



# The Newsletter of TWU Local 101 • YEAR IN REVIEW

## BURNING BRIGHT

Transport Workers Union  
Utility Division

One Union. One Voice.

Transport Workers Union Local 101 AFL-CIO • 195 Montague Street, 3rd fl. Brooklyn, NY 11201 • TEL: 718-745-7597 • Winter 2014 • [www.twuocal101.org](http://www.twuocal101.org)



## Standing Together, Membership Achieves Historic Victories

**W**e've had a very exciting year. We achieved a major success at our April section meeting when we voted unanimously in favor of a weekly 50-cent assessment to provide each active member with a \$15,000 life insurance policy held by the union, in addition to the one each employee receives from National Grid. I'm especially proud of this decision because it marks the first time since I've become involved with this union that we've come together to establish a formal process for taking care of each other.

A few months later, we were confronted with a more serious challenge. Our contract was set to expire, and we knew our medical benefits would change significantly as a result of the Affordable Care Act. The negotiation process would be crucial because we were determined to minimize the increase in members' out-of-pocket health care expenses. Although contract negotiations usually start in September, this year we suspected we'd need more time to come up with a fair contract. So, at our request, negotiations opened on July 15. We hoped to reach an agreement well before the deadline, but that wasn't to be.

In exchange for extending the contract from three to five years, the company was insisting on a high-deductible health insurance plan with either less coverage or no wage increases for the entire life of the contract. The negotiators' explanation for these demands was that, under the ACA, the company would have to pay a new tax on health insurance starting in 2018. We weren't willing to take their word for it, so we hired Milliman, a consulting firm, to check their math. It turned out the tax wouldn't apply to the company until 2021, if ever.

When we brought Milliman's findings to negotiation meetings, the response we got from company negotiators was disappointing. They proposed a series of different models for health plans that all had one thing in common: they increased the burden of health care costs on us, the members. Nothing we said persuaded the company to offer us medical benefits we could accept. What eventually made the difference was our consistent effort to keep member-



ship informed. As October approached, our members knew from our e-mail updates where things stood. Their frustration, like ours, was mounting, and they were ready to take action.

On October 9, a thousand members rallied in front of MetroTech Center in support of our demands. Our purpose was to show the company that the whole union was equally committed to our shared goals and could not be pressured into giving them up. By turning out in such great numbers, we sent that message loud and clear. But to make sure the company understood the full meaning of our position, we had to go a step further. On Oc-

tober 13, 700 members assembled for a strike vote, which passed. At that point, the ball was in the company's court.

The next afternoon, we signed a contract that included free dental coverage, 14.25 percent in wage increases over five years, minimal increases in employees' medical costs and no givebacks whatsoever. This was remarkable not just for us but for any union that negotiates with a company the size of National Grid.

During the process, we had won the support of Harry Lombardo, the president of TWU International; John Samuelsen, the president of Local 100; Jerome Lafragola, the international vice president; Mario Cilento, the president of AFL-CIO; and Vinny Alvarez, the president of the Central Labor Council. A lot of people took notice

of our efforts, and our success proved to all of them that our collective voice was loud enough to overcome pressure from a company worth \$24 billion. I'm ecstatic with the new contract, but more importantly, I'm proud of what we've achieved together.

In closing, I'd like to remind you all to stay committed to your union by showing up at monthly meetings and participating in our new Veterans Committee and, for our sisters, the Women's Committee. We look forward to continuing to educate our members and accomplishing great things with all of you in the coming year.

## Committees



The new Executive Board of the Local 101 Women's Committee is as follows:

**Chair:** *Rea Plummer*

**Co-Chair:** *Robin Bovell*

**Recording Secretary:** *Fereda Ali*

**Board Members:**

*Louise Barnes*

*Chimère McCasling*

All female Local 101 members are invited to attend Committee meetings. The first one will be on Saturday, January 31 from 12 p.m. to 3 p.m. at the union hall at 195 Montague St., 3rd floor, Brooklyn, NY. The schedule for further meetings will be announced once it has been decided.



