

Farm labor group, Reynolds American go back and forth over human rights abuses

CHRONICLE STAFF REPORT

Scores of people marched to the Reynolds American building, where the company's shareholders meeting was being held on Thursday, May 7, to demand the company act to ensure that its supply chain is free of human rights abuses.

The Farm Labor Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO (FLOC) then marched to Lloyd Presbyterian Church, on 748 Chestnut St. and held a rally.

Baldemar Velasquez, president of FLOC, a union that represents tobacco farm workers in North Carolina and the U.S. South, said, "We'll keep coming back until Reynolds American decides to really do something about the conditions farm workers endure in North Carolina tobacco fields. It took us five years just to sit down and talk with Reynolds; this shows that our actions are working."

FLOC is focusing on three areas: reliance on human trafficking for the company's labor supply on contract farms; squalid conditions found in the labor camps; and the state of fear of retaliation for workers who complain about these abuses.

Velasquez believes that only when migrant farm workers have a recognized worker organization can their complaints

about their working and living conditions be effectively addressed. He wants Reynolds American put into practice the company's commitments to human rights and sign an agreement guaranteeing freedom of association on their contract farms. After nearly three years of discussions Reynolds American has yet to sign an agreement with FLOC.

"It took us five years just to get a meeting and we've been waiting for nearly three years for a signed agreement" Velasquez said. "How many more years will it take before Reynolds American signs an agreement with FLOC guaranteeing freedom of association on their contract farms?"

"We had an extended Q. and A. sessions where folks were quite cordial," said David Howard, media contact for Reynolds American. "We had some good back and forth, and good discussions on matters of interest, so overall it was a very good annual shareholders meeting."

"We were able to illustrate and give summary of many things that R.J. Reynolds has done in taking significant steps to promote responsibility in the tobacco supply chain in 2014, stressing that we remain committed to finding ways to make further improvements moving forward."



Photo by Erin Mizelle for the Winston-Salem Chronicle
Jasmine Whaley, a community supporter of AFL-CIO, reacts during the rally as she and hundreds of people of all races and ages join in support of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee's efforts to end human rights abuses in North Carolina tobacco fields.

In 2014, in advance of FLOC's 2014 organizing campaign that the union had last year, FLOC had expressed to us concern about having access to workers, Howard said. "To assist in that, we worked with grower groups to educate growers about the rights of access to FLOC, so FLOC could come and communicate with workers on the farm about the union. We invited FLOC to inform us about any violations of that right and we did not receive a single report of a RJRT (R.J. Reynolds Tobacco) grower denying workers access to FLOC, so obviously I think that went well."

"In last year's shareholder meeting, FLOC had also said that workers might suffer retaliation if asking for a raise or complained about working conditions, so R.J. Reynolds Tobacco company's 2015

Grower Contract expressly prohibits growers from retaliating against workers for seeking changes in the terms and the conditions of their employment.

This is in our contract language with our growers."

Howard said Reynolds American officials "feel we have listened to FLOC and took direct action after listening to their concerns, in an area where we can. That's what's important here. ... We are working very hard to make a difference."

Howard said that in Reynolds American's grower contracts this year, "we now prohibit the use of child labor. In other words, growers can't employ workers under the age of 16. They can employ 16 and 17 year old workers only with written parental consent and only after they've received safety training."

BIG TENT PROJECT

Tai Hensley, a junior at Wake Forest University and president of the multicultural sorority Delta Xi Phi, stands in front of The Big Tent Project, a project addressing race relations and diversity in Winston-Salem since 2011.



Members of the multicultural sorority, Delta Xi Phi, and Wake Forest student government showcase The Big Tent Project as together they ask the question, "Who are you?" in efforts to challenge stereotypes and stop racism.

Photos by Erin Mizelle for the Winston-Salem Chronicle



CHRONICLE STAFF REPORT

A project addressing race relations and diversity in Winston-Salem reappeared, this time at Wake Forest University. It is called "The Big Tent: Transforming Race Project."

In 2012, the project traveled to different high schools to discuss the topic of race.

This project has been in the works since 2011 through the Winston Salem Human Relations Department, Professor David Finn at Wake Forest University, and several Wake Forest and Winston-Salem/Forsyth County students as well as a variety of volunteers.

On Friday, April 24, two Wake Forest organizations, Delta Xi Phi Multicultural Sorority and Student Government, brought a big tent to Manchester Plaza with a focus on identity and misrepresentation.

"This is one of many efforts held by student groups on campus to take a step toward living out our motto of Pro Humanitate, or "For Humanity" as we have faced some issues in the past school year relating to race relations and misrepresentation," said Tai Hensley, president of the Delta Xi Phi Multicultural Sorority. "We are hoping this project will help our student community continue our journey toward being an inclusive environment for all students."

A non-profit organization, founded in 1970 (incorporated in 1971) to support families by helping them meet the developmental needs of their children from infancy through school-age. NWDC, Inc. is governed by a voluntary Board of Directors that consist of private and public citizens, and parents of three counties: Forsyth, Davie, and Stokes. Northwest has the capacity to service 700 children and families in community child care centers.

CHARACTER, ETHICS, MORALS AND VALUES... DEFINED

What is Character?
The action you take to carry out the values, ethics and morals that you believe in.

Consistency between what you say you will do and what you actually do.

Putting the ethics into action.

Defines, builds, or breaks your reputation.

Moral strength. It takes moral courage to do what is right when it may cost more than you are willing to pay.

Who you are and what you do when no one is looking.

"What is wrong is wrong, even if everyone is doing it. Right is still right, even if no one else is doing it." - William Penn

Ethics:
Define moral rights and wrongs. Transcend culture, ethnicity, and are relevant to all socioeconomic conditions.

Are the should and ought of life.

Morals:
Are ethical principles Founded on fundamental principles of right conduct rather than legalities.

Morals are always the same. Immorality varies from generation to generation.

Values:
Refer to all important beliefs.

Not all are ethical, some are neutral or non-ethical.

Stated; what we say, and Operational; what we do.

"Character is not reflected by what we say, or even by what we intend, it is a reflection of what we do." - Anonymous

NWDC

301 North Main Street
Winston-Salem, NC 27101
Phone 336.721.1215
Fax 336.721.1217

To partner with child care providers, families and the community in order to offer affordable quality early childhood education for all children, while utilizing cost effective resources, materials, technology and qualified personnel.

NWDC is a 501(c)(3)-non-profit organization.

nurture. enrich. grow.

NORTHWEST CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTERS, INC

MudPies
NORTHWEST CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTERS
Serving Davie, Forsyth and Stokes Counties

Day Camp of Summer

LOCATIONS:
WS DOWNTOWN
WS DOWNTOWN EAST
MOCKSVILLE
KING

JUNE 15 - AUGUST 21
\$125 per week

"Providing quality child care for tomorrow's leaders, since 1970!"

Dates may vary depending on program location

NWDC is a 501(c)(3)-non-profit organization

Have a Story Idea?

Let us Know

news@

wschronicle.com