Member profile:
Shannon Lienhart
Mathematician, teacher, and social justice unionist Shannon Lienhart helps transform the political landscape at Palomar College and in North County San Diego.

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Make it fair: the campaign for commercial property tax reform
As the expiration of Proposition 30 approaches, a movement to push for new revenue to fund California’s future educational needs is emerging.

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A union-community partnership gets children to read
When the San Jose/Evergreen Faculty Association joins hands with the community, children’s literacy wins.

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Adjunct Action Day

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It’s time to build on the legacy of Proposition 30 with smart tax reform

The urgent need for Prop. 13 reform

S adly, despite the historic victory that Proposition 30 represented in California, the statewide and national trend toward more income inequality has continued unabated and now the end of the austerity hiatus is in sight unless we act to address it. Indeed while many of our state leaders seem happy to declare victory and do little else to address the need for more revenue to fund our state’s educational infrastructure as well as social services to help soften the hard edges of California’s shamefully high poverty rate, dire problems await us if we fail to act now to invest in the future.

The simple truth is that as hard as it is to do politically, the fight for progressive tax reform is at the heart of the central struggle of our time: the effort to address income inequality by more fairly taxing the rich and corporations in order to reallocate those resources for the greater public good.

But rather than addressing that need, many continue to prefer attacking educational institutions from K-12 to college for not being efficient enough or for perhaps not even being necessary as currently constituted. Why invest more in education, they say, when we can transform the system to do less with more? Thus just as we did with the fight for Proposition 13, as CFT President Joshua Pechthalt pointed out in his State of the Union address, “Big commercial interests have figured out how to avoid changing legal ownership and thereby not paying property taxes based on fair market value. What used to be a 50-50 split between residential and commercial property tax revenues has shifted to residential property owners shoulders 70% of all property taxes. Even smaller, newer businesses suffer while companies like Disneyland are essentially paying property taxes based on mid 1970’s property values.”

And addressing this inequity would bring in $9 billion of ongoing revenue which would allow us not just to stop new cuts from happening but to begin to restore what we have lost over the last several decades in educational institutions across the state.

That is something worth fighting for.

The California Federation of Teachers is an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, AFT-CIO. The CFT represents over 120,000 educational employees working at every level of education in California. The CFT is committed to raising the standards of the profession and to securing the conditions essential to provide the best service to California’s students.

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Perspective is published three times during the academic year by CFT’s Community College Council.

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Perspective is a member of the International Labor Communications Association and AFT Communications Network.
Perspective is printed and mailed by Pacific Standard Print in Sacramento.

Cover: Adjunct Action Day at San Diego City College.
JAME LYTEL PHOTO

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

June 22-26 Union Summer School, Kellogg West Conference Center, Pomona
July 1 Deadline for continuing college students to apply for Roael Teillbot Scholarships
July 12-14 AFT TEACH Conference, Marriott Wardman Park, Washington, D.C.
September 25 Division Councils, Sheraton Grand, Sacramento
September 26 Committees and State Council, Sheraton Grand, Sacramento
Shannon Lienhart became a mathematician because she was looking for truth. “I was raised an atheist, so I always wanted to find an absolute truth,” she laughs. “I thought I could find that in mathematics. But I didn’t, and I’m still dealing with that.”

Instead of absolute truth, she found teaching. “I did find my passion after all, and it still is. In fact, when I discovered how much I loved it, I became addicted to it.”

And then, after teaching, she found social justice and the union.

That was not such a far cry from the values of her family. In fact, it was very much aligned with what she saw in her parents. They both came from South Dakota, her father from a farming family with Amish roots. “We’d get these weird things for Christmas in the mail, little corn leaves woven together,” she recalls. But despite the Amish tradition of pacifism her father went into the Air Force, which led to Lienhart growing up in San Diego.

A life career as a pilot in the service didn’t make him pro-war, though. Both her father and mother opposed the war in Vietnam and her mother and grandmother marched against it. “After they saw the news on television of the beginning of the first Gulf War, I later saw them weeping.”

