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## UFCW Workers Win Fight to Protect Health Care, Vote for New Agreement

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UFCW members in Southern California voted 86 percent to ratify a new agreement affecting 70,000 grocery workers at almost 900 stores, with three supermarket companies, Safeway, Kroger and Albertsons, on February 26, 2004.

After 20 weeks without paychecks, workers won their fight to protect affordable health care, their pensions and job security. The companies demanded separate health and pension plans for current and future employees which would have resulted in the effective elimination of health care and retirement security benefits for workers.

Workers stuck together and won:

- \* Affordable health care benefits for new and current workers with no weekly employee premiums in the first two years, and only nominal payments if needed, in the third year.

- \* Employer contributions of nearly \$190 million to re-build the health plan reserves.

- \* A combined pension fund for new hires and current employees – ensuring a secure pension fund in the future.

- \* A wage payment averaging about \$500 in the first and third years of the contract.

In standing up for affordable health care, the grocery workers put health care on the national agenda and sent a message to

employers everywhere that attempts to eliminate health care benefits will come at a high price. The strike also raised the alarm for national health care reform.

The support and solidarity of millions of people and organizations across America was essential to the workers. From the first day on, customers refused to cross the lines with an average of 75% of customers shopping elsewhere, amounting to estimated loses of more than \$2 billion for the companies. Workers spirits were also lifted by community support including rallies and hundreds of thousands of dollars in food and financial aid. Many national and local political, faith and labor leaders put their bodies on the line to defend the grocery workers and America's middle class. Just days before the settlement, presidential candidate Sen. John Kerry joined the workers holding the line stating, "I honor these hard working men and women for taking a stand, on behalf of workers everywhere, in the fight for national health care reform... No worker should ever have to stand on a picket line in order to provide quality health care for their family."

Now the focus shifts, as UFCW contracts expire in Arizona, the **Washington DC-Baltimore area**, Northern California, Seattle and elsewhere.

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## Got A Grievance?

Do you have a grievance? Maybe you do. Maybe it's just a gripe. You need to get in touch with a steward and they will help you determine your next step.

You do, however need to get to them soon. Our Cingular and Verizon contracts give us 30 days to present a grievance. If you bring your problem to a steward in the last few days there is a very good chance that they won't be able to present it in time. Your steward needs time to investigate the grievance, talk to witnesses etc.

What happens next? Once the steward has enough information to start they will informally discuss the issue with your supervisor, if the issue can't be settled the steward pre-

sents the issue to the supervisor in Verizon and requests a meeting (to be held within 7 days), in Cingular the grievance is reduced to writing and sent to the designated company representative, who shall contact the rep within 7 days to set a mutually agreeable date and place for a meeting.

Both contracts provide for appeals to a second step and arbitration or mediation past this point. At Cingular the second step comes fairly quickly but in Verizon it can take much longer.

If you have been terminated you should find other employment. **If** you get your job back at all it could take years. Check your contract for the grievance process.

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## Proxies

Verizons Annual Stockholders Meeting is being held in Richmond Virginia on April 28th. We expect that the District or National will be collecting Proxies from our members to take with them, but as we go to press we do not have any details.

Please be prepared to have your Stewards and Officers collect them on short notice. We will get the notice out on whether or not they are being collected and if they need filled out or just signed as soon as possible.

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## Workers' Memorial Day April 28, 2004

On April 28, 2004, CWA and the U.S. Labor Movement will once again celebrate and observe Workers' Memorial Day to remember those who have become ill, injured, or killed on the job, as well as to renew our fight for strong safety and health protections.

The theme for this year's Workers' Memorial Day is "Good Jobs, Safe Jobs: Protect Workers Now." For many years, CWA and other unions have led the struggle for safe and healthy working conditions, dignity, and respect on the job. This work has led to the passage of laws and protections that have improved working conditions for millions of U.S. workers.

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## Safety Glasses

Verizon has changed their vendor to AOSafety. Your Supervisor can get the information off the web.

You must select an eye care professional from the "Professional Eye Care Locator" application and make an appointment prior to your visit.

The company paid program covers single vision, bifocal or trifocal lenses in plastic CR-39 with scratch resistant and UV coatings, basic frames, side-shields and case. Three tints are authorized depending on indoor or outdoor use. A valid prescription is required to process your order.

You also have the option of paying extra for a long list of optional frames and lenses including polycarbonate (\$3) and polarized lenses (\$40).

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**President's Point of View.....**

*Denise Burns*

Are you busy? Is there more work than you and your co-workers can handle? Do you feel pressured and discouraged? Then we're all in the same boat. What you must remember when you're getting frustrated is that no one at our level created this situation. I see and hear of too many co-workers that are upset with each other or bosses that are upset because the work can't get done.