In 2014, Local 101 started a Veterans Committee, with Minerva Rivera as chair and Eric King as co-chair. They attended the TWU International Veterans Committee quarterly meeting in Miami, FL, in November to participate in the election of officers for the international committee. **Meetings for Local 101's Veterans Committee will be announced once they are scheduled.**

# Proud of Local's Success in 2014

Having been your extremely proud Vice President for the past two years, I have had the pleasure of visiting the field workers and obtaining a better understanding of the types of work that's done every day. This knowledge helps me when I attend meetings about department issues. I strongly believe that knowledge is power.

This year was a critical year for Local 101, and therefore for me as an officer, because our contract expired on October 15. We started negotiations months ahead of the expiration date, and I firmly believe that this helped in getting us a great contract.



Negotiations are never easy. I can tell you that Local 101 had an army of soldiers ready to do battle with National Grid. My greatest joy during negotiations was the response we got from each and every one of you. Our rally was a success thanks to you, and calling a strike vote put us over the top. Your voice was heard, loud and clear.

After we took the strike vote

and negotiations resumed, the company made a 180-degree turn. We stood strong and tall, knowing that politicians, other big unions and you were backing us 100 percent.

I want to personally thank you for respecting your union leaders during this process. You and your family were safe in our hands throughout a period of anxiety, and the trust you showed strengthened our motivation to keep going until we achieved our goals. I hope you've all had a happy holiday season and am looking forward to working for you in 2015.

## Union Members Show Each Other Strong Support



In 2014, Local 101 faced some important challenges, and we approached them with the goal of bringing about change. I've been with the company for 21 years, so I'm familiar with the ways this union is used to doing things. Our actions in 2014 represent a break with the past because we consistently chose to act as a group.

We proved early in the year that we achieve the best results when we all collaborate to solve problems. One memorable example of this was our unanimous vote in favor of the 50-cent assessment for the union's life insurance policy. We had replaced the annual charitable golf outing with the Family Day picnic in 2013 because not enough people could participate in the golf outing. As a result, we didn't have the funds to help all the families of the five members who passed away that year. It turned out that despite the

encouragement of union leadership, few members were buying personal life insurance policies, and the company policy was inadequate to support the families of the deceased members. After a brainstorming session in an executive board meeting, we found an insurance company that would provide the union an additional life insurance policy for 50 cents per member per week. Because we found a way to make these payments manageable for everyone, everyone at the section meeting was able to take part in the decision to ensure the security of our families.

Collaboration like this is possible because of the bonds of love and trust that tie our members to each other and our leadership. We saw the clearest evidence of this during the contract negotiations, which were my favorite part of last year. The process showed me that leading this union is worthwhile because the members return the support and loyalty we constantly strive to provide them. On the day of the rally, what I saw was one

union standing together to fight for what was right. Our President, Michael Conigliaro, worked tirelessly throughout the process, but he also kept the membership more involved and better informed than we've been for any other negotiations I can remember. I was honored that he gave me the responsibility of drafting a proposal for the Call Center, which I based on the feedback I sought from every member who works there. Even though we anticipated that these negotiations would be difficult, this time we all knew it was our contract.

I am very much looking forward to seeing what else we can accomplish with the strength we gain from our loyalty to each other. I especially want to congratulate and welcome the new Women's Committee board and encourage my sisters to participate in the Committee's activities in the months ahead. I know I have a wonderful union, and I am very proud to be an officer.





## Looking Back on a Lifetime Fighting for Our Rights



I started working at National Grid 38 years ago, when the company was still Brooklyn Union Gas. I started as a C person in Greenpoint and then spent five years at the satellite station in Red Hook. There wasn't much supervision, but our station was always first or second in productivity. If a supervisor asked us to work overtime, we did it. The trouble started when overtime became mandated. After one man was fired for refusing to work overtime because he had to help his grandmother, the whole shop walked out. All of us were fired, and I ended up as an A meter technician in Coney Island.

