



# Waiting Times

## Taxi Workers Alliance of Pennsylvania

4205 Chestnut St. Phila.Pa. 19104

[www.twapa.org](http://www.twapa.org)

(215) 279-0472

[twapa1@yahoo.com](mailto:twapa1@yahoo.com)

### Organizing Committee

Frank Shaeffer

Tekle Gebremedhin

Ronald Blount

Steve Chervenka

Touleg Fakieiesi

Dyakyayie Quincy Tarylor-

Mohammed Shukur

Patrick Anamah

Mike Nwabudike

Mohammed Baradji

Moloud Aguidi

Femi Olanyi

Satnam Singh

Kevin Evans

Ferdinand Morrison



**Ronald Blount - UTWA President**

## Exonerated

It took a Commonwealth jury less than 25 minutes to pick a foreman and return “Not Guilty” verdicts on all counts. Mr. Blount was falsely accused of assaulting a customer, 33 year old, Megan K. Saunders.

During the trial, Ms. Saunders was impeached several times on her recollection of the incident, for example, she couldn’t recall saying that Mr. Blount must have been an illegal hack and was flying under the radar with no social security card. She further had problems explaining why she didn’t seek medical treatment or whether witnesses was present or not.

Most outstanding about her testimony, surrounds the physics of the alleged assault. Ms. Saunders gave conflicting testimony about whether she was in the standing position, sitting down, or in both positions by leaning on one cheek.

Even though Ms. Saunders claimed to be choked for more than a minute, falling in and out of consciousness, the responding officers, ( Continue on page 3 )

### UTWA supports Septa Workers during recent strike

Despite the Parking Authority issuing an executive order to bring in scab cabs from the surrounding counties of Philadelphia, UTWA membership showed solidarity to our brothers and sisters of TWU Local 234.

During the Strike, UTWA members visited all of the picket lines of the workers, handing out flyers expressing the taxi workers support. The following day, the Media Mobilizing Project joined us in documenting the workers’ side of the strike.

Local 234 has been without a contract since March 2009 and finally had to make a stand for economic justice. Weathering a storm of attacks from government officials, mass media, and other misinformed people, TWU was able to work collectively in securing a fair contract.

Frank Brooks III, a Local 234 representative, said that “they are struggling to protect one of the few middle class jobs left in Philadelphia.” In an era where most good paying manufacturing jobs has vanished from the city and an unemployment rate well over 11%, this seems to make sense.

One symptom of this recent recession, can be seen in workers’ earnings that have remained frozen. More people have been surviving on credit cards instead of their wages. Over the past decade, most workers wages have remained steady, while the cost of living continues to climb. Yet, on the other end of the spectrum, CEO’s are raking in income at a all time high. So bravo to our comrades at Local 234.



### Unified Taxi Workers of Pennsylvania

“Power cedes nothing without Demand. It never did and it never will “ Frederick Douglas—1857

## Next General Meeting for Philadelphia Taxi Drivers !!

Attention all Philadelphia taxi drivers, the Taxi Workers Alliance will be holding a **General Meeting on December 2nd, 2009 at our office, 4205 Chestnut Street.** The meeting will begin at **7pm sharp.**

This is your chance to voice your complaints and find solutions for the problems we face. Every one matters as we seek to work collectively in building our Union. Refreshments will be provided and parking will be plentiful.

At the last General Meeting, over 75 taxi drivers attended, as we viewed a documentary film of last summer's Rally over unfair parking tickets. Everyone was given an opportunity to speak. It is our hope that at least 100 drivers attend this meeting.

On the agenda, will be updates to the lawsuit involving the Parking Authority, TWA Benefit program, information about the upcoming public hearing for workers compensation, and other pertinent information.

If we are not fighting to solve the problems you face, now is the time to come forward. Now is also the time to join UTWA if you have not already done so. As you all well know, we cannot obtain anything of value by working alone. This is how they pick us off. We must work together collectively in order to have a work environment that includes dignity, respect and justice.

So please, make every attempt to make the General meeting. Come out and be apart of your Union. In the words of Frederick Douglas, "Power cedes nothing without demand, it never has, it never will".

### Tune into Labor Justice Radio

UTWA Vice President Patrick Anamah is the host featuring all the latest updates in the taxi industry. Tune in every Monday from 7 pm to 8 pm and new shows, 1st Tuesday of every month from 1 pm to 2pm

Labor Justice Radio can be heard in West Philly on channel 88.1 FM (WPEB). If any taxi driver is interested in volunteering to help produce the show, please contact UTWA at (215) 279-0472 ■



## Pennsylvania State Rep. John Perzel Indicted : Accused of spending \$10 million on election campaign



On Thursday, November 12, 2009, State Rep. John Perzel was indicted in connection with an alleged scheme to have campaign work performed at taxpayers expense.

