



# THE CAUSE

DECEMBER 2006

*A Newsletter for the Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy*

## Building a Living Wage Region

With the adoption of the region's most recent living wage ordinance in May 2006 by the City of Ventura, CAUSE begins 2007 with a comprehensive policy research project designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the region's four ordinances and one city policy. As a result of strong public support in Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties, living wage ordinances and policies have been adopted by the County of Ventura (2001), and the cities of Oxnard (2002), Port Hueneme (2003), Santa Barbara (2006), and Ventura (2006).

Living wage ordinances require that employers receiving public funds, such as municipal service contracts, financial assistance, and or leases, pay their workers a wage above the federal poverty level. The region's first living wage ordinance was adopted in 2001 by the County of Ventura at \$8.00

per hour with health benefits or \$10 without, while the most recent living wage adopted by the City of Ventura is \$12.50 per hour without health benefits.

"Before the coalition takes up our next living wage campaign, it's imperative we have more information on how the county and the other local living wage cities are implementing these ordinances and policies, and if there's the need for us to go back to push for better compliance or amendments to existing ordinances, such as the current need to increase the county's outdated living wage level" stated Bernardo Perez, co-chairperson of the Ventura County Living Wage Coalition (VCLWC).

The CAUSE study, which is projected to be completed by the summer of 2007, will be conducted in collaboration



*Luz Bernardino, living wage activist, addresses the Ventura City Council.*

with the Partnership for Working Families, with research assistance from California Lutheran University and the University of California, Santa Barbara. The research project will include a review of current county and city service contracts, and interviews with city officials, employers and affected workers, as well as an analysis of current state and regional poverty data.

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## CAUSE Strengthens Ties with SEIU

Sharing stories of CAUSE's strong collaborative working relationship with organized labor, and in particular, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 998, as well as discussing SEIU's national agenda for immigrant rights and universal healthcare, CAUSE Executive Director, Marcos Vargas, and Community Planning Director, Cesar Hernandez met with SEIU President, Andy Stern during the recent Gamaliel Foundation 2006 National Leadership Assembly in Minneapolis.



*From left to right, CAUSE Community Planning Director, Cesar Hernandez, SEIU President Andy Stern and CAUSE Executive Director, Marcos Vargas.*

At a time when the percentage of workers belonging to unions nationally

is at its lowest level in decades, from 1996 to 2004, Stern lead SEIU in adding

over 600,000 new members, a 27% increase. With a bold plan to refocus the labor movement on building union density through organizing, in 2005 Stern also spearheaded the establishment of the Change to Win Coalition, which includes the UFCW, Laborers, SEIU, UFW, UNITE HERE, and Teamsters. Stern's book, *A Country That Works: Getting America Back on Track* (Free Press), presents his vision for building a strong, visionary, democratic and more strategic labor movement for the global 21st century.

# Greetings from the CAUSE President



Greetings to the extended CAUSE community,

Thank you so much for your presence beside us, your support beneath us, and your partnership with us throughout 2006! We couldn't have done it without you!

This year, CAUSE celebrated five years of work together in Ventura County. We were delighted that so many of you joined us for our anniversary celebration on October 13 so that we could see each others' faces and hear each others' stories. You are part of an extended community that has grown, in the past five years, to include over 13,000 individuals and 240 community organizations in Ventura County.

Together, we have helped to improve the lives of over 5,000 working families through:

Passage of living wage ordinances in Ventura County, and in the cities of Oxnard, Port Hueneme, and Ventura.

Opening Centro Mujer, a woman's organizing center, in South Oxnard as a focus of our Women's Economic Justice Program.

Organizing for health coverage for the 30,000 children in our county without it.

Increasing voter registration and voter education among youth and traditionally underrepresented communities.

As we develop these initiatives to enhance life for everyone in our county, we look forward to your continued partnership and support. In this season of generosity and light, we wish you much joy and look forward to working with you in 2007.

In peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Meidell'.

Pamela S. Meidell  
President of the Board

## No to Wal-Mart – Yes to a Livable Ventura

Two years ago a group of Ventura residents, business people, union representatives, people of faith and sustainable economy advocates came together to oppose Wal-Mart's plan to come into the city of Ventura.

The Stop Ventura Wal-Mart Coalition, with CAUSE's technical support, is working to convince the Ventura city council that a Wal-Mart does not fit the city's stated vision for Victoria Avenue, as expressed in the city's

General Plan, and that new rules are needed to actualize what is appropriate development for the Victoria Corridor. In January 2006, the council adopted a 12-month moratorium on all Victoria development to allow staff time to propose these new guidelines.

For over a year, Wal-Mart has been in discussions with city staff, seeking permission to reconfigure the site, with the city repeatedly stating its requirements for a scaled-down,

walkable Victoria. According to the City Manager's November 1, 2006, letter to the Wal-Mart Real Estate Manager in Arkansas, these discussions have been fruitless; the Wal-Mart representatives have shown no willingness to accommodate city demands.

The coalition, now renamed "Livable Ventura," is working to put a positive face on community participation in the city's planning process. Too often citizens get involved late in the  
*continued on next page*

## Celebrating CAUSE's Five Years of Work for E

**2001** Adoption of County of Ventura living wage ordinance

- Adoption of CAUSE proposed "working families" county redistricting plan by the Ventura County Board of Supervisors.
- First published report: *Meeting the Challenge: Extending Health Coverage to Ventura County's Uninsured Working Families*
- CAUSE's Women's Economic Justice Project established as a result of a campaign to include county in-home supportive service (IHSS) workers under county living wage ordinance.

