

## Local 653 Leverages Current Relationships into Organizing Victory



New Local 653 members, Mary Parker and Ellie Ottoson, take a break from work at the Pequot Lakes, Minn., SuperValu.

Workers at the new Pequot Lakes, Minn. SuperValu grocery store, owned by S. & R. Quisberg, Inc., have chosen a real voice at work with Local 653.

The workers in the 100-member unit expressed their desire to form a union by signing authorization cards and the store owner respected their choice. They join with workers in two Cub Foods stores in the Brainerd area to make S. & R. Quisberg an 100 percent union company.

“By using our existing relationships and the employer's past history with our local and our members, we were able to reach out and help this owner provide good jobs in a new community,” said Local 653 President Raymond Sawicky.

Mandi Turcotte, 19, who works the front end in the Pequot Lakes SuperValu said having a union gives her security in her job and benefits.

“With my union I feel comfortable making my job a long-term career,” said Turcotte. “I have security in knowing I’m never alone.” **OP**

## Sake Plant Workers Vote “Union Yes” With Local 8GS

Workers at the Gekkeikan Sake brewing facility in Folsom, Calif., stood together to form a union with Local 8GS in an election June 3. Gekkeikan is the world’s largest sake manufacturer, and this plant is its only facility in the United States.

Despite an extended anti-union campaign by the company and a large union-busting law firm, the 22-member unit stood strong and overwhelmingly voted for representation with Local 8GS. **OP**

## California UFCW Locals Stand Together to Register Around 12,000 New Member-Voters in Spring Drive

UFCW locals across the state of California worked together to register more than 12,000 UFCW members to vote over a six week period from April to May. The voter registration drive was a cooperative effort of Region 8 and locals 5, 8GS, 101, 135, 324, 770, 1167, 1428 and 1442.

Each local had a goal of increasing the number of registered member voters by 10 percent, and each local met or beat that goal. Leading the pack was Local 770 which registered 300 percent of its goal and Local 1428 which had 200 percent of its goal.

The effort was born when the locals met at the Legislative and Political Action Conference in March, and planned at the States Council meeting that followed.

“The UFCW was the first union in California this cycle to launch such an aggressive voter registration drive. We set very high goals and we met them,” said Rick Eiden, Executive Vice President of UFCW Local 324 in Buena Park, Calif. “Every local committed to making this a success, and it shows. We worked together to make this drive an amazing success that positions us well for the upcoming fall elections.” **OP**

## UFCW Canada Sets New Record With Nearly Two Million Dollars for Charity

In the past year, UFCW Canada has raised a record amount for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society of Canada. Members across the country pitched in and raised more than C\$1.9 million for leukemia research.

This year also marks another milestone for UFCW Canada's charitable efforts. Since they began fundraising for leukemia research more than 25 years ago, members across Canada have raised more than C\$21 million for this important cause.

"The remarkable fundraising achievements of UFCW Canada members are an outstanding example of what can happen when working people dedicate themselves to a common cause," said UFCW Canada National President Wayne Hanley.

Local 12R24 held the largest single fundraiser in UFCW Canada this year, a bottle return drive that brought in more than C\$1 million for leukemia research.

"The UFCW Canada contribution has made – and continues to make – a profound difference in the search for a cure and in the lives of cancer sufferers and their families, who face enormous challenges each and every day," says Caren Sherman, Grants & Awards Chair of the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society of Canada. **OP**



UFCW Canada celebrates 21 years of giving to the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society of Canada.

## UFCW Haiti Fundraising Efforts Come to Life



UFCW efforts to assist in the rebuilding of earthquake-devastated Haiti are coming to life with the architectural work well under way on a new high school in St. Marc, Haiti.

The high school is being built by the Mortel Family Foundation and is pictured in the rendering above.

After a devastating earthquake earlier this year, UFCW locals from across the country came together to raise more than \$430,000 for earthquake relief. After careful study, the UFCW chose Hope for Haiti and the Mortel Family Foundation to support.

For more information about these organizations, please visit [www.hopeforhaiti.com](http://www.hopeforhaiti.com) and [www.highhopesforhaiti.org](http://www.highhopesforhaiti.org).

If your members would like to donate to the fund that will support these efforts, please make a check out to the UFCW Charity Fund Foundation, Inc. Write in the memo that the check is for UFCW Help for Haiti, and send it to the following address: Help for Haiti, UFCW International Union, 1775 K Street, NW, Washington, DC 20006. **OP**

## Special Report: Decades of Determination, Unity Bargaining, Yield Results at Farmer John In Los Angeles

Today, Pedro Albarran and the nearly 1,200 workers at Hormel's Los Angeles Farmer John pork plant all have bigger paychecks, a bit of justice for the times they were forced to work off the clock, and the respect and dignity that comes with a real union voice on the job. The new contract bargained by Farmer John workers and UFCW Local 770 is a testament to the perseverance of workers like Albarran, to the solidarity among workers who will never meet, and to the power of UFCW unity bargaining.

