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IBEW Local Unit 21
Scholarship Essay

Why Are Unions Important?

In a world centralized around competition, a company's number one priority has shifted from benefitting their workers to making the largest obtainable profit. With the population of working class Americans on the rise, labor unions play an important role in the protection of worker's rights. Not only are unions important for worker's rights, voice and equality, they also are extremely important aspects to our community. Unions have used their connections to reach out to the community to help raise money for several organizations and for those in need. They give support and act as a medium between local communities and larger organizations. Unions have been reported to support Breast Cancer Awareness, students in need, the hungry and movements to support the end of child abuse and at-risk youth.

Saving lives has always been one of the duties of being a firefighter, but the members of Montgomery County firehouse took this duty to a new level. With nearly 1 in 8 women being diagnosed in their lifetime (12%), breast cancer hits home for a lot of women and families. In order to give back, the men and women of Montgomery County Career Fire Fighters association decided to create a fundraiser to raise money to support the women and families that have been impacted by breast cancer. According to Arlene Borenstein, the men and women in this local firefighter union "rose to the challenge of designing, selling and wearing pink T-shirts (Borenstein 1)," which raised \$10,000 during the month of October, Breast Cancer Awareness Month. \$5,000 was given to the Susan G. Komen association and the other \$5,000 to the Red Devils, Inc. of Maryland. These

organizations are both “non-profits that provide services, grants and education for breast cancer patients and survivors along with their families” (Borenstein 1). This is a prime example of how local unions positively impact the community around them. These specific firefighters used the strength of their union to come together for a great cause in support of their community and local organizations.

Following this amazing accomplishment that took place in Maryland, IBEW Local 21 has also positively impacted their local communities through the use of fundraising. Days of Giving has not only helped students in need of school supplies, but this year is targeting a food drive to support hungry families in the community. In the summer of 2015, IBEW 21 dedicated an event to collect school supplies for students in need. On June 25, 2015, hundreds of lives were changed as a tornado ripped through Coal City. A reported 884 properties were damaged and 54 houses were completely lost. In order to show support to these families, the IBEW Local 21 reached out the surrounding communities to help raise money and collected school supplies for students living in this area as well as students assisted by My Joyful Heart, Crittenton Centers and Mercy Home for the upcoming school year. Several union members, union retirees, friends and several different communities helped create a successful event.

The most recent event of the IBEW 21 days of giving targets struggling families, especially those who cannot afford adequate amounts of food for themselves and their families. This specific food drive supports the organization “Feeding America.” According to the *Feeding America* website, “1 and 7 people struggle with hunger” in Illinois. Donations are collected from local communities and are transported to specific food banks to help those at risk for hunger. Feeding America states, “last year alone, the

“Feeding America” network distributed more than 3 billion meals to people in need” (“Feeding America” 1). IBEW Local 21, my local union, promotes their event not only on their website, but also on social media to reach out to their community. The outreach that the union has for this event spreads across Illinois and Indiana and “benefits Northwest Indiana, Central Illinois, Northern Illinois, River Bend, Eastern Illinois, Peoria Area and St. Louis Area food banks, as well as Greater Chicago Food Depository.” This positively impacts local communities because when you donate, your donation will be sent to the closest food bank in your area. This helps directly impact those in your community and helps spread awareness on hunger and the need for collaboration. It is important for local unions to promote events, such as this, to help those in need and inform their community of local issues.

Another way that IBEW Local 21 positively supports their local communities is their involvement with March for Kids. This specific organization pledges to stop child abuse and help children who are at-risk for abuse. This event raises awareness in the community with the hope of ending child abuse. The March for Kids event takes place in the month of March, targeting St. Patrick’s Day events and the parade. Thousands of volunteers walk the streets of Chicago to help raise money to help support their mission: save children’s lives from abuse and neglect. A lot of these volunteers come from those who are apart of local unions. Several postings on websites and on social media promote volunteering at this event to help support Mercy Home.

In the end, unions do much more than just fight for worker’s rights. Unions are constantly getting involved in the community and promoting a positive environment for everyone in it. Several times a year, unions take part in volunteer opportunities that

support their community and support those in it. Besides their large participation in these volunteer events, their promotion of these events are especially important. Unions act as a median between community members and local organizations in need of volunteers and donations. In Maryland, a local fire department raised \$10,000 in one month for Breast Cancer Awareness. Closer to home, IBEW Local 21 has done a lot of work targeting families in surrounding communities; especially targeting children. Summer of 2015, IBEW Local 21 created a fundraiser to collect school supplies to families in their community affected by a tornado as well as other financial situations; they also in the process of collecting cash donations and food donations to help support a national organization to help end hunger affecting Americans. Lastly, IBEW Local 21 annually supports the Mercy Home March for Kids in Chicago by raising money for support as well as providing volunteers to fundraise during St. Patrick's Day. Unions, especially IBEW Local 21, find great ways to get involved in the community and positively support local and national non-profit organizations.