Rep. John M. Perzel, the former speaker of the state House, was charged with 82 criminal counts in a sweeping scandal involving sophisticated, multi-million dollar software programs paid for by taxpayers but allegedly used for political campaigning.

The Philadelphia Republican is the most prominent political figure thus far to be charged in Attorney General Tom Corbett's long-running investigation unofficially known as Bo-nusgate.

"Perzel was architect behind a sophisticated criminal strategy that spent nearly \$10 million of taxpayer money purely for campaign work," said Corbett.

In 2001, Perzel decided on a bold gambit for the state to take over the Philadelphia Parking Authority in a Republican power grab. The move came after a meeting with John Street in which the then-mayor paid more attention to his BlackBerry than to the House majority leader. What Street did, in Perzel's mind, was show a lack of respect for him.

If Rep. Perzel is convicted of these allegations, this could definitely affect the PPA structure.

### UTWA Toy Drive needs donors

This year UTWA toy drive has officially started. This year, UTWA Events Director Kevin Evans has chosen to target homeless shelters that are in need of the holiday treats.

Please contribute unused toys or cash donations to this meaningful project. The toy drive is in it's 4th year, and have supplied many children with joy and happiness during this special time of the year.

Toys can be dropped off at UTWA office located at 4205 Chestnut St. 2nd floor, and cash donations can be given to Mr. Evans by dialing (610) 209-8766. We as ambassadors of the city will continue to lead the way of charity and goodwill towards all.

## Taxi Workers Alliance Academy to start soon

UTWA is please to announce the opening of the Taxi Workers Academy, in partnership with the Community Learning Center based in Philadelphia.

Classes will prepare students to take the U.S. High School Equivalent exam. Students can then move on to Community College of Philadelphia, or other State funded training programs for better career choices.

To qualify, TWA members must 1st past a placement test, which will take place on December 8th and 10th, 2009 at UTWA office 4205 Chestnut Street.

After the 1st 12 students are placed, classes will begin on December 15th until March 9th, 2010. Classes will be held from 1pm to 3:30pm, Tuesday and Thursday each week. Students who qualify can take the G.E.D. test early.

“This is a great way to have my MBA degree that I earned in Bangladesh accredited in the U.S.”, said Mohammad Shukur, a long time taxi driver and UTWA member. Brother Shukur is correct, if he earns his U.S. GED, he could then take exams at Community College to have his credits accepted here, in the U.S.

The Community Learning Center has programs throughout the city and saw a need to develop a program for taxi drivers. Executive Director Rebecca Wagner of the Center has been working extremely hard in making the Academy a reality. ■



Rebecca Wagner

## Supreme Court case against the PPA moves into it's final phase. !!!

On November 5th, 2009, the Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania heard oral arguments over our lawsuit against the PPA. The lawsuit is a continuation of the State Supreme Court case arguing that the PPA rules and regulations was installed improperly. The hearing was held in Pottsville, Pennsylvania.

TWA was represented by Michael S. Henry, an attorney based in South Philly who have done a great deal of work for the taxi industry. Mr. Henry argued that the PPA did not follow the State Document Law and therefore their rules and regulations are invalid.

If we are successful. The P.U.C.

rules and regulations would come back into affect. There were 7 Justices seated on the bench and 3 seem to be sympathetic to our side, hopefully we can convince one more to obtain a majority.

This legal battle has been in existence for well over two and a half years. A decision from the court is expected within 4 months. This lawsuit along with the many other strategies UTWA have employed seems to be effective towards our long term goal for dignity, respect, and justice in the workplace.

We will keep our members posted with any new development in this endeavor.

## Exoneration of Ron Blount (cont. from pg. 1)

found no physical injuries, in fact, the 1st responding officer arrived within 10 minutes and testified that there was no body bruises, rip clothing, or any other indications of a struggle.

During the trial Mr. Blount was supported by over 50 people from a wide range of organizations throughout the city and from a greater range of ethnic background.

The Judge and Jury clearly picked up on the inconsistencies of Megan Saunders testimony. At one point the Judge became clearly agitated with the waste of taxpayers money and time and told the prosecutor that there is no need for anymore witnesses.

