



TEAMSTERS LOCAL 117

DOCK TALK

News from the hardworking men and women of the grocery warehouse division
Members of Teamsters Local 117

Summer 2010



Teamsters Local 117: 14675 Interurban Ave. S, Suite 307 • Tukwila, WA 98168 (206) 441-4860 • www.teamsters117.org

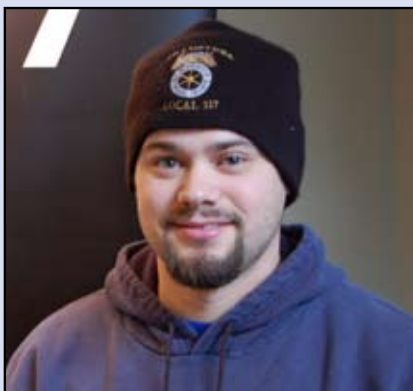
Member In the SPOTLIGHT

Andrew Johnson
Safeway

Teamsters Local 117 member, Andy Johnson, learned the value of his Union from his family, but not in the way you might expect. For Johnson, Unions were not instinctual, part of his lineage or in his blood. Instead, Johnson saw how his father was mistreated at work, with no pension and no job security, and his sister with a university degree couldn't afford health insurance.

"My dad worked for years in a non-Union warehouse," Johnson

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Andy Johnson, Safeway



The "Master Agreement": Building Union power through multi-employer bargaining

Seasoned Teamsters in the grocery industry will remember the day, not long ago, when the Union bargained a so-called "master agreement." On again off again, from at least 1971 to 2003, the Union engaged in negotiations with as many as 13 companies at a time. Unions conceived of multi-employer bargaining as a way to build power and solidarity across the industry.

"It created unity," said Tom Gallwas, retired SuperValu employee and former Business Representative at Teamsters Local 117. "We all had buttons and stickers. We were putting them on our clipboards, on our coats, on our lockers.

Management looked at that stuff and it put pressure on the employer."

Union solidarity led to strong contracts and results on the wage and benefit line. As Teamsters JC 28 President John Williams points out, "We are able to command the highest levels of wages and benefits in the country because all of the companies are at the same level."

But the Union did not exclusively see **Building Power, Page 8**

GROCERY NEGOTIATIONS WORKSHOP

Haven't been through contract negotiations in the grocery industry? Come learn about the process and how you can get involved:

July 18, 2010 @11am-1pm or 5pm-7pm
Teamsters Building, Tukwila

For more info., contact Jennifer Day at 206-441-4860 ext. 1222.

Lumpers demand respect, fair conditions



Best Loading Lumper, Josh Nagy, talks to KIRO reporter

Enough already!" the Lumpers are saying. On Friday, June 11, Lumpers at five warehouses in the grocery and food services industries took a bold and important step toward gaining Teamsters representation when they marched to confront their bosses and demand an end to exploitative working conditions.

Lumpers took action at the Unified Grocers distribution center in Seattle, the Fred Meyer distribution center in Puyallup, the Safeway distribution center in Auburn and the Sysco and Food Services of America distribution centers in Kent.

The objective of the action was to give notice to Best Loading, TW, and Roadlink that Lumpers are organized, know their rights and want to affiliate with the Teamsters. Last week, a majority of Lumpers in our area petitioned the National Labor Relations

Board to join the Union.

"Lumpers united!" yelled the Lumpers when they arrived at each of the five locations. The reaction of the employer was mixed. At Unified Grocers, a manager at Roadlink ran scared when he saw the group, while at Sysco a Best Loading representative agreed to talk.

At Sysco, a reporter from KIRO Channel 7 interviewed two Lumpers, including Rafael Hernandez, of Best Loading. "Just because we're Latino doesn't mean that we don't have rights," Hernandez said. "We have the same right to overtime, vacation, health insurance and retirement as other warehouse workers in our industry." A report on the action was televised later that evening.

"We want to improve our quality of life," added Arnulfo Lopez, who works for Best Loading out of the Sysco warehouse in Kent.

Earlier in the week a group of Teamster order selectors at Food Services of America showed their solidarity with the Lumpers and their distaste for Union busters when they tossed out a goon hired by TW to spread lies and deceit about the Union.

Lumpers in the grocery and food services industries are employed by third-party carriers to unload cargo

at warehouse distribution centers. Most Lumpers receive no health care or retirement benefits, and some are paid by the unit, or "piecework", rather than on an hourly basis. This leads to sweatshop-like conditions, in which workers perform backbreaking work while their compensation can drop below minimum wage.

"This is about fairness," said Miguel Lizarrara, a Lumper at Unified Grocers who works for Roadlink, a lumping company with corporate headquarters in Chino Hills, California. "We work side by side but earn a fraction of what other workers on the dock are earning. They have health and retirement benefits; we do not."

