THE LABOR DAY LIST: Partnerships that Work

Celebrating Successful Labor Relations Strategies in the New Economy
What is The Labor Day List?

American Rights at Work Education Fund releases its fifth annual Labor Day List: Partnerships that Work to recognize successful partnerships between employers and their employees’ labor unions that are working well in the global economy. While many companies profess that they must implement massive layoffs, slash benefits, employ temporary and cheap labor, and hire union-busters to prevent workers from forming unions in order to remain profitable in today’s marketplace, the practices of businesses profiled here suggest there is another way.

The featured trendsetters are bucking the current “race-to-the-bottom” trend while defining new standards for 21st century labor relations that balance profitability with workers’ needs and rights. By fairly compensating employees and sharing decision-making responsibility with them through unions, these employers prove that embracing such a forward-thinking business model is a smart, ethical, and successful strategy.

The list, a current snapshot of some of the nation’s most innovative partnerships, includes a cross-section of national and regional employers of various sizes, locations, and industries. The highlighted employers have demonstrated a commitment to respecting workers’ rights and decisions to form unions, providing sustainable wages and family-friendly benefits, and speaking out on the need for others to follow suit.
Table of Contents

2  Introduction: Responsible Business Practices in a Tough Economy

3  American Income Life Insurance Company  OPEIU
   A leading voice within the business community for labor law reform that protects working families with supplemental life insurance.

4  Ivory Leathers, Inc.  IAM
   Bringing American-made apparel to a niche market while empowering workers and reinvigorating our manufacturing sector.

5  McGuire Scenic  IATSE
   Building scenery for diverse entertainment and industry projects, and growing momentum for worker-friendly policies.

6  Morton Williams Supermarkets  RWDSU/UFCW
   This New York neighborhood grocer supports workers’ rights and meets a diverse range of customer needs.

7  Print & Copy Center  GCC/IBT
   This printer has built a small business into a successful enterprise while treating employees with respect.

8  Raymond’s Painting and Decorating  IUPAT
   A family-owned business able to complete and project successfully due to its highly-trained union workers.

9  West Sheet Metal Company  SMWIA
   Valuing workers’ voices and skills on the job, this contractor has built a reputation of delivering projects on time.

10 Wisconsin Vision, Inc.  UFCW
    An eye care provider with a progressive view on workers’ rights and quality patient care.
In a climate of uncertainty and prolonged debate on how to fix our economic meltdown, some companies across the nation are weathering the storm by working closer and harder than ever with their strongest asset – their employees. American Rights at Work Education Fund’s fifth annual Labor Day List: Partnerships that Work, spotlights employers for their commitment to respecting workers’ rights and decisions to form unions, providing sustainable wages and family-friendly benefits, and speaking out on the need for others to follow suit.

**Productive Labor Relations Benefit Everyone’s Bottom Line**

Economic success does not have to come at the expense of workers’ rights. While many U.S. companies instinctively put the squeeze on employees as a first response to below standard financial forecasts, some of this year’s firms are surviving—and even thriving—due to their strong collaboration with staff. These employers share first-hand experiences of how business models focused on collaboration can increase productivity, customer and employee retention, safety ratings, and profits.

Longstanding relationships between unions and Labor Day List businesses have resulted in highly-skilled employees capable of meeting projects needs for their employers’ clients. Others featured this year are a diverse group of self-made entrepreneurs who want their workers to share in their company’s success. And many reap the benefits of the training their workers’ unions provide, helping minimize safety hazards and improve on-the-job performance. All have an unparalleled commitment to their employees.

**Taking a Stand for Workers’ Rights**

Employers showcased in this report walk the walk when it comes to respecting their own workers’ rights, and now they are going a step further by standing up on behalf of all U.S. workers. Every business profiled herein has spoken out on the need for meaningful labor law reform to ensure men and women have decent opportunities and their rights protected. Through their support of the Employee Free Choice Act, legislation making it easier for workers to choose to form a union, a new generation of visionary employers is laying the foundation for the financial well-being of workers and businesses alike.