My union career started there about 20 years ago. I'd been suspended for refusing to do scheduled work during overtime and risk getting home late while my wife was sick. When I filed a grievance report, my supervisor responded that the rules for overtime had changed, and my delegate accepted that without question. I wasn't willing to stop working overtime, so I ran for delegate myself instead. I was used to acting as a mentor because I already coached our softball teams and worked

a two-man car with employees who were still in training.

I enjoyed being a delegate, but it was sometimes a thankless job. If you try to help someone at your location who's in a different department, some supervisors won't deal with you because you're not that person's delegate. Strikes are hard for everyone because you fall behind on medical payments and lose money you'll never get back. And some people just aren't going to appreciate what you do. I worked to keep the members' trust by doing my due diligence and making sure cases went to arbitration even when it cost money.

I've learned a lot over the years, and there are plenty of things I could learn even now. After I was appointed to the Executive Board eight years ago, I had to work with everyone, not just the people at my location. As a result, I've become much more patient and better at listening. Often people don't care as much whether their problem is solved as whether someone is listening to them and understanding them. I've also found that sometimes representing members means seeing through supervisors and knowing how to stand up to them if they dig in their heels to impress their underlings. I didn't think I was right all the time, but I was secure in what I did know.

Although things didn't always go the way I wanted them to, I don't lose much sleep over those times now that I'm retired. I always tell members that when you've been around as long as I have, the bad memories fade away and leave you with the good ones. After all the time I've spent working for this union, I think of the people I've worked with as friends first and foremost. Some of the best times I've had have been with my friend Mike Conigliaro. Josephine Arroyo and Angela Green have always been there to lend an ear when I needed it. All the work we did was rewarded when we got to see members come together to help each other and their communities. When people come to a rally or donate their time and resources after a disaster, it shows they appreciate their union, and we realize we're doing something right.

Looking back, I'm thrilled to have been around for so many of this union's proud moments. The things we achieved by working together have made all my years with the union worth it for me. I'll continue to cherish those memories now that my time as an active member is over, and I want each of you to know how much I appreciate everything you did to support your union. I wish you and your families the best for 2015 and the years to come.

# During Family Crisis, Fellow Members Rally Around Union Mom

Chimère McCasling, a Call Center Representative at MetroTech, says her son Jonmère still wishes he had stayed home on Saturday, September 20. That day, she had told him not to leave their apartment, but to an energetic 15-year-old, the prospect of staying home alone all day was unbearable. After Chimère left for work, Jonmère headed for the nearby apartment of a friend's grandfather, where a group of young people often gathered to talk and play video games. He could not have anticipated at that moment that within a few hours, he would be in surgery for gunshot wounds.

The shooting happened during a dispute between Jonmère and a 17-year-old acquaintance that started when the other boy swore at Jonmère for standing in front of the television. After their argument escalated into a physical scuffle, the boy pulled a gun out of his backpack. Jonmère asked him to put the gun down and offered to fight him, but the boy refused. He shot Jonmère twice in the stomach, once in the hand as he held it up to protect his face, and once each in the arm, shoulder and femur.

Chimère learned of the shooting shortly before 1 p.m., when she left the floor of the Call Center to take a break and immediately got a phone call from a friend of Jonmère's who had tried to call her a few minutes earlier. After he told her the news, she headed straight back to the floor to tell her supervisor her son had been shot and she was leaving. She took a cab to Brookdale Hospital, where staff told her Jonmère had a 15 percent chance of survival. He was in surgery for several hours while doctors removed the bullets from his body and repaired his blood vessels.

Around 3 a series of blood transfusions had failed to stop his blood loss, the doctors asked Chimère for permission to give him an injection that no patient as young as Jonmère had ever received before. It contained clotting factors that would stop his bleeding but could also cause blood clots in other important vessels, like the ones in his brain. She was given only a few seconds to make a decision, but by the next morning, it had become clear that she had done the right thing by agreeing to the treatment.

