



Illinois Outlook

A Newsletter of the Illinois AFL-CIO Member Assistance Program

SUMMER, 2009

Peer Counselors Join to Educate Community Leaders on Dislocated Worker Benefits

Peer counselors who formerly worked at US Steel and ASF Keystone in Granite City joined forces in June to share their experiences in helping dislocated workers. John Fernandez, Scott Legault, Curtis Nunn, Kevin Brown, and Matt Krause gave a powerful presentation at the Illinois AFL-CIO Central Labor Council – Community Services Conference at Pere Marquette Lodge in Grafton.

The group's panel discussion titled, "Helping Dislocated Workers" was both troubling and inspiring as they talked about the many plant closings in Illinois and the number of workers who have been helped through their program.

The presentation helped labor leaders to understand the challenges dislocated workers face. Whether connecting to community agencies, helping with job search or serving as counselors to former co-workers, the peer counselors explained their role in providing support during difficult times.

The panel was coordinated by Member Assistance Program Field Representatives Ty Becker and Tom Spears. "We were very pleased with the peer counselor presentation," stated Tom Spears. "Sometimes by just sharing their story, dislocated workers can inspire community leaders to initiate programs or offer more assistance."

Nearly 100 union leaders and community service activists



Tom Spears, Illinois AFL-CIO MAP coordinator; Jason Fernandez, Scott Legault, Chris Nunn, Kevin Brown, Matt Krause- peer counselors; and Ty Becker, Illinois AFL-CIO MAP coordinator.

throughout the state attended the conference and many offered assistance or encouraging words. Becker added, "You know when the question and answer session flows over into lunch that attendees are engaged. This was a productive effort on both sides. The audience gained information and the presenters gained support."

The peer counselors are collectively assisting nearly 2,700 members of the United Steel Workers union.

UNEMPLOYMENT LIFELINE UNVEILED

The figures are staggering. Unemployment in Illinois is at 10.4 percent. More than

600,000 people filing unemployment claims a week. And only 37 percent of unemployed workers collecting unemployment benefits.

Eye-popping as the numbers may be, they are just numbers. The real stories are the individual ones. For every 600,000 people who file for unemployment every week, there are 600,000 unique stories. Hardworking people, struggling to get by. And too often, they don't know where to turn for help.

The AFL-CIO has created the Unemployment LifeLine. It's a one-stop online guide that links workers to local resources, from unemployment offices to veterans' services to child care.

It also offers the opportunity to talk to others and share support and lessons learned.

Check out the Unemployment LifeLine at www.unemploymentlifeline.com and pass it along to family and friends who may need the help.

In addition, the Unemployment LifeLine offers regular opportunities for action, empowering unemployed workers to make America's economy work for all.

The AFL-CIO, along with Working America, the Working America Education Fund and the AFL-CIO's Community Services staff, put this site together. With your help, it can keep growing. If you know of a resource that isn't on the site, we want to know about it, to spread the word further.

But most importantly, tell your unemployed (and underemployed) friends and family members about the Unemployment LifeLine. No one should be without the help they need.

Laid-off Caterpillar Employees Rally in Pontiac

PONTIAC - The day Caterpillar Inc. laid off Jeff Shoff from its Pontiac plant was also his daughter Allyson's 10th birthday.

Shoff worked for four years for the heavy equipment manufacturer before being let go March 30.

To make matters worse, the job market has been "pretty dry," Shoff said.

Shoff was one of several recently laid-off Caterpillar employees at a rally Saturday night organized by the United Autoworkers Local 2096 and by UAW Local 2488, which represents former employees of Interlake Material Handling Inc.

At the rally, held in the Local 2096 parking lot, across from the Caterpillar plant, many laid-off employees expressed cautious optimism that economic conditions will improve soon.

"Hopefully we get back to work, that's all," said Jason Dehn, who built fuel injectors for the plant for three years before being laid off.

"It's a good thing, the two locals are getting together to bring the people out," said Ron Morehead, field representative for the member assistance program with the Illinois AFL-CIO. Morehead was the guest speaker at the event.

"In these times, the concerns seem to increase every day," he said. "They don't seem to be going away."

One thing that has also been increasing is the number of employees the company has laid off. Union officials have said

66 Caterpillar employees have been laid off in June, bringing the total number of layoffs at the Pontiac plant to an estimated 350 since last fall.

"Hopefully things will get better," said Mark Grundler, Caterpillar employee. "We got a good union, a good company too. I've always been proud to work at Cat. I think things'll get better. It might take a year or two."

Grundler, who is on medical leave from the plant, said he learned from union officials at the rally that he will be laid off when he returns to work. The 45-year-old said he began working at the company on a supplemental basis in 2004. He was among the employees hired in 2005 for a five year contract under a "second-tier wage." Grundler said the company's June cuts have eliminated all of those employees hired under that contract.

"I'm ready to get back to work," said Jolene Ohman, who was let go Feb. 13 after working at the plant for three years.

"My heart goes out to each and every one of them," said John Bogucki, acting president of United Auto Workers Local 2096. "They're in my thoughts and prayers. I hope this economy picks up soon. We're going to set up a program to make sure everybody survives this."

Seventy-five people attended the rally which included a cookout.

June 21, 2009 article taken from The Pantagraph by Bridget Flynn

Minimum Wage Rises to \$8.00 an Hour on July 1

Wage hike helps more than 390,000 hardworking Illinoisans

The Illinois Department of Labor (IDOL) is reminding Illinois workers that the state's new minimum wage is \$8.00 an hour, effective July 1. According to the Economic Policy Institute (EPI), the increase in the minimum wage stands to help over 390,000 workers cope with the rising cost of living and pay for basic necessities like groceries, gas, rent, childcare and medicine.

