

July 2013 — June 2014

## Annual Highlights

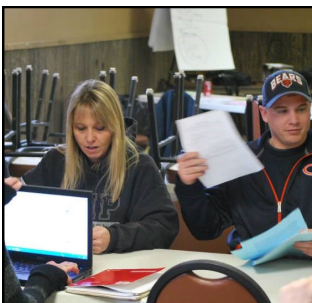
### Educating & Empowering New Leaders



First-time bargaining committee members practiced new skills at the January, 2014 Collective Bargaining course.



Four emerging women union leaders were awarded scholarships to attend the 2014 Labor Short Course.



Central Labor Councils sponsored 19 programs bringing together new and experienced leaders on a regional basis.

An influx of energetic new Iowa labor leaders took part in Labor Center continuing education programs this year.

The year kicked off with a July, 2013 labor history class hosted by Iowa IBEW's "RENEW" program for young workers, and wrapped up with a June, 2014 class for the Quad Cities "Next Up" young worker group.

In between, scores of fresh faces (along with some familiar ones!) appeared in Labor Center classes. A total of 2,732 workers and union leaders attended Labor Center classes during the year, including residents from 62 different Iowa counties. Off-campus classes reached 2,454 workers in their home communities, while 278 workers spent one to five days at intensive non-credit courses on campus.

Central Labor Councils in communities including Burlington, Cedar Rapids, Dubuque, Iowa City, Keokuk, and the Quad Cities hosted classes that brought new and experienced leaders from multiple industries and unions together to learn about subjects like collective bargaining, workplace legal rights, labor history, and many others. Several local unions also hosted education programs specifi-



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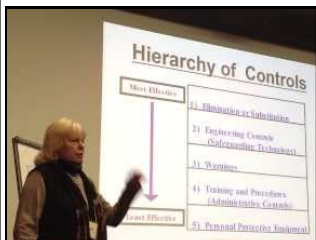
cally focused on young workers or new union stewards.

Boosting women's leadership was the focus of a successful education conference for women workers sponsored by the Iowa City Federation of Labor. The Labor Center also awarded scholarships to four emerging women leaders to

attend this year's Labor Short Course. Held in May, 2014, the Short Course drew 34 new leaders to campus for a week of intensive work on communication, leadership, and representation skills, along with classes on labor history, economics, and labor policy issues.



A full-day Labor Center education conference for Women Workers was hosted by the Iowa City Federation of Labor.



Guest instructor Nancy Lessin emphasizes the importance of eliminating workplace hazards.

## Courses Equip Workers to Protect Health and Safety

Union health and safety activists from across the region converged on campus twice this year for Labor Center health and safety courses.

A fall course designed for railroad workers emphasized issues such as fatigue and other major hazards on the rails, while a spring course focused on industrial and service workers, including sessions on subjects like ergonomics.

Both courses covered legal rights in historical context, roles of OSHA and other government agencies, and strategies for strengthening safety committees. Highlights of both courses included presentations on hazard identification and challenges associated with behavior-based

safety programs from national expert Nancy Lessin of the Tony Mazzocchi Center for Safety, Health and Environmental Education.

Labor Educator Paul Iversen noted that for many, the courses provided “new perspectives and strategies” for protecting worker safety. One participant commented that “everything I previously believed about safety and the general practices that I see around me every day was challenged,” and the course “opened my eyes to a different



Course participants analyze accident reports and prepare proposals for mock safety committee meetings.

way of thinking and problem solving.”

Fast-paced agendas packed a great deal of information and skill building into two intense days. As one attendee put it, “the amount of information I was able to take away was excellent.”

## Education Helps Iowa Workplaces, Communities Prepare for Health Care Changes

How will health insurance work in the era of the Affordable Care Act? How will changes affect the uninsured, those who have insurance at work, or unionized workers who bargain over benefits?

Labor educator Matt Glasson answered hundreds of questions like these as he helped Iowa workers and service providers prepare for and navigate health care changes this year.

Timed to coincide with the start of open enrollment in new healthcare “Marketplace” plans, a fall 2014 Labor Center conference called “Health Care Going Forward” brought together over 60 union

leaders, uninsured Iowans, UI students and faculty, community service providers, health care professionals, and local legislators.

Glasson joined guest instructors from SEIU, the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, and several Iowa-based nonprofits to sort through background and practical information on the ACA.

Positive responses to the conference led to invitations for Glasson to provide presentations to numerous unions and other groups on and off campus, including the UI School of Social Work, the Sudanese American Associa-

tion, the Center for Worker Justice, HACAP/Headstart, the Linn County African American Family Preservation Coalition, and labor councils all across the state.

Glasson says teaching classes on this issue has been especially gratifying. “Our programs are really addressing an unmet need for reliable information about the ACA, presented in a way that is clear and comprehensible to people. It’s otherwise rare for this kind of community education to be happening, and participants have repeatedly expressed how grateful they are to finally understand what’s happening with health care policy.”

*“Our programs are really addressing an unmet need for reliable information.”*

*-Matt Glasson, UI Labor Center Labor Educator*

## Worker Rights Education Engages New Audiences

Labor Center outreach and education on basic workers' rights continued to expand to new groups this year through distribution of the Center's *Iowa Workers' Rights Manual*, partnerships with nonprofits working with low-wage and immigrant worker populations, research on problems like wage theft, and educational programs providing accessible, accurate information on workplace rights.

