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Local 853 – organizing and building a stronger union

What should members know about the union that they may not know now?



Sean Cassidy
Central Concrete, So. San Francisco

“The union is a group and not all individuals. We act together—not solo. We bargain as a group.”



Linda Hancock
Young’s Market, Sacramento

“They need to know how much the union is there to back them. Most members don’t realize how strong the union’s support is.”



Roger Wachtler
Schawk, San Francisco

“They need to know how the union works. And how we have the same goal as management, which is to make a better company.”



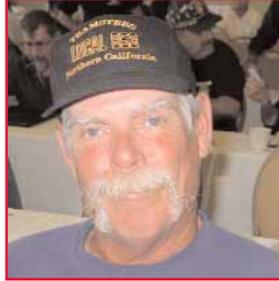
George Norris
Truitt & White, Berkeley

“We always thought it was a strong local, but with training and education, we’ve become a lot smarter. And the diversity of our businesses really helps.”



Yvonne Picardo
Genesis Logistics, Union City

“They need to know their rights—and they need to know that the union helped them get those rights.”



Craig Clack
Economy Lumber, Oakland

“They should know how strongly the local supports the workers—especially our last contract, which, thanks to Stu and Rome, was the best in 14 years.”



CONNECTIONS

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“This is the largest construction-related trucking company that the Teamsters have organized in decades”

Reliable Trucking is now reliably Teamster

After two years of organizing, mobilizing, fighting a union-busting campaign, winning an election and slogging through tough negotiations, the drivers at Reliable Trucking finally ratified their first union contract by an 84% margin on Sunday, October 7, 2007. The company is headquartered in Concord, and the drivers work throughout Northern California.

“Reliable is the largest construction-related trucking company that the Teamsters have organized in decades, and we welcome the 120 new members who drive for this company. We hope this will be the spark that starts a resurgence of Teamsters driving construction gravel, dirt, and powder up and down the highways,” said Local 853 Secretary-Treasurer Rome Aloise. “We now have a tool to use to organize the rest of these companies and bring them back to the Teamsters—where they belong.”

Back in 2005, Local 853 decided to build its construction division. After much research, Business Agent Stu Helfer set Reliable as the first target. He had already been contacted by several Reliable drivers who were interested in unionizing, and he knew that the company was owned by Conco Companies, which has union contracts in some of its other divisions.

Local 853 members join organizing drive

The first step was to solicit authorization cards from the drivers. Helfer led the campaign with major support from Local 853 Organizers Ormar Locklear and Jesse Casquero and Local 137. In addition, as the campaign began to heat up, a number of member-organizers joined in, including Doug Radnich and Joaquin DeAnda from Cemex, Terry Post from Bode and Kent Kerns from the *SF Chronicle*. This huge effort resulted in more than 70% of the drivers demanding recognition. But, ultimately the employer rejected the recognition demand and an NLRB election had to be scheduled.

The organizing campaign for the election ran from March to August, 2005. In that time, Reliable utilized a notorious union-busting firm to



Reliable drivers join Local 853 after ratifying their first contract in October.

harass, bribe, make promises to and intimidate the drivers. At the same time, Local 853’s staff and members spent hundreds of hours meeting with drivers all over Northern California to keep their spirits high and to deal with the constant turnover of drivers.

Although a large majority of the drivers voted in a mail ballot election in favor of representation, that wasn’t enough to stop the company from filing objections to the election to delay the process. Local 853 began a campaign to force the company come to the table. Finally, after more than a year of legal maneuvering, in April, 2007, the company called Aloise and asked for “an off the record” meeting where they offered to start negotiations. In September, a tentative agreement was reached.

Getting the agreement

“Getting this contract was not easy,” Aloise says. “We had to take the competition in the industry into account because most of this work is done by owner-operators who don’t have a contract.”

The two-year agreement puts in place all of the basics of a union contract, including a grievance procedure, job protections, vacations, and provisions for health and welfare and pensions. “Perhaps most important to the new members at Reliable, the contract includes rules that we can enforce with the company,” Aloise said.

“We see this contract as a first step,” Aloise said. “In the next few years, we will work to organize other companies so that Reliable is not the only union company. Then when it comes time to renew the contract, we’ll get an even better deal for our members.”



Reliable drivers vote to ratify their contract at October 6 meeting in Stockton.



Never forget the value of that first union contract

As *Connections* goes to press, I am still basking in the good feeling that the drivers at Reliable Trucking finally have a contract. That's what unions are all about.

These hard working truck drivers have worked under conditions that our members would never dream of putting up with. Working long hours for little pay or no pay, paying huge amounts of a small paycheck for health care for their families, having no pension or no way to deal with injustices, except to quit—all of the classic symptoms of working without a union, except in this case, sometimes worse.

With our help, the Reliable drivers decided to fight for something better for themselves and their families. The fight was long and difficult. Along the way, several drivers were fired or quit when they couldn't stand it anymore. But in the end, the majority stood tough and won their battle for rights on the job, and most importantly, for dignity in their workplace.

This group of drivers took the first step toward gaining what most of us have enjoyed for years, but this first step is the most important—it's a first contract!

Teamwork is what makes the difference between winning and losing these types of campaigns, and the drivers could not have achieved their victory without the hard work of the Local 853 staff and many of our current members. Stu Helfer did an outstanding job on this campaign, along with organizers Jesse Casqueiro and Ormar Locklear, and Phil Tarantino and Bo Morgan from our Construction Division.

Making lives better for working people

is what we are all about. All Local 853 members should be proud. I certainly am!

