

UFCW LOCAL 400 Kroger Connection

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

JANUARY-FEBRUARY-MARCH 2010

***For good contracts,
representation & job security...***

We're Stronger Together

I'm pleased to introduce this first edition of Local 400's Kroger Connection – a new publication to build communication and unity among our 11,000 represented Kroger employees in Virginia, West Virginia and portions of eastern Tennessee and Kentucky and Ohio.

As you'll see in this issue, major developments for Local 400's three Kroger divisions include the negotiations for 2,500 workers under our Richmond and Tidewater Virginia contract, set to expire in March 2010, and a new union growth initiative directed at all non members -- 400UNITED -- which began in late September 2009 and is now in effect throughout all Local 400 Kroger divisions.

Both the bargaining and expanded internal growth efforts will directly affect all Kroger employees. The Richmond-Tidewater contract will influence future bargaining in the other Kroger divisions and our success there depends on member unity and support throughout the supermarket chain.

As for 400UNITED, this is a campaign to build union membership in our ranks and bolster Local 400's ability to provide excellent daily representation, protect union market share and negotiate union contracts with strong wages, benefits, working conditions and job protections.

I first announced the 400UNITED organizing program at a stewards seminar in Roanoke, Va., last April and stewards there were excited by the idea because they face a special challenge in growing our membership: The state's "right to work" law prohibits union security agreements requiring that all employees join the

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C. JAMES LOWTHERS
LOCAL 400 PRESIDENT

Sec.-Treas. Tom McNutt answers member questions at Richmond meeting.



BARGAINING ISSUES

Richmond and Tidewater Members Meet With Leaders

With negotiations set to begin in the first quarter of 2010 for nearly 2,500 Kroger employees in the Richmond and Tidewater areas of Virginia, members got a chance to discuss bargaining issues with top union officers and staff negotiators at meetings in Richmond and Norfolk in November.

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400
United

**Growth Program to
Bolster Union Strength**
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Bargaining Issues

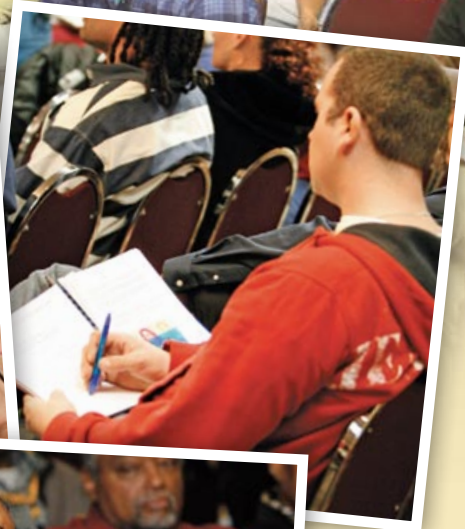
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Secretary-Treasurer Thomas McNutt presented results of a membership bargaining survey that allowed members to voice their suggestions for improving wages, benefits, vacations, holidays and working conditions.

The meetings, attended by about 200 members, were “very positive,” said Angela Chiles, a steward and member of the rank-and-file bargaining advisory committee. “Members got the chance to ask lots of questions about the bargaining process and talk about the issues they care most about.”

Specific contract proposals are still being formulated on major issues such as wages and health benefits, although negotiators shared a few proposals already drafted to improve working conditions, transfer rights, union security, health and safety, and to create joint labor-management committees to address problems and ideas of mutual concern.

The current contract expires March 27, 2010.



We're Stronger Together

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union – despite the fact that every employee benefits from union representation and the terms of the union contract.

Even with this road block, Local 400 shop stewards find that when employees learn the facts – what Local 400 is really all about – they are receptive to joining our ranks and lending support to our efforts to secure our jobs and our futures. (See “New Employee Outreach Effort Builds Union Awareness, Membership Growth,” page 3.)

Among these facts: Studies repeatedly show that union workers earn substantially better pay and benefits than non-union workers. Unlike “right to work” states like Virginia, states like Maryland, West Virginia, Kentucky, Ohio as well as the District of Columbia provide for Union Security – guaranteeing 100% union membership and support, and contracts that always provide better wage-benefit packages than in areas where union strength is weakened by “right to work” (for less).

Well, Virginia, we're fighting back with 400UNITED. We're determined

to spur membership growth at Kroger to levels that will insure our ability to bargain good contracts, protect union market share and represent our members effectively every day.

Protecting our jobs isn't just about bargaining. A strong membership base gives Local 400 the resources to help defend Kroger's market share – and our own job security – from the invasion of non-union retail predators like Walmart and Martin's (currently known as UKrop's in Richmond). A good example is the story on page 5 of this issue reporting Local 400's successful effort to block a planned Walmart Supercenter in Blacksburg, Va.

