

Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County

www.livingwagesonoma.org

Fall 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"

hottel@sonic.net

PO Box 427, Santa Rosa, CA 95402

(707) 545-7349 x220

Sebastopol City Council Considers Living Wage Ordinance

Marty Bennett

Co-Chair, Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County

The Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County introduced an ordinance to the Sebastopol City Council on June 17th. The ordinance requires that all employees of the city, city contractors, and firms receiving financial assistance from the city pay their workers \$12.25 an hour with benefits, or \$14.00 without. Additionally the ordinance mandates that covered employees receive 12 days compensated time off and a cost of living adjustment in the hourly wage each year. Businesses with less than six employees, temporary workers and student interns are exempted from the ordinance.

Dr. Peter Hall, an economist and city planner affiliated with the UC Berkeley Institute for Labor and Employment presented a fiscal impact report to the council. His research indicated that the ordinance would cover 15-18 workers below \$12.25 an hour, and the maximum increased costs to the city would be approximately \$39,300, which represents 0.5% of the 2002-2003 city budget.

The Sonoma West Times endorsed the campaign and editorialized that the City Council "should take this opportunity to set the standard for other cities in Sonoma County and take a stand for fairness and justice by establishing a living wage ordinance for city workers and city contractors." Numerous Sebastopol civic and religious leaders have endorsed the living wage campaign including the Rev. Gene Nelson of the Sebastopol Community Church (United Church of Christ), Nick Stewart, Burbank Housing Development Corporation, Una Glass, Sonoma County Conservation Action, and Susan Wells, League of Women Voters of Sonoma County. The Living Wage Coalition has initiated a petition and signature drive to demonstrate to the city council

that there is strong community support for the legislation.

City Council member Sam Spooner who is a leading proponent of the proposed ordinance stated "any person who works at any job is entitled to a wage that will provide for the basic needs of a family." A solid majority of the Sebastopol City Council supports the concept of a living wage.

At a second study session on August 19th the City Council took a 'straw vote' which was 4-1 in favor of implementing a living wage ordinance this fiscal year. The Living Wage Coalition anticipates that the council will pass the first living wage law in the county after Labor Day. Later this fall, the coalition intends to introduce a comparable measure to the Sonoma City Council. Tabling and signature gathering are planned for both Sebastopol and Sonoma.

Please call Lynne Hollander at 707-823-7293 or savio@sonic.net for information about the Sebastopol campaign or Rev. Norman Cram at 707-939-1425 Dootscram@aol.com for information about the Sonoma campaign. The ordinance and/or fiscal impact report can be downloaded from the website.

The Annual Labor and Social Action Conference Sonoma State University Oct 24th and 25th

Cost: \$55

Contact: Mary Fromer

(707) 545-7349 x109

mfromer@SEIULOCAL707.org

Amy Goodman, a journalist and host of the radio show Democracy Now! is the keynote speaker Friday night.

**Are you an official member yet?
Please turn to Page 5 for the Living
Wage Coalition membership form.**

Impact of the Petaluma Outlet Mall

by Eileen Morris

A decade ago when phase one of the Petaluma Premium Outlet Malls was first wending its way through the city approval process, the project looked like a really great idea. After all, the outlet malls in Gilroy were bringing in millions of sales tax dollars—covering anywhere from one-quarter to one-third of Gilroy’s costs for firefighter, police and administrative salaries. These salaries have to be paid by a city’s General Fund, and sales tax is one of the few sources of General Fund Revenue around.

Hopes for the Petaluma project were so high that the City Council annexed the property, and agreed that Chelsea Corporation, the outlet developer, would have to pay only \$1 million toward the construction of the Rainier freeway interchange and over-crossing. If the Rainier project is ever built (the great “what-if” in Petaluma), the most recent estimates put its costs at over \$30 million. Several councilmembers have proposed scaled down versions, but the fact remains: if any version is eventually approved, the developers will have freeway access to their project at a very cheap price.

The first phase of the Petaluma project did indeed result in a boost in sales tax revenues for the city of Petaluma. The return hasn’t been as great as expected—partly, no doubt, because there is not freeway access—but it hasn’t been anything to sneeze at either. The primary rationale of the Council which approved the project was very clear. The city needed General Fund revenues and this was a way to get it.

But now, the outlet developers are proposing phase two of the project, a 600,000 square-foot expansion. The Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County thinks it’s a good idea to look not just at the benefits, but at the costs of a project like this, and to examine the ways in which a city can better predict and cover similar costs in the future.