Daughter of a social worker

Lienhart’s mother was a social worker. Working in the San Diego County welfare department, she would grow angry at media stereotypes about “welfare fraud.” “She knew that wasn’t the reality for people who depended on aid to families,” Lienhart says. “She had big problems with the way then-Governor Ronald Reagan talked about families that needed this money. I think today I’m actually carrying on their passion for social justice issues, especially hers.”

Lienhart went to San Diego State University for both her bachelor’s and master’s degrees, which is where she also discovered teaching. And then, right out of graduate school, she got a permanent faculty job at Palomar College, where she’s taught for the past 25 years. “People today have to put in so many years before they can find a permanent position that I almost feel ashamed of how fast and easy it was for me,” she explains. “But it was a different world in 1991. And then, after teaching, she found social justice and the union.

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FAIR ACCREDITATION

Assemblyman Phil Ting’s AB 1397 tackles the problems with ACCJC

Next steps in holding ACCJC accountable

Despite the recent ruling that the ACCJC acted illegally in its 2013 decision to disaccredit City College of San Francisco, the fight for fair accreditation in California community colleges is not over. Now is the time for others to hold the ACCJC accountable. Several state legislators have stepped up with three bills to enhance oversight of the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC). Described as an agency “gone wild” by former CFT president Marty Hittelmann, the ACCJC has sanctioned community colleges at an alarmingly higher rate than its counterparts in all other regions. When it decided to terminate City College of SF’s accreditation without adequate justification and due process, this opened the door to further scrutiny around its conflicts of interest and the illegal and unfair actions committed by the ACCJC.

Fair Accreditation Act

CFT and AFT 2121 first documented the travesties of this commission in an April 2013 complaint to the U.S. Department of Education. Since then, the groundswell of evidence has paved the way for reform efforts. CFT has been working closely with Assemblymember Phil Ting on AB 1397, the 2015 Fair Accreditation Act, a broad accreditation reform bill. It stipulates that at least a reasonable proportion of visiting teams must be academics, and that “relatives” cannot be involved in accrediting decisions to avoid conflicts of interest. It requires greater transparency in the ACCJC’s meetings, decision-making processes, and records.

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Planning processes to SLO documentation, after the ACCJC declared Show Cause in July 2012. Lastly, under Ting’s legislation, the ACCJC will no longer be able to stack the appeals panel with its past commissioners and affiliates, as it did in City College’s case. Assemblymember Ting has also sponsored AB 1385 which would safeguard community colleges by giving them the authority to prevent the ACCJC from collecting special assessments to pay for its legal fees. Assemblymember David Chiu introduced AB 404 in February to coordinate the roles of the federal and state agencies in oversight of this regional accreditor. ACCJC is a private entity which until recently enjoyed monopoly status in accrediting two-year and community colleges in California. Colleges under sanction are not afforded an opportunity to question the validity of the ACCJC’s decisions. The ACCJC has created a climate of fear in the California community colleges. AB 404 would let colleges report confidentially on the impacts and behavior of the accreditor to the CCC’s Board of Governors, who would report these findings to the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI). This bill recently passed out of the Assembly Higher Education Committee.

In an op-ed published by the San Francisco Examiner, Chiu described the role of the colleges in this process: “College administrators, trustees, faculty, staff, students, and others would be able to communicate how they perceive a federally-recognized accreditor is complying with federal law in the performance of its duties.” AFT 2121 President Tim Killikelly is optimistic that these bills will pave the way to reforming accreditation of our community colleges: “The time has come for the ACCJC to be held accountable for its actions. These pieces of legislation will go a long way towards reforming the accreditation system in California.”

Calls for more reform

On the legal front, Judge Curtis Karnow ruled in January that when the commission decided to yank City College’s accreditation in 2013 and added ten areas of noncompliance that were never mentioned before, that they had engaged in “significant unlawful practices.” Judge Karnow ordered a final injunction to remedy the ACCJC’s violation of due process rights. The commission had to produce a detailed report in reconsidering its decision to terminate CCSF, which it sent to the college in early April. The commission’s stance has been staunch denial of any wrongdoing, despite a host of improper and illegal actions documented by Judge Karnow, the U.S. Department of Education, the California State Auditor, the CFT and AFT 2121.

