

CLOSE TO HOME: A LOCAL GOOD NEWS STORY FOR LABOR DAY

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By Ofelia Cardenas and Juanita Galipo

We work as a housekeeper and banquet server, respectively, at the Hyatt Vineyard Creek hotel in Santa Rosa. We are both mothers and Santa Rosa residents.

This Labor Day, we are celebrating a victory that will immediately benefit us and about 50 of our coworkers at the Hyatt, but which we hope will spread **to** hospitality workers throughout the North Bay.

Last month, together with a majority of our coworkers, we chose **to** join a union, and management respected our choice. That may sound like an unremarkable series of events, but in fact it is extraordinary. Most of the time, when workers try **to** organize a union, they face vicious resistance from their employer. The path **to** unionization winds through a minefield of intimidation and retaliation, and many workers who set out down that path never make it, either because they get fired or because the entire organizing campaign is defeated.

Just a few days before we officially joined our union, workers at the Nissan factory in Canton, Mississippi, lost an election **to** join the United Autoworkers, after what Sen. Bernie Sanders called “one of the most vicious and illegal, anti-union crusades in decades.”

A complaint filed by the regional office of the National Labor Relations Board includes allegations that Nissan threatened **to close** the plant if the union vote succeeded and threatened **to** fire workers who were involved in the organizing campaign.

This sort of thing not only happens in the deep South, it also happens right here in Northern California. Ten years ago, when workers at a hotel in the East Bay tried **to** organize, 12 of them lost their jobs after a well-timed immigration audit, which turned out **to** have been requested by a congressman at the behest of the owner of the hotel, who lived in the congressman’s district and had donated **to** his campaigns. This was only the most publicized example of what is unfortunately the norm.

Employers’ vicious resistance **to** unionization is matched only by workers’ need for it. Housing costs have gone through the roof and workers in the North Bay’s booming tourism industry simply cannot keep up.

In Sonoma County, the median hourly wage for a hotel housekeeper, according **to** the most recent data available from the Department of Labor, is only \$11.95. In Napa County, it’s only \$11.51, despite Wine Country being **home to** one of the most lucrative tourism markets in the world.

Our employer’s respect for our decision **to** unionize is unusual but not unprecedented. Our union, UNITE HERE, also represents workers at the Sheraton in Petaluma, where the hotel developer

signed an agreement (known as a “cardcheck neutrality agreement”) **to** respect workers’ right **to** organize before the hotel was even built. More recently, the Graton Resort and Casino did the same, allowing hundreds of casino workers **to** join UNITE HERE in an atmosphere of cooperation rather than conflict. As a result, our union brothers and sisters at these two workplaces earn wages and benefits far superior **to** the area median. These success stories can and should be duplicated elsewhere in our region.

Spreading the union throughout the Wine Country hospitality industry would make our whole community healthier. A parent who makes a decent living is better able **to** provide for her family and contribute **to** society, not **to** mention afford a decent place **to** live. For that reason, we call on hotel owners, operators and developers throughout the North Bay **to** follow our employer’s example and respect your workers’ right **to** organize a union.

Ofelia Cardenas and Juanita Galipo are employees at the Hyatt Vineyard Creek Hotel in Santa Rosa and leaders of the union-organizing campaign.



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