The unique companies we highlight this year demonstrate that indeed, there is a better way. Representing wide-ranging industries from retail to insurance, they prove that good labor relations are possible in every sector of our economy. Labor Day List employers have skilled, innovative workforces that serve as an inspiration for others as we work to build an economy that works for everyone again.
A leading voice in the business community to support and protect working families

A leading insurance company in North America with a fully unionized workforce, American Income Life sets a high bar for respecting workers’ rights. Selling affordable supplemental life insurance for working families, the company also helps promote public policy that protects workers.

Respecting its employees’ choice to organize with the Office and Professional Employees International Union through majority sign-up over 40 years ago, the insurer and its workers see the rewards of an all-union staff. Its workforce earns fair wages, health insurance, and a defined pension benefit. However, the company’s “I Care” philosophy includes a unique system of collaboration that ensures high employee retention and satisfaction.

Unlike other insurance providers, where agents must find their own sales leads, the company’s marketing division generates leads, helping agents focus more on selling policies and less on researching clients. Recently, staff collaborated to design a new presentation that agents can use to market policies more efficiently. This partnership among coworkers to find innovative ways to increase sales enables everyone to have a part in the company’s success.

As Roger Smith, President and CEO of American Income Life believes, “When you treat your employees right, it increases productivity. It’s a great business model. Other companies have tried to mirror what we do and they just fail because they don’t have the culture behind it.” In fact, A.M Best, one of the oldest insurance rating companies in the United States, gave American Income Life a superior A+ rating for profitability in 2008.

The company has a philanthropic commitment to impact issues affecting working families. In 2008, Smith received the America’s Agenda “Health Care Heroes” award for speaking out as a business leader for healthcare reform. Additionally, the company supports the Employee Free Choice Act, viewing it as crucial to the future of America’s middle class. Smith has lobbied, written op-eds, run advertising, and launched a coalition of employers who support the legislation, Business Leaders for a Fair Economy. The company’s agents across the nation even recruited 11,000 new supporters of the bill.

“We believe the Employee Free Choice Act is a smart, fair and good public policy because it protects workers’ freedom to form unions,” explains Smith. “I challenge other responsible business leaders to support this landmark legislation. What is good for workers is good for business.”

Through its leadership and dedicated staff, American Income Life embodies this sentiment through the example it sets for others.
Manufacturing American-made apparel and empowering workers

>>> After repairing and altering leather garments for nine years, in 1992 Ruth Schepp started her own business, Ivory Leathers. The company has evolved into a six-person operation serving North Dakota and the needs of motorcycle and leather enthusiasts across the country. Schepp believes that American consumers will buy American-made products if given the chance, and is committed to helping resurrect U.S. garment manufacturing.

Schepp’s husband, a union machinist for 34 years, helped convince her that a union shop was the right way to conduct business. So in 2008, Ivory Leathers agreed to let its workers join the International Association of Machinists, through the majority-sign up process. “I thought my employees deserved to have a pension, fair wages, safe working conditions, and a good relationship with their boss,” says Schepp. And that’s exactly what they’ve earned. In fact, the company negotiated a contract with its workers in just three hours.

Ivory Leathers’ employees also work in an atmosphere based on mutual trust and respect. According to Barb May, a store employee, “Nobody ever hesitates to ask a question. Ruth Schepp has really created a strong team she knows she can depend on. She’s laid the groundwork so that everyone is on the same level here.”

Schepp has been recognized numerous times for her contributions to the business community, and in 1994, she was one of seven women in North Dakota to be honored with “Businesswoman of the Year” by the state. She is proud of the fact that as both an entrepreneur and a woman, she’s been able to cater to an industry made up predominantly of male motorcycle enthusiasts. And her success and knowledge within the industry gave her the confidence to launch ILI Clothing last year, which manufactures a wide array of apparel and accessories.