**2002** Adoption of a City of Oxnard living wage policy.

- Annual CAUSE *Women Working for Economic Justice Conference*
- Publication of *Challenging the Feminization of Poverty: Women in Poverty in the Central Coast*

**2003**

Adoption of the City of Port Hueneme living wage ordinance.

# Amigas de Centro Mujer

**“Our goal is to build the power of working women and immigrants through leadership development and social action,”**

— *Luz Bernardino, founding Centro Mujer leader.*

Saturday, December 9, 2006 marked the first gathering of the Amigas de Centro Mujer, a philanthropic leadership group dedicated to the support of CAUSE’s women’s organizing center, Centro Mujer. Over sixty community

leaders were in attendance, including Carla Castilla of Congresswoman Lois Capp’s office, Jeanette Sanchez of SEIU 998, and Oxnard City Councilman John Zaragoza.

Centro Mujer, located at 4225 Saviers Rd. in south Oxnard, began four years ago as a vision of CAUSE’s Women’s Economic Justice Project. Opening its doors to the low-wage working women in Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties, in November Centro Mujer

celebrated 12 participants who recently graduated from the first leadership development class. These leaders have already begun putting their training to work by organizing actions at Oxnard City Council meetings around community input into the city general plan process and addressing the Board of Supervisors regarding children’s health coverage needs.

For more information regarding CAUSE’s Centro Mujer contact Gabriela Alvarado at (805) 487-8984.

## No to Wal-Mart *Continued from previous page*

development planning process, when all that is possible is to kill a proposed development. In contrast, following the “accountable development” model, Livable Ventura aims to get involved early in the development process. By getting involved early, community advocates can work with the city to negotiate a “community benefits agreement” with the developer. Examples of community benefits that are being negotiated in other cities in California are inclusion of affordable

housing, parks, living wage jobs, and traffic mitigation.

However, unlike many developers, Wal-Mart has demonstrated no intention of granting community benefits – based on its interactions with city staff. The world’s largest retailer believes its presence alone – with the promise of new jobs and low prices - is its gift to the community. But more and more, communities are catching on to the fact the Wal-Mart jobs are poverty-

level, increasingly part-time, and with meager (if any) benefits. And the low prices, if real, are at the cost of squeezing foreign and domestic suppliers and their workers.

To protect and enhance “Livable Ventura” advocates are determined to keep Wal-Mart out. Citizens have a right to “livable cities” that grow only through responsible, sustainable development. Goliath may be marching on Ventura, but David is well armed with determination and the growing public repugnance for the world’s largest retailer.

Staff’s proposal is scheduled to roll out to the public on January 29, 2007 – the same time the Victoria moratorium is set to expire. For more information on the Wal-Mart proposal and Livable Ventura, e-mail Nan Waltman at no2walmart@yahoo.com.

## Living Wage

*Continued from front page*

For more information on the VCLWC, and or CAUSE’s living wage research project, including volunteer and internship opportunities, contact Cesar Hernandez at (805) 658-0810 ext. 202.

## The CAUSE Next Issue February 2007

- **Creating Health Care for All**
- **Building a Movement for Immigrant Rights**
- **Strengthening Our Voice Through the Ballot Box**

## Economic and Social Justice for Working People!

### 2004

Mujeres Unidas por Justicia, Educacion, Respeto (MUJER), a grassroots membership based working women’s organization, established as an outcome of CAUSE’s Women’s Economic Justice Project.

- Through community-based unionization campaign 2,300, predominately women, home care IHSS workers receive union contract under SEIU local 998.

### 2005

Establishment of Ventura County Children’s Health Initiative, broad-based collaborative to insure all of Ventura County’s 30,000 uninsured children.

- CAUSE offshoot organization, Ventura County Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (VC CLUE), receives funding to hire organizing staff.
- Establishment of the Ventura County Social Justice Fund in collaboration with the Ventura County Community Foundation.

### 2006

Adoption of City of Ventura living wage ordinance

- One-year moratorium on Ventura Wal-Mart Development
- Opening of CAUSE’s women’s organizing center, Centro Mujer
- CAUSE Women Working for Economic Justice Conference



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## *Mark Your Calendars*

### **Fifth Annual CAUSE Women Working for Economic Justice Conference**

Saturday, March 17, 2007

Oxnard College

4000 S. Rose Ave. Oxnard, 93033

For more information contact Maricela Morales at (805) 658-0810 ext. 203

### **Ventura Working People's Alliance 2nd Annual Convening**

Saturday, March 24, 2007 (date subject to change)

North Oxnard Methodist Church

For more information contact Marcos Vargas at (805) 658-0810 ext. 201

### **CAUSE Farmworker Health Access Summit**

Saturday, April 14, 2007

For more information contact Maricela Morales at (805) 658-0810 ext. 203

### **Alice McGrath 90th Birthday Celebration**

Sunday, April 22, 2007

Orchid Room, United Food and Commercial Workers Union, Local 1036

For more information contact Carole Power at (805) 658-0810 ext. 211

## **BE A CIVIC LEADER!**

**CAUSE needs community and student interns in the areas of:**

- Policy Research
- Community Organizing
- Fund Development
- Office Administration

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or contact us on the net  
at [www.coastalalliance.com](http://www.coastalalliance.com)**

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