Lizarrara estimated that approximately 95% of the Lumpers in the grocery and food services industries in our area are Latino.

Support the Lumpers!

What can YOU do to help the Lumpers become Teamsters?

- Proudly wear the "We are all Lumpers" stickers.
- Talk up the Teamsters on the dock. Show your support!
- Have lunch with a Lumper.
- Follow FSA's lead - evict Union busters who are bad-mouthing your UNION!

Member Spotlight cont.

said. "He worked hard but didn't have any of the protections or benefits that I have. He and his co-workers tried to organize a couple of times, but the company always threatened them, said they would close down and move to Mexico."

Still, Johnson didn't grow up around Unions, so he didn't go out looking for a Union job. His first job was at the old Safeway on east hill in Kent where his parents had shopped for twenty years. He was a member of UFCW, but he didn't pay much attention to his Union. "My salary wasn't great. I had health insurance, so that was good, but I wasn't involved."

That all changed when Johnson

stumbled into a Teamsters job at the new Safeway warehouse in Auburn. His life-long friend, Jeremy Walker, had tipped him off. "You've got to come down here and apply," his friend had said. "It's hard work, but the pay and benefits are incredible."

Johnson got hired on at Safeway as an order selector and has been there ever since. "The work is non-stop, there is a lot of heavy lifting and the standards are tough, but I always remember what I am taking home."

His five-year career as a Teamster has already begun to pay dividends: Johnson recently purchased his first home, on an acre in Spanaway for himself, his wife, Heidi, and their 16-month-old son, Landon. He calculates that he will be able to retire at age 52 with a full pension.

From all accounts, Johnson has been a tireless Union advocate.

Last year, he helped raise toys for laid-off Teamsters as a part of the Teamsters for Tomorrow (TFT) Toy Drive. He also played an important role in organizing last October's TFT Leadership Summit and is a delegate on the Pierce County Labor Council. This summer, Johnson will be joining the Teamsters Paint Tacoma-Pierce Beautiful work crew as they paint the home of a low-income, elderly resident of Pierce County.

Johnson saw what happened to his dad and his sister, how they struggled to make ends meet. Now he says he's a convert. He's grateful to his Union and wants to give back.

"Getting this job was the best move I ever made. I want to see younger folks get more involved. We are the future of this Union."

From the shop floor

Workers at four grocery warehouses were asked the following questions: "What will it take for Teamsters to get a fair contract in 2011?"



Romero Gomez
SuperValu

"We have a lot of young guys down here at SuperValu. We need to involve them because they are our future."



Al Stipek
Safeway

"We need to follow our leadership and present a united front, show the company that we can't be divided."



Jesse Howard
Unified Grocers

"Health care is going to be a huge issue. It's going to take a willingness for everyone to figure out our position and then stick to it."



Jim Wise
Fred Meyer

"It's going to take solidarity and balls. And we need to start communicating with each other because we're all in this together."

Fred Meyer Teamsters show unity, strength



Fred Meyer Teamsters gather in support of the janitors organizing campaign.

You know you are in a strong Union shop when members can sit down face to face with management and openly voice their concerns in an effort to resolve issues at work. That is exactly what happens on a monthly basis at the Fred Meyer grocery warehouse distribution center in Puyallup.

As a part of regularly scheduled Labor-Management meetings, Teamster Shop Stewards along with Business Representative, Cecil Fouts, discuss operational issues with management. At a recent meeting on June 8, six Stewards took part including Les Liedtke, Cody Harris, Aaron Schrupp, Tommy Eidson, Allen Meier, and Matt Collins.

"It's a good platform for resolving issues," said Schrupp. "I have between 5-15 guys a day come to me with questions about things like seniority,

benefits or funeral leave, so there can be a lot to talk about. I've even been able to get a couple of unfounded write-ups erased at these meetings."

At the June 8 meeting, the Stewards brought a number of concerns to the table including racking issues, replenishing issues, seniority and how a volume slowdown after the Memorial Day holiday was mishandled by management.

Compared with some of the bad actors in the industry, Fred Meyer is fairly responsive addressing issues that members have brought forward.

"We want to ensure that the employer adheres to the contract, but we also want to point out operational inefficiencies so that the company remains profitable," Fouts said.

From all indications, the process has been effective: Business at Fred Meyer is strong, with parent com-

pany, Kroger, reporting a market capitalization of \$13.05 billion. Fred Meyer's success clearly demonstrates that a strong, unionized workforce can outpace the non-union competition.

The Union became energized last summer when a previously unorganized group of janitors voted to join forces with Teamsters Local 117. In solidarity with the janitors, hundreds of Union members in the warehouse wore stickers supporting the janitors in the weeks leading up to the election.