This is not just a Verizon problem. This also applies to Cingular. Relax and take a breath. Do what you can, the best you can. If you get overwhelmed and feel that you need to get angry with someone, point the anger at Corporate America. If they aren't laying people off, sending jobs overseas, trying to take away benefits, asking for concessions or providing incentives to retire, then they most likely don't operate in America.

I don't see the end in sight. What I do see is people being angry at others for the wrong reasons. I have 29 years at Verizon. I have been here through the downsizing, the upsizing, the hometown workplace, the mega centers, separate departments, merged departments, line of businesses and all 360 degree turnarounds. Never once

did I consider it was a co-workers fault. It stems from management decisions.

I have been happy when my co-workers have been promoted, if that's what they desired. I have done my job so as not to put more work on my co-workers. You are paid to come to work and do your job (not someone else's). If someone isn't doing their job and nothing is done about it, then it is a management issue. Yes, it affects all of us, but management runs the company.

The same things play out year after year. In every work place, in every work location. We either have management that does nothing to correct situations, management that punishes everyone not just the offender or management that treats disciplining employees as a priority.

Where we go from here is up to us. As union brothers and sisters we need to treat each other like we want to be treated. We need to do our job and help each other. Who knows how long we will be on this boat, where it's heading or who's driving. We need to grab our life preservers and hang on.

*"We must all hang together, or, most assuredly we shall all hang separately."*

**Got Problems You Can't Handle On Your Own?**

At work, at home, money, kids, health? LifeBalance is now VZLIFE. The number is 800 845-0632. The web site is www.verizon.com/life (available on the web, not the eway). At VZLIFE they can help you with numerous issues. Drugs and Alcohol, Elder Care and Aging, Events and Transitions, Health and Wellness, Legal and Financial and Work and Personal Growth to name just a few. They also handle the EAP line.

Today's work environment can put us all on edge. If you need assistance with something call and get help.

For Cingular EAP the number is 800-287-9009.

**More Work Sent Overseas**

Do you use Travelocity to book travel? Travelocity has become yet another company to send American jobs overseas with the announcement that they will be closing their Clintwood, VA call center by the end of the year and sending the work to WNS North America, an Indian company, starting in April. The company says the Clintwood workers will be offered jobs at their facilities in Pennsylvania or Texas. The company also plans to cut 50 jobs at its San Antonio, TX location. Total jobs affected-300.

**Pension Calculation Error**

It was brought to our attention that many of you had recently run your pension calculation on Hewitt's website and got numbers much larger than you expected. Once the issue was investigated it was obviously too big an increase for the mortality table change to cause. We contacted Hewitt who had an error in their calculator which has now been resolved.

## Protect Yourself from Identity Theft

How can someone steal your identity? Identity theft occurs when someone uses your personal information such as your name, Social Security number, credit card number or other identifying information without your permission to commit fraud or other crimes.

The U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) projects that by the end of 2003, 210 million identity theft complaints will be registered by its ID Theft Data Clearinghouse, up from roughly 1.4 million registered in 1999.

Identity theft is a serious crime. People whose identities have been stolen can spend months or years - and their hard-earned money - cleaning up the mess thieves have made of their good name and credit record. In the meantime, victims may lose job opportunities, be refused loans, education, housing or cars, or even get arrested for crimes they didn't commit.

The FTC commissioned Synovate to survey 4,057 US adults between March and April 2003. The survey determined that 12.7 percent of respondents had been the victims of identity theft in the past five years, 6.0 percent of whom only experienced the misuse of an existing credit card. Another 4.7 percent, however, had new accounts or loans opened with their personal information, or had theft, fraud or other crimes done with their personal information.

What can you do to protect yourself? Following are some tips:

Order a copy of your credit report from each of the three major credit bureaus once a year. By checking your report on a regular basis, you can catch mistakes and fraud before they wreak havoc on your personal finances. Don't underestimate the importance of this step. One of the most common ways that consumers find out that they're victims of identity theft is when they try to make a major purchase, like a house or a car. The deal can be lost or delayed while the credit report mess is straightened out. Knowing what's in your credit report allows you to fix problems before they jeopardize a major financial transaction.

Know what's in your wallet. Sixteen percent of victims have attributed their identity theft to a lost or stolen wallet. So you're prepared if your purse or wallet is stolen, place the contents of your wallet on a photocopy machine and copy both sides of your credit cards, license and other ID cards. Then you will know what you had in your wallet and all of the account numbers and phone numbers to call and cancel. Keep the photocopy in a safe place.

If you suspect ID theft, immediately close the accounts that you know or believe have been tampered with or opened fraudulently. Use the FTC's ID Theft Affidavit when disputing new unauthorized accounts.