It took over 19 months before Mr. Blount was given a chance to give his side of the story. However, dur-

ing this time, the PPA used every opportunity to discredit Mr. Blount publicly. According to Mr. Blount, “This is an old trick, where they demonize the leader in order to ignore the oppression and exploitation of the masses”.

Even though Ron Blount was found “Not Guilty” in these criminal proceedings, the PPA is maliciously pursuing the matter again within their own court system. Problem is, the PPA Judge is their employee. This Judge tried to revoke Ron’s taxi certificate before hearing any of the facts in the case, stating that people will not ride in taxis because of these allegations.

Why it is unclear whether Ron will receive a fair trial at the PPA, he will however remain president of UTWA. ■

## Public Hearing For Workers Compensation To Help Taxi Drivers

In August, 2009 State Representative Mark Cohen introduced House Bill 1914. This legislation is seeking to provide workers compensation for taxi drivers. The Bill is currently in the Urban Affairs Committee.

The next step of the process will be a **public hearing scheduled for December 17th 2009 at 10 am in the Convention Center, room 108.** We are asking all UTWA members to attend this hearing as we continue our fight for economic justice.

Workers Compensation would provide economic relief to taxi drivers in the event of injuries, accidents, and even untimely deaths. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, taxi drivers are 60 times more likely to be assaulted or killed on the job than any other occupation.

The cost for this safety net is relatively inexpensive. In New York for instance, the cost is \$3.60 a day per cab, covering both drivers who work the taxi. In Chicago, the cost is about \$4 per day. All major U.S. cities provide some sort of workers compensation for taxi drivers. What is the cost of a human life? How many times did we as a community, collect money to help our fallen brothers and sisters?

It's time for Philadelphia taxi drivers to join the 21st century. It's time for us to join the civilized world. We are not animals, or disregarded trash. Our life has value and we should demand to be treated as such. So please come out for this public hearing to voice your concern about being treated humanely. ■

**Mark K. Kirby**  
**Attorney at Law**  
**135 S. 19th Street, Phila. Pa.**  
**Office phone # (215) 599-5033**  
**For all of your legal needs**



## Teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Where do we go from here? First, we must massively assert our dignity and worth. We must stand up amidst a system that still oppresses us and develop an unsailable and majestic sense of values.

As long as the mind is enslaved, the body can never be free. Psychological freedom, a firm sense of self-esteem, is the most powerful weapon against the long night of physical slavery. No Lincolnian emancipation proclamation or Johnsonian civil rights bill can totally bring this kind of freedom.

Power properly understood is nothing but the ability to achieve purpose. It is the strength required to bring about social, political and economic change. ... Now a lot of us are preachers, and all of us have our moral convictions and concerns, and so often have problems with power. There is nothing wrong with power if power is used correctly.

What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power cor-

recting everything that stands against love.

I'm concerned about justice. I'm concerned about brotherhood. I'm concerned about truth. And when one is concerned about these, he can never advocate violence. For through violence you may murder a murderer but you can't murder murder. Through violence you may murder a liar but you can't establish truth. Through violence you may murder a hater, but you can't murder hate. Darkness cannot put out darkness. Only light can do that.

I know that love is ultimately the only answer to mankind's problems. And I'm going to talk about it everywhere I go. I have decided to love. If you are seeking the highest good, I think you can find it through love. And the beautiful thing is that we are moving against wrong when we do it, because John was right, God is love. He who hates does not know God, but he who has love has the key that unlocks the door to the meaning of ultimate reality.

( Excerpts from Dr. King's "Where do we go from here.")

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## Moving Forward

by Steve Chervenka, Political Director

To all the drivers and owner operators supporting the UTWA, you are taking this to the next level. The UTWA is not about protesting over one issue and it's over. It is an alliance acting as a union, that continues to grow and gain influence over the pathetic working conditions and standard of living of all cab-drivers.

Three years ago, we had our general meetings at the Oregon and Penrose Diners and used a few tables for discussion. Last October 7th, at our new location on 4205 Chestnut Street, we packed the house. The message is getting out; we can fight and we can win if we are united.

On December 2nd, at 7 PM, we will be holding our next general meeting. We have a short video to show on our Worker's Compensation campaign, and a short presentation on the Grand Opening of the UTWA Academy. The Worker's compensation campaign, for drivers injured on the job, and the UTWA Academy for drivers whom want to earn a GED and advance in a new career, are two great advancements of the UTWA for 2009. Nevertheless, these are only new beginnings. We have many issues.

