

UFCW Women's Network Convenes in Florida; Focus on Education, Growth and Leadership at Biennial Convention



President Hansen with newly elected Women's Network International Chair Rhonda Nelson

Hundreds of UFCW women and other activists gathered in Lake Buena Vista, Fla., from October 22-25, 2009, for the UFCW Women's Network Ninth Biennial Convention.

The topic of this year's convention was "Education—Growth—Leadership." Participants reiterated their commitment to improving the lives and workplaces of members by providing UFCW members with the knowledge, mentoring, and skills necessary to participate effectively at every level of our union. Speakers also talked about plans to foster leadership skills of young women activists by increasing their involvement in the work of the UFCW. The network also discussed concrete ways to connect with the UFCW growth agenda and how the Women's Network can use their knowledge to drive UFCW growth.

Several noted speakers, including International President Joe Hansen, this year's keynote speaker, addressed the attendees.

The convention focused on group discussions and workshops on topics including strategies to promote women's activism and leadership in unions, communication and problem solving, building teams of powerful grassroots leaders, and bargaining language for working families.

Attendees were enthusiastic about the convention and eager to go back to their locals to put into practice their newly acquired knowledge. **OP**

Hundreds of UFCW Ohio Members Lobby for Public Benefits Disclosure



More than 200 members of UFCW Locals 75, 880, 1059 and the UFCW Chemical Workers Council (ICWUC) visited the halls of the Ohio State Capitol in Columbus, Ohio, this past Tuesday.

UFCW members met with 26 senators and 56 representatives and lobbied for support of the proposed legislation that will systematize the release of quarterly reports of employees on public assistance by employer, and make reports available to the public.

Last September, the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services released new data showing that profitable, major corporations in Ohio push their workers onto public safety net programs like Medicaid. Many of these corporations shift their responsibility for employees to the state and taxpayers instead of providing access to quality, affordable health care and higher wages to their employees.

For instance, more than 15,000 Walmart associates in Ohio, about 30 percent of the company's workforce in the state, are enrolled in Medicaid or receive food stamps. This comes at the expense of the taxpayer. The combined state and federal bill for Medicaid, cash assistance, and food assistance for Walmart workers and their dependents during fiscal year 2008 was close to \$61 million, according to the same report.

"It's just wrong for profitable companies to use our public assistance system to compensate their employees," said Bonnie France, a Local 75 member and Kroger employee. **OP**

Food Processing, Packing and Manufacturing Division Discusses Capitalizing on Industry Trends at Chain Meeting



President Hansen spoke about how the dynamic membership in the packing and processing division has increased membership and improved contracts, and called on the participants to use the unity agenda to take advantage of opportunities in the industry.

A record number of local presidents, representatives, staff, stewards and rank-and-file members working in the packing and processing industries met in Council Bluffs, Iowa, last week, for the Food Processing, Packing and Manufacturing Division's chain meeting, and for the Biennial National Meatpacking, Food Processing, and Poultry Safety and Health Conference.

Participants at the chain meeting broke out by sector (beef, pork, poultry and food processing) to participate in presentations on industry trends, government and policy outlook, and workplace diversity. They also discussed opportunities for core industry organizing and unity bargaining designed to bring up standards across the industry.

This was the first chain meeting attended by UFCW Local 1208, which represents Smithfield workers in Tar Heel, North Carolina. "It makes us feel real good to know that we have brothers and sisters throughout the country, who stand behind us 100 percent," said Ted Thomas, a Local 1208 member and prospective steward.

In addition, nearly 200 people attended the Sixth Meatpacking, Food Processing and Poultry Safety and Health Conference. The biennial conference, funded by an OSHA grant, brings together activists from local unions across the US and Canada. Local union leadership, stewards and safety and ergonomic committee members attended the conference to learn, share and strategize on the most important health and safety issues in their plants.

For approximately two-thirds of the participants, this was their first health and safety conference.

The opening plenary featured Don Stull, a Professor from the University of Kansas, Debbie Berkowitz, Chief of Staff at OSHA in Washington DC and Ben Bare, the Director of the Omaha Area OSHA Office.

Workshops in English and Spanish offered over the 3 days included topics ranging from "Introducción a la Ergonomía" to "Building the union through safety and health" and "Chemical Spills." **OP**

Wake Up Walmart Pulls 'Mask' Off of Walmart on Health Care



Last month, Wake Up Walmart launched its annual Halloween campaign which focused on pulling the 'mask' off of Walmart's hypocritical stance on health care.

Across the country, UFCW locals held more than 60 actions in front of Walmart stores, asking customers to sign an open letter to the CEO of Walmart, Mike Duke, demanding that he lead Walmart towards better health coverage for its workers and real health care reform for America.

Walmart has been running ads which state that 94 percent of their associates have some type of health care, yet they fail to mention the reality of their health care coverage: nearly half of their employees are forced to go elsewhere for coverage, the plans they do offer are unaffordable and inadequate, and tens of thousands of employees are on state aid, costing taxpayers millions of dollars.

Wake Up Walmart supporters wore masks to symbolize Walmart's PR mask, and to emphasize the hypocrisy in Walmart's words and actions.

UFCW locals that participated in the Halloween campaign include Locals 1445, 1776, 152, 1360, 400, 23, 1994, 880, 700, 75, 2, 655, 88, 1000, 2008, 1564, 536, 711, 21, 1439, 99, 324, 5, 135, 1262, 8-GS, 1360, 152, 1445, 888 and 1500. **OP**