

*Opinion*

# Paying tribute to unions this Labor Day

Regis Kingera

The first Labor Day holiday was celebrated Tuesday, Sept. 5, 1882, in New York City as a day to honor those "who from rude nature have delved and carved all the grandeur we behold," according to Peter J. McGuire, a cofounder of the American Federation of Labor and the suggested founder of Labor Day. That was 123 years ago, and I have been a part of it for over half those years.

All of my life, I have lived under the umbrella of organized labor.

My father and my uncles were fighting for workers' rights long before I was born. I was raised in Johnstown, Pa. Johnstown was like so many other western Pennsylvania towns; its life depended on the steel mills, the coal mines, and the railroads.

As a child growing up in this community, I became aware of the absences of the grandfathers, fathers and relatives of my own and those of my friends. I became aware of the hazards in the workplace that

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took the lives of these people. I became aware of the steelworkers, and railroad workers and mineworkers who left bits and pieces of themselves at the workplace because of unsafe procedures. I became aware of the horrible sounds a miner makes gasping for a breath, coughing so hard to rid himself of what is impeding his breathing that he spits out blood.

I also became aware of the union.

But most of all I became aware of the optimism that workers had for their unions. They believed that by joining in a labor movement, they could stand strong for themselves and their families. Most of these men did not have much of an education, but they understood the value of an education.

They understood that with a union they could achieve a living wage, a wage that

would allow them to provide for the education of their daughters and sons. With the union, they could move out of the company house to a house that they would own.

Working together with a union, they could receive proper health care for themselves and their families; with a union they could have a decent life after they became too old to work. With the pensions the unions fought for and Social Security benefits they voted for, they could retire.

However, these things came at a cost along with other union women and men; they will remember all those years they gave to the company, the blood and sweat and body parts they left behind on the shop floors and in the darkness of the coal mine and under the wheels of train cars. Remembering how they were able to retire

because with a union, they for the first time in their lives could go to work and after eight hours they could come back home; they didn't have to go to work to die.

I, along with my sisters and brothers in the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and the AFL-CIO, shall continue the fight they started. We shall remain in this fight to remind everyone that what they accomplished will never be given up freely.

To those who think they can take away any of these rights for which our grandfathers and fathers fought and died, I say do not try it. We are determined to pass that legacy to our children and our grandchildren. To those who believe that we are not strong and united, I say, don't you believe it. To those who believe that they can challenge any one of my union sisters and brothers, and not have me standing next to them, I say, don't you believe it.

We have a birthright to protect, and we shall. That is something you can believe.

*Regis Kingera is a retired International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers member. He lives in State College.*

# Residents rally against Rush Township landfill

Michele Barbin and Ed Walsh

Imagine this: In return for having the neatest and best-organized desk in the class, your child's space is designated by authorities to be the place where all of the sloppier kids dump their trash so their work spaces will appear deceptively clean.

Centre County has been on the cutting edge for decades in terms of environmental responsibility. It implemented one of the first recycling programs in Pennsylvania, and has the first all natural gas powered public transportation system to keep our air cleaner. Our county officials should be highly commended because such foresight has been responsible for large quality-of-life gains for everyone.

Instead, outside developers are attempting to punish rather than reward us for such responsible environmental stewardship. Lancaster-based Resource Recovery, LLC, is trying to build "the largest landfill east of the Mississippi" in our county to handle tens of millions of tons of garbage from large urban areas in New York and New Jersey where residents have not yet learned to respect our fragile environment.

Let's return for a moment to your beloved but dumped-upon child. Suppose the bum-

"These developers want to degrade a 5,800-acre forest that constantly improves Centre County's air, damage an interior forest wildlife habitat, displace seasonal properties adjacent to the site, and destroy various outdoor recreation opportunities."

--Michele Barbin and Ed Walsh

bling authorities also promised, at first, that this absurd plan advantaging the slobs would only be temporary -- but then contradicted themselves and tried to make it permanent. The dump developers have, in fact, acted similarly to favor irresponsible communities numerous times over the past year. In May 2004, for example, they publicly proclaimed that if either Rush or Snow Shoe Township didn't sign on, they would abandon the project. When Snow Shoe Township subsequently refused, however, RRLLC arrogantly pushed on with its dump plans without even acknowledging this deceit.

RRLLC also publicly assured audiences countless times that if they did not receive permission to build a privately-funded interchange off Interstate 80, they would abandon the project. Now they are having trouble getting approval for that exit and threatening to use Snow Shoe roads if

denied a new interchange.

These developers also frequently change their dump estimates of garbage tonnage, increased truck traffic on I-80, and additional jobs likely to be provided by their proposed boondoggle. Only the ignorant and/or naïve believe anything RRLLC says in public anymore.

All Centre Countians must be concerned about nitrous oxides (NOx) emitted from diesel trucks - especially because Central Pennsylvania's air is already in "noncompliance" vis-à-vis ground level ozone levels. Volatile organic chemicals (VOCs) emitted from a 750-acre landfill would further aggravate our situation, and 450 diesel-spewing trucks making daily round trips to the east coast -- dumping up to 9,000 tons of VOC-emitting municipal waste a day - would make it virtually impossible to solve our air quality problems.

While the most immediate and nasty effects of this RRLLC project would fall upon Snow Shoe Township, Cooper Township, and the Black Moshannon Forest, all of Central Pennsylvania would obviously be negatively impacted. These developers want to degrade a 5,800-acre forest that constantly improves Centre County's air, damage an interior forest wildlife habitat, displace seasonal properties adjacent to the site, and destroy various outdoor recreation opportunities. And how many additional I-80 accidents and deaths might RRLLC's greed and venality also eventually cause?

We've undermined RRLLC's credibility in each public encounter since this struggle began and also won a few significant victories (no defeats thus far). We call ourselves People Protecting Communities (PPC) and know that grassroots members can neutralize fat cats' money because decision-making public officials count votes keeping them in office. For much more info, visit our Web site ([www.stoplandfill.com](http://www.stoplandfill.com)) or give us a call (814-234-8398). Spice up your life this fall by participating in creative hell-raising fun.

*Michele Barbin and Ed Walsh represent People Protecting Communities.*