsed the living wage campaign by a vote of 79-3. This is the first time an entire congregation considered and voted to endorse the campaign. Gene Hottel and Marty Bennett made several presentations at the church over a four-five month period last year. Much thanks to retired pastor Warren Kremmel, who facilitated the endorsement process. A notice will go out to all UCC churches in the county about this endorsement.

The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship and Congregation Shomrei Torah are considering endorsing the campaign. A number of other religious organizations and congregations have already endorsed and a complete listing can be found at www.livingwagesonoma.org.

THE CITY OF FAIRFAX TOWN COUNCIL IN MARIN COUNTY PASSES LIVING WAGE ORDINANCE

August 8, 2002 - The City of Fairfax Town Council in Marin County passed a living wage ordinance that mandates all employees of the city, city contractors, and firms receiving public subsidies pay \$13.00 an hour with benefits and \$14.75 without. The ordinance applies to approximately 12 firms who have contracts over \$10,000. This is the highest living wage ordinance passed in the nation. The City of San Anselmo is now considering a similar ordinance.

RECENT LIVING WAGE WINS

During the fall of 2002, several polities across the United States adopted living wage ordinances: Broward County, Florida; Taylor, Michigan; Westchester, New York; Bellingham, Washington; Louisville, Kentucky; Cincinnati, Ohio; and New York, New York. Details are available at www.livingwagecampaign.org.

Please visit Living Wage Coalition
of Sonoma County website:
www.livingwagesonoma.org

Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County

MARCH FOR HEALTH CARE, FOR WORKERS' RIGHTS, AND AGAINST WAR: CELEBRATE CESAR CHAVEZ WEEKEND

WHERE: DOWNTOWN SONOMA, GATHER AT THE PLAZA. TIME: 3:30 PM
WHEN: MARCH 29TH, 2003. FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL JAMIE: 510-773-7350

by Jamie McCallum, organizer, SEIU Local 250

On March 28th, Cesar Chavez weekend, some workers from Sonoma Healthcare Center, accompanied by community allies, will begin a 20 mile walk from Santa Rosa to Sonoma to draw attention to the conditions for workers and patients at the nursing home where they work. They will arrive in Sonoma on March 29th and hold a large rally and march to pressure their employer to drop its objections and do the right thing--recognize the union and negotiate a contract.

The demonstration will draw attention to the dwindling public healthcare dollars allotted to care for our com-

munity as a war-soaked budget drains vital social services.

Workers at Sonoma Healthcare Center, a nursing home in Sonoma, began organizing their union about a year ago to improve conditions for themselves and their patients, and voted overwhelmingly for SEIU Local 250, the fastest-growing healthcare workers' union in the country. Since then, their employer, the Ensign Group, has battled the workers' decision and objected to their election, denying justice. While many nursing home companies see the benefits of cooperating with their employees, the Ensign Group has chosen to waste valuable resources and fight against changes which would dramatically improve conditions for our community. Workers say enough is enough.

Sebastopol Living Wage Campaign Begins!

by Lynne Hollander

The campaign for a living wage ordinance in Sebastopol has begun. A group of supporters met early in February to begin discussions of the best way to proceed in this city, where officials have been very welcoming. A majority of city council members have endorsed the principle of a living wage ordinance so chances for passage of a strong ordinance look good.

Although it will be closely modeled after the one proposed for Santa Rosa, the details of the ordinance (e.g.,

what size contracts are covered) will be established after we have a fiscal impact study done (hopefully in conjunction with the city).

Even with the excellent prospects for passage, the Sebastopol group has work to do! We need to inform people about the Living Wage concept and mobilize community support for passage of the best ordinance possible. Rabbi Michael Robinson and I have been organizing the Sebastopol group; anyone interested in helping out should send an e-mail to savio@sonic.net or leave word at 823-7293. If you belong to any Sebastopol organization, church etc., please let us know.

Events Calendar

25 February - Santa Rosa City Council Meeting (which begins at 4 P.M. at City Hall) in support of the Parking Lot Attendants' Union

Contact: Charlotte Shimura, 707-545-7349 (also, for details of this item's place on the agenda, contact: ci.santa-rosa.ca.us)

11 March - Health Care Crisis March and Rally, gathering at Noon at Sutter Senior Center at Steele Drive and County Center Drive. Contact: Aly Krall at SEIU Local 707-545-7349 ext. 102.

15 March - Sonoma County Conservation Action Dinner

Veterans' Center, Sebastopol, 5:30-9:00 P.M. Contact: Marty Bennett 707-939-8933

22 March - Housing Action Forum at Santa Rosa Junior College, 9-12 Noon
Santa Rosa Junior College Faculty Lounge/Doyle Student Center
Contact: Paul Carroll, SEIU Local 707, 707-545-7349

29 March - March for Health Care, for Workers' Rights, and Against War
Sonoma Plaza at 3:30 P.M. Contact: Jamie McCallum, 510-773-7350.



If you would like to volunteer to carry the Living Wage Coalition banner at any of these events, please contact Marty Bennett at 707-939-8933 or mbennett@vom.com.

- I want to serve as a volunteer
- Please keep me informed
- Please send a speaker to my civic or religious organization
- I want to contribute \$ _____
- Please use my name as an endorser:

Name: _____

Organization: _____

Telephone (day): _____

Telephone (eves): _____

E-mail: _____

Mail to:

Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County
 PO Box 427
 Santa Rosa, CA 95402

UPCOMING MEETINGS:

The Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County meets on the third Tuesday of each month at 6:30 p.m. Meeting dates for Spring 2003 are: March 18, April 15, and May 20.

These meetings are held at SEIU (Service Employees International Union) Local 707, 613 Fourth St., Suite 206, Santa Rosa.

The research and organizing committees do not yet have regularly scheduled meetings and anyone interested should contact the committee chairs listed below:

Gene Hottel - outreach
 (707) 525-8203 x220 - hottel@sonic.net

Marty Bennett - research and legal
 (707) 527-4873 - mbennett@vom.com

Tim Wiese - organizing affected workers
 (707) 235-8330 - wieset@mcn.org

Terese Voge - fundraising/media contact
 (707) 586-3032 - fasc@fasc.org

John Norris - Interfaith Committee on Living Wages
 (707) 769-9251 - johnnorris@aol.com

Lynne Hollander - volunteer coordinator
 (707) 823-7293 - savio@sonic.net



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