



ORGANIZING for
HEALTH and JUSTICE

52 Linwood Ave.
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cacwny.org

Clean Air Connection

JANUARY 2019 NEWSLETTER

We support Tesla workers



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In December, we launched a campaign with Tesla workers, United Steelworkers, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and the Coalition for Economic Justice to unionize the Tesla plant and put forward a vision to shift Buffalo from an extractive past to a renewable future that works for everyone, *not just the elite and wealthy*. We see the unionization of Tesla, and of the renewable sector, as a strategy to build a just and equitable renewable energy economy, an economy that provides generational sustaining careers as our energy system transitions.

Tesla was given \$750 million in taxpayer funding to build a state-of-the-art solar production facility. The multi-million dollar giveaway, part of New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's highly criticized Buffalo Billion program, is 1.5 times the entire budget for the City of Buffalo. The investment promised 1,450 careers at \$65K/year. After Tesla acquired the Solar City facility, the company advertised job listings for primarily entry-level positions with wages as low as \$14 an hour and limited benefits. "This is about the deal that was promised to Western New York," said worker and organizing committee member Curtis Johnson, who has worked for over 30 years in the manufacturing industry. "The deal was high road jobs. That was the promise."

Our campaign launch was covered by New York Magazine and Bloomberg, with far reaching support from Sierra Club, 350.org and Sunrise Movement! This work has the potential to set a precedent for generations of green jobs that are family sustaining as well as public investments that *actually serve the public*. The workers organizing at Tesla are leaders on the front lines organizing to make these promises to us and our community come true. Join us and show your support! Tell your friends and post on social media with the workers' hashtag #wepowerbuffalo.

Commemorating 40th anniversary of Love Canal

In November, member Diane Lemanski joined Lois Gibbs — director of the Center for Health, Environment and Justice — to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Love Canal disaster, and the creation of the federal Superfund program.

Gibbs' leadership brought national attention to the fact that an elementary school was built on top of a toxic chemical dump in Niagara Falls. She created the Love Canal Homeowners Association and was critical in the creation of the Superfund, a federal government-funded source for major disasters.

Lemanski connected the legacy of environmental injustice in Niagara Falls with the ongoing organizing across Western New York. "We need to unite together, to organize," Lemanski said as she described her experience successfully ending an unpermitted concrete crushing operation in her neighborhood.



Clean Air member Diane Lemanski, right, with Lois Gibbs.

Tonawanda Coke declares bankruptcy

On Oct. 12, in U.S. District Court, Tonawanda Coke revealed that it would close its facility and reorganize under Chapter 11 bankruptcy. Clean Air members living in neighborhoods adjacent to the company's property have experienced the criminal behavior of Tonawanda Coke for over a decade.

"Today is a little taste of justice for the kids that were struggling for air to breathe on playgrounds during asthma attacks, and families like mine who are still grieving their loved ones who passed away from cancer and lost their battles," said Clean Air board member Emily Terrana.

Shortly after the announcement, Clean Air called on New York State to assist in the transition of workers, many of whom had been put at risk during the company's operations. New York State formed a Rapid Response Team coordinated by the Department of Labor and held two workshops for workers to access services and link to employers.

If you are or know a TCC worker who couldn't attend the sessions, these two offices can assist: The Buffalo Career Cen-

ter (284 Main St., Buffalo, 851-2600) or the Niagara Falls Career Center (Trott ACCESS Building, 1001 11th St., Niagara Falls, 278-8258).

According to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, the lifetime cancer risk from environmental benzene exposure in neighborhoods around Tonawanda Coke is more than 10 times less now than a decade ago. What's more, despite a small uptick in benzene releases this year compared to last year, the levels are 92 percent lower since the century-old River Road plant closed in mid-October.

Before the government shutdown, EPA launched a website to provide information as the company's closure continues: www.epa.gov/ny/tonawanda-coke-corporation-tcc-site.

As the bankruptcy proceedings continue, Clean Air will continue to hold Tonawanda Coke accountable for remediating the site. A portion of the property has already been classified as a Class 2 Superfund.

Annual Meeting set for Jan. 31

Want to learn more about a campaign in this newsletter, or join a leadership team? Come to our Annual Meeting! It'll be on Jan. 31 from 5-7 p.m. at the United Way of Buffalo & Erie County (conference room 102), 742 Delaware Ave., Buffalo, NY 14209. The Annual Meeting is open to all, but only members can vote on the Board of Directors candidates. For a list of board candidates, visit www.cacwny.org. If you are a member and haven't received your ballot, contact Rebecca at Rebecca@cacwny.org.

