

Guest Article

By Eryn Byram, Labor's Community Service Agency



Thank you labor, and labor allies, for caring about our community

Imagine the eve of Labor Community Service Agency's (LCSA) union-wide giving event, Presents From Partners: thirteen stations set up, thousands of toys assembled and displayed, the decorations hung. To walk around the event hall, taking it all in, can take your breath away ... the bikes, the dolls, the construction sets, the sports balls, the books, the stuffed animals. As 170 union volunteers wait for the 650 children and their caregivers coming our way the next morning, it's impossible not to think about how we are going to pull something of this magnitude off, yet again. But year after year, we do. Because we are Organized Labor. We build things. We make things happen. We fix the rights from wrongs.

Our guests are families displaced by unsustainable housing costs, families with savings wiped out due to a cancer diagnosis, workers struggling through the broken system of workers' compensation.

Along with our union families in need, Labor's Community Service Agency reaches out and includes families from Right 2 Survive, Department



of Human Services foster children, and other community organizations.

But in the season of giving, the one thing they all have in common is the desire to bring some joy, happiness, and normalcy to their children.

And it takes the combined efforts of over 40 unions to pull off this incredible action of solidarity, from the trade apprentices who sling hundreds of bagged toys, to the stagehands who

help during event set-up. From the incomparable dedication of the school district classified union members who inventory every gift in the union trucks and flatbeds that haul 20-plus loads across town.

From the year-long dedication of the Presents From Partners Planning Committee to the retirees who hand stitch 450 stockings each year.

From our labor credit unions who help provide toys, bikes, and books, as well as gifts for children to give their caretakers, to the brothers and sisters who show up to assemble 70 bikes.

From the bilingual Santa who brought so much joy to the children, to the retail union that sent all the families home with delicious holiday food.

From the union-represented Spin Events and Catering who provided hot meals for each family free of charge, to the half a dozen union-made cakes served throughout the day.

From the union halls that provided storage, to the one that graciously hosts us year after year.

From all the union locals that held toy drives, to the lone members who

dropped a few toys by to pitch in.

Thank you to our labor ally sponsors: William C. Earhart, Kaiser Permanente, Regence BlueCross BlueShield, Oregon Building Trades Council, Pac/West, Lindquist CPA, BALMCC, Franz Bakeries, and Loomis Sayles and Co., and our in-kind sponsors that are too numerous to list.

And a special thank you to the Northwest Oregon Labor Council for their years of support, and to United Way of the Columbia-Willamette, who make all LCSA programs — including Presents From Partners — possible.

But most of all, thank you to the dozens of unions, the hundreds of unionists, and the entire labor movement for caring about our community. Together, we created warm holiday memories with our families. We brought smiles to hundreds of children's faces. In December, your giving nature defined solidarity.

Eryn Byram is executive director of Labor's Community Service Agency.

Washington state minimum wage rises to \$12

Thanks to a ballot initiative that voters approved in 2016, the Washington minimum wage rose to \$12 an hour Jan. 1. The law mandates a further increase to \$13.50 next January, to be followed by annual increases based on inflation. The law makes no exception for tipped workers or farm workers, but workers under 16 years old may legally be paid 85 percent of the minimum wage, or \$10.20 per hour.

Wages also rose Jan. 1 in the cities of Seattle, Tacoma, and SeaTac, which have their own even higher minimum wage rate schedules. Seattle's minimum wage rose to \$15 per hour, and \$16 per hour for large employers with over 500 workers worldwide. Tacoma's rose to \$12.35. SeaTac's rate, which is just for hospitality and transportation workers, rose to \$16.09.

The federal minimum wage has been stuck at \$7.25 since 2009.

Oregon's minimum wage — currently \$10.50 to \$12 depending on region of the state — will increase on July 1 to from \$11 to \$12.50.

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