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...ON THE JOB with Bakers Local 114

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catch it. But mistakes are few. In January, his name went up on a plaque — 2019 employee of the year at the Portland bakery.

He leaves work coated in a fine layer of flour, eyelashes all white. It's a physical job, and it keeps him strong and fit.

"I love mixing," Aldaco says. "You're always working."

Aldaco makes good dough, and not just for buns. His union wage is \$24.74 an hour, and in the summer — high season for hot dog and hamburger buns — overtime pays \$37.11 an hour. There's paid vacation and holidays, a retirement benefit, and full-family health care. That health benefit hit home Nov. 27 when Aldaco's wife gave birth to their first child. They named her Angela Victoria Aldaco. Health benefits negotiated by his union covered 90% of the hospital bills. Now he's enjoying three weeks of paid leave.

For Aldaco, union made all the difference.

Aldaco joined Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco and Grain Millers (BCTGM) Local 114 the old-fashioned way: He helped



At Franz Bakery, hamburger buns begin with Bakers Local 114 member Mario Aldaco, who combines ingredients in a giant mixer to make the dough.

organize his workplace. At the age of 19 he had followed his father to the United States, leaving the small village in the state of Guanajuato, Mexico, where he'd grown up. His first job in the United States was as a sanitation worker making \$9 an hour at Richmond Baking in McMinnville, Oregon — a nonunion producer of organic cookies and crackers with about a dozen employees. Wages were half what union bakers were making at the time, and Richmond workers

were often mistreated by supervisors. Co-workers started talking about unionizing.

Mario's father had worked at a company where workers tried to unionize, and a lot of them got fired; he told Mario to be careful. It's illegal to fire a worker for supporting a union, but it's all too common. On Dec. 27, 2005, the day the union filed for an election, Richmond Baking fired one of Aldaco's pro-union co-workers.

"I didn't know nothing about

unions," Aldaco recalls. "It was scary at first. Then we started organizing."

On March 1, 2006, the union vote was 6 to 2; workers would now be in Local 114.

When they started negotiating the first contract, Aldaco was asked to be on the negotiating committee. Six months later, a first union contract raised pay \$0.50 to \$1.75, made numerous safety improvements, and protected workers from arbitrary discipline. The company also paid \$6,000 back pay to the fired union supporter to settle a federal labor law charge.

Aldaco now served as a union steward, and volunteered on other union organizing campaigns, talking to nonunion workers. He became a member of the union Executive Board in 2007, and one of three union trustees in 2010. [Trustees are union officers who look through the union's books to make sure financial records are accurate and properly kept.] That same year, a fellow union officer encouraged Aldaco to apply at Franz. He was hired. It changed his life.

"Better benefits. Better pay," Aldaco said. "Union jobs are just better."

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