

UFCW Local 204 Members Attend Public Hearing on Explosion at ConAgra Slim Jim Plant



Members of UFCW Local 204 who work at the ConAgra Slim Jim plant in Garner, North Carolina, along with the family of Louis Watson, prepare to attend a public hearing of the U.S. Chemical Safety Board (CSB) into the explosion at their plant.

The June 9, 2009 explosion that rocked the ConAgra Slim Jim plant in Garner, North Carolina killed four workers and injured scores more. The explosion was caused by the ignition of natural gas that was being purged inside from a gas line to a new water heater being installed inside the plant by contractors.

Workers in the Garner plant, members of UFCW Local 204, took action to make sure that no family should have to go through what they went through. More than a dozen went to the U.S. Chemical Safety Board (CSB) hearing into the Garner disaster last week to encourage the board pass urgent safety recommendations to prevent indoor fuel gas purging.

UFCW Local 204 President Brian Murphy testified during the public comment period, as did ConAgra worker Debra Petteway whose son, Louis Watson, was killed in the blast. "Louis Watson was my son, he was my only son and now he's gone," Petteway said. "They didn't have to die, and if someone doesn't fix this, it's going to happen again."

The CSB voted 2-1 to make urgent recommendations to prohibit indoor fuel gas purging. As On Point goes to press, news reports are suggesting a fatal explosion at a power plant in Connecticut was caused by indoor fuel gas purging. **OP**

UFCW Local 38 Members in Milton, Pa., Ratify New Contract with ConAgra

An overwhelming majority of the workers at the ConAgra facility in Milton, Pa., voted this past Sunday to accept a new agreement with the company.

The new three-year deal between ConAgra and the 700 members of UFCW Local 38 includes:

- Wage increases that average \$1.87 per hour over the life of the contract;
- Maintenance of affordable quality health care benefits while improving dental and vision coverage;
- Improved retirement security pension;
- A fair pay structure that ensures everyone in the plant is paid equally for their work.

"We are very proud of this contract and for our members who stood together to sustain good wages and benefits while maintaining profitability for the company. This contract shows that it's possible with the right leadership for labor and management to work together to achieve a contract that will help our local economy prosper," said UFCW Local 38 President Russ Baker. **OP**



This past Tuesday, over 100 members of UFCW Local 21 in Seattle, Wash., made phone calls to Senators Patty Murray (D-WA) and Maria Cantwell's (D-WA) Offices. Local 21 members advocated for the Senate to use the reconciliation process to pass health care reform this year. They also made the case for part-time workers to be included in the coverage. **OP**

UFCW Local 75 Members Accept New Four-Year Agreement with John Morrell Co.

UFCW Local 75 members at the John Morrell facility in Cincinnati, Ohio, accepted a new contract last Sunday with the company.

The new four-year contract, which covers 260 workers, provides for:

- Wage increases of \$1.35 over the four-year agreement;
- Improved retirement security pension;
- Improved vacations;
- Maintenance of quality, affordable health and welfare benefits.

“We are really excited to have this new contract,” said Local 75 Executive Board member Pherry McElbain who has worked at the John Morrell facility for over three decades. “The improvements we’ve made to the contract show that when we stand together, we can make changes that benefit everyone: the workers, our families, the company, our community, and the local economy.” **OP**

UFCW Local 1428 Members Meet with Fresh & Easy Workers to Share Ideas



Fresh & Easy workers gathered at the UFCW Local 1428 office in Claremont, California, to share stories about their respective experiences at the Tesco-owned grocery chain. Workers from stores across California and Nevada, as well as the distribution center and kitchen in Riverside, California met to talk about improving their working conditions by forming a union at their employer and how to stand up for their rights in the workplace. To learn more about the workers’ efforts at Fresh & Easy, visit www.insidefreshandeasy.com. **OP**

UFCW Mourns Passing of Former International Vice President Beth Shulman



Former UFCW International Vice President Beth Shulman succumbed to her battle with brain cancer this past Friday in Washington, DC. She was 60.

Shulman led an accomplished life. For many, she will be remembered as the renowned author, policy analyst, speaker, and commentator who made raising the standards of living for workers across America the cause of her life. We at UFCW remember the friend, colleague, mother, daughter, and wife.

A native of Los Angeles, Calif., Shulman began her career with the UFCW in 1976 as Assistant General Counsel. She later served as the Executive Assistant to the Director of UFCW Central Region. From 1987 to 2000, Shulman was a UFCW International Vice President, Executive Board Member, and Director of the Health Care, Insurance, Finance, and Professional Employees Division.

Since 2000, when she retired from the UFCW, Shulman has worked as a Consultant, co-chaired the Fairness Initiative on Low-Wage Work, a project to increase public awareness about the problems of low-wage work and the need for policy change to improve low-wage jobs. She is author of *The Betrayal of Work: How Low-Wage Jobs Fail Thirty Million Americans and their Families*.

Shulman is survived by her husband and son from Washington, DC, and her mother from Los Angeles. **OP**

Due to the President’s Day holiday, observed this year on Monday, February 15, the next issue of *OnPoint* will be available on Wednesday, February 17, 2010.