We have to continue to build dues-paying members, and continue building support outside of our membership. There are 5,000 cab drivers in Philadelphia, which is at least 25,000 voters, and that can decide an election. Once we were far behind in the labor movement, now WE ARE THE LABOR MOVEMENT.

Most of our passengers just assume that we have at least some basic legal protections like Workers Compensation and a guaranteed living wage. Sadly, the most important diplomat for the city of Philadelphia has NOTHING.

### UPDATES

**Philadelphia Police:** UTWA met Deputy Police Commissioner Johnson at a peace rally in West Philly and he was impressed with what cab drivers in the UTWA were doing. This is an opportunity to meet with the top brass and talk about the job-related issues with the police.

**Amtrak Police:** Captain Powers is training at the FBI academy and there is a new captain at 30th Street that we would like to meet with. We have had a great relationship with the Amtrak Police and the management at 30th Street and want to continue it.

**Airport Police and Parkway management:** Drivers were being ticketed for not stopping at a misplaced stop sign. This sign is going to be moved back so that drivers can stop and see the traffic. Parkway is aware of communication issues in moving cabs at certain hours and is working on the problem.

Parkway is reviewing the Public Service message that Arrival passengers get and is open to recommending changing for a more positive message to increase taxi service.

*Continues next column*

**New Bike Lanes:** On Pine and Spruce streets, you are allowed to momentarily drop off and pick up passengers in the bike lane.

**University Police:** They are giving a warning to drivers stopping in bike lanes to pickup and drop off passengers?

**PPA:** They are waking up drivers taking "cat-naps" inside cab. A meeting with the TLD is being planned for an agenda that includes many unresolved issues.

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*Contact UTWA if you have a special concern or were ticketed because of a hospitality issue.*

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### WHAT BECAME OF DRIVE BY TICKETING?

UTWA went into action. We met with the PPA's TLD first, then with some of PPA's Board. Stu Bykofsky wrote an article in the Daily News. We collected evidence from drivers experiences and GPS records.

The PPA's response was: It doesn't exist; Drivers are driving away when being ticketed.; You are accusing us of being criminals; and your evidence is insignificant compared to the amount of drivers there are.

A protest was organized. MIND TV did a documentary on it. We shut down Market Street at the PPA's main office. We shut down 9th and Filbert. Ticketing has decreased but there are still unresolved issues.

The PPA has given us an option to contest tickets before appealing by calling 888-591-3636, and when finally getting a live person, we can request a GPS investigation which will put the ticket on hold until the investigation is complete. A big issue is the fine attached to the ticket because the driver didn't know about the ticket. Since you have 15 days to pay a parking ticket from the day it is issued, any time after that includes a fine.

We are still going to pursue drive-by-ticketing. There should be no fine attached to tickets before the driver receives the ticket. If you receive a ticket that was not given to you, you should let us know. You should be ready to protest if necessary. On the other hand, lets be courteous to the on-street ticket writers just doing their job under the policies of their management. They should understand and appreciate that we are doing ours, and that most of the ticketing issues arise out of the "hospitality initiatives" of their management, such as the rules and regulations for credit cards and receipts. A source of ours tells us that the PPA's TLD may be getting a dollar for every parking ticket they collect. Is that an incentive to keep drivers suspended or unable to renew their taxi license? The TLD *is suppose to be* "self-sustaining"!

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#### Advertisement

Vladimir and Boris from US TRANS SERVICES, formerly at Tioga and Janney streets, have moved a few blocks away to 2200 Castor Avenue, Unit #D. They have serviced and sold taxi-cabs since 1999. The new garage is much bigger, more modern and very secure. For service call 215-744-3705

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#### Historic Taxi News

[STRIKERS' HERO IS PUT IN JAIL; Philadelphia Car Men Enraged by Arrest of Their Leader, Pratt.](#) NYT February 22, 1910 [CHICAGO TAXI DRIVERS QUIT.; Leave Machines at Theatre Time to Enforce Recognition of Union.](#) NYT April 5, 1910

## The Blessing Sunlight for Philadelphia Taxi Industry



**UTWA Senior Vice President  
Mohammad Shukur (middle)**

“My name is Ron, how are you brother?”, - This was my 1st encounter with Ron Blount. We were at 641 N. Broad street, a huge gathering of taxi drivers, including New York’s TWA Bhairavi Desai, demonstrating against the upcoming PPA GPS system. Simon Abitol was the target and I was inspired looking at Ron leading the Rally. I also was looking at a group of drivers with unconditional dedication to launch a movement against the Parking Authority’s inhumane and unjust GPS system that was introduced in the early part of 2005.

