



FDC celebrates growth at 2010 convention

Delegates share ideas and coordinate strategies

Representatives of unions in the retail food and drug industries gathered to share ideas and coordinate strategies during the Food & Drug Council's annual convention in December.

At a time when unions are confronting challenges in organizing, collective bargaining and market share, the FDC has been experiencing rapid growth in size and influence. The coalition now includes 45 local and regional labor organizations based in nine states.

FDC affiliates represent more than 375,000 members of the UFCW, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, the International

Longshore and Warehouse Union, the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, the International Union of Operating Engineers, the Sprinkler Fitters and the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers.

Welcome to Las Vegas

As she welcomed the delegates to Las Vegas, UFCW Local 711 President Roberta West provided a sobering description of the unemployment that grips the city. Nevertheless, she drew encouragement from the FDC's support for her union in Nevada and Utah. West said the FDC's assistance in picketing Fresh & Easy markets helped prompt the non-union chain to close six of its stores in Las Vegas.

In her annual report, FDC Director Ellen Anreder noted that the FDC reflects the labor movement's increasingly unified response to concentrated corporate power.

"Our growth demonstrates the willingness of labor organizations to reach across old institutional, industrial and regional boundaries to build solidarity, organize more workers and win better contracts than they could accomplish on their own," Anreder said. "The more affiliates we gain, the stronger we get."

Pledge of support

FDC President Paul Kenny, who also serves as secretary-treasurer of Teamsters Local 630, described how

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Roberta West
UFCW 711 President



Jeremy Bird
Organizing for America



Mickey Kasparian
UFCW Local 135 President

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Teamsters came to the aid of UFCW members during the 2003-2004 Southern California strike and lockout.

Kenny pledged that the spirit of union solidarity would continue this year, as more than 120,000 UFCW members throughout California and thousands more nationwide negotiate new contracts with the supermarket companies.

“We know your negotiations are coming up, and we will support you,” Kenny told the UFCW delegates at the convention. “We’re ready to stand alongside you.”

Kenny noted that Double Trouble, the FDC’s big blue truck with the names and logos of its affiliates on its sides, has inspired fear among employers who see it.

The rig had a role in his union’s successful organizing of 320 dairy workers at the Alta Dena plant in City of Industry, Calif. That victory capped a long campaign in which the FDC distributed handbills to grocery shoppers in California.

“This will make Southern California dairy workers 100 percent union,” he said. “It’s a big victory for all of us.”

Attorney Ralph Phillips, who serves as the FDC’s legal

adviser, discussed legislation that will affect union workers and organizing campaigns. He praised the FDC’s affiliates for their tenacity in bringing non-union workers into their ranks.

A general’s salute to Labor

Retired U.S. Army Brigadier Gen. Clara Adams-Ender inspired the delegates with anecdotes from her years of military service. She emphasized the need for the Labor Movement to embrace diversity as it stays united.

“Unity is simply a coming together around a common mission and goals,” she said. “The better every worker understands the mission and its goals, the more unified the organization will be.”

She continued: “Diversity helped ensure America’s greatness. It ensures an exchange of ideas from different points of view. Imagine the brainpower that is possible with a diversified organization.”

Adams-Ender encouraged the delegates to step up and take personal responsibility for their organizations’ destinies. “Our attitude is about the only thing in the world we can truly control,” she said.

“These times of unparalleled economic hardship require resilience,” she said. “Thank you for all you do to help others.”



Ralph Phillips
FDC Legal Counsel



Will Durst
Political Satirist



Barbara Childs and Earnest Phillips
University of Nevada, Las Vegas



Clara Adams-Ender
U.S. Army Brig. General (Ret.)



Ellen Anreder
FDC Director



Paul Kenny
FDC President

Jeremy Bird, deputy director of President Barack Obama’s Organizing for America, reflected on the challenges of reaching out to voters in support of progressive change.

“We learned that organizing is much more effective when people are engaged by someone from their own neighborhood and that coordinating social media and person-to-person contact bring the best results,” he said.

“We have to use data to drive our decisions, not just our intuition, during organizing campaigns,” Bird said.

Power to define future developments

Doug Dority, the UFCW’s former international president and the current president of America’s Agenda: Health Care for All, described aspects of health care reform legislation that disappointed him. Nevertheless, he said that activists have the power to define future developments in health care.

“We can make positive changes,” Dority said. “It’s just a matter of getting started.”

Dority also praised the concept of union benefit trust funds forming co-ops to consolidate their strengths and become eligible for government funds.

Jerry Dale Reeves, M.D., an expert on health and welfare

benefits, gave a presentation on Value-Based Benefit Design, a health care strategy for benefit funds that encourages employees to make good choices with their benefits. It emphasizes low-cost preventative steps that benefit plans can make more available to participants while deemphasizing costly screenings and procedures that have limited effectiveness.

“You want to keep the barriers low and remove as many of them as possible so that participants can easily access high-value services,” he said.

Linda K. Foley, president of the Berger-Marks Foundation, which is dedicated to bringing more women into the Labor Movement, said unions need to be more inclusive, letting women and younger members get involved in decision-making.

“Step up and be proactive in organizing women,” Foley said, “and step back and let the younger generation play an active role.”

Earnest Phillips and Barbara Childs from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, engaged the audience in a discussion about social media in organizing campaigns.

Highlighting a two-pronged revolution in hardware

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Dr. Jerry Dale Reeves
Health and Welfare Benefits Expert



Jacques Loveall
UFCW 8-Golden State President



Doug Dority
Former UFCW Intl. President



Linda K. Foley
Berger-Marks Foundation



Rita-Ann Richards
Philanthropist



Entrance to the Union Restaurant

FDC Convention

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(tablets and smart phones) and software (Facebook and Twitter), they described how electronic communications could work in tandem with unions' established print materials.

"You can't just do Facebook and say you're done — you're not," Phillips said. "It's a powerful medium, but some things are still best explained in print."

UFCW 8-Golden State President Jacques Loveall discussed the restrictions imposed by the Pension Protection Act and the Employee Retirement Income Security Act on union benefit funds. Both laws need to be radically reformed or repealed, he said.

"The PPA forces unnecessary

confrontations between management and employees," he said. "It's forcing us from defined-benefit to defined-contribution pension plans. It's a direct assault on the fundamentals we stand for."

Loveall emphasized that the FDC helps working people stake their claim on the wealth that they create. "We need to build strong coalitions both inside and beyond the labor movement," he said.

Mickey Kasparian, president of UFCW Local 135 in San Diego and Imperial Counties, detailed his union's recent successes, including passage of an ordinance to prevent "big box" retailers from opening without first conducting studies on their potential impact on local economies.

He also looked ahead to the

Southern California UFCW food negotiations, noting that unions in the region are enlisting pledges of support from shoppers.

"The issues are the same for all of us: pension, health benefits, wages and working conditions," Kasparian said. "These will be very difficult negotiations, but as always, we will get our members a contract they deserve."

Union leaders from across the country also delivered "field reports," sharing information about their respective challenges and successes.

Political satirist and self-described "raging moderate" Will Durst closed the event with humorous reflections on politics and popular culture, from Sarah Palin to Arnold Schwarzenegger and from PETA to President Obama.



Above: Banners hung in the FDC meeting hall conveyed the event's spirit of solidarity.