

Center on Policy Initiatives turns its attention to “Building our future with a green and fair economy”

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By Leon Thompson

The 2009 Center on Policy Initiatives Gala, held at the Holiday Inn San Diego on the Bay on October 21st, honored the MAAC Project, which provides self-sufficiency for low and moderate-income people. Long-time activist Deborah Szekely, and San Diego’s Construction Workers were also honored. View highlights and videos of the event, including a film on construction premiered by MAAC.

The Center on Policy Initiatives (CPI) is a San Diego think tank that has, for 13 years, advocated for working people and their families, taxpayers and the environment in San Diego City and County. The organization has conducted research, resulting in publications that have informed citizens and given structure to policy solutions aimed at improving lives in our region. Many of its reports are shaping policy decisions by San Diego elected officials. (www.onlineCPI.org)

For instance, in March 2009 CPI published Construction – Working without a Healthcare Net. Its research revealed that jobs in San Diego with the highest risk of injury also had the highest rate of uninsured workers. CPI suggested a policy of multi-employer health plans.

In September, Construction Apprenticeships Programs: Career Training for California’s Recovery