



NETWORK HONORS BOZEMAN & BITTERROOT VOLUNTEERS FOR SIGNATURE GATHERING

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Human Rights in Action is a publication of the Montana Human Rights Network, a non-profit organization based in Helena.



MHRN is a proud member of Montana Shares. Learn more at: www.montanashares.org

On July 19th, the Montana Human Rights Network presented “Activist on the Ground” awards to local activists Donna Swarthout, of the Gallatin Valley Human Rights Task Force, and Bill LaCroix, of the Bitterroot Human Rights Alliance.

Both Swarthout and LaCroix attended a March training sponsored by the Network featuring human rights activist Loretta Ross. The training helped participants approach economic justice from a human rights framework. The human

rights framework uses the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* as its foundation. The framework focuses on society’s responsibility to meet the basic needs of its citizens and provide for an adequate quality of life. In this case, the group came up with the slogan, “No one who works full-time should live in poverty.”

Participants then took that information back to their communities to train others and to organize signature gathering in support of Montana’s newest economic justice initiative, the campaign in Montana to raise the minimum wage.

Swarthout and her crew of volunteers collected over 2,500 signatures in the Bozeman area. LaCroix organized volunteers in the Bitterroot Valley, resulting in over 3,000 signatures and the qualification of four legislative districts in support of raising the minimum wage.

Overall, volunteers associated with the Network collected more than 9,000 of the 22,000 signatures needed to qualify the initiative for the November ballot! The Network and MEA-MFT had the largest contribution of signatures of all the partner organizations.

If you are interested in helping raise the minimum wage in Montana, or if you would like to bring an economic justice training to your community, contact Kim Abbott at the Network. And be sure to vote on November 7th to Raise Montana (Yes on I-151)!



Ken Toole (left) presents Bill LaCroix (right) with an “Activist on the Ground” award.



Participants at a Network training practiced skills like writing letters to the editor.

Montana Shares is hosting its 12th Annual Raffle, with 45 great prizes including trips, art, jewelry, food and more. The Network has been a member of Montana Shares for three years, participating in workplace giving campaigns and other Montana Shares activities. *Fill out the raffle tickets at the bottom of the insert in this newsletter, send a suggested \$10 donation per ticket to Montana Shares, and help the Network and Shares continue their great work.* The raffle drawing is September 9, 2006, so don't wait!

NEWS FROM AROUND

Flathead Reservation Human Rights Coalition

On April 25th, the Flathead Reservation Human Rights Coalition facilitated two trainings for community members on economic justice and the human rights framework. They also helped train local youth, who collected more than 400 signatures in support of raising the minimum wage during Salish-Kootenai College's "Spring Fling" and the Kicking Horse Pow Wow. The Coalition is also planning mini-camps for teenagers, which will include training and discussion of human rights issues and a screening of *The End of Silence*, the Network's documentary on Montana's gay youth. It is also planning a community family picnic. Stay tuned for more details.

Gallatin Valley Human Rights Task Force

Many thanks go out to Donna Swarthout, the outgoing organizer of the Gallatin Valley Human Rights Task Force, and best of luck in her new endeavor at Montana State University. Swarthout helped train volunteers on economic justice and the human rights framework, and organized the collection of more than 2,500 signatures. The Task Force also recently received a grant from the Pride Foundation to put together a collection of resources for gay and lesbian community members. Another program they are working on is helping with an affordable housing project in Bozeman. Also, on July 6th, the Task Force co-sponsored a concert featuring the Seattle Men's Chorus.

Bitterroot Human Rights Alliance

Bill LaCroix has taken over the position of coordinator of the Bitterroot Human Rights Alliance. Thanks to John Schneeberger for his many years of hard work in the position! The Alliance facilitated two trainings on economic justice and the human rights framework. Volunteers in the Bitterroot then collected more than 3,000 signatures in support of a minimum wage increase and qualified four legislative districts for the ballot initiative. The Alliance also recently helped create a citizen watch group to promote democracy in local government.

Anaconda Coalition for Tolerance Education

The Anaconda Coalition for Tolerance Education has taken on anti-bullying work within the Anaconda School District. It has hosted a screening of *The End of Silence*, and the group is planning a community-education campaign to ensure that Anaconda schools have comprehensive anti-bullying policies.

Helena Human Rights Task Force

The Helena Human Rights Task Force hosted the first Network training on using a human rights framework for issue education on the minimum wage initiative. Also, see the back page of this newsletter for information about the upcoming Network conference in Helena and a lecture series hosted by Montanans for Corporate Accountability.

VEHICLES NEEDED!

Staffers for the Network are still in desperate need of one or two *reliable* vehicles (see photo!). Organizers and staff drive all around the state for presentations, grassroots organizing, and fundraising. If you have a car you would be willing to donate, call Alison James at the Network. Help keep social justice on the road!



Ken Toole (left) and Scott Nicholson (right) push the Network's current company vehicle.