The developers are not required to divulge the names of their prospective tenants, but, according to Chelsea, the project could create anything from 200-some to almost 600 new jobs—most in retail, some at a proposed movie theater.

What we can predict, with absolute certainty, is that the vast majority of those new jobs will be filled by adults and will not pay a living wage.

How do we know that? Researchers from the University of California at Berkeley examined the impact of our proposed living wage ordinance. While doing so, they looked at the employees and the pay scales at the existing outlet mall, and at a similar de-

velopment in the county, interviewing managers and employees at 27 firms. Most of these employees are adults and the bread winners for their households. An hourly wage of \$8.50 per hour, without benefits, is considered handsome in one of these retail establishments. But studies from the National Low Income Housing Coalition show that a single person hoping to rent a studio apartment in Sonoma County needs to make about \$17 per hour in order to live comfortably. “Affordable Housing for Everyone,” a report by New Economy Working Solutions, shows that a single parent of two children needs to make \$21 per hour to afford a rental in Sonoma County.

It’s no news to Sonoma County residents that wages have not kept pace with prices, but nowhere is this more pronounced than in the rapidly growing service sector, where entry level wages hover around \$7 per hour.

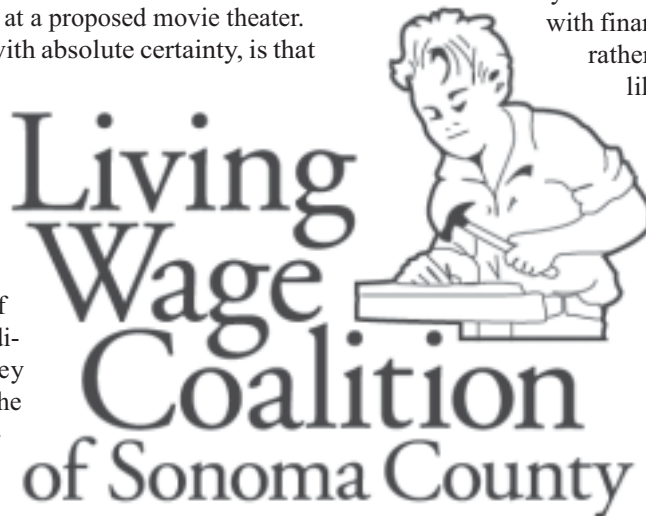
Therefore, the new retail stores will result in the following: increased reliance by outlet employees on public and private subsidies and assistance; less family time for employees because they’ll need to work more than one job just in order to survive; housing overcrowding; long commute times for employees who will be forced to live far away from their jobs; and increased reliance on emergency room services, the “primary care physician” for many of America’s uninsured.

The most grievous costs are to the dignity and health of the employees, who see their hard labor rewarded with wages that will not support them, but taxpayers can expect to shoulder hefty costs as well. According to a report by the South Bay Labor Council, low wage employment costs cities, counties and the Federal government \$500 for single adults, and \$17,000 for adults with two children per job annually. These “hidden subsidies” of low-wage employers include Food Stamps, housing assistance programs, MediCal, and the local emergency room.

We think that those costs—or some of them, at least—should be factored into the project approval process—especially when the city provides a developer with financial inducements to build here rather than elsewhere—inducements like limiting a contribution for freeway access to \$1 million, for example.

Here, it has to be noted that most of the approval process for phase two of the Petaluma outlets was defined over ten years ago. It’s unlikely that the city will be able to distribute costs between itself and the developer in a radically different

continued on Page 3...



San Francisco Votes on Minimum Wage

SAN FRANCISCO PUTS MINIMUM WAGE ON BALLOT - San Francisco ACORN, together with labor and community allies in the "\$6.75 Is Not Enough" coalition, on July 7 turned in over 20,000 signatures in an attempt to put an initiative on the ballot in November that would create a city-wide minimum wage standard of \$8.50. The city must determine that at least 10,000 signatures are valid for the initiative to go on the ballot. San Francisco would become the third city in the country, after Washington D.C. and Santa Fe, to put in place a minimum wage law covering virtually all businesses.

California's current minimum wage is \$6.75. The national minimum wage is \$5.15. If the national minimum wage had kept pace with inflation since the late 1960s, it would now be approximately \$8.50. ACORN and allies collected the signatures in two weeks of intense canvassing. For more information, link to <http://www.acorn.org/acorn10/livingwage/reports.htm> or contact John Eller at caacornsfro@acorn.org or 415-725-9869.

