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An Interpretation Of The Positive Role Unions Play In The Community

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Job security, higher wages, and better benefits; these are just some of the many things unions bargain for to benefit their members. These benefits are well known in the work force. What the general public may not know is that unions do many other things to support their communities. Aside from economically helping their members, they also volunteer their time for a wide range of charitable causes, from fundraisers, to food drives, to assisting military veterans, to helping under privileged homeowners. These charitable causes help union members to be seen in a different light and makes unions a positive force in the community. By donating their time and talents, unions have impacted their local communities giving them positive exposure. Unions can be a beacon of hope to those in need and to those who want to see their community thrive.

In 2014, New Jersey, Local Union 102 started an Annual Motorcycle Run and Cruise In. The Motorcycle Run raised \$20,000 for Goryeb Children's Hospital (Corrigan 2012). More than 130 motorcycles participated in the event. After the Run the motorcycles went back to Local Union 102 for a classic car show, where they had food and music for everyone to enjoy (Corrigan, 2012). The car show was a giant hit. The community was able to enjoy themselves and also benefit from the money they raised for the Children's Hospital. In 2015, after another Motorcycle Run, Local 102 donated the money to a guide dog school (IBEWlocal102.org, 2015). In addition to raising money for noble and charitable causes, the Run promoted solidarity among union members and the community.

Unions do more for the community than just fundraisers. Local Union 164 won a community service award for helping low income homeowners with various electrical problems and helped update their electrical wiring. The homeowners included: elderly, disabled, veterans, and storm victims (Sullican 2014). These homeowners could not perform these upgrades themselves, nor afford to have them done by an outside service. Likewise, St. Louis Local 1 electricians donated more than \$70,000 in supplies to help with electrical upgrades in their city (IBEW.org, 2009). Without these upgrades, these older homes had a much higher chance of having an electrical fire. Their advanced training and education put them in a position to provide needed services to those who could not afford to hire out for help. Winning a community service award demonstrates that others outside of the union recognize their charitable work.

When it comes to food drives, most people would think to donate during the holidays. Many go hungry in the summer as people are more inclined to donate during the holiday season. Advertisements are often seen for drop-off sites at different locations and large overflowing bins are seen in grocery stores during the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays. This is a time when people feel most charitable. Local Union 21 for three years in a row, has had food drives for those in need (Przybylinski 2015). Many food banks get overwhelmed with all the food they receive during the holidays, but they run out during the summer leaving some families to go hungry (Przybylinski 2015). Local Union 21 thought outside the box and ran the food drive in the spring so that the food bank would have food in the summer. Because school is not in session in the summer, children do not receive their free and reduced breakfasts and lunches, putting a strain on families' incomes. Not

only did Local Union 21 have a successful food drive, they did it in a time of year to maximally benefit the local community. Thanks to Local 21, in addition to having enough food for the holidays, the shelter was able to feed those who desperately needed food in the summer.

Another positive community service unions provide is assisting military personnel. The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers pays the union dues for any member while on active duty (Bowden 2012). There are several stipulations that must be followed and adhered to by the member and they need to provide the appropriate paperwork to get this benefit. Unions also provide an opportunity for armed forces members to transition to well paying careers when they leave the military. Finding well paying jobs today can be very difficult. It may be even more difficult for a military veteran to find a job, as they have to "translate the skills they learned in the military into language that civilian employers can understand" (Bowden 2012). Anyone who is a hard worker and would give up his or her life to defend our freedom deserves a job, and unions are one of the primary organizations that help veterans with this. Helmets to Hardhats was formed to help military veterans "connect to quality career and training opportunities" in the construction field (Bowden 2012). IBEW Electrical Workers offer an apprentice program where veterans can "learn while (they) earn." (Bowden 2012). Often, the industry offers a salary higher than the national average along with fringe benefits. "Some apprenticeship programs partner with community colleges to offer college credit for apprenticeship classes" (Bowden 2012). This type of job could be a perfect fit for disciplined military veterans. The Union will help these military veterans go through the rigorous process of finding a job. We can never

repay what military members have done for our country, but helping them find a well paying job is a start in the right direction.

In addition to providing better job security, better benefits, and higher wages for their fellow members, unions also actually provide a variety of community services that sometimes go unnoticed. Union workers have helped out their local communities in a variety of ways including holding fundraisers and food drives, providing professional home maintenance and upgrades, and by assisting military members. In these charitable acts, the general public can see unions in a better light and appreciate what they do to help their communities. Unions give the community a sense of hope to those who need it. Representing many different types of workers, unions possess the power to make a serious difference. The public can look up to unions because not only are they looking out for the working class, but they provide a variety of charitable events to benefit their local communities.

## References

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