THE SOUND OF HUMAN RIGHTS

By Robyn Morrison, Network Member from Helena

What is the sound of human rights? It is the sound of familiar love songs, with a remarkable twist, performed by the Seattle Women's Chorus. It is the songs of economic and social justice written and performed by Amy Martin and the Borrowed Geniuses.

As a native Montanan, who just completed a year of seminary in the famously progressive and inclusive city of Berkeley, California, I was surprised and thrilled at the opportunity to attend concerts by these musical artists sponsored by, and for the benefit of, the Montana Human Rights Network. Right here in the community I call home, I heard the beautiful sounds of social and economic justice. I know that the Montana Human Rights Network works tirelessly to create a culture of inclusion and acceptance; and to fight hatred, intolerance, and inequality. How-



The Seattle Women's Chorus takes a bow in Helena after performing in July.

ever, this summer is the first time that I have had the pleasure of experiencing one of their artistic or cultural events.

The Seattle Women's Chorus concert on July 6th was an exceptional musical performance involving gifted musicians. Listening to familiar love songs sung by women who love other women, enriched and expanded the meaning of the lyrics. Music speaks to the

heart. Hearing the familiar words of devotion, disappointment, and heartache from a new perspective gave me a deeper appreciation of the common ground shared by a more complete spectrum of loving relationships.

Amy Martin's May 30th concert was equally moving. Amy Martin's ballad "Rose of Sharon" told a story of a single mother struggling to survive and care for her child; a story that originated during the Dust Bowl years, but is far too appropriate for this day. A skilled musician and song writer with an intense commitment to use her talents to seek a more just, merciful, and compassionate world, Martin is a treasure to her adopted State of Montana.

The arts are integral to the quality of life we experience in our communities. Music has also been integral to nearly every social justice movement in history. In the words of Victor Hugo, "music expresses that which cannot be said and on which it is impossible to be silent." I am deeply appreciative that the Montana Human Rights Network brought the community of Helena two amazing musical events this summer with the power to transform the individual human heart at the deepest level. Bravo!

AMY MARTIN TEAMS UP WITH THE NETWORK

Where art and activism meet! The Montana Human Rights Network and Raven's Wing Records are proud to announce the forthcoming release of Amy Martin's seventh CD in seven years, *Bind Me to Free!* In partnership with the Network, Amy will share her music with people across the state to help promote the Network and its initiative to raise the minimum wage this fall.

Stay tuned for the date and details of the *Bind Me to Free* CD release party in Missoula. In the meantime, you can sample and download music from www.amymartin.com.

This partnership offers a unique opportunity for Amy and the Network. By working together, we can help each other reach new audiences and bolster progressive community-building around the state. We need your help! Please consider a donation to help promote democracy and social justice in Montana.

PRESERVING A LEGACY OF JUSTICE

We send many thanks to a dedicated Montana donor who recently contributed \$30,000 a year for the next three years to support the Network's pursuit of justice, equality and democracy for all. If you too would like to see social justice work in Montana continue for years to come, consider the Network in your long-term charitable giving plans. Talk to your financial advisor about contributing through your will or estate, charitable gift annuities, and the many other options for planned giving. Call Alison James, Development Director, if you would like to discuss including the Network in your financial plans.

NETWORK'S ANNUAL CONFERENCE TACKLES "BIG BOX SHOCK"

The Montana Human Rights Network will hold its annual conference November 17-19 at the Great Northern Hotel in Helena. The conference this year will focus on "big box" stores and their local and global effects. The conference is co-sponsored by WEEL (Working for Equality and Economic Liberation), the Smart Growth Coalition, The Policy Institute and Montanans for Corporate Accountability.

The weekend will kick off on Friday, November 17th with a special visit from the producers of *Independent America: The Two Lane Search for Mom and Pop*. This documentary chronicles the couple's journey across 32 states to witness the impacts of corporate culture on local communities. The Friday evening event will feature a special showing of the docu-

mentary, with the producers facilitating a discussion.

Workshops on economic justice, urban planning, corporate accountability and community activism will start on Saturday morning. A luncheon and keynote address will be followed by a session with local community activists from Hamilton, Polson, Helena and other Montana communities dealing with "big box shock." This session will provide attendees with tools to take back to their towns to run effective community campaigns.



Independent America filmmakers Hanson Hosein and Heather Hughes on the road.

A special, invitation only session on Sunday will be offered for community activists. Mark November 17-19 down on your calendar and contact the Network for more information!

!!! UPCOMING LECTURE SERIES !!!

- *Montanans for Corporate Accountability* will be hosting a fall lecture series in Helena on food and agriculture.
- Topics will include organic agriculture, food security, farm to college programs, food and health, and Montana's place in the global food market. Lectures will take place at the Neighborhood Center in Helena from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. on September 18, October 9, October 23, November 13 and December 11. The series is co-sponsored by
- Alternative Energy Resources Organization and The Real Food Store and Deli.



MONTANA HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK

P.O. Box 1222
Helena, MT 59624
(406)442-5506
e-mail: network@mhrn.org
Web: <http://www.mhrn.org>

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