Nominations open for annual awards

Each year, we recognize the work of our members and supporters at our Annual Dinner. Our work is based on the principle that no one can accomplish anything alone. We work with many people in many neighborhoods who deserve recognition. Who should we shine the light on this year? Go to <https://www.cacwny.org/get-involved/annual-awards-dinner/> to make a nomination.

Resilience Through the Lens

On Dec. 20, Clean Air and the CEPA Gallery concluded an eight-week social justice and photography course with a community exhibition that highlighted stories of injustice, bravery and strength told through local artists. Eleven community members participated in the course, which combined photography with grassroots expertise. The Resilience Through the Lens graduates focused on housing and lead, mental health, accessibility and disability rights, energy, and public investment. “Resilience Through the Lens gave us a place to connect with people who have a lot of different ideas on how to make Buffalo and the world a better place. It really opened my eyes to different local environmental issues, and it made me happy to see people in all walks of life thinking creatively about how to engage the public in our causes,” said participant Elizabeth Schlant.



Clean Air members attending the Resilience Through the Lens community exhibition at the CEPA Gallery in December.

\$40K for Justice in 40 Days...We. Did. It!

When we launched this fundraising campaign, we knew it was ambitious and would be hard, but we had an incredible team that made it achievable. And guess what...we did it! We raised \$59,796!

We would like to extend a huge thank you to the \$40K for Justice in 40 Days Team – a group of over 20 Clean Air members, board members and allies who fundraised their hearts out. And a special thank you to: 1. A generous supporter from an anonymous donor-advised fund at North Star Fund, and 2.

Our match supporters who made every dollar that was donated go twice as far: Joe and Nancy Weiss, Cynthia and David Silverstein, and Betty Stanton and Steve Halpern.

If you contributed, became a new member, renewed your membership or made a sustaining gift - THANK YOU! With your support, we will continue to build leadership, strengthen our relationships with one another, take on the corporate elite who pollute our neighborhoods, and take control of budgets and policies that impact our lives and communities.

Updates on Huntley Plant

Over the past four years, Clean Air and our partners in labor have worked to transition Tonawanda’s economy through the NRG Huntley coal plant retirement in a way that sustains and creates a tax base, provides family sustaining safe jobs, and improves community health.

In March 2018, NRG listed the site for sale. The Town of Tonawanda has proposed eminent domain as a strategy to take control of a section of the site in order to maintain access to vital raw water resources currently utilized by at least five companies that employ thousands of people. On

Dec. 3, the Town Board held a public hearing, which Clean Air members attended.

While we believe that public control of raw water intake is a step in the right direction for both transparency and accountability of the provision of this vital resource, Clean Air has requested that the town identify the specific portion of the Huntley property they are seeking to acquire. We are also requesting an extension of the public comment period to allow adequate time for public review and input.

In October, NRG Energy applied for the southern portion of the Huntley site to be remediated under the New York State brownfield program. The presence of coal

waste byproducts on the site presents the real possibility of toxins leaching into the soil and groundwater, putting public health at risk. Assessing the level of contamination is vital to remediation, redevelopment and eventual access to the waterfront.

Clean Air’s Huntley Just Transition Campaign Team reviewed the company’s application and submitted a comment urging that remediation efforts meet levels that are safe enough for humans to use the site for recreation and access to the water. The team also requested that the state require NRG to reassess the contaminants on the entire Huntley waterfront site.

Clean Air

52 Linwood Ave.

Return Service Requested



Become a sustaining member of Clean Air today!

Clean Air works to build the power of everyday people to make our communities healthier, safer, and more equitable places to live. **Becoming a monthly sustainer helps us continue to hold corporations and agencies accountable to putting our health and environment first.** Choose to give \$5, 10, or \$20 per month! For more information, call Julia at (716) 852-3813, or *send your support directly to:*

Clean Air, 52 Linwood Ave., Buffalo, NY 14209.

¿No eres miembro? ¡Inscríbese hoy mismo! Clean Air trabaja para desarrollar el poder de la gente para que nuestras comunidades sean más sanas, y lugares más seguros para vivir. Envíe su apoyo de \$ 10, \$ 20 o \$ 50 a:

Clean Air, 52 Linwood Ave., Buffalo, NY 14209

*Thank you to our
community partners!*



*Mercy United
CWA Local 1133*

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