

# Labor's Language: Glossary of Union Terms

Labor agreements, publications, and even officials often use terms that are almost exclusive to the labor arena. To help stewards feel more comfortable operating in this area, "Labor's Language: A glossary of Labor's Terms" is a regular Steward Edition feature.

**Hot Cargo Clauses:** Clauses in union contracts permitting employees to refuse to handle or work on goods shipped from a struck plant or to perform services benefitting a company listed on a union unfair employer list. Most hot cargo clauses were made illegal by the Taft-Hartley Act, but there are some exceptions.

**Housevisits/Homework/Housecalls:** Terms used to describe visits by union staff, union volunteers, or a union

organizing committee to the homes of workers they are attempting to organize. Such visits give organizers an opportunity to discuss the union and answer unorganized workers' questions in a relaxed and secure atmosphere.

**Illegal Strike:** A strike called that violates the law, such as a strike that ignores "cooling off" restrictions, or a strike that disregards a "no strike" agreement signed by the union or imposed by a court of law.

**Impartial Umpire:** Term often applied to a permanent arbitrator, named for the life of a union contract, and usually selected by mutual agreement between the union and the employer. The term indicates his/her function of presiding over the

union contract to enforce its observance by both parties.

**Impasse:** In general usage, the term refers to a situation where two parties cannot agree on a solution to a dispute. In legal usage, if impasse is reached, the employer is legally permitted to unilaterally impose its latest offer.

**Industrial Union:** A union whose membership includes all workers in a particular industry, regardless of the particular skills the worker exercises.

**Informational Picketing:** Picketing done not to cause a work stoppage, but to publicize either the existence of a labor dispute or information concerning the dispute.



876 Horace Brown Drive  
Madison Heights, MI 48071

Roger Robinson  
President

Rick Blocker  
Secretary/Treasurer

George Misko  
Recorder

1-800-321-6406  
www.ufcw876.org

# UFCW876 STEWARD EDITION

United Food and Commercial Workers Union Local 876 • Vol. 4 No. 2 • Feb. 2008

## Conversations with Stewards Get High Marks

### Members Want to Hear Union Updates from Stewards

The importance of communication between union stewards and their coworkers was reinforced by the results of the Local 876 Membership Surveys conducted by Wayne State University last year.

"When asked to select the top three ways they prefer to receive information from their union, most members included conversations at work with their steward," Roger Robinson, Local 876's president, said. "We have always considered stewards to be a vital communication link with the membership, and now know members feel the same way. Hopefully, these results will serve as an incentive for stewards to regularly talk to their coworkers about their contract and other union issues. Members have sent a clear message to stewards that they want to hear about their union from them."

To insure stewards have information to share with their coworkers, Local 876 mails the monthly *Steward Edition* newsletter to all stewards' homes, and distributes the bi-monthly *Local 876 Bulletin* at the workplace. Stewards with internet access can also visit the union's website ([www.ufcw876.org](http://www.ufcw876.org))

for a variety of other labor-related news and information, along with links to several other useful union sites.

"Stewards should make a point of talking to members about what they read in the local's publications and hear at meetings," Robinson said. "In addition, stewards should ask mem-

bers how things are going at work and if they have any questions about their contract or current events at work. Maintaining regular communication with all of the members at their workplace is an important function of being a steward and building a strong union."

### Act Now to Participate in 2008 SPUR Program

Earlier this month, Local 876 held an informational open house and interviews for members interested in participating in the union's newly expanded Special Project Union Representative (SPUR) Program. Stewards who missed this opportunity and are interested in learning more about, or participating in the SPUR program, should call Brad Wilson at the Local 876 office at 1-800-321-6406 ext. 8641.

Members selected to participate in the SPUR program will be trained by the local to assist in worker outreach and community development programs. Once trained, SPURs will be contacted on an as needed basis for projects in their community. SPUR assignments may be as short as a few hours, or last as long as a couple of months. SPURs will be paid lost time to compensate for missed work hours.

### REMINDER: Local 876 Scholarship Deadline March 3

Stewards are encouraged to remind members of the quickly approaching deadline for 2008 Local 876 scholarship applications. To be considered for one of the five \$2,000 awards, completed applications must be received at the Local 876 office by 5 p.m. on March 3, 2008.

On-line applications for the UFCW International Scholarship will be accepted at <http://www.ufcw.org/scholarship> until March 15, 2008.

Gains Come Despite Weak Economy and Fierce Employer Resistance

## Union Membership Up for the First Time Since 1983

Union membership in the U.S. rose in 2007 for the first time in 25 years.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics annual report, unions added 311,000 members last year, raising the unionized share of the workforce to 12.1 percent, from 12 percent in 2006.

"The percentage increase in union membership may not be tremendously significant, but you need to remember this growth comes despite significant losses of union jobs, especially in the midwest," Roger Robinson, Local 876's president, said. "Had we not lost thousands of manufacturing, automotive, and other unions jobs, the gains in labor's representation of the workforce would have been much greater."

Most of labor's growth came from the west, with California and Nevada increasing its organized workforce by 200,000 and 15,000 respectively, largely due to successful drives to unionize construction and casino workers.

Despite organizing 40,000 Michigan child care workers, the state lost a total of 23,000 union members last year. Still, Michigan is the fifth most unionized state in the country, behind New York, Alaska, Hawaii, and Washington, with 20.6 percent of its workers represented by unions.

