



Instructor Mark Graf levels with his bricklayer apprentices. Story on Page 6.

# Apprentices a feast of hope

Some of the brightest lights in elevating Milwaukee into good jobs -- and some of the newest lights, the carefully trained beneficiaries of that elevation -- were honored April 8. Unions, guests and the campus directors and teachers of the Milwaukee Area Technical College filled a Downtown banquet hall for a notable step forward

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## SPECIAL SALUTE BUILDING & CONSTRUCTION TRADES

in individual and group achievement, though it was largely ignored -- again! -- by Milwaukee media.

Stretching back to the 1960s, the Apprentice Banquet has been

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UAW's Tony Rainey shows his civic apprentice leadership plaque to other guests at the banquet, including (right) his wife, Alberta Walker.

AFL-CIO MILWAUKEE

# LABOR PRESS

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MILWAUKEE AREA LABOR COUNCIL, AFL-CIO

Vol. 69, No. 4

MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN



Thursday, April 30, 2009



(USPS 350-360)

## Corporations pray hysteria will prevail

By Dominique Paul Noth  
Editor, Labor Press

### Comment

The over-the-top reactions to improving the lives of workers inspired a tongue-in-cheek contest on the Internet: The Chicken Little Sky Is Falling Bizarre Corporate Panic Over Workers' Rights contest.

There was so much nonsense floating about in the blogs and news stories it was hard to pick a winner.

Should it be the US Chamber of Commerce, whose Randel Johnson called the Employee Free Choice Act a "firestorm bordering on Armageddon"?

Or Fox News commentator John Rutledge who, when not shilling teabag parties, called the act "a Gestapo tactic"?

Or Home Depot founder Bernie Marcus who saw it as "the demise of a civilization"?

Or, my personal favorite, casino billionaire Sheldon Adelson, who offered the act as one of two "fundamental threats to society," the other being "radical Islam."

That made a piker out of former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, who merely called it "a mortal threat to American freedom."

It made him an also-ran to Wisconsin business groups condemning Gov. Doyle's proposal to extend prevailing wage standards to any project worth several thousand dollars in taxpayer support.

The businesses and their automatic GOP votes in the state legislature acted as if Doyle had thrust commerce into Dante's Inferno, since they apparently regard emulating existing federal standards as doomsday or "economic sui-

cide."

"My Lord," they proclaimed, "doesn't this mean that people can't work for free?!" It turns out the Doyle proposal exempts volunteers, as the pretend panic-stricken well knew.

Yet even all this was mild compared to the invective unleashed in so many Milwaukee suburbs, causing a rush to pass ordinances of no proven value and weight and loaded with unintended consequence. No proof exists that such ordinances would survive challenge -- and there was no challenge planned until such ordinances emerged.

In fact, no suburb was under threat of direct legislation to require minimum paid sick days (as was overwhelming approved as common sense by voters in the city of Milwaukee).

The suburbs were nevertheless goaded into misjudgment by the same business groups whose misjudgments about what would work in the economy had helped drive the US into recession.

The suburbs were further pounded by conservative talk radio, which demeaned the same November voters who put Barack Obama in the White House and kicked out so many Republicans. These are the very voters accused by radio-talk of passing "feel good legislation" (which I suppose makes paid sick days the left-wing equivalent to the right-wing's Terri Schiavo case).

But here's the ironic boomerang. Such widespread wrong-headed hysteria didn't just produce sarcastic comments that

**Hysteria** continued Page 7



Re-elected officers and a new executive board (all listed on Page 2) were sworn in by Municipal Judge Valarie Hill at MALC's April 1 Open House. Related coverage on Page 3.

## US labor on the move

### New union emerges as old ones move closer to solidarity

Even unrelated moves on the national labor front have repercussions at the Milwaukee Area Labor Council. One example: Few noticed that in the first three months of 2009, an international union disappeared in Wisconsin while remaining alive (certainly in courtrooms) in most other states.

But here all the locals associated with UNITE HERE disaffiliated and, through their common Chicago/Midwest board, voted to be part of a newly formed national union, Workers United.

Among the newly aligned familiars joining Workers United was Local 122, famous locally for handling major restaurants and hotels.

UNITE, itself a merger of needlepoint, garment and laundry unions, and HERE (hotel and restaurant employees) had merged in 2004 to activate organizing, particularly in neglected low-wage professions. It became

about 425,000 strong. UNITE had the money through the nation's only union-owned bank, Amalgamated, and HERE had the higher numbers. It seemed an understandable marriage among workers, who also split from the AFL-CIO in 2005 to become an anchor of the Change to Win federation.

But it also set the stage this year for a very public and ongoing divorce. In Wisconsin, there was no animosity between the garment and restaurant locals. They got along and saw the same needs, which is probably why they moved in tandem to become part of Workers United.

Behind the scenes there was acrimony and maybe testosterone ambition at the top. Bruce Raynor, the veteran leader of UNITE who became the new

UNITE HERE general president, was openly upset by how much money (most brought in from UNITE's coffers) and how little successful organizing emerged from the president of the hospitality division, John Wilhelm, who came from HERE and was focused on the gaming and big hotel industries on the coasts. Meanwhile, actual gains in these areas were being made by SEIU, UAW and AFSCME.

So UNITE HERE councils and locals from Philadelphia to Chicago - most of the Midwest, in fact - felt ignored in organizing clout and attention from the Wilhelm forces while charging that \$61 million had been spent to little avail.

The upshot? Raynor made sure to keep a sympathetic ear at the bank and Wilhelm felt shut

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