On other fronts, AFT 2121 has engaged in battles with an administration installed after the onset of the accreditation crisis. In January, credit classes at City College’s campus serving a low-income Tenderloin community in San Francisco were abruptly relocated and the start of noncredit classes delayed, ostensibly for reasons of seismic safety. Yet the college community was not consulted in the months leading up to this decision.

City College faculty have engaged city officials and the college community in efforts to respect the voices and needs of the most vulnerable students. The union ensured that faculty rights around workload were respected amid the shuffle of moved classes. AFT 2121 also played a key role, along with the Academic Senate, in forestalling, for the time being, a misguided reorganization of departments.

Community College faculty have remained committed to meeting students’ educational needs. While ACCJC pays lip service to educational quality, it has sanctioned colleges for primarily non-academic reasons. Now a rising tide of supporters are clamoring for accreditation reform system for the state’s community colleges, in continuing the primary work of educating and supporting students.
Closing corporate tax loopholes can fund the future

The fight for progressive tax reform continues: it’s time to make it fair

As we continue to push for equity for our part-time faculty and fair pay and good benefits for everyone we represent, we are faced with the fact that after what is likely to be a decent year for the budget this time around, dark clouds loom.

Indeed, just as the money from Proposition 30 has begun to right California’s financial ship, we know that the sales taxes from that measure are set to expire and, right behind them, the tax increases on top earners.

The fact is, the Governor insisted that the tax increases in Proposition 30 be temporary hoping that the economy would pick up enough to make continuing this revenue stream unnecessary. Unfortunately, his hope has not come to pass and the expiration of Proposition 30, if allowed to happen, will hit education in California hard.

Thus, if we don’t want to go back to the bad old days of budget cuts, hiring freezes, and general austerity from K-12 to the UC and CSU systems, we need to find a way to fill the hole in the budget that the expiration of Proposition 30 will create. Of course, the most logical course of action would be to extend or make permanent Proposition 30’s taxes on the rich and stop budgetary bleeding before it starts. But, truth be told, even this is not enough.

CFT leads the way

If we ever want to get to a place where we are not just preventing cuts but actually restoring California’s education system to what it was when it was the envy of the country, something bolder is needed. And that means taking a look at the harmful legacy of Proposition 13.

As CFT President Josh Pechthalt noted in this year’s State of the Union address, “Prop. 13 was part of a national anti-tax effort led by groups like the Howard Jarvis Tax reform group . . . Since 1979, California has lost tens of billions of dollars in uncollected property tax dollars that should have gone to public schools and vital social services.”

Indeed, when Proposition 13 was first approved by voters in 1978 it was sold as a protection for single-family homeowners. But what voters were not told is that Prop. 13 contained giant loopholes that allow some commercial property owners to avoid paying their fair share of local property taxes. This gives tax avoiders an unfair advantage over smaller, competing businesses that are paying their fair share and deprives our communities of much-needed revenue. As a result, California has made deep cuts to public safety, fallen behind in student funding, and been forced to close parks and libraries.

It’s time to close the loopholes that allow some commercial property owners to avoid paying their fair share and to reinvest these lost funds in California’s future. This would result in $9 billion of additional revenue each year that could be invested in schools, colleges, roads, health care, public safety, small business relief, and more. This solution adds tough accountability provisions to ensure funds are spent appropriately, and it does not touch residential properties covered by Prop. 13. In fact, it protects them.

If we close the loopholes and make it fair, it will bring in real long-term sustainable revenue to help make California and its schools great again. As Pechthalt put it:

“Fighting for progressive tax reform is exactly the kind of struggle we need to be a part of. Not only do we have a real need for additional funding, but it allows us to raise issues of income distribution and inequality, the vital role of government and the obligations that we have to support our children and the next generation of decision makers. It deepens bonds with our students, parents and community members . . . .”

Taking on Prop. 13 is an issue of economic justice as well as generating revenue to fund the kind of public education and services all Californians deserve.

We have formed an impressive labor-community coalition and the CFT sits on the executive committee with California Calls, SEIU, CTA, ACCE and the Advancement Project.

Community-labor alliances get the goods

Chris Wilson, the Associate Director of Alliance San Diego, a local affiliate of California Calls, echoes Pechthalt’s enthusiasm for the cause of progressive tax reform and the widespread benefits it could bring both at the statewide and local levels.

