

OPENING CELEBRATION

EDITION



WORKERS' RIGHTS LAW CENTER OF NEW YORK, INC.

Toward Authentic Justice

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WRLC Opens Its Doors in Kingston

On June 1, the Workers' Rights Law Center of New York, Inc. (WRLC) opened its doors in the offices of UNITE HERE Local 189 in Kingston.

The WRLC believes that authentic workplace justice must be a fundamental component of New York's Hudson Valley communities. The WRLC will provide legal representation and education in support of low-wage workers' efforts to achieve this vision of justice.

There are three central components to the WRLC's work. First, the Center's staff provides free legal services to low-wage workers struggling to enforce their rights in

the workplace. Second, the WRLC will launch its Small Claims Court Project this Winter. As part of this program, local community members will accompany workers bringing actions in Small Claims Court. Finally, starting in January 2005, the Center will start its Community Education Project, which will contribute to the empowerment of workers by educating workers about their labor and civil rights. This education will be done in large part by a diverse group of local worker-leaders who are trained by the WRLC staff to conduct outreach and "know your rights" presentations in their local communities.

The WRLC works collaboratively with local labor unions, workers' groups, and other community groups to protect the rights of workers in the region.

Nine Hudson Valley counties are served by the WRLC: Westchester, Rockland, Putnam, Orange, Sullivan, Dutchess, Ulster, Columbia, and Greene.



Four WRLC Cases Highlight Workplace Abuses in the Hudson Valley

The WRLC is representing low-wage workers in a number of cases against Hudson Valley employers. Below are four cases which illustrate some of the abuses that are commonplace in the Hudson Valley.

Last month, the WRLC

filed a class action lawsuit against a major manufacturer in Sullivan County. The defendant, which had received Empire Zone benefits designed to create jobs in the region, failed to pay overtime to over 100 immigrant workers and

illegally deducted a uniform cleaning charge from the workers' wages.

Another class action alleges that an Orange County employer continually made sexual comments

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SOME FACTS YOU MAY NOT KNOW:

- 69 percent of African American workers and 72 percent of Latino Workers in the Hudson Valley describe the quality of jobs in the area as fair to poor.
- 65 percent of the job growth in the Hudson Valley between 1998 and 2008 will not require any college degree.
- The food service industry in the Hudson Valley experienced a 10.2 percent job growth between 2000 and 2002, but the average food service worker's annual wages in 2002 were only \$14,728, over \$4,000 below the poverty threshold for a family of four.

Four WRLC Cases Highlight Abuses

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and lewd gestures at female employees, in violation of state and federal sexual harassment laws. The employer also did not pay overtime or keep payroll records, as required by federal law.

In another case, an employer paid one worker as little as 2 dollars per hour over the course of eight months. The other three plaintiffs were not paid the minimum wage or overtime, and sometimes went for months at a time without being paid at all.

In a case currently before the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, a 60-year-old worker was fired by a Dutchess County landscaping company. Management told him he was being fired

because he was “too old.” In addition to these age discrimination charges, the worker alleges that the employer illegally deducted money from his and other workers’ wages for substandard housing and other expenses.

Aside from these cases, the WRLC is representing many workers throughout its

“...an employer paid one worker as little as 2 dollars per hour over the course of eight months.”

service area on other employment and civil rights claims. These potential cases range from a group of women who were fired from their job at a major hotel after they

complained about their working conditions, and a man who was held in bondage by a Westchester County construction contractor for over three months.



WRLC Founders are Awarded International Fellowship

The global social venture fund Echoing Green has named WRLC Founders Tricia Kakalec and Dan Werner among the world’s “Best Emerging Social Entrepreneurs” for their efforts to improve working conditions for immigrant and low-wage workers in New York’s Hudson Valley.

As winners of the prestigious 2004 Echoing Green Fellowship, Kakalec and Werner will receive \$90,000 in seed funding and technical assistance over two

years as they launch the WRLC.

Both bilingual attorneys, Kakalec and Werner worked together at Farmworker Legal Services of New York for the past six years. Building on the experiences and lessons learned in their advocacy work, the team launched the WRLC to create a new framework for bringing authentic workplace justice to the region’s workers.

“Through the Echoing Green Fellowship, we are the first to invest in visionary lead-

ers with bold ideas for social change,” said Dr. Cheryl Dorsey, Echoing Green’s president. “Tricia and Dan represent a new type of community leader that uses entrepreneurial principles to transform communities.”

The WRLC was one of nine projects to receive the fellowship from nearly 700 applicants in 37 countries.

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SPECIAL THANKS!

Echoing Green

The Dyson Foundation

Laurie Baldwin, UNITE HERE Local 189

Assemblyman Kevin Cahill

Mark and Sarah Parker

A Generous Anonymous Supporter

Katherine Moore

Ellen Campfield

Our Board of Directors: Jen Fuentes, Michele Kalstein, Michael Schlanger, Geovanny Trivino, Martha Davis, Mary Lynch, Michael Wishnie, Robert Cisneros, and Joe Belluck.

Our colleagues at Farmworker Legal Services of New York, especially Jim Schmidt and Lew Papenfuse

Our other friends and supporters, especially Diana Adams-Ciardullo, Ray Brescia, Mia Butzbaugh, Olga Campos, Judi Conti, Michael Dale, Arturo Delgado, Ed Felton, Terri Gerstein, Jennifer Gordon, Maggie Gray, Nan Hermus, Congressman Maurice Hinchey, Roger Jara, Millie Johnson, Barbara Kakalec, Lara Kasper, Emma Kreyche, Kevin Loughran, Mary McGreal, Michelle Still Mehta, Wolfredo Morel, Sandy Oxford, Anna Pedicini, Guillermo Perez, Orlando Reyes, Tim Riley, Anne Rosa, Joe Schivone, Nan Schivone, Ray Sheenan, Charlotte Sibley, Doug Stevick and Lisa

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Our generous organizational supporters, including UNITE HERE Local 189, the Hudson Valley Area Labor Federation, Comite Mi Gente, Somos la Llave del Futuro, Sullivan County Peace and Justice, Rural and Migrant Ministry, Safe Horizon, Western New York Law Center, Casa Juan Diego (Yonkers), St. John’s Episcopal Church (Monticello), Mid-Hudson Coalition for Economic Justice, Urban Justice Center, Farmworker Law Project, and Sisters of St. Ursula.