The Labor Center is currently partnering with the Center for Worker Justice—a nonprofit founded by low-wage workers and allies in Iowa City—to deliver a six-part education series on basic rights, and to prepare workers for launching their own community-wide survey on wage theft. This

work continues a collaboration with Iowa Policy Project researcher Colin Gordon on a 2012 report on "Wage Theft in Iowa," detailing why Iowa workers are missing out on an estimated \$600 million annually in unpaid wages.

According to Labor Educator Robin Clark-Bennett, "Without education, low-wage

workers too often confront a 'wild west' environment, where rights may be routinely violated." Workshops on low-wage work and wage theft have also been requested by labor councils, churches, and service providers. "People across the state are eager to learn about these issues and to help inform workers about their rights," said Clark-Bennett.



Labor Educator Robin Clark-Bennett leads a workshop on wage payment laws for low-wage workers and interns at the Center for Worker Justice.

*"Without education, low-wage workers too often confront a 'wild west' environment, where rights may be routinely violated."*

-Robin Clark-Bennett, UI Labor Center Labor Educator

## Oral History Project Launches New Interviews

What was it like to be among the first women hired at Ottumwa's Morrell meatpacking plant during WWII? How were polio vaccination clinics first established in Waterloo? What conditions faced young Iowans moving from farms to factories in the 1920s in Sioux City? Why did workers in Des Moines tire plants engage in dozens of "wildcat" strikes in the 1950s?

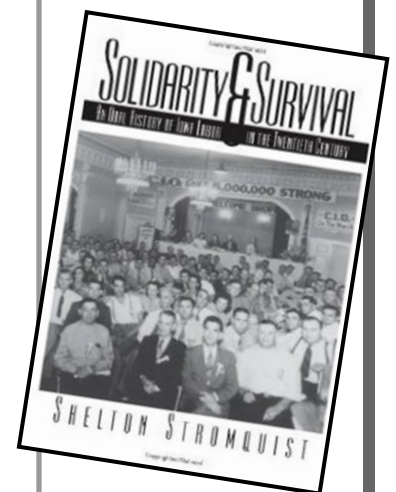
Oral histories collected through the Iowa Labor History Oral Project (ILHOP) illuminate these and thousands of key turning points in Iowa history.

Oral Historian John Mc Kerley is now at work at the Labor Center conducting new interviews to capture important experiences and events from more recent decades. With support from the UI Division of Continuing Education, the Labor Center is overseeing the project in collaboration with the Iowa Federation of Labor and the Iowa State Historical Society.

ILHOP was first initiated with support from the Iowa Federation of Labor in the early 1970s. At that time, the Labor Center headed a statewide committee of historians and

labor leaders who for two decades coordinated professional recording and transcription of over 1,100 oral histories now archived in the State Historical Society of Iowa library.

ILHOP quickly gained recognition as one of the most comprehensive worker oral history collections in the world. The interviews are regularly sought out by researchers, students, and educators, and UI Professor Emeritus Shelton Stromquist used ILHOP interviews as the basis for his 1993 *Solidarity and Survival: An Oral*



ILHOP interviews served as the basis for Shelton Stromquist's 1993 oral history of the Iowa labor movement.

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## About the Labor Center

The Labor Center is a unit of The University of Iowa's Division of Continuing Education. Since 1951, the Center has acted as a bridge between the University and Iowa's labor community. Our mission is to provide educational programs and resources to Iowa workers and their unions.

The Center annually conducts a series of **open-enrollment, non-credit short courses and seminars** for union members on the UI campus, and regularly **travels to communities across Iowa** to provide classes on a range of topics tailored to the needs and interests of Iowa workers.

Our staff also provide **research assistance and technical information** to worker organizations, serve as a **resource for UI faculty, staff, and students** interested in labor studies, and disseminate information on labor issues to the public.

## Oral History Project, cont'd

Continued from p. 3

*History of Iowa Labor in the Twentieth Century.*

As Stromquist puts it, the worker stories originally collected by ILHOP in the 1970s and '80s "give human measure to the changes that swept across the economic landscape of Iowa and the nation in the twentieth century.

They tell of workers as agents of their own lives and communities."

Yet much has continued to change in the intervening decades. Since the 1970s, new laws, shifting demographics, political and economic trends, technology, and globalization have transformed

Iowa's workplaces and its labor movement.

Today, new interviews are focused on preserving more recent phases of Iowa history and including the stories of working women, minorities, immigrants, and public sector workers not yet fully covered in the existing collection.

The digital age also presents exciting new possibilities for ILHOP. Audio recordings, photos, and documents from the State Historical Society's vast labor collections could eventually appear in interactive formats on-line, making these rich, complex stories of work, struggle, and historical change easily accessible to all Iowans.

"Today, we can record interviews digitally," noted Labor Center Director Jen Sherer. "And there are endless new ways to use digital files in public history and education projects."

Sherer said she's proud that the Labor Center can help extend ILHOP's legacy to a new generation of workers. "We teach many labor history classes," she said, "and nothing brings history to life better than allowing students to hear about and relate to workers' first-hand experiences of history, as told in their own words."



Some of the first ILHOP interviews conducted forty years ago preserved memories of miners who had worked in 19th-century Iowa coal mines



New interviews are capturing Iowans' experiences with dramatic workplace changes from the 1970s to the present.