Later that year at the Convention Center, I got to hear the PPA’s explanation for this new regulatory GPS system and was completely shocked. I remember telling my fellow taxi drivers that this system will be the most expensive and that a harsh injustice will begin once it is installed. And since the GPS installation, tears have been my companion over the past 4 years.

I started taxi driving in 2001 and over this period, I’ve seen several taxi driver groups’ activities, but I never would get involved. But in 2005, as an educated and curious man, and after my 2nd meeting with organizers in the airport holding lot, I felt compelled to stand up for my humanity and got involved with the Taxi Workers Alliance.

Era by Era, Allah (God) sends pioneers to this world to change society by bringing peace and justice for humanity. I believe Ron is one of them because he receives unconditional love and respect from the taxi community and vice versa. I observed that Ron possess special characteristics to help lead the taxi movement.

He is most humble to creation, respect every ethnic community, dedicated to needs, powerful in voice, strongest protester, and unconditionally surrenders to truth. I stayed close and learned a lot from Ron, and Ron learned a lot from me.

From my understanding in 2004, Ron was active with the Brotherhood, which at the time was the only taxi driver association in the city. George Seymour at the time was the Brotherhood’s president. Ron began spending many hours and much resources trying to organize and mobilize drivers for their rights. However day by day, Ron began feeling uncomfortable with the Brotherhood’s ideas and campaign activities. Evidentially Ron along with organizers Tekle Gebremedhin, Hewitt Malone, Joseph Conte, Nabil Hasan, and Khalid Alvi decided to bring their vision to harvest. After several meetings with the New York Taxi Workers Alliance, they decided to form the Taxi Workers Alliance of Pa. These highly dedicated men worked day and night to develop the new organization with the help of other social justice organizations in the city including Jobs with Justice, Media Mobilizing Project, Philadelphia Student Union, Asian American United, and many more.

From March 2005 to March 2007, TWA-PA restructured several times in order to find a conscious and dedicated organizing committee. My involvement began in 2005, and I always tried to be constructive and pragmatic with ideas. I felt that it was important to us in this struggle to unify both the Brotherhood and TWA, in order to form one strong taxi movement. This was necessary if drivers were to work with pride, dignity and justice. Our strategy focused on ethnic community representation, which proved to be successful in the May 2006 Strike that had 98% participation city-wide. These are some of the ideas as Senior Vice President, that I was able to suggest.

I continue to search for clarity of our socio-economic background. 90% of Philadelphia taxi drivers are 1st generation immigrants. I really felt apart of the movement by suggesting that we organize by ethnic communities and seeing how this strategy was effective. Furthermore, I believe that Ron understands the suffering of drivers and the need to elimi-

nate the poverty that effects drivers and their families.

From March 2005 to November 2006, TWA-PA launched several campaigns through Ron’s initiatives, such as, GPS struggle, meter increases, fuel surcharges, mileage restrictions, PPA inspections, test scores for hack licenses (reduced from 88% to 78%). Then there was the Rally in Harrisburg to stop House Bill 2545, 350 of the city’s taxicabs caravan into the capital to protest at John Perzel’s office. Eventually, Governor Rendell vetoed it.

From March 2005 to November 2009, under Ron’s leadership, TWA-PA launched a very effective movement. For example, Ron unselfishly spent many hours with drivers in the field, losing money he could have earned. Ron traveled throughout the country building a network of allies including government officials, union leaders, and social justice organizations. Ron setup TWA-PA office where organizers are provided with a space to strategize our campaigns. Ron setup TWA-PA non-profit status enabling us to apply for funding for equipment, technical support, and communications. He further arranged training and workshop for the organizers provided by Jobs with Justice, AFL-CIO, SEIU, Philadelphia Joint Board, and Asian American United. Ron constantly attends meetings with airport officials, Amtrak management, and even the PPA. Ron started the health fairs for taxi drivers, toy drive, and health discounts for our members. Ron latest endeavors include the TWA academy to help drivers obtain their U.S. GED. All of this while under the pressure of a criminal case, that was fueled for political reasons, where he eventually was exonerated.

I’m praising Allah (God) for giving Ron the strength and wisdom to help with our struggle. We need to know sincerely who we are., as well as what is necessary for our unity. I’m requesting every taxi driver in Philadelphia to step up and become apart of TWA-PA. Please contribute some effort for your benefit, safety, and humanity. Putting Allah (God) 1st, united we can be victorious in our struggle for dignity, respect and justice. This struggle, journeys towards truth and fairness. We need each of us to reach our destination. ■