Reforming Prop. 13 to close corporate loopholes will provide billions in revenue for our state. This will help us provide long-term stability in funding for education, public safety, and services vital to improving the living conditions for all Californians. With this reform we can bring an estimated $803 million to San Diego County in 2019…this is a game-changer. Imagine a future where people won’t have to choose between feeding their families and a college education for their children. This is the time…this is the fight! Alliance San Diego is excited to work with the coalition of faith groups, labor, and community organizations across the state, as well as our local partners, on reform that will provide revenue improve the quality of life for all residents for generations to come!

Certainly there will be powerful forces against us but the early polling shows that this is a fight we can win and one that could bring together a dynamic new labor-community alliance aimed at transforming the future of California for the better. !

By Jim Miller, AFT 1931
Report from Sacramento

April is the month when the initial round of Capitol hearings kick into full swing as all bills get vetted through their first policy committee. I am pleased to report that, as of this writing, all CFT sponsored bills are still alive!

**AB 1010 (Medina)**

The first of our bills, **AB 1010 (Medina)**, mandates a robust part-time job security system that would apply to all districts that currently do not have these protections in their collective bargaining agreements. It creates minimum standards for part-time faculty job security at California’s Community Colleges.

**AB 1066 (Gonzalez)**

**AB 1066 (Gonzalez)** prevents schools from misusing the ability to hire temporary classified employees indefinitely rather than utilizing permanent classified employees for the same positions.

Over 30 years ago, the legislature decreed that the non-academic employees of K-12 and community college districts must be included in the classified service. However, many workers in the state have been misclassified as “temporary” employees, preventing them from earning permanent status, due process rights, fixed and delineated work duties, vacation days, sick time, holidays and other benefits. **AB 1066** prevents such wrongful exclusions.

**AB 1066 was heard on April 8th in the Public Employees, Retirement, and Social Security (PERSS) Committee where it passed 6-0. It now moves on to be heard in the Assembly Higher Education Committee on April 28th.**

**AB 1385 (Ting)**

**AB 1385 (Ting)** requires the accreditor to seek approval of its member institutions prior to assessing its member institutions for the agency’s legal costs. The bill stipulates that the ACCJC’s legal costs cannot be reimbursed under this measure are giving that part-time faculty retained and accountability ensuring security with consistency for Colleges at California’s Community Colleges.

**AB 1010 (Medina), mandates a robust part-time job security system that currently do not have these protections in their collective bargaining agreements unless the colleges have approved the assessments by a majority vote of its institutions. Despite the ACCJC violating state and federal law and regulations, the state, through its current accreditor (ACCJC) has employed a deeply flawed process and has violated state law and federal regulations. In response to these findings, **AB 1397** proposes reasonable reforms to the community college accreditation process by ensuring that fairness, objectivity, and transparency guide the process of accreditation.

**AB 1397 was heard on April 28th where it passed 7-2.**

**SB 373 (Pan)**

**SB 373 (Pan)** attempts to successfully address the more than quarter of a century goal of the legislature to assure that at a minimum, 75% of community college classes are taught by full-time faculty. One of the goals of **AB 1725** to mandate an increase in the percentage of courses taught by full-time faculty. The purpose of **SB 373** is to correct this shortcoming in the original legislation by providing a method by which the stated goal of **AB 1725** can be attained. The bill limits the absolute number of part-time faculty a community college district may hire to no more than the total equivalent number of part-time faculty currently employed during the 2014-15 fiscal year. This proposal also contains a prohibition against newly hired tenure-track faculty from performing any type of overload assignments during their four-year probationary period until they become tenured regular employees.

**SB 373 was heard on April 8th in the Senate Education Committee where it passed 5-2 over the objections of the committee chair. It now moves on to be heard in the Senate Appropriations Committee.**
This lobbying campaign began with an anonymous Facebook post on October 1, 2014 calling for a national strike on February 25, 2015. The seeds of the National Adjunct Walkout Day were planted. In earlier articles I have discussed in more detail the rationale behind this event, but the need for such an event was clear and pressing.