Schepp’s positive experience with her workplace’s union inspired her to speak up for the Employee Free Choice Act. “I want my employees to be able to choose to join a union and they already did. But I also want to see other workers have that choice without fear of repercussions,” Schepp proclaims. Writing letters to newspapers throughout North Dakota, participating in numerous conference calls, and joining a national coalition of business leaders supporting the bill, she’s doing her part to give workers what they deserve – a voice at work.
Building momentum for worker-friendly policies

Don McGuire started McGuire Scenic 14 years ago to provide theatrical scenery for local performances and national traveling shows. Since then, the business has evolved and diversified, supplying scenery for theatres, conferences, trade shows, and events. While McGuire can boast of working with top-tier clients across the country like Cisco Systems, the Ordway Theatre in St. Paul, and the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, the company is most proud of its record of giving men and women good jobs.

McGuire's commitment to its workers, who are represented by the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, inspires deep loyalty. In fact, several employees of McGuire Scenic have been with the company since it was founded. McGuire contributes to each employee's pension welfare fund, provides health insurance, and pays higher wages than non-union design companies. McGuire understands the sacrifice its employees and their families make during the long hours it takes to get the job done and compensates for it, paying overtime wages for early or late shifts and for work on holidays.

The returns of having a union workforce are extensive, both for the staff and McGuire Scenic itself. The union has helped hone the specialized skills required for scenic design work, including offering forklift and carpentry training that minimizes safety hazards and increases productivity. This union advantage is one reason traveling Broadway shows use McGuire Scenic: they know hiring union contractors results in superior performance and safety.

Don McGuire believes that openness and respect are keys to a successful labor-management partnership. “We try to keep it all open here, so there are no issues. If we know and follow the rules, which are fair, and if everyone stays in those boundaries, union and management can work together with no problems.”

As an employer, Don McGuire supports the Employee Free Choice Act so more working men and women can have the same rights and opportunities as his employees. “The benefits for employees and their families are far greater than benefits associated with non-union jobs,” says McGuire. “All workers should have a chance at forming a union because they are treated better.” When more workers can freely form unions, more companies will enjoy the benefits of a skilled, loyal workforce—an asset that McGuire Scenic knows firsthand.
A neighborhood grocer supporting workers, communities, and customer needs

Two brothers started Morton Williams Supermarkets with their first store in the Bronx over 50 years ago. The family steadily expanded to 12 stores by designing its operations to cater to the diverse populations of New York City, be it the Italian-Americans in Westchester or international patrons near the United Nations.

The grocer also found success by defying a cookie-cutter approach in its employment practices and work culture. As Avi Kaner, an executive at Morton Williams, attests, “In corporate America there’s often a negative dynamic between management and unions. In our case, it’s very different. We view it as a win-win situation.”

Morton Williams takes great satisfaction in providing a secure livelihood for its employees, and has honored its employees’ wishes to be members of the United Food and Commercial Workers. As its business expanded and new employees were hired, the grocer’s workforce has used the majority sign-up process to choose whether to join the union—including supervisors and management. The company believes that in order to have a stable workforce, employees must be given access to affordable health care, fair pay, and a pension.

The workers’ union reciprocates by providing three main benefits to the company: extensive health and safety training, a systematic approach to address issues of disagreement, and a loyal, veteran staff. Providing meat-cutting services to its customers, the union’s training assistance is invaluable to preventing injuries. With a union contract facilitating their operations, they have a clear blueprint to tackle any concerns and develop plans to overcome these obstacles. Because of the good benefits, many employees have worked at the company for over 20 years. The grocer affirms that by offering long-term job stability, its employees tend to become very good at what they do.

Morton Williams recently won an award from the Hudson County Chamber of Commerce for expanding its business to a developing community. It has also lent its voice to support many community and workers’ rights issues including a living wage ordinance and job creation for unemployed neighborhood residents.