Every rank-and-file member can play a role in growing our membership, building our union and protecting our jobs by protecting our market share. It's the responsibility of all of us to encourage membership among our co-workers.

Please join with us in 400UNITED – become a union-builder.

400 United

New Employee Outreach Program Builds Union Awareness and Membership Growth



Patricia Whitehurst

“Our message is, a strong membership means fewer problems in the stores and a better union contract.”

– Patricia Whitehurst

It’s called 400UNITED – a program to educate all Kroger employees about the benefits of union membership and their rights to representation under the union contract.

All Local 400 contracts at Kroger now have a provision that requires management to introduce new workers to a shop steward their first week on the job. That’s especially important in reaching workers in “right to work” states like Virginia and Tennessee, where anti-union laws prohibit union security agreements.

“New employees often don’t even know that a store is unionized,” said Patricia Whitehurst, a Kroger shop steward in Virginia Beach. The new-hire provision in the contract guarantees that new employees learn about the union and their contract right away.

“We let them know that their wages and benefits come from collective bargaining,” says Whitehurst. “If they don’t sign up for membership right away, I know they’ll come looking for me before long when they have a problem, and then they’ll usually become a member.”

Whitehurst and her two fellow stewards have tripled membership at the store in just three years through making it “our mission” to sign up every new hire and also maintain close communications with all employees. “Our message is, a strong membership means fewer problems in the stores and a better union contract,” she says.

Local 400 shop stewards at Kroger stores across Virginia and Tennessee can testify that when given the real facts about unions – and about the power of worker solidarity – more employees than not will become members.

400UNITED is an intensified outreach effort that not only is boosting membership but also participation in the union’s political action program, the Active Ballot Club (ABC).

Even in states like West Virginia, where the local has a union security

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Know Your Union Representatives

The Local 400 Regional Directors and Representatives shown here are responsible for contract enforcement covering our 11,000 represented Kroger employees at 113 stores.



Terry Dixon, Regional Director
Roanoke and Richmond Divisions



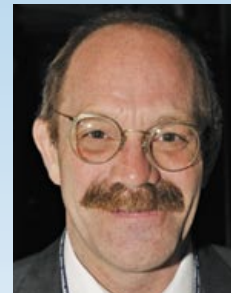
Nelson Graham, Regional Director
West Virginia Division



Heith Fenner,
Representative



Robert Brown,
Representative



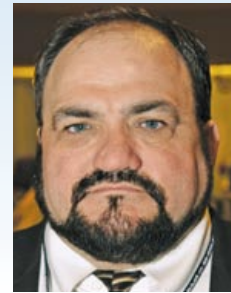
Jeff Seaman,
Representative



Mark Collins,
Representative



Teresa Ransone,
Representative



Chuck Miller,
Representative

Heith Fenner	#508	#536	#273	Teresa Ransone	#364	#734	#783	#722
#239	#509	#537	#316	#391	#743	#784	#730	
#334	#510	#538	#320	#399	#750	#785	#739	
#359	#511	#539	#325	#403	#751	#788	#752	
	#512		#328	#404	#754	#790	#753	
	#513	Mark Collins	#330	#405	#763	#792	#755	
Robert Brown	#515	#176	#335	#406	#765	#796	#773	
#500	#520	#192	#345	#407	#768	#805	#776	
#501	#523	#202	#367	#408	#769	#817	#787	
#502	#525	#210	#375		#770		#799	
#503	#532	#215	#400	Jeff Seaman	#772	Chuck Miller	#807	
#504	#533	#226	#401	#668	#778	#688		
#505	#534	#255	#402	#669	#780	#708		
#507	#535	#261		#725	#781	#714		
					#782			

**NO
WALMART
HERE!**

Local 400 Helps Block Job-Threatening Walmart Incursion in Blacksburg, Va.

Local 400 members can be proud that their efforts helped block Walmart from devastating Blacksburg, Virginia's historic and scenic downtown area with one of its giant Supercenters – and saving the jobs of many Local 400 Kroger members and others in the process.

Concerned citizens and business owners approached Local 400 for help when Walmart attempted to use its political muscle to overturn zoning restrictions against big box stores in the downtown area. Local 400 Organizing Director Jim Hepner, a native of that area, was dispatched to work with Blacksburg United for Responsible Growth, “the BURG,” in holding public forums to describe how the Supercenters can devour competing businesses and undermine community wage and benefit standards.