While there were a number of actions across the state, we at CFT need to do a better job of coordinating these types of events with other locals and other higher education unions. Along with some big actions sponsored by my local in San Diego, there were several other events across the state. At UC Santa Cruz, adjuncts held a rally and march behind a puppet of “Saint Precaria.” In San Francisco, adjuncts at the San Francisco Art Institute held a walkout and rally at noon. At UC San Diego, there was a march, rally, and teach-in and there were also events at Berkeley.

At our local here in San Diego, we decided that a strike was the wrong way to go. There were many reasons for this decision, but ultimately many adjuncts felt that a strike would be less effective than a day of action, and that a day of action would better serve our goal of trying to educate the larger community about these issues, and they were almost uniformly enthusiastic about doing so. By Ian Duckles, AFT 1931

Another surprising and inspiring aspect of the event was seeing the level of student engagement. Many of my colleagues and I spoke directly to our students about these issues, and they were almost uniformly enthusiastic about them, and could easily grasp the injustices involved.

under the leadership of Jim Mahler and in consultation with the Part-Time Faculty Committee, had already initiated a lobbying campaign to urge the Governor to allocate $30 million for adjunct office hours, $50 million for adjunct pay equity and $100 million for the conversion of part-time to full-time positions. This lobbying campaign began asking for more resources for adjunct issues. Furthermore, because we are adjuncts and many of us teach on multiple campuses in multiple districts, we were also able to reach out to other union brothers and sisters so as to send a coordinated message across the San Diego region. We worked closely with representatives from Palomar College (AFT 6161) and Southwestern College (Represented by the CTA) to craft a coordinated campaign to send a message to the public at large and the governor specifically. As a result we were collectively able to generate over 1500 letters to Governor Brown from faculty, staff, administrators, students, and members of the community.

We also worked closely with Fred Glass, CFT Communications Director, to craft a message to the media and to try and get media to turn out for our rallies. In this effort we were also successful, generating positive reports in the San Diego Union-Tribune (our local daily fish wrap), the San Diego Reader, and other local and campus media.

One of the more surprising and inspiring aspects of the day from my perspective was seeing how other campus groups responded to our actions on that day. We only planned rallies at three of the six campuses we represent. This was mainly because our plans only had so much time and energy so we focused on our three largest campuses. Seeing what was going on, other campus groups came together to also honor adjuncts. The Academic Senate at Miramar College chose to put on an “Adjunct Appreciation Day” pizza party in the late afternoon/early evening. At our continuing education location in Mid-City the adjuncts and full-timers came together to plan their own rally with songs and banners. As this illustrates, our planning had a kind of “multiplier effect” incentivizing other groups who didn’t want to be left out.

Another surprising and inspiring aspect of the event was seeing the level of student engagement. Many of my colleagues and I spoke directly to our students about these issues, and they were almost uniformly enthusiastic about them, and could easily grasp the injustices involved. Taking note of this, our local has reached out to student leaders on campus in order to create a multi-district student centered group to work on issues of educational justice. This work is still in its early stages, but the initial responses from students and student groups have been overwhelmingly positive with students thanking us directly for putting together such a group. Needless to say, we are quite excited about the possibilities this group holds for future actions. Perhaps we will even be working with and cultivating some of the future leaders of the labor movement!

Looking further into the future, we would like to make the last Wednesday in February an annual event to acknowledge the hard work of adjuncts and to remind the campus community and the public about the many ways our labor is taken advantage of, and the ways that we are exploited by the current systems in place in higher education. We hope to craft an even more coordinated, statewide message when we do this event next year.

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San Luis Obispo

**Non-credit ESL teachers come into the union at Cuesta College**

Non-credit teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) at Cuesta College are in for a big raise. The twelve instructors teach non-credit ESL courses in the college’s division of community programs and continuing education.

“Historically, they have been separated from the rest of Cuesta College faculty,” says Debra Stakes, president of the Cuesta College Federation of Teachers, AFT Local 4909. The non-credit ESL teachers have been paid at a much lower pay scale. Instead of a system of peer evaluation, they’ve been evaluated by the director of community programs, who has no disciplinary expertise. And they’ve had no protection, since they haven’t been covered by Local 4909’s union contract.