Watching as retail giants advance a race-to-the-bottom business model, Morton Williams also supports the Employee Free Choice Act so competition is fair and all grocers can have comparable labor benefits and policies. Morton Williams is a testament to the fact that you can be successful in the supermarket industry and look out for your employees’ well-being.
Building a small business into a successful enterprise while treating employees right

Over the past 14 years, James O’Malley and his wife have grown Print & Copy Center into a thriving business just outside Pittsburgh. This full-service printing shop produces thousands of jobs annually and prints everything from envelopes and letterhead to direct mail and political signs.

The owners are most proud of creating good, middle class jobs. Benefits negotiated in their union contract provide 10 employees with 401(k) matching funds, two weeks of vacation, six paid holidays, and bonuses. The O’Malley’s have also raised wages and allowed for additional bereavement leave. These benefits, combined with a cooperative work environment, have led to great employee devotion. Many employees have worked at Print & Copy for 12 years or more, and most have logged over five years at the company.

O’Malley is confident that he can be competitive because of the quality of his employees’ work and dedication to customer service. Seventy percent of his business is corporate, and he attributes his ability to juggle a large variety of clients to his pool of adept employees trained by the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. “Most people fail to realize that unions make a big contribution to businesses through their apprentice program,” says O’Malley. “Every year, unions train thousands of young men and women, the next generation of workers, to go into the workforce.” The company’s good service, affordable prices, and repeat customers are a clear indication that Print & Copy is doing well by its clients.

O’Malley’s willingness to share his company’s prosperity with employees is at the core of his personal belief system, developed from his upbringing in a family of union firefighters, steelworkers, and police officers. “My father never knew his father because he worked 12 hours a day, 6 days a week. Without unions, life would still be like that today.”

Honoring this principle, Print & Copy’s owner supports the Employee Free Choice Act because he believes workers should have the right to join a union, without fear of reprisals. “There’s a place for unions, which is to make a safe work environment and make sure people are paid fairly,” asserts O’Malley. He has participated in press conference calls and appeared on a Pittsburgh radio program to urge the bill’s passage. Print & Copy Center is a testament to how small businesses with unions can have a successful operation, a dedicated workforce, and a great reputation.
A successful family-owned business illustrating the value of skilled union workers

Raymond’s Painting and Decorating is a poster child for how a family and minority-owned business can thrive through labor-management cooperation and entrepreneurship. Since 1978, the commercial painting company has served the Denver area with reliable, superior painting services while providing good, family-supporting jobs.

Raymond’s has built a reputation as a dependable contractor that can deliver projects on time. The company’s work has graced the walls of some of Denver’s most notable landmarks, including facilities at Qwest Communications, the University of Denver’s Nagel Hall, renovations at the Magnolia Hotel, premier regional community health network Denver Health, and numerous stores at the Cherry Creek Mall.

Co-owner Estevan M. Trujillo attributes this success largely to the strong relationship the company has with its employees. “We invest in our employees with good wages and benefits. We’ve been around for 33 years providing for our employees. They have a dedication to us as much as we have a dedication to them, knowing we have their best interest at heart in getting good work.” In addition to the higher wages that come with union representation, the staff earns premiums above their regular wages when performing hazardous, more technical, or after-hours work. The company also provides full healthcare benefits to its workers and their families, and a pension through the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades’ pension fund.

The company truly values having a highly-skilled workforce, finding it key to their top-notch reputation in the industry. Employees have access to professional development and training at no cost to them through the union’s apprenticeship program. All are required to complete 16 hours of upgrade training per year, including 10-20 hours of safety training to minimize on-the-job injuries. With their extensive training, it is no wonder that a number of Raymond’s senior employees are invited to participate as the union’s apprentice instructors and trainers.