For an excellent report on this: "Raising Low Pay in A High Income Economy: The Economics of A San Francisco Minimum Wage" go to: <http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~iir/>

Petaluma Outlet Mall

... continued from Page 2

way, but we can and should analyze the project and use the lessons we learn as a spring board for future approval processes. And, we should note, that at the time the project was approved, the cost of living-especially of housing-was considerably lower in Sonoma County. Councilmembers could not have intuited that things would get so out of whack.

Petaluma, of course, is not alone in grappling with skyrocketing housing costs and stagnating wages in the service sector. Other communities, and our own local leaders, have proposed creative solutions to these problems.

One issue that will soon be considered by all Sonoma County policy makers is a jobs/housing linkage fee. This fee would require commercial developers to contribute to the construction of affordable housing to offset the demand that new jobs will create. The Living Wage Coalition believes this fee is a crucial step to lowering the cost of living for low-wage workers.

Other communities have adopted living wage ordinances, some very broad. The city of Richmond, for example, requires large employers receiving financial assistance from the city or its redevelopment agency to pay \$11.42 per hour plus benefits. The rationale behind this ordinance is that businesses which benefit from government subsidies should en-

Public Hearing on the Sonoma Healthcare Center

by Ben Boyce

The Sonoma Interfaith Committee in Support of Caregivers and SEIU Local 250 are sponsoring a public hearing on the crisis at the Sonoma Healthcare Center on Thursday September 18th, 7:00 PM, at Burlingame Hall in the United Congregational Church, 252 Spain Street in the town of Sonoma. The purpose of this hearing is to bring wider public attention to the plight of the caregivers at the Sonoma Healthcare Center (SHC), who have been working under duress from management for well over a year, since they voted overwhelmingly to be represented by SEIU 250. The SHC management, under the direction of the executives of the Ensign Corporation, have brought in a union-busting law firm and fostered a hostile work environment in an attempt to block the clear mandate of the staff to engage in collective bargaining. The sponsors of the public hearing hope to bring this act of blatant injustice to the attention of the wider public through testimony offered by expert witnesses to a panel of distinguished community leaders chaired by State Senator Wesley Chesbro.

The testimony is structured in three main topics:

I) The Right to Organize for the Common Good Testimony regarding the violation of Caregivers' human rights by a denial of their right to organize and bargain collectively for a living wage and dignity in the workplace.

II) The Responsibility to Provide Quality Care Testimony regarding the violation of patients' human rights and violations of civil codes caused by inadequate nursing staff levels and high staff turnover rate.

III) The Duty to Practice Corporate Responsibility Testimony regarding managerial malpractice at the Sonoma Healthcare Center and the corporate irresponsibility of the rogue executives of the Ensign Corporation.

For more information call: 707-545-7349 x220.

hance the public good rather than creating poverty-level jobs.

The city of San Jose is studying the idea of a Community Impact Report. Inspired by the Environmental Impact Reports required for some projects by the California Environmental Quality Act, the CIR studies a host of impacts, including employment levels and wages, affordable housing needs resulting from the project, and necessary increases in city services. Other cities which are considering the CIR approach include Los Angeles, Oakland, Denver and San Diego.

We encourage everyone in the community to follow the outlet mall expansion proposal carefully, to ask for explicit answers about the true costs of the project, and to support the above proposals for future project approvals.

Eileen Morris is a member of the Sonoma County Living Wage Coalition.

Labor in the Pulpits

by Heather Chase

I hadn't heard much in my time as a seminary student preparing for ministry about labor and religion. That has now changed. My internship through the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice and the AFL-CIO at the Living Wage Coalition this summer has made it a daily topic of discussion in my life. Here is some little known history that you might find interesting.

As far back as the 1800's, churches served as "stations" along the underground railroad where passengers, slaves that traveled by night, could hide during the day.

Minister Charles Stelzle of The Presbyterian Church, in 1910, established the Labor Temple in New York, which was a base of strike activity and an employment bureau was set up with seminarian serving as volunteers.

In the 1930's Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin started a movement in the Catholic church with their paper called the Catholic Worker. Many Catholic Workers joined strikers on picket lines, organized consumer boycotts, served as third party mediators between workers and management and helped unions organize many kinds of workers.

The Jewish Labor Committee in the 1950's focused to fight discrimination and prejudice among workers in America.

In 1968 Martin Luther King, Jr., a Baptist minister, supported the Sanitation worker's strike in Memphis, TN.