Mentoring for the future

Often, our members take for granted the wage and benefit packages, days off, seniority and grievance procedures that come with their union contract. It's easy to forget that some group of workers, way back when, fought to organize for a union contract—for your union contract.

That's why, when we brought together our shop stewards for their annual seminar, we focused on mentoring new members. We coached stewards on how to welcome new members and teach them the basics about how the union works.

Certainly, it is important that our stewards mentor new members, but it is equally important that all of our members pitch in, as well. We need to make sure new Teamsters realize that the union is the only thing that stands between them and the loss of rights, protections, and dignity on the job.

Many new members think everything they walk into—health care, pension, good wages, holidays, vacations—are “given” to them by the employer. All of us need to make sure that our new members know that the union makes these things happen because mentoring new members makes the union secure and stronger.

We also talked to our stewards extensively about DRIVE, the Teamsters' political action fund. Elected officials, on both

the state and federal level, have a major impact on our work lives.

We—as workers and as union members—have been attacked for the last seven years during the Bush administration; this has to change if we are to survive.

We all need to realize the importance of the union's political participation. Your stewards and business representatives will be talking to you about signing up for DRIVE.

Pension accrual rate goes up

I am happy to announce that the accrual rate for the Western Conference of Teamsters Pension Trust Fund will be raised to 2.0 for members who have up to 20 years of service, and to 2.65 for those with 20 or more years of service, effective January 2008.

This plan—the largest Union pension fund in the country—is fully funded and in good shape. By making good decisions and making sure our investments are allocated in a fashion that grows our funds, our plan has recuperated from the hits it, and all plans, took in the stock market in the years 2000-2003.

With our strong pension plans and our SIP 401(k) plan, we are working to ensure your ability to retire with a secure income, and to enjoy the fruits of your labor.

Teamsters Local 853

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Debra Chaplan, Editor

Benefits and Announcements

Monthly Union Meetings

Local 853's membership meetings are held the second Thursday of each month at 7:00 p.m. They are held in the West Bay and East Bay:

- 1700 Marina Blvd., San Leandro *or*
 - 151 West 20th Avenue, San Mateo.
- Call 510-895-8853 to confirm location.

WCT Pension Plan Q&A

On the second Wednesday of every month, a representative from the Western Conference of Teamsters Pension Administrator comes to

Local 853's San Leandro office to answer your pension questions. Call 510-895-8853 or 800-400-1250 for an appointment.

SIP 401(k) Enrollment

Most Local 853 members are eligible for the SIP 401(k) Plan. If you are not yet enrolled, or wish to increase your pre-tax deferred amounts—check with your business agent, your company's HR department, or call 1-800-4-PRETAX [1-800-477-3829].

Stewards' Seminar teaches about political action, legal rights and mentoring new members

"Our union doesn't belong to anybody, we're only the stewards of it," began Local 853 President John Becker as he opened the 2007 Stewards Seminar on October 6 at the Hilton Gardens Inn in Emeryville. "Our job is to remember the people who came before us and fought to get the union; to continue to fight for the union; and to pass it on to people who will understand why they have to fight for it in the future."

Mentoring new members was the theme of this year's seminar, attended by stewards from 85 different companies. "Every steward needs to start looking for their replacement," explained IBT Central Region Vice President Cheryl Johnson. "Finding people who represent diversity and youth will ensure the future of our union and this Local."

Stewards were encouraged to approach new employees within their first 30 days on the job to explain the role of the union. Why? Because if the steward doesn't do it, the boss surely will. "We have to let them know that their rights were won by the union, not just granted by the employers," Johnson added.

The stewards split into groups to talk about what information to include in a new member orientation. Each group had numerous ideas, but the most important was to let the new members know who they could talk to with questions or concerns.

Long-time steward at Bode Gravel, Terry Post, and Business

Agent Bob Strelo presented their perspectives about being an effective steward.

"Your job is to police the contract," said Post. "Often, the members will think you're a kiss ass and the employers will think you're a whiner. But you are the union's most visible line on the job and you reflect the Local in everything you do." Post's advice to stewards is to pace themselves, to avoid cynicism and to enjoy their victories as a badge of honor. "My employer wrote that I was the cancer of the company. That's a badge of honor!"

Strelo suggested that stewards of Local 853 are held to a higher standard. "A good steward honors the contract, puts in a good day's

work, and does not seek favors because he or she is a steward. That's called integrity." Stewards are also expected to listen carefully; thoroughly investigate grievances; communicate to members, the company and their business agent; enforce the contract, treat everyone fairly, and keep their cool!

Secretary-Treasurer Rome Aloise helped field questions from the stewards. "The union's job and the role of our business agents is to see the big picture. Our role is to do what's good for the group—which may or may not benefit the individual with the grievance."

Stewards also heard about the Teamsters' DRIVE political program, the Joint Council's organizing program, and workers' comp.



Stewards in action:

Pictured right (top to bottom): Stewards, including Tim Gouldbech, Terry Salmi, Charlie Gibson, George Norris and Craig Clack listen to guest speakers; stewards work on new member orientation plans; Business Agent Antonio Christian looks on as John Davidson, Bob Scarreta, and Mike Furtado present the main points their small groups developed.

Seminar Guest Speakers

Pictured below (L to R): IBT Central Region VP and Human Rights Director Cheryl Johnson; Western Region VP Chuck Mack; Joint Council 7 Organizer Pilar Barton; Workers' Comp Lawyer John Harrigan; IBT-DRIVE Coordinator Jack Peasley; Bode Shop Steward Terry Post and Business Agent Bob Strelo.

