

Unions have been a part of American history longer than the electric lightbulb has existed. Yes, the concept of unions is over one hundred fifty years old. Beginning in 1866, the National Labor Union was originally founded to prevent unsafe work environments and to prohibit child labor because both were rampant during this time period. Since that time, unions have grown in many capacities and now provide many more positive benefits than ever before for employees individually and for the community as a whole. Unions have grown past simply protecting jobs. Union members help others succeed, encourage others struggling, and bring others together.

The first thought that comes to minds when the words 'labor' and 'union' are presented is protection or rights of a job position. Union members help the community by giving individuals job stability. Imagine life without labor unions. Job stability would evaporate, equality in the workplace would dissolve, and safety would be an afterthought. Now take this thought a step further as previous and current union members have. Union members help others succeed. This scholarship award is one great example of this help. High school and college students are helped by union members by being awarded a scholarship to aid in paying for further education. Another way that union members help the community is with all of the various drives that are planned. For example, clothing drives. Clothing drives provide clothing for families in need. This is a wonderful way to reach out to the community and meet the needs of individuals. Families are extremely thankful for union members that participate in events such as these to meet the needs of others.

The Christmas season is when most of the community help is displayed greatly. Various donations are made for families in need. For example, the Toys for Tots. This fundraiser, run by the United States Marine Corps Reserve, greatly appreciates any donations that union members have contributed. Children whose parents may not be able to afford gifts, are able to have

Christmas gifts due to the generous hearts of union members. Also, there are fundraisers to raise money for those families that have lost loved ones. The Michael Kunas Memorial Fund was created to honor the memory of Michael Kunes who passed away from a massive heart attack. Funds raised from fundraising events are given to assist those who have “experienced great tragedy or loss in their lives” (IBEW). Last fall, the union hosted “a night of bowling and family fun” to assist Dispatcher Jacqueline Thomas who was suffering from a brain debilitating injury. These fundraising events are sponsored by volunteer donations and have been a great help and encouragement to the participants and those receiving the funds. Union members help others in their community not only through their time but also through their physical giving.

Not only do union members enhance the community by helping others succeed, but they also encourage others in the community. Frequently one hears of families that have lost loved ones and whether unexpectedly or not, the families are still full of extreme hurt. Union members encourage them not only by being there for the families, but by hosting fundraisers to provide for those hurting families. Union members encourage students in their education by providing the 21 days of giving school supplies. This is extremely encouraging to parents and caregivers that are trying to prepare their children for the upcoming school year.

Union members not only encourage those in the community, but they also encourage each other. Encouraging each other to be involved in community events or simply listening to each other’s struggles and relating in that way can be such a great encouraging force to other members. Encouragement has no limit. Encouragement can be a fundraiser, a word, or simply a smile and union members understand this well.

One last way that union members enhance the community is through bringing people together with a common purpose. When looking around the room at a normal union meeting,

most of the time, the group would not have met together if it were not for the purpose of the union. Union meetings bring people together as one voice. One person can appeal to their employer or other supervisor frequently for a specific request, but that provider may not listen or may not change anything. Union members bring people together as one voice to make changes, fix problems, and make work a more bearable activity- sometimes even enjoyable. Union members not only protect jobs, but also represent the individuals holding those jobs. Union members are a mediator between employees and employers. They show employers that your job is important and deserving of respect and with that comes respectable pay, benefits, and safety. Employers need employees to get tasks completed and employees need their employers to pay their wages so that bills can be paid and vacations to be taken. Without a mediator, nothing would be accomplished. Union members are those mediators.

Union members get together for many different common purposes. Members join together to make all of those encouraging fundraisers, clothing drives, and other events possible. Without joining together, all of that great work would not be as effective or even thinkable. Union members link together and hold various events simply to get to know each other. Various parties, grill-outs, and picnics bring union members together to relax and create more ideas of how to benefit the community even more than before.

Union members are a wonderful contribution to any and every community that they are a part of. Obviously, labor unions are nowhere near perfect, but the benefits that they bring to the community are innumerable. As said before, without labor unions, job stability would evaporate, equality in the workplace would dissolve, and safety would be an afterthought, if thought of at all. The individual members of unions are what make labor unions effective and are a great enhancement to the community. Labor unions have grown past simply protecting jobs. Union

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References

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