Over the last few weeks I have talked with faith leaders in Sonoma county about the relationship of religion and labor. I asked them to consider providing an occasion for their congregations to think about how they can participate in the labor movement. Several pastors are welcoming local workers to speak over Labor Day weekend about their experience and how the community can support workers. Across our nation and in our own communities there will be hundreds of speakers reminding us that these are our neighbors and we must all work together for a better community.

Supporting workers' rights, standing in picket lines for a living wage and educating future faith leaders about how to organize workers are some of the things that can be done. What is your congregation doing on the local level? On the national level? Let us celebrate this Labor Day weekend, the relationship of faith and labor and continue to work for justice together.

Events Calendar

- **Tabling at Sonoma Farmer's Market ***

Tuesdays, 5:30 pm - 8:00 pm
Sonoma Plaza, Sonoma

- **North Bay Labor Council Labor Day Pancake Breakfast**

Monday, September 1, 8:00 am - 12 noon
1700 Corby Ave, Santa Rosa
707-545-6970

- **6th Annual Progressive Festival ***

Sunday, September 14, 11:00 am - 6:00 pm
Walnut Park, Petaluma Blvd. & D Street, Petaluma
Free admission. Food and Drink Available

- **Public Hearing on Sonoma Valley Health Center**

United Congregational Church,
252 Spain Street, Sonoma
Thursday, September 18, 7:00 pm
707-545-7349 x220



* **If you would like to staff a table or volunteer to carry the Living Wage Coalition banner at any of these events, please contact Gene Hottel at Hottel@sonic.net or call (707) 545-7349.**

Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County

Santa Rosa Parking Lot Attendants Sign First Contract!

by Marty Bennett
Co-Chair, Living Wage Coalition

Approximately 40 parking lot attendants for the City of Santa Rosa signed their first contract in July. These workers are retired seniors who work part-time to supplement their pensions. For most their paychecks are essential to cover basic living expenses.

Earlier this year the parking lot attendants overwhelmingly voted for representation by SEIU Local 707 after the City Council voted not to consider a living wage ordinance and refused to acknowledge the low pay and lack of benefits for parking lot attendants who work part-time in city garages. The ordinance, if considered and passed, would have covered part-time city workers like the attendants.

With their one year contract the workers received an immediate 5.5% pay raise to approximately \$9.00 an hour, grievance procedure, job security, and unpaid time off upon request. Next year the attendants will bargain for paid sick leave and supplemental medical benefits. The parking lot attendants have not yet achieved a living wage, but the Living Wage Coalition believes that unionization is a major step forward. The coalition intends to collaborate with SEIU Local 707 to make these workers visible and to educate the community about their plight.

Days after signing their contract the attendants were informed by the city that all workers would have their hours reduced, effectively offsetting the wage increase. SEIU Local 707 General Manager Michael Allen immediately filed an unfair labor practices complaint with the Public Employees Relations Board. The complaint charged that the City cannot unilaterally reduce hours or lay-off workers without first consulting with the union.

Simultaneously, the Santa Rosa Press Democrat revealed that the city redevelopment agency has annually provided a five million dollar subsidy to offset fees charged to developers. The parking lot attendants at a meeting to ratify their contract asked: Whose interests does the city serve? - the wealthy few or the many residents of Santa Rosa struggling to make ends meet?

www.livingwagesonoma.org

Become A Member of the Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County: Annual Membership

Individual membership	\$30
Family membership	\$50
Supporter	\$100
Leader	\$250 and up
Benefactor	\$500 and up
Student/low income	\$10

Enclosed is my contribution of \$_____

Please make your checks payable to:

"Media Freedom Foundation/
Living Wage Fund"

Name: _____

Org.: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____

Zip: _____

Tel: _____ Email: _____

Send to:

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

Phone: 545-7349 x220

Email: hottel@sonic.net

Web: www.livingwagesonoma.org

Your contributions are tax deductible to the full extent allowable by law.

Media Freedom Foundation is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) that serves as the fiscal agent for the Living Wage Coalition.

Living Wage Coalition of Sonoma County

- 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.

These meetings are held at SEIU (Service Employees International Union) Local 707, 600 B Street, Santa Rosa (please note new location).

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) 545-7349 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

Ben Boyce - Interfaith Committee on Living Wages

(707) 935-1642 - benboyce@ap.net

Lynne Hollander - volunteer coordinator

(707) 823-7293 - savio@sonic.net



PO Box 427, Santa Rosa, CA 95402