Other midwestern states suffered even greater losses in union membership, with Illinois experiencing the largest decline in unionization. There, the union rolls dropped by 89,000 workers in 2007.

Not only did the 2007 gains in unionization rates in western states offset declines in the midwest, but for the first time since 1983 (the first year for which data is available) the unionization rate in western states (14.7

percent) was higher than in the midwest (13.8 percent).

In addition to revealing geographical changes in unionization trends, the 2007 data also found unionization levels to be changing by industry.

"It used to be that when you thought of a manufacturing job, you rightfully associated it with a union job," Robinson said. "The 2007 data revealed that manufacturing workers are now less likely to be in a union than the average U.S. worker."

While the unionization rate slipped in manufacturing, it rose in construction, health services, and education.

Unions also made headway in the retail industry, increasing membership rates from 5 percent to 5.2 percent.

"The increase in the number of workers with a union card is also significant in that it comes at a time when the economy is slow and workers' right to organize has been all but eliminated," Robinson said. "Employers regularly threaten, intimidate, terminate and engage in other illegal activity to prevent their workers from unionizing. If the next congress passes, and the new president signs, the Employee Free Choice Act then unions will see meaningful, continued growth."

## Help Spread the Word! Free Tax Preparation Available

All qualifying Michigan residents have the following two free tax preparation assistance options available to them.

**I-CAN! E-File** is a web-based software written at a fifth grade level that will guide individuals, including those with no computer training, through the completion of their federal and state of Michigan taxes for FREE in English or Spanish. It is not necessary to download any software to complete the process, therefore I-CAN! E-File is available anyplace with internet access including public libraries, and Michigan Works! sites. I-CAN! E-File is recommended for those with a household income less than \$50,000. I-CAN E-File can be accessed at <http://www.icanefile.org>.

**One-on-One IRS Approved Tax Preparation and Filing** is available at no cost through the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program for individuals and families whose household income meets Earned Income Credit (EIC) guidelines. General EIC income maximums are \$39,783 for couples with two children, \$35,241 for couples with one child, and \$14,590 for couples with no children. Income maximums are approximately \$2,000 less for individuals in each category. A list of VITA sites is available from the Local 876 office at 1-800-321-6406 and at <http://www.michiganeic.org/freetaxprep>.

Members with additional questions regarding the EIC, or the free tax preparation services should be directed to the Local 876 office.

## Credibility Key to Stewards' Effectiveness

Credibility is defined as being believable, reliable, and trustworthy. For all union representatives, including union stewards, credibility is the foundation for being a good, effective representative of the membership.

"Credibility is a vital trait for union representatives and stewards. Without credibility, it is virtually impossible to be a successful membership representative," Roger Robinson, Local 876's president, said. "However, credibility doesn't automatically come with the position. Credibility must be earned and maintained through continuous effort."

As it relates to being a union representative, credibility has three main components as outlined in the accompanying box -- believability, reliability, and trustworthiness.

"Developing and maintaining credibility isn't about what you say, it's about what you do," Robinson said. "It's about showing, not telling."

It's easy for a steward to tell a member he has a grievance (or not), a manager that she's wrong, and union leadership that they should be more aggressive in pushing an issue forward. But those words can be easily dismissed as "talk" or personal opinion, and do not bolster one's credibility.

Instead, stewards achieve credibility by showing the member the contract article proving her case is good (or not), collecting and providing evidence and witness proving management is wrong, and preparing a combination of all of these elements to demonstrate to union leadership justification for pursuing an issue.

"It takes more than just saying you are going to be somewhere or do something to develop credibility,"

### Three Components for Credibility

#### 1. Stewards Must be Believable

Say what you mean and mean what you say with the ability to back it up. Most important, if you don't know or are unsure of the answer to a question or the solution to a problem, indicate that you need to do some checking before you can respond.

#### 2. Stewards Must be Reliable

You must follow through on your commitments, show up where and when you are supposed to be, and be fully prepared.

#### 3. Stewards Must be Trustworthy

Members must be able to trust your actions will be in their best interest. Both members and management must trust that you are acting in good faith and the information you provide is accurate.

Robinson said. "You become credible when you actually show up where and when you said you would, deliver on your commitment, and conduct yourself in a trustworthy manner."

Stewards maintain their credibility by being believable, reliable and trustworthy on a consistent basis, day in and day out.

"Credibility isn't automatically renewable or transferable," Robinson said. "With every new situation, every different worker or manager encountered, and every new work area or location entered, credibility has to be reestablished. Credibility is earned, not given. It takes time and effort to achieve, but can be quickly and easily lost if not continuously maintained."

Being credible however, is not about being perfect.

"Nobody is perfect. Everybody makes mistakes, even the most credible stewards," Robinson said. "They maintain their credibility by admitting their mistake, working to limit its damage,

determining what led to the mistake, and taking care to make sure a similar mistake doesn't happen in the future."

Stewards can employ a variety of basic tools to help them avoid mistakes and achieve and maintain credibility. Simple things such as wearing a watch to ensure timeliness, carrying a notepad and pen for recording contact information and notes, and maintaining a file and storage system for organizing and storing records and other relevant documents.

"Each year at the local's Steward Seminar we try to give stewards a new tool, such as a calculator portfolio to help them be better equipped to do their job," Robinson said. "All stewards should also have a plastic filing box from the local to store their grievances and other important information. These are small tokens, but play a big role in helping stewards develop their credibility and effectively execute their duties as union representatives."