



October-December 2019
Vol. 14, Issue 4, (USPS 018-250)

**Greg M.
Conger**

A U D I T O R I U M

Auditorium re-named to honor Conger's legacy



Special Commemorative Issue

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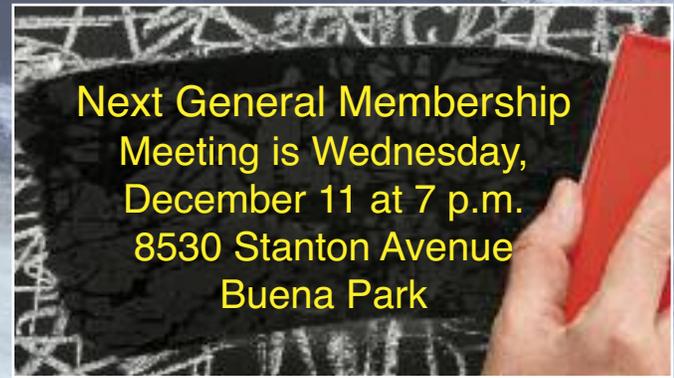
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Next General Membership Meeting is Wednesday, December 11 at 7 p.m. 8530 Stanton Avenue Buena Park

Members to vote on proposed jurisdictional change

Local 770 and Local 324 have agreed to realign our jurisdictional lines slightly on the west and north side of 324's current jurisdiction. The purpose of this realignment is to have the entire store represented by one Local and one Union Representative. We will conduct a vote on this at our membership meeting on December 11, 2019 from 6:30 p.m.—7:30 p.m. All current members are eligible to vote.

Withdrawal Card Request

Change of Address Form

Member's name: _____

SSN: _____ DOB: _____

Address _____

City _____ zip _____

Phone # _____

email _____

If requesting withdrawal, what was your last day worked? _____

If we don't know where you live or how to reach you, there's no telling what you might miss out on in the future.

U have to tell us!

Editor: Todd Conger

Asst. Editor: Mercedes Clarke



UNION OFFICE HOURS
8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Monday-Friday

TELEPHONE NUMBERS: Orange County: (714) 995-4601
Long Beach-Downey-Norwalk Limited Area Toll Free: (800) 244-UFCW

MAIN OFFICE: 8530 Stanton Avenue, P.O. Box 5004, Buena Park, California 90622

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Greg Conger's impact will be felt for years to come

—by President Andrea Zinder



In my years of working with Greg, it has been a privilege to witness his many admirable qualities. Greg is hard working, passionate, compassionate, wise, and loyal.

Throughout his years at 324, Greg was a tireless fighter, he pursued what was right and never gave up. He shared his wisdom generously and was always open to the views of others. He had strong opinions but was a team player. I have known Greg as a voracious reader of history, politics and current events; always his scholarship informed his decisions.

Greg took tremendous pride in his family and understood that our members deserve a work - life balance to spend quality time with loved ones.

Most importantly, Greg never lost sight of the fact that we are here because of and for our members.

Greg began his union career in 1984 with Local 551 of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters. In 1992 he was elected President of that local. In 1994 Greg stepped down from that Presidency in the interest of merging Locals 551 and 324. Shortly thereafter he became Secretary Treasurer of Local 324 and in 2003 he was elected President.

Right after he was elected President UFCW members working in the grocery industry were forced to strike to avoid losing medical and pension benefits. Corporate employers set out to transform the industry from one that provided a respectable middle class career to one that provided a poverty wage, high turnover, and dead end job. At the same time, their concerted plan was to break the unions and deplete our treasuries.

With Greg's leadership, when the strike ended, because of our members' enhanced solidarity, Local 324 was stronger than it ever had been. Greg's leadership before and after that strike led to the conviction of Ralph's for felonies related to the lockout. A federal court order of restitution replenished our strike fund and provided compensation to our members.

As a chief negotiator in every contract cycle with the food employers since 2003, Greg's leadership protected our members' wages, benefits, and working conditions, helping to better the lives of tens of thousands of families.

In 2004, Greg was elected to be a Vice President of our International Union and immediately earned the respect and esteem of the entire UFCW International Executive Board and Local Union Presidents around the country.

At the same time, Greg served as chairman of our Health and Welfare Benefit Fund, one of the largest multi-employer plans in the country.

While 2003, 2004 were among the hardest years, Greg fought with our employers to maintain our medical and pension benefits up through the 2019 food negotiations.