Jonmère improved steadily over the next few days, but he still had a long road ahead of him. In the next month and a half, he needed eight more surgeries. As an athletic teenager who liked to keep busy, he was unhappy to be confined to a hospital bed for over two months, even

though he received frequent visits from friends, family and classmates. In order to keep his spirits up, stay informed about his treatment and make sure he cooperated with his doctors, Chimère needed to spend her days at the hospital with him. This posed a risk to her job, which she needed to support herself and Jonmère. Luckily, her Union brothers and sisters came to her aid.

Chimère was astonished to receive so much help from so many people. Dozens of members donated money, food and even vacation days to allow her to take care of Jonmère without having to worry about work or bills. She was used to solving problems by herself and expected to have to do the same this time, but her situation inspired the sympathies of her fellow members, including many she'd never met. She says their readiness to help her made her feel like part of a large family for the first time. Not only did they contribute their hard-earned money and vacation time, but they also came to the hospital regularly to keep her company. When she described the experience of spending so much time at the hospital, she named a long list of members who continuously lent her their time and support: Yolanda Daniels, Constance Bradley, Coretta Jones, Louise Barnes, Fereda Ali, Robin Bovell, Taisha Lawrence, Latoya Wiggins, Tawana Cottingham and Rea Plummer. She also explained the crucial roles Louise, Rea and the Union Officers played in finding members who were willing to donate vacation time. She credits the members' help with allowing her to maintain her mental health and financial stability.

Chimère is eager to return the generosity she has benefited from. This winter she ran for a place on the Women's Committee in hopes of helping other members the way they have helped her. Now that she's won, she looks forward to what the committee is going to accomplish in the new year. She hopes to eventually open a youth center so that Brooklyn children and teenagers will have a safe place to socialize and be exposed to healthy adult influences. In her opinion, trouble between young people arises when they don't have enough to do and their parents are too busy to supervise them. She says if she can prevent at least one other child from suffering what her son has, she'll be satisfied that what started as a disaster will result in something good.





# Local 101 plays baseball at Local 100's Family Day!

Local 101 participated in a friendly game of baseball at MCU Park in Coney Island. We went up against other fellow unions and played a great game that led us to the championship. Local 101 was decked out in their Burning Bright union colors of yellow and blue. It was down to the last game when Local 101 went head to head with Local 100, and 100 won by one run. We'll get them next year.





# Second Annual Family Day Picnic

LOCAL 101 MEMBERS AND THEIR FAMILIES ENJOYED THE SECOND ANNUAL FAMILY DAY PICNIC IN FLOYD BENNETT FIELD

The air was filled with the smell of food from the grill and the sounds of the laughter of happy families on what can only be described as a perfect summer day. Brothers and sisters embraced each other throughout the day with strong handshakes and union hugs. Our resident DJ Danny Gee turned things up to add music to the atmosphere and to get people dancing. There were plenty of carnival games, arts and crafts, bouncy castles and water slides for children to play on. The union will continue this timeless tradition of solidarity and family because bonds between members, departments and shops were strengthened on that beautiful day. Save the date for the *Third Annual Family Day Picnic* on August 29th, 2015.











# Members Get *Powered Up*

LOCAL 101 MEMBERS RALLY FOR BETTER BENEFITS AND FAIR WAGES

On October 9 in front of One MetroTech, a demonstration of leadership and unity was presented in downtown Brooklyn. It showed management the strength that Local 101 can achieve. It was a historic moment for the union. We had incredible speakers from fellow unions, who showed their admiration and respect for the rally.

One of the most passionate speeches was given by our own International President, Harry Lombardo. His energy pervaded and energized the crowd. The union's message was made loud and clear.









# TWU Local 101 Holiday Party

On the evening of Thursday, December 18, the members of Local 101 gathered to celebrate the end of a successful year at the Knights of Columbus Hall. In a room glittering with holiday decorations, guests feasted on an Italian buffet from Brooklyn's own C&C Catering. Eventually, the music provided by DJ Danny Gee moved some of us to let loose on the dance floor.









# BURNING BRIGHT

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