Ultimately, the city of Blacksburg opposed the Walmart development, but the retail titan then went to court and managed to win a ruling overturning the zoning restriction against the Supercenter. But the citizens and Local 400 prevailed last February when the Virginia Supreme Court reversed the lower court, thus blocking the big box deal for good.

“When it was clear that Walmart wasn’t coming in, the downtown Kroger remodeled and expanded, creating many more jobs,” Local 400 President Jim Lowthers reported. What’s more, blocking the deal helped save jobs at four other Kroger stores within a 45-mile radius, including locations in Christiansburg and Radford, Va., he said.

A Clear & Present Danger

Local 400 and our Kroger members in Richmond are facing a direct, powerful challenge to union market share – meaning our contract standards and jobs – with the invasion of the Dutch mega-conglomerate Royal Ahold.

Ahold’s recent purchase of the family-owned Ukrop’s grocery chain brings not only tremendous competitive marketing muscle to bear against Kroger, it brings to the Richmond community a Walmart-style contempt for workers and their job conditions, and hostility toward unions and collective bargaining.

It’s a development that strongly underscores the message of our 400United initiative and the themes outlined in this issue of Kroger Connection – we have to continue shoring up our union ranks, our resources and our own collective power to protect and expand our market share.

Ahold operates in a “double-breasted” fashion, which means it walls off its unionized operations (where it inherited union contracts in previous acquisitions, such as Giant Food) from its growing non-union sector.

It’s the non-union Ahold subsidiary, based in Carlisle, Pa., that has been flooding Virginia with its Martin’s supermarkets to compete with Kroger – and that now has swept up the 25-store Ukrop’s chain in Richmond.

For months the Ukrop’s workers have been nervous, understandably, knowing that their company was up for sale. The Dec. 17 announcement that the buyer was Royal Ahold surely was their worst nightmare.

Ukrop’s long maintained a paternal relationship with its workers and took pride in its local roots, supporting many community service projects over the years. Employees, customers and the community at large are bound to see a far different attitude from the giant, bottom-line-oriented Ahold, whose executives command an empire of more than 6,000 supermarkets worldwide from their offices in Amsterdam.

For Kroger workers in Richmond and around the region – and for all of us – the Ahold/Martin’s incursion is truly a clear and present danger, a threat to union jobs and working conditions. But we’re gearing up for the fight, and we know what it takes. It means building our union by organizing both internally and externally.

Through unity and resolve, I’m confident it’s a fight we can win.

“We have to continue shoring up our union ranks, our resources and our own collective power to protect and expand our market share.”

THOMAS MCNUTT
LOCAL 400 SECRETARY-TREASURER





400 United

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Larry Southern



Kenneth Coy



Angela Chiles

provision, greater steward contact with new employees under 400UNITED is building a strong spirit of union solidarity and awareness of how the local's political and legislative programs benefit members and their families.

In Bridgeport, W. Va., shop steward Larry Southern says nearly 90 percent of new hires at his store are signing up for ABC (political) participation after he and his two fellow stewards explain how electing pro-worker candidates to office "is vital to protecting overtime pay and many of the benefits and rights that we've achieved over the years." He reports that employees are interested in knowing about the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA), noting that, "Even non-union people at Walmart and Kmart come up to me and ask about EFCA. They are scared to death, but they know the free choice bill will help them get a union, and they want what we have."

The new Kroger workers "are very appreciative of getting to sit down with us and learn about their contract rights," says Southern. "A lot of them don't even know they are entitled to a week's vacation after a year among other things."

At Kenneth Coy's store in Roanoke, Va., the new employee provision hadn't been enforced until two months ago, when Coy became a shop steward. "When we started enforcing it, management willingly complied," he says – and the result has been more than a dozen new union members in that short time.

"Most people are receptive to hearing about the union if you take the time to sit down with them," according to Coy. Now Coy and assistant steward Paul Muse are planning to hold meetings with longer-term non-members in each department. "Many of these employees never had a chance to learn about unions and collective bargaining and to ask questions of a steward," he said. In one department meeting so far, four out of the five who attended became members on the spot, he reported.

Coy brings a special credibility to the table when he talks to workers: He has been a UFCW member on and off since 1972, starting in his hometown of Cleveland, Ohio, and he recently worked a few years at a non-union store in North Carolina. "I can tell people first-hand, without a union, you have no security, no dignity. It's night and day."

In Richmond, Angela "A.C." Chiles and her fellow shop steward have built union membership in their store to more than 80 percent by making sure they talk to each newly hired employee, and by keeping in close touch with every single worker – whether a union member or not.

"You have to remember, non-members today are potential members tomorrow. It never fails – sooner or later they will come to me with a problem and then they find out what a union is all about," she says.