The contract negotiated during our most recent food contract bargaining cycle is probably the best since prior to the strike and lockout. Greg was instrumental in this process and Local 324 is proud that he was at the bargaining table representing our members.

It has been an honor working with Greg and I will miss him. He will, however, always be part of the DNA of Local 324.

Labor

.....
Improving the lives of UFCW members
behind every decision Greg Conger made

A career that spanned 35 years and made an indelible impact in the lives of thousands of hard working men and women in Southern California ended Oct. 1 as Gregory M. Conger retired from the UFCW.

An event honoring his years of service took place at the Local's auditorium Oct. 20, drawing a crowd that included the Union's highest ranking dignitaries from Hawaii to Washington D.C., many of whom took to the podium to praise a long list of groundbreaking accomplishments.

The event included emotional tributes from family, friends and professional colleagues who credited Conger with leading an embattled Labor Movement to victories from the bargaining table to the halls of government.

One of several news-worthy highlights came when as the Local's new President Andrea Zinder announced that Conger's name would be remembered not only in the hearts of thousands but on the very building in which they were gathered.

By year's end, his name will be prominently displayed on the front of the Local's auditorium, which underwent a floor-to-ceiling renovation in 2015, representing one of Conger's most high-profile accomplishments of his time in office.

In a speech in which Zinder praised Conger's long and short-term goals for Local 324 on a variety of fronts, she cited the auditorium as an example of Conger's visionary style. It's state-of-the-art features also fulfilled a longstanding personal commitment Conger maintained —to guarantee that the building that bore the union's name be a space every member could take pride in.

Zinder's announcement came at the tail end of an evening that brought together many veterans of the Labor Movement. Before and after formalities, Conger seized on opportunities to swap stories with longstanding friends and colleagues.

Several of those present were among his earliest co-workers and who shared memories of four decades earlier when he was first starting a new profession. At least one of them recalled the time Conger nearly severed his finger after an accident with a saw.



of Love

.....
embers was the primary motivation
onger made in his 16-year tenure

Traces of the injury are still evident on close examination. It is one of the reasons Conger always emphasized workplace safety to members—his words of caution issued in a slightly louder octave to meat cutters.

Conger routinely shared anecdotes of his own experiences with members to demonstrate that he knew where they were coming from.

“When I first met Greg, my first reaction is that he was one of us,” said Executive Board member Charles Swain. “He is the real thing.”

Conger’s career path began in 1976 when he started at Alpha Beta as a meat cutter.

The job provided the stability and income necessary to support wife, Joyce, and two kids. Todd was seven and Kristen barely two when he started his new career. He and Joyce had purchased their first house in the sleepy suburb of La Mirada only a year earlier. By most definitions, they fit the mold of the All-American suburbanites all the way down to the dog and two-car garage.

Although his father was a hard-core, dyed-in-the-wool union man, Conger was content with being a more passive supporter of his union.

That changed when his union representative suggested he consider joining the staff of Meat Cutters Local 551.

After concluding that the idea had some merit, Conger set out to make it happen. Just prior to starting his new job as a union representative Jan. 2, 1984, he recalls stopping by his father’s house to share the news.

“Nothing in the world had ever moved Bob Conger to turn off Sunday football, but this news probably would,” Conger predicted.

After some innocuous small talk he announced he would be starting a new job the following morning as a member of the union staff.

Conger recalled that he had plenty of moments in his life that were worthy of accolades, but somehow this one, at least in the eyes of his father, stood apart from all others.

“He raised the remote control in the air and looked at me with tears in his eyes and pressed mute on the television. He had never in my life been so proud,” Conger recalled.

Some of Greg’s best qualities, trust, respect, people skills, loyalty made this Local into what it is today and I just hope I can follow in his footsteps.



—UFCW Local 324 President Andrea Zinder

Thankfully Greg, the impact that you have had on your members, this union, this country will last many lifetimes.



—UFCW Intl. President Marc Perrone

Early Days of Conger's presidency were among

Many myths surrounding the strike/lockout persist. Many are unaware that a court order and a new contract helped unions regain almost everything lost

Even the most casual observers of the retail grocery industry saw the fight brewing a full year in advance. Vons CEO Steve Byrd was giving speeches about the need to control healthcare costs at virtually every public event he attended.

Then Sec.-Tres. Greg Conger was urging members to save money because the likelihood of a strike was "somewhere between highly likely and guaranteed."