Illinois raised its minimum wage to \$7.50 an hour in July 2007, with automatic increases of 25 cents built in over the next three years to \$7.75 on July 1, 2008; \$8.00 on July 1, 2009; and \$8.25 on July 1, 2010.

"The increase in the minimum wage helps full-time workers meet their family's basic needs," said IDOL Director Catherine Shannon. "As of July 1, the Department will be enforcing a higher minimum wage of \$8.00 an hour in Illinois, and will continue to ensure that workers receive the wages they've earned."

Raising the minimum wage to \$8.00 an hour generates an additional \$520 in annual wages for a fulltime minimum wage

worker – up to \$16,640 per year. The increase ensures that Illinois workers receiving the minimum wage will stay above the 2008 federal poverty level of \$10,400 a year.

When the final rate of \$8.25 per hour takes effect in 2010, the state will have helped boost the pay for minimum wage workers in Illinois by \$3.10 per hour, or 60 percent in seven years. This makes Illinois a national leader in raising wages for low-income workers.

Nationally, twenty-nine states saw their minimum wage increased to \$7.25 on July 24. That's the date the federal minimum increased causing those states to join 21 other states that already pay \$7.25 per hour or more.

The Illinois Department of Labor is also reminding Illinois workers that if they are not receiving at least the minimum wage, they should call the IDOL hotline at 1-800-478-3998 so the State can help them get the wages they're owed.



Illinois workNet Centers - Illinois workNet Centers are one-stop service centers with staff committed to supporting and developing the workforce in their community. Illinois workNet Centers help individuals find the services they need, and help employers meet their human resource requirements. For more information, go to www.illinoisworknet.com.

Record 73.4 Million Pounds Collected In Letter Carriers' National Food Drive

*Donations Increase Slightly Despite Recession In Nation's
Largest Effort to 'Stamp Out Hunger'*



Despite high unemployment and hard economic times, working families across the U. S. donated a record 73.4 million pounds of non-perishable food items during the 2009 National Letter Carriers Food Drive.

The food was collected by letter carriers on May 9 as they delivered mail along their postal routes in over 10,000 cities and towns in the nation's largest one-day food drive to "Stamp Out Hunger." The food is distributed to food pantries and charities in the communities where it is collected to help with the overwhelming local demand.

"This is an amazing testimony to the generosity of the American people even as they themselves struggle to make ends meet in these hard times," NALC President William H. Young said. "Our members take pride in being able to serve their postal customers and help them assist millions of needy Americans, including many working families, children and the elderly."

Recent reports show that one in eight Americans are struggling with hunger, and food banks across the country are challenged to keep up with rising demand. Unemployed workers can call their local United Way for direction on receiving donated food.

National sponsors of this year's Food Drive include the National Association of Letter Carriers, AFL-CIO and its affiliated unions, U.S. Postal Service, Campbell Soup Company, Valpak Direct Marketing Systems, United Way, Feeding America, and "Family Circus" cartoonist Bil Keane.



Governor Quinn Signs \$31 Billion *Illinois Jobs Now!*

**Capital Construction/Economic Recovery
Plan Means Over 439,000 Jobs**

CHICAGO – On July 13, Governor Pat Quinn signed into law bills that create the \$31 billion Illinois Jobs Now! plan, which will revive the state's ailing economy by creating and retaining over 439,000 jobs over the next six years. At a bill signing ceremony, Governor Quinn stressed this is the first statewide capital construction effort to become law in over a decade.

"This is a crucial economic recovery initiative that will generate what's needed most in Illinois: jobs, jobs, jobs," said Governor Quinn. "*Illinois Jobs Now!* provides many long-awaited improvements to our bridges and roads, transportation networks, schools and communities."

Governor Quinn added that *Illinois Jobs Now!* will create many new "green" weatherization jobs, protect and improve the state's fresh water supplies, and advance high-speed rail from Chicago to St. Louis, which will cut down on auto traffic and emissions.

"With *Illinois Jobs Now!*, our state rises to the challenge of building a viable green economy for the 21st Century that serves our people and strengthens our businesses," said Governor Quinn.

For more information, please visit jobsnow.illinois.gov.

Helpful Web Sites

Illinois workNet Center, www.illinoisworknet.com
 Illinois Veterans Care Program, www.illinoisveteranscare.com
 State of Illinois, www.illinois.gov
 Illinois Department of Employment Security, www.ilworkinfo.com
 Illinois Skills Match, www.illinoisskillsmatch.com
 Illinois AFL-CIO, www.ilaf-cio.org
 Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, www.commerce.state.il.us
 IETC Workforce Investment Act, www.illinoisbiz.biz/wia2
 National AFL-CIO, www.aflcio.org
 OSHA, www.osha.gov
 US Department of Labor Employment & Training Administration, www.doleta.gov
 AFL-CIO Unemployment Lifeline, www.unemploymentlifeline.com

Laid Off Worker Assistance available on Illinois WorkNet website

The new Laid Off Worker Assistance area of Illinois WorkNet provides individuals affected by job layoff with guidance and a pathway to achieve re-employment goals. This web page uses a series of interactive icons to help users link to resources.

You can access the Laid Off Worker Assistance tool at www.illinoisworknet.com by clicking on the green icon located in the individuals portal.

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NEWSLETTER NOTICE

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