Checkbook safety:

The next time you order checks, only print your first initial, instead of first name, and last name on the checks. If someone takes your checkbook they will not know if you sign your checks with just your initial or your first name, but your bank will know how you sign your checks.

When you are writing checks to pay on your credit card accounts, do not put the complete account number on the memo line. Instead, just put the last four numbers. The credit card company knows the rest of the number and anyone who might be handling your check as it passes through all the check processing channels won't have access to it.

Consider not printing a phone number (or use your work phone) on your checks. That way, you can write in your phone number only when required.

If you have a P.O. box, print that on your checks instead of your home address.

Never print your Social Security number on your checks. (If you have it printed, anyone can see it and use it with malicious intent.)

Protect your private information. Shred documents showing account numbers before throwing them away. Destroy old credit cards - don't just toss them into the trash. Lock your mailbox or use a P.O. box to keep your personal information safe.

## Verizon Freeze Notices

The company is so short handed that they are once again "freezing" lateral and downgrade movement from some groups. In accordance with the agreement they can freeze 2 out of every 3 months.

So far we have letters affecting E. Colton O'Donoghue Jr's engineering group and Kathy Rhodes' Patuxent District.

The Engineering group is frozen for 2004 with the exception of April, July and October, presumably all titles none are specified.

In the Patuxent District the freeze is from February 1 to April 3 and affects the following titles. CST, OPT, MA, Mgmt Planning Clerk, Mgr Clerk, COT, Serv Tech, Sys Tech, Repair Clerk and General Clerk.

## Retirees Corner

The next meeting is April 12 at 10:00 am at the Union Hall. Helen Gibson, CWA Special Programs Administrator, will be the guest speaker. After the meeting there will be a luncheon.

At the meeting in March it was announced that there are speakers scheduled for the next three meetings. In May, will be Sue Anderson, CWA Health Care Coordinator. There was also discussion on Southern Maryland forming a Chapter Retiree Club. When the area is large clubs are allowed to have chapters so that members don't have to drive too far to attend meetings.

RMC meetings will be held on the second Monday in January, February, March, April, May, September, October, November and December.

Attention retirees.....Union Privilege Legal Services also apply to you. If you need a lawyer you may call the local office to get a name and number in your area. You receive a 30 minute free consultation and discounts on services.

## Beneficiary

Verizon members, active and retired, have you taken the time to call the benefits line to check on your beneficiary and death benefit? If you haven't you should. Call 866 998-8777 to verify your beneficiary on your life insurance. Remember that after age 60 your life insurance benefits depreciate. However, your death benefit does not. Only spouses are entitled to the death benefit. Call to request a letter on the amount you should receive to keep in your files.

## Reminder

Members, who are directed by their physician to have a colonoscopy, can take a *chargeable* sick day. Prior to this change in benefit, a member would have to take a vacation day, an excused paid day, or an excused without pay day on the day of the scheduled procedure. If you have this procedure scheduled and have a problem reporting this time as a chargeable one day of absence, have your supervisor contact Labor Relations.

Scholarships

Joe Beirne Scholarship Information

Applications will be accepted between November 2003 and March 31, 2004, the final deadline. Early submission is encouraged. The winners will be chosen by lottery. (Web Only) http://cwa-union.org/members/beirne/index.asp

Roberta B Mervine Scholarship Fund

Deadline for the RBM Scholarship application is April 30. Call or email the local office if you want a scholarship form sent to you for the 2004-2005 school year.

Dates to Remember

Membership meetings

04-05 Northern Area
04-06 Southern Area

Other Meetings

03-25 Executive Board meeting TBA
03-25 Stewards Meeting 6:30 PM
04-27 Executive Board meeting TBA

Other

03-28 thru 03-31 Legislative Conference
04-21 thru 04-23 District 2 Conference
04-28 Deadline for newsletter articles

Get Well to:

Bobby Suit recovering from a heart attack
Archie Woodburn recovering from surgery

Sympathies to:

LaDonta Edwards on the death of her grandmother
Sonny Jordan on the death of his son
Laura Kilby on the death of her grandfather

Community Service

The Daffodil sale made \$649 for The American Cancer Society- Thanks to All
Look for the next fund raiser from Current.

Who's Doing YOUR Work?

In response to a grievance that is over a year old we finally have a copy of an e-mail from labor advising management that they are not to perform CTS work (formerly OCS). They are to ensure that bargained for work is to be performed by bargained for employees. Verizon legal has reviewed the document in question.

Reminder

Call the hall or let your steward know about address changes.

«FirstName» «LastName» «Suffix»
«StreetAddress»
«DeliveryAddress»
«City» «State» «Zip+4»

Periodical Mail
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