Longtime Fred Meyer Teamster, Tim Kirby, talked about why the support for the janitors was so strong. "We're all striving for the same thing – job security and respect for ourselves and our families," he said.

Maintaining the Union's strength, through an organized Stewards' network and a high degree of membership involvement, will be essential as bargaining approaches in 2011.

From the looks of things, Teamsters at Fred Meyer are up to the challenge.



Shop Steward, Matt Collins, shows his support



A leader of the janitors campaign, Missy Orlean



Fred Meyer Teamster, Dan Gustafson

At Unified Grocers, Local 117 members fight for respect

In the universe that is the grocery warehouse industry, some things change over the years, while others remain maddeningly constant.

In the old days, when UG, under different ownership, was known as AG, or "Associated Grocers," you picked orders off labels with a "pony and trailer" and attached your load to a "towline" that circled the warehouse to the dock. Forklift drivers had to swing in to grab the trailer before the next one rattled along.

Nowadays, order selectors at UG pick with double pallet jacks using the Vo-collect system as they do elsewhere in the industry. The job is faster and much more demanding.

"I think it's fair to say that technology is the biggest change that Union members have seen since I worked there in the 1970s," said Teamsters Local 117 Private Sector Coordinator and former employee, Wil Rance.

Unfortunately, said Rance, there's one thing at UG that hasn't changed in

the last 30 years; namely, the ongoing contract violations that have made the company "the grievance capital of the Local."

"UG does not appear to respect our contract," he said. "That's why we see this abundance of grievances."

1990 - the year of the AG strike

Longtime Union members at UG will remember 1990 as the year of the 9-week strike. The strike wasn't over money, members say. It was about respect.

"Back then, management was abusing the language in the contract and pushing everything their way," said Ken Garcia, who has been a Shop Steward for 15 of his 21 years with the company. "You'd get in trouble for anything and the guys were getting pissed off."

Local 117 members were hopeful that the change of ownership in 2007 would have a positive impact on the way the company treats its employ-

ees, but so far little has changed. The management still doesn't show enough respect for its workers and often tries to undermine the contract.

"It sounds all negative, but there are some positives, too," said Garcia. "On the dry grocery side where I work, we've gotten pretty good at working things out with management, but that definitely isn't true everywhere in the warehouse."

Despite the difficult working environment, UG membership has remained incredibly solid.

"They have always been supportive of their Union," said Rance. "You have generations of Teamsters who work there. These are guys who have faced adversity and won't back down from a fight."

That is just the kind of attitude that Union members in the grocery industry will need as we prepare for upcoming bargaining in 2011.



2010 Shop Steward Elections

In preparation for upcoming negotiations in 2010, new postings for Shop Steward will go up. In addition to the day-to-day duties on the shop floor, some Stewards will serve on the negotiating committee.

If you are interested in running for Shop Steward, look for the Steward election posting on your Union bulletin board and be sure to sign up. Elections will take place by the end of August.

Safeway Teamsters win hard-fought success



Teamsters Local 117 members at Safeway celebrate 2008 lumber arbitration victory.

Safeway Teamsters work in a new, state-of-the-art facility on 116-acres in Auburn. The new location boasts a 538,000-square-foot dry goods warehouse and a 515,000-sq-ft refrigerated warehouse. Together with a recycling center, trucking department, dispatch office, fuel station, truck repair shop, and administration center, the site is imposing. A massive, 2 1/2-year construction project preceded its opening in 2005.

As colossal as the facility is, Safeway Teamsters are masters of their new surroundings. The warehouse is full of diehard Unionists with countless years of experience between them. Indeed, Local 117 members at Safeway have been a driving force behind their Union's unparalleled success in the grocery industry.

"When bargaining rolls around, we're ready. We fill out questionnaires, set up phone trees, talk to each other about the need to stand behind our leadership," said 39-year member and

longtime Shop Steward, Al Stipek. "This time will be no different."

This kind of attitude has led to several recent victories for Union members at Safeway, including a groundbreaking arbitration case, in which an arbitrator overruled a company decision to allow subcontractors to operate forklifts when unloading third-party carriers.

"This victory benefits not just the members at Safeway, but every Union member working in the grocery industry," said Local 117 Secretary-Treasurer, Tracey A. Thompson.

In April 2008, the Teamsters scored another victory at Safeway when two receiving clerks, Stephanie Mercado and Jessica Holt, voted to join the Union.

Despite the recent successes, there is also a degree of uncertainty that looms over Local 117 members at Safeway. The company has decided to merge its Variety warehouse in Bellevue with the Auburn facility, a

move that will affect 80 Teamsters at Variety and 100 grocery members in Auburn. Safeway says it is on schedule to make the move this fall, before the busy holiday season.

Local 117 plans to bargain with the company over the effects of the move on members in late June or early July. "We will be discussing seniority rights and wage and pension disparity, among a number of other issues," said Business Representative and new Local 117 President, John Scarcy.