Albarran began his job boning shoulders in the fabrication department of Farmer John 16 years ago, in 1994, but the story of this plant's fight for dignity goes back much further.

### A Decades-Long Battle

During the consolidations and upheaval in the meatpacking industry during the 1980s, Farmer John pushed draconian cuts on its union workforce. Demands for drastic wage cuts, the elimination of pensions and the gutting of health and welfare funds forced workers on a nine-week strike in 1985. Farmer John promptly hired nearly 500 permanent replacement workers. By December, the union workers lost their fight and went back to work unconditionally. Farmer John exacted a harsh revenge. Besides wage and benefit cuts, they cut off union access to the plant, union security, even dues checkoff. Within a few years, the union was down to a handful of members and the company had instituted a 15-year wage progression--essentially, a 15-year probation period.

Without access to the plant, without dues checkoff, without the right to visit workers on company property, Local 770 fought to represent workers from the outside, and bargained contracts with little leverage. Yet, a handful of stalwart activists and union stewards kept the union alive inside the plant. At times, as few as four or five members were faithfully mailing their dues in each week, or paying them in cash at a corner market in exchange for a paper receipt. One of those was Pedro Albarran.



Pedro Albarran, Deepak Vig, and Brian Caballero hold up a ballot envelope at their contract ratification vote.

“Pedro stayed with us since 1995,” says John Grant, who came out of the Farmer John plant and is now Vice President, In-House Counsel and Packinghouse Director at UFCW Local 770. “For more than a decade Pedro worked in that plant galvanizing people, bringing people together, never giving up. He was a shop steward, pretty much on his own in there. Even though the company harassed him, tape recorded his conversations, left notes ridiculing him—even sabotaged his tools, he would still talk to workers, still stand up, still accompany co-workers when they were called HR, and still represent them to the company.”

From time to time, even his co-workers would make fun of him for talking about the union. “I have always known and believed there is power in numbers,” Albarran says. “A lot of workers didn’t understand why I would talk about the union. You have to have self-respect to demand respect at work. But for a lot of people, after many years of being psychologically pressured or intimidated, it’s hard to have hope. It is hard to hold on to the mentality that when people are united, they can get things done. That is why, for awhile, I worked alone.”



## A New Owner, a New Chance for Change

Things began to change in 2004 when Hormel bought the Farmer John plant. Hormel had union workers in plants across the country. Local 770 renewed efforts to organize the Farmer John workers. SPURS, local union reps, international organizers began making home calls.

“We told workers this is Hormel now. It’s a new company. Hormel is union at other locations and their lowest wage is higher than your highest wage,” Grant said. The message had traction. More and more workers came to general membership meetings. Then there were department meetings. Representatives from the International’s Occupational Safety and Health Office worked with members to do “risk mapping” of their departments and to learn about ergonomics. “Eventually, the workers just took over,” Grant said. “The way it’s supposed to be.” The local may not have had access to the plant, but the union was back.

## Pedro’s Voice: Heard in the Heartland

Fast-forward to 2007. The master chain agreement (and the last chain agreement in the industry) for workers at five other UFCW-represented Hormel plants was about to expire. At the five locals (Local 22, in Fremont, Nebraska; Local 6, in Algona Iowa; Local 9 in Austin, Minnesota; Local 1473 in Beloit, Wisconsin; and Local 1996 in Atlanta, Georgia), rumors were flying that the Hormel was going to try to break the chain and then demand intolerable increases to workers’ health care premiums. Plus, it seemed like the company was starting petty skirmishes on the local level just to wear workers down. In Beloit, four workers in the plant’s tool shed wanted to join local 1473. But Hormel made them go through a full NLRB election. When workers voted yes, the company appealed. In Fremont, Hormel was nit-picking about when union representatives could be in the plant, making it difficult to time the chain or talk to workers on the job.

Feeling like the next contract was going to be a big fight, the locals, together with the International, devised a member mobilization and unity bargaining strategy designed to amplify worker voices; to build real solidarity between workers and the locals; and to send

the message to Hormel that the chain couldn’t be broken, and couldn’t be worn down with petty local tactics. On the contrary, the locals intended to grow wherever the company did, making sure the workers who make Hormel successful share in that success.