Understanding that their company’s success goes hand in hand with giving workers a decent quality of life, Raymond’s has reached out to build support for the Employee Free Choice Act. Raymond’s founder and co-owners have lobbied Colorado’s senators, participated in town hall meetings, and worked with fellow employers who back the measure. Raymond’s ability to meet and exceed customer expectations while investing in the well-being of its employees shows that fully-union businesses can succeed in today’s economy.
Valuing workers’ voices and skills on the job

Started out of owner Allen William “Willie” West, Jr.’s garage, West Sheet Metal Company has built its business and reputation from the ground up. The company installs and fabricates heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems for high-profile clients like Lockheed-Martin and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute.

“I’m most proud of staying in business,” says West. “We’ve always prided ourselves on our good relationship with customers, and they return to us because they know we’re reliable.” He correlates this customer satisfaction to his committed, engaged employees, who have never registered a grievance or major complaint in the company’s history.

West attributes the company’s success partly to the benefits provided by a partnership with the Sheet Metal Workers International Association Local 100. Since he started the company, all of his employees have been members of the union. In fact, he completed a sheet metal apprenticeship of his own in 1973, and still carries his union card. Not only do his employees have fair wages, a direct benefit retirement plan, and health care, they also get the advantages of top-of-the-line training through their local union.

As new technologies for the sheet metal industry emerge, West knows he has something his competitors don’t: confidence that his workers can get the job done without complex supervision. “You have to be willing to understand that you are going to have some higher costs going in for your labor, but I think you get a better quality of people and the operation of your company is easier. You can turn your jobs over to your foremen and project managers and feel comfortable they’ll complete the task.”

In the spirit of valuing what unions bring to the table, West Sheet Metal supports the Employee Free Choice Act. Meeting with the staffs of Virginia’s senators, West urged lawmakers to support this worker-friendly legislation. As he puts it, “People should have a voice in the situation of their employment, so they can raise their concerns.”

Countering critics of the Employee Free Choice Act, the company has spoken out as a successful small business that grows and competes thanks to a strong labor-management partnership.
An eye care provider with a progressive view on workers’ rights

Wisconsin Vision runs full-service optical eye care centers, examining patients’ eyesight, selling optical accessories, and producing contact lens and frames in its own laboratories throughout the Midwest. The company has built successful one-stop shops for everything vision related, while earning a reputation for its outstanding record on union-management relations.

At Wisconsin Vision, employees view their work as a long-term career, not just a job—a direct result of the benefits the company provides and a healthy workplace relationship. The forward-thinking company has a long history of respecting its workers’ rights, allowing its staff to freely choose a union with the United Food and Commercial Workers through majority sign-up a year after it started its business. The negotiated contract provides salaries above industry averages and offers affordable health, dental, vision, and retirement benefits. They also have family-friendly leave benefits, including paid vacation, sick days, and family and medical leave. As Darren Horndasch, President of Wisconsin Vision, articulates, “If our employees are happy and knowledgeable, they are going to have a great interaction with patients. That’s great for business because it builds relationships with our patients.”

While opticians are not required by law to become certified by the American Board of Opticianry, Wisconsin Vision encourages its employees to do so by paying for their exam and giving bonuses for achieving certification. As new technologies emerge in the industry, the company hosts training sessions so staff can give the best patient care possible. This professional development, combined with the precision by which the company’s employees do their work, creates measurable results. Wisconsin Vision’s ‘remake’ rate, when eyewear measurements are off, is only 8.5 percent – well below the industry average of about 15 percent.