The non-credit teachers have a 5-step salary schedule, and they all start at step one, regardless of experience. While the steps go up from there, they top out well below the rate for faculty teaching for-credit courses with equivalent knowledge and seniory. Several of the teachers have been teaching for over 10 years.

“We are bringing these teachers out of the shadows, into the bargaining unit,” Stakes emphasizes.

**San Jose**

**A union-community partnership gets children to read**

A couple of years ago, the leaders of the union at Evergreen Community College, the San Jose Evergreen Faculty Association, AFT Local 6157, heard California Attorney General Kamala Harris speak at a CFT convention. “What she said about the school to prison pipeline resonated with us,” says local vice-president Frank Espinoza. “If kids aren’t reading at grade level by the third grade, she told us, many will have issues with the criminal justice system later on.”

Local leaders were even more aghast to learn that the corporations operating for-profit prisons were even making projections of future prison populations by looking at the percentage of kids with trouble reading at that early age. When the teachers returned to San Jose they took a look at their own community, determined to do something about this. “Our college is in a community in East San Jose, with many poor and immigrant families,” Espinoza says, “where we know many don’t have books at home. If children don’t have them as part of their home life, they’ll be less likely to learn to read early in their lives.”

The union then reached out to one of the most active organizations in East San Jose, Somos Mayfair. Mayfair is the name of one of the oldest neighborhoods in the city, the name of the group means, “We are Mayfair.” Within this neighborhood is the Sal Si Puedes barn, where farm worker union founder Cesar Chavez lived in his youth. Somos Mayfair already had a literacy program, designed to get kids and parents reading.

Its mission is “cultivating the dreams and power of the people of Mayfair through cultural activism, social services and community organizing. We are generations of immigrants, rooted in a vibrant community who nurture healthy families and successful students, and who speak out for justice in Silicon Valley.”

According to Somos Mayfair, every year 200 children in the neighborhood enter kindergarten. But in 2011 over 85% were unprepared, and four years later, by the third grade, only 27% at Cesar Chavez School were reading proficiently.

To push back, the organization recruited “promotoras” – volunteers who work with the 400 local families with children under 8. They in turn try to get families to adopt daily practices that encourage reading, including reading to the children for 20 minutes a day, as well as having a healthy diet, exercise, and time for reflection.

What Somos Mayfair didn’t have was money and resources, and especially books. “We went to them, and explained that the AFT has a partnership with First Book, a project that provides books for children at no cost. We could get them books for the kids to take home. But the books would still have to be shipped, and that cost money that Somos Mayfair didn’t have. So our local made our first donation to this cooperative effort – $500 to pay for getting children’s books to San Jose.”

As a result, Somos Mayfair was able to get 3200 books into the hands of children, who could take them home. The organization has requirements for families who want to participate. Kids have to attend a literacy fair, and take part in a certain number of activities to qualify. Getting the books is part of a larger program that involves visits by the promotoras at home and literacy events in parks and other public places. Some families even participate in documenting their own history, and that of their community.

“Promotoras” volunteers give books to children in Mayfair.

**Literacy activities are closely aligned with academic schoolwork, Espinoza says, in order to ensure pre-school and young school-age students are progressing in their academic requirements.** “We didn’t begin this out of the blue,” he explains. “Some of us on faculty have had a relationship with Somos Mayfair for many years. Arturo Villareal, for instance, wrote about the historic organizing efforts of Cesar Chavez and the Community Service Organization in this community. Organizing is deeply rooted here, with a rich history that goes way back.”

A number of Evergreen students themselves come from the neighborhood, and at the college teachers began to recruit students to volunteer with the literacy drive. “The Mayfair is often stereotyped as a poor and immigrant community in a kind of demonizing way,” he charges. “This effort enabled young people here to validate their rich culture as a source of strength.”

Espinoza believes the effort has been good for the union too. “This is our community,” he emphasizes. “By being active in it, we’re going beyond wages and working conditions. We’re taking responsibility for helping to organize so that our children don’t fall and become statistics.”

Somos Mayfair gets it. They’re doing phenomenal work with very little resources, and as a union, we can make a difference by working with them. We’re very fortunate to have this partnership.”