The locals engaged stewards, rank and file members, and in-plant leader-activists months ahead of time. When negotiations began, the UFCW confronted Hormel on the very first day at the bargaining table. With a carefully crafted presentation that drew on research and worker voices, the locals put the company on notice that these negotiations would be about more than boot allowances, health premiums, and yearly raises. No, this year’s bargaining would also answer pressing big-picture questions, like why was the company insisting on growing its non-union workforce? Why was Hormel actively trying to keep non-union workers from getting a UFCW voice on the job? Why were they keeping Local 770 from servicing UFCW members in their Farmer John plant? What about guys like Pedro Albarran?

The locals scheduled simultaneous handbill actions armed with information to get workers talking about the issues at hand: health care, pensions, middle class wages, examples of Hormel’s anti-union attitude, power in numbers. Workers at all five plants were engaged not only on the issues at their plant, but about big-picture issues. They were galvanized, activated, ready to take action on behalf of one another.

The unity bargaining plan was successful. Hormel went mum about breaking the chain. They dropped demands to make health care unaffordable. The new contract increased wages to the best in the industry. The company dropped its fight to keep the four tool shed workers in Beloit from joining their co-workers in the union. The company even made whole the pensions of dozens of Austin workers who had been unfairly punished since the historic P9 strike in 1985.

By working together and by mobilizing their workers, the locals won just about everything they fought for, except one thing: access to the Farmer John plant. Hormel insisted over and over that, although Hormel owned Farmer John, the L.A. plant was just a subsidiary, it was independent. It was a family company. Hormel



had no power to effect change for workers in Los Angeles.

Local unions left the bargaining table with an agreement they were proud of, but the Farmer John issue wasn't dead.

### **The Road to Los Angeles Goes Through Algona. And Austin, and Beloit, and Fremont, and Atlanta.**

In early 2010, Hormel contacted Local 770 wanting to settle the Farmer John contract early, although it wouldn't expire until August 2010. But the initial meeting did not go well. Hormel didn't offer anything meaningful and refused to address issues like plant access, dues checkoff or union security. They wouldn't discuss the donning and doffing grievance that local 770 had filed.

Later that spring, at the Hormel chain meetings in Council Bluffs, Iowa, the situation at Farmer John was the only topic of discussion. Local 770 was in contact with several hundred activist workers. They were having regular meetings. One or two people from each department in the plant met every week about strategy for upcoming contract negotiations. But their lack of plant access, union security and dues checkoff were enormous hurdles to getting a fair deal. Was there anything the other Hormel locals could do to support Local 770 during this fight?

"We left the chain meeting with the intention to go back to our plants and make some noise," said Dan Hoppes, President of Local 22 in Fremont, Nebraska and Chair of the Hormel Chain. "We went back to our plants and made sure that every rep, every steward talked to their HR directors or their supervisors about how shortchanging the Farmer John workers was wrong. We let them know that when the master chain agreement was up again in 2011, that the unfair, inequitable situation at Farmer John was going to be an issue."

If Hormel still refused to negotiate a real contract, there was a backup plan. The locals would launch the same type of coordinated, unity bargaining campaign they did in 2007. Every Hormel local left the spring chain meeting with a roll of stickers that said "Farmer John."

A series of worker-to-worker handbills were developed, printed, and ready to go.

But, as locals were putting pressure on their own HR directors, word of the UFCW's coordinated plan got out. "Farmer John" stickers made it on to a hard hat and into a plant here and there.

Suddenly, Farmer John came to the table and wanted to talk seriously. First, they settled the donning and doffing grievance filed by local 770 for \$550,000. Local 770 secured a check for every employee in the plant—ranging from just \$50 to \$1,250. Next, there was real progress on the contract. Wages were improved by \$2.10 over six years. The 39-month progression was reduced to just 12 months, resulting in a third of the workforce getting an additional raise of up to \$1.05. Workers won a fourth week of vacation after 17 years. Local 770 won checkoff, orientation, and complete access to the break and changing areas plus periodic tours of the plant to see the production line.

Within two weeks, 996 out of a workforce of 1,200 had signed up to be members of the union.

"During the negotiations, we got stuck on the wage progression," Grant said. "I needed ideas on how to proceed, so I sent a casual email to all the Hormel locals. It was a Friday afternoon. I didn't think I'd hear anything for a while because it was so late on a Friday. But immediately I was flooded with emails, phone calls, and calls on my cell from everyone I'd emailed. Everyone had helpful ideas, but what struck me was that even if what they had to say hadn't been helpful, the fact that all across the country—from the midwest to the south, everybody I'd emailed called me back. It couldn't have been any more clear that Local 770 wasn't flailing alone against Farmer John, but the whole UFCW was in the fight with us. They had our back. They were ready to stand with us."

"Things are different in the plant now," Albarran says. "Everyone knows this contract is much better than what we ever had before. The union has access to the plant, to see what goes on, to make sure things are right. And it is only thanks to everyone uniting and working together." **OP**