As bargaining with the \$9.5 billion company commences now and again in 2011, Teamsters at Safeway will need to retain the resolve, grit and determination that they have demonstrated throughout the years if they are to achieve the success that has helped bring all members in the grocery industry a strong Union contract.



Shop Steward, Bill Barnett



Shop Steward, Mike Holden



Receiving clerks, Jessica Holt and Stephanie Mercado

SuperValu members build on a rich history

Though SuperValu is still considered a relative newcomer to the Tacoma grocery scene, its predecessor, West Coast Grocery (Wesco), had been a Tacoma mainstay since Charles H. Hyde founded the company in 1891.

In its infancy, Wesco shipped thousands of tons of foodstuffs north to Alaska during the Klondike Goldrush. One of the trademark brand names for the company was “AMOCAT” (Tacoma reversed), still visible on the south side of the original warehouse building on Pacific Avenue in downtown Tacoma.

SuperValu acquired Wesco in 1985 and has prospered to become a \$2.84 billion company and the leading grocery wholesaler in the United States, supplying products to more than 4,200 stores, including Acme Markets, Albertsons, Bristol Farms, Bigg’s, Cub Foods, among many others.

Local 117 members at SuperValu of a more senior ilk will remember the rocky transition from Wesco to SuperValu in the mid 1980s. According to former SuperValu employee and retired Local 117 Business Representative, Tom Gallwas, companies at that time started trying to break the Union.

“Reagan had just fired the air-traffic controllers and it was a tough time for Unions,” Gallwas said.

Companies were using cutthroat tac-

tics and Unions had to fight back. “Back then, there were no bargaining committees and no Shop Stewards,” Gallwas said. “Members didn’t participate in the process like they do today.”

Nowadays, SuperValu has an accomplished and experienced group of Shop Stewards who vigilantly enforce the contract.

John Morris is a SuperValu Steward who has been in the role since 1993. “My job is to support the Union and work to defend the members’ rights,” Morris said. “This company went from a family-owned to big business overnight and we’ve had to adapt.”

With negotiations coming up next year, building solidarity will be key to the Union’s success.

“We need to stick together,” said new Shop Steward, Greg Wiest. “We all need to be on the same page so that we can win a strong contract.”



Order Selector, Shane Plumley



SuperValu Teamster, Joe Anthony



Shop Steward, John Morris



Teamster veterans Rich Cieplik (l) and Doug Larson (r)

Building Power

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benefit from the multi-employer approach. Area standards and parity with respect to labor costs meant that companies didn't have to worry that one of their competitors was getting a better deal. It allowed companies to hone their business and focus on other aspects of operations.

Unfortunately, not all companies have always understood the value of a level playing field.

The most recent fracturing of the multi-employer contract occurred in 2003 when Associated Grocers (AG), now Unified Grocers, decided to go it alone. In doing so, AG threatened the level playing field that had developed throughout the industry.

AG's departure was not the first time an employer had severed relations

with the group. Since the inception of multi-employer bargaining, other employers have insisted on autonomy, usually at their own peril.

In 1986, West Coast Grocery (Wesco), now SuperValu, hired a union busting attorney, but to little effect. That year, the Union responded by quickly sealing a 1-year deal with Safeway before achieving a short-term contract with Associated Grocers shortly thereafter. Wesco ultimately accepted the terms set forth in the other agreements.

The Union has fought to preserve area standards through the present-day grocery contracts, but it has not been easy. It has taken unity, strength, participation, and organization on the part of generations of determined, in many cases, heroic, Teamsters.

With 2011 bargaining in the grocery industry fast approaching, that is important to remember. "No matter

if we decide to bargain together or separately, we must recognize the value of area standards and the need for all of us

in the industry to stick together," said Teamsters Local 117 Secretary-Treasurer, Tracey Thompson.

"To achieve the best results, each workplace needs to be well-organized and establish a communications system," Williams said. "We need to trust our Union because our legacy of an area standard has produced strong contracts and strong solidarity across the board."



Teamsters Local 117

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MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

July 18 - Grocery Contract Negotiations Seminar

July 24-25 - Ethnic Fest (Help staff the Union table at Tacoma's cultural heritage festival)

July/Aug. - Paint Tacoma Beautiful (Paint the home of low-income Tacoma resident.)

Aug. 1 - Solidarity Day (Free tickets to the Tacoma Rainiers' game!)

WANTED! Reporters, writers, photographers and other Teamsters in the grocery industry who are interested in contributing to this newsletter. For more information, contact Local 117 Communications Coordinator, Paul Zilly at 206.441.4860 ext. 1269.

For more Teamsters news, visit the Local 117 website at www.teamsters117.org. Connect with other Local 117 members on Facebook or follow us on Twitter.