For 15 years, Wisconsin Vision has given back to its community, including providing free eyeglasses to displaced families. This commitment to ensuring all families in need have the same opportunities in life that employees at Wisconsin Vision enjoy is why Horndasch has thrown his full support behind the Employee Free Choice Act. He has publicly supported the bill by participating in a panel and signing a support statement, as well as joining a national coalition of entrepreneurs and business owners, Business Leaders for a Fair Economy. The eyewear company should be commended for its 20/20 vision on how respecting workers’ rights is a solution, not a hindrance, to successful business operations.
In its first and second annual *Labor Day List: Partnerships that Work*, American Rights at Work Education Fund featured the following successful partnerships between employers and their employees’ labor unions:

**The 2005 Labor Day List**

- **Addus Healthcare**  SEIU
- **Brightside Academy**  AFSCME
- **Catholic Healthcare West**  AFSCME, CNA, CHEU, ESC, IBT, LIUNA, SEIU, UNITE HERE
- **Cingular Wireless**  CWA
- **Costco Wholesale Corporation**  IBT
- **Douglas County School District**  ATU, AFT
- **Edward Kraemer & Sons**  IW, IUOE, LIUNA, OPCMIA, UBC
- **Harley-Davidson Motor Company**  IAM, USW
- **Kaiser Permanente**  AFSCME, AFT, IFPTE, KPNAA, OPEIU, SEIU, UFCW, USW

**The 2006 Labor Day List**

- **Allina Hospitals & Clinics**  ADIT, IUOE, MNA, SEIU
- **American Electric Power**  IBEW, UMWA, USWA, UWUA
- **Boh Bros. Construction Company**  IBT, IUOE, IW, LIUNA, OPCMIA, UBC
- **Jackson & Perkins**  UFW
- **McAninch Corporation**  IBT, IUOE, LIUNA, UA
- **NHS Human Services**  AFSCME, AFT, SEIU, SPFPA
- **North Philadelphia Health System**  AFSCME, SEIU
More Partnerships that Work

In its third and fourth annual *Labor Day List: Partnerships that Work*, American Rights at Work Education Fund featured the following successful partnerships between employers and their employees’ labor unions:

### The 2007 Labor Day List

- **AT&T, Inc.** CWA, IBEW, IBT, IFPTE
- **DoubleTree Hotel San Jose** UNITE HERE
- **Montefiore Medical Center** NYSNA, SEIU
- **SCA Tissue North America** USW
- **Stromberg Metal Works, Inc.** SMWIA
- **Swanton Berry Farm** UFW
- **Thompson Electric, Inc.** IBEW

### The 2008 Labor Day List

- **A. Zahner Company** SMWIA
- **Alabama Power** IBEWIA
- **Delta Construction Corporation** BAC, IUOE, LIUNA, UBC
- **DMAX-Ltd.** IUE-CWA
- **Gamesa Technology Corporation, Inc.** USW
- **Justice Clothing** IAM, UFCW, UNITE HERE
- **Maimonides Medical Center** CIR, NYSNA, 1199SEIU
- **State of Kansas** AFCSME & AFT (KOSE), FOP, GCIU, IAFF, IBT, KCGES, KSTA
- **Team Industries, Inc.** UA
- **Washington National Opera** AFM, AGMA

To request copies of previous editions of *The Labor Day List: Partnerships That Work*, contact srbprogram@americanrightsatwork.org

For more information or to view the publications online, visit www.americanrightsatwork.org
The American Rights at Work Education Fund

The American Rights at Work Education Fund is an educational and outreach organization dedicated to promoting the freedom of workers to form unions and bargain collectively.

Socially Responsible Business Program

Launched in the summer of 2005, American Rights at Work Education Fund’s Socially Responsible Business Program promotes awareness of socially responsible and ethical corporate labor practices. The Program engages forward-thinking business and labor leaders to develop and encourage sound policies and collaborative efforts that sustain workers, businesses, and society at large. The Labor Day List: Partnerships that Work is a project of American Rights at Work Education Fund’s Socially Responsible Business Program.

Nominations for the 2010 Labor Day List: Partnerships that Work

Each Labor Day, American Rights at Work Education Fund will profile a new list of employers that partner with their employees' labor unions to empower their workforce. To nominate an employer for the 2010 Labor Day List: Partnerships that Work, please contact:

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Please include your name, contact information, name of nominated employer, and the reason this employer should be considered. Submission deadline is April 2, 2010.