Local 324 President John Sperry stepped down from his position, handing over leadership a little more than a month before one of the longest and costliest strikes in American history paralyzed the retail grocery industry in Southern California.

Conger became one of the leading voices for workers both in the media and at other public

events.

His passionate and often emotional speaking style became a familiar one to radio and TV audiences until the end of the 141-day struggle.

Ralphs and Albertsons locked out their workers after the Unions struck Vons. But unable to operate without any skilled workers, management at Ralphs conceived a plan to bring workers back. This was uncovered when a handful of Local 324 members reported seeing scab UFCW members working in Ralphs stores. Conger personally appealed to the U.S. Justice Department, insisting that Ralphs was committing a felony by covertly hiring back locked out workers.

Although skeptical, Justice Department investigators looked into the accusations. Several



the hardest in the Labor Movement's history

months later, they announced a 53-count felony indictment of Ralphs Grocery Company.

The crimes were even worse than many suspected. The company's senior managers had hatched a plan to lure back employees and gave them bogus Social Security numbers to cover it up.

Ralphs eventually pled guilty to five felonies and paid the largest court-ordered restitution in history to all seven UFCW Locals and thousands of workers.

The day of the announcement, news reporters trickled into the union's Buena Park headquarters in search of comments from Conger.

Despite the repetition, Conger couldn't help choking up with emotion as he recalled the suffering Local 324 members endured because Ralphs "refused to play by the rules."

In newspaper and television interviews, Conger gave all the credit to the handful of brave members who worked under cover with federal agents to bring the practice to light, dismissing any suggestion that he helped make it happen.

Most people would be tempted to take a break at

that point, but Conger used the next few months to map out a plan to win back what unions lost in the strike/lockout.

Retired Exec. VP Rick Eiden recalls that Conger methodically set about laying the groundwork a year in advance of the next round of negotiations with the grocery chains.

Under the battle cry "Take it Back," Conger oversaw an aggressive public relations campaign that caught overconfident grocery executives off guard.

Employers maintained their uncompromising positions until the bitter end, but ultimately relented to the pressure.

The new contract abandoned the draconian two-tier wage and benefit system implemented in 2004 and included major gains in all areas, reversing setbacks from years past.

When Kroger announced that the CEO it installed at the helm of its Ralphs subsidiary would be reassigned, it was clear that Southern California's unions were healthy, on their feet and marching forward once again.





1984

After working as a meat cutter for several of the area's grocery chains, Conger was hired as a union representative for Meatcutters Local 551. He earned a reputation as a tenacious defender of members' rights.

1997

Soon after becoming Secretary-Treasurer, Conger embarked on an ambitious effort to create the Local's first ever stewards program. Despite push back from union reps unaccustomed to change, the program took root and is credited with being the driving force behind several successful contract campaigns.

2003

Within a month of being elected president of Local 324, one of the longest and costliest strike/lockouts in U.S. history would begin, forever altering the face of Southern California's grocery industry.

2005

Thanks, in part, to Conger's relentless back channel appeals, the U.S. Justice Department announced 53 felony charges against Ralphs Grocery Company. They eventually pled guilty to five felonies and paid the largest restitution penalty in history.

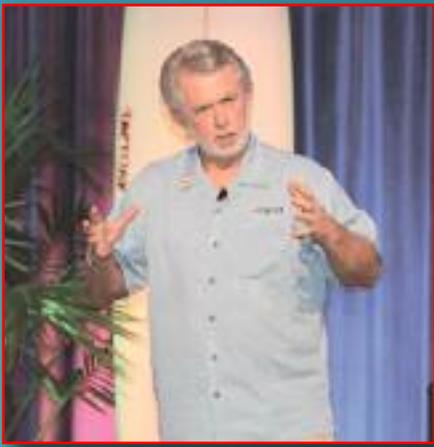
Only 13 months after becoming president of Meat Cutters Local 551, Conger merged with UFCW Local 324. He believed that the move would bolster the bargaining power for members — a belief confirmed by later contracts. He did what was best for members even though it meant he would have to step down as president.

1996

Conger became a UFCW International vice-president. The honor was partly an acknowledgement that his leadership kept unions alive in Southern California in the face of what became increasingly clear was an attempt to break them.

2004





2012

Conger travels to Sacramento to cast one electoral vote in the 2012 Presidential Election. He described serving as an elector as one of the greatest honors of his life.

2018

In the 2018 Midterm election, Local 324 helped flip the entire Orange County Congressional delegation from red to blue. In the summer of 2019, the number of registered Democrats surpassed the number of registered Republicans in the county.

2019

It appeared Conger would leave office the same way he came in—on strike. But a last-minute deal that protected benefits, increased wages and enhanced contract protections was a major victory for workers.

Conger successfully pushes employers to scrap two-tier system implemented by companies after strike/lockout. Under the battle cry “Take it Back” members ratify a new contract that regains most of what was lost in 03/04.

A comprehensive top-to-bottom renovation of the Local’s Buena Park headquarters begins. The remodel includes fitting the auditorium with state-of-the art sound and projection systems.

Recognizing his role in the union’s ambitious remodelling effort a few years earlier, President Andrea Zinder announced that the Local’s Auditorium would bear the name Greg M. Conger, forever preserving his name in the Local’s rich history.

2007

2015

Local 324
Thanks You
for your
years of
leadership



Decades of negotiating success follow Andrea Zinder into her new role

After graduating college, Andrea Zinder began her career with the National Labor Relations Board where her duties included investigating charges of unfair labor practices. The job gives her a singularly unique perspective and one she has relied on many times in her career. After a few years, Andrea knew she could not continue in a role that didn't specifically allow her to advocate for workers.

Once her interest in representing working people became known, she was offered the position of Director of Research and Collective Bargaining at UFCW Local 770. In 1997, Andrea joined the staff of Local 324 and continued to be one of the chief negotiators in Southern California. In September 2003 Andrea was elected Secretary-Treasurer.

She is widely known across the country for being a masterful negotiator. She has served as a primary negotiator for virtually every major contract involving a Southern California UFCW Local since 1984.

She has played primary roles in negotiations with the Retail Food Employers, Rite Aid, Savon, Disneyland and Kaiser Permanente.

Andrea currently chairs both the Food and Drug benefit trusts as well as the Drug Pension Fund and was

elected President of the UFCW Western State's Council in January 2019.

Andrea's service on the California Pharmacy Board from 1999 to 2010 gave her the experience necessary to help shape legislation in California to better protect and defend pharmacists and consumers and to maintain the high standards of the profession.

Those paying attention may notice that the extensive resume is not simply diverse. It effectively places her at the heart of contract negotiations for every one of UFCW Local 324's corporate counterparts.

Andrea said that meeting with members, attending rallies and other actions and helping members through tough times is what she likes most about her job.

She said she looks forward to carrying on the tradition of Local 324 while making changes necessary to remain relevant to our younger members and addressing the challenges of the workforce of the future.



Secretary-Treasurer Matt Bell represents the Labor Movement's next generation of leaders

Matt Bell began his career working for Vons as a dairy deli clerk for seven years in San Diego. After receiving a bachelor's degree from the University of San Diego California, he moved to Orange County to work as an organizer for UFCW.

During his 10 years as an organizer, Matt lead campaigns and walked door to door talking to thousands of workers about joining UFCW.

He successfully organized 1,000 new workers in a beef plant in the Imperial Valley, organized and executed a Nurses Strike in St. Louis, and assisted thousands of workers into joining the Union in Orange County and across the country.

For seven years Matt served as a Union Representative, enforcing the contract on a daily basis in local stores and work sites. Matt earned a reputation as a tireless advocate for members, successfully helping dozens return to their jobs. His efforts resulted in the largest back pay award for any



member in local 324's history, over \$90,000.

After the retirement of Rick Eiden, Matt was promoted to Executive Vice President where he has led the drive to organize the emerging cannabis industry. He currently serves as one of the chief advocates for cannabis workers as state and local officials grapple with the complexities of regulating the new industry.

He has worked to enact pro-worker legislation in Sacramento that protects the rights of cannabis workers, pharmacists, and affords striking workers unemployment benefits.

When President Conger tapped Matt to replace Eiden, he said the choice was an easy one. "He has the work ethic, intelligence and passion it takes to achieve a lot in the role. He also brings a new perspective to the job," Conger said.

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8530 Stanton Avenue
P.O. Box 5004
Buena Park, California 90622-5004



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Stats for Greg Conger's Presidency 2003-2019



STATS

Since
Greg Conger
became
President

Grievances filed	21,213
Members back to work	2,628
Backpay collected	\$4,388,952.13

UFCW324.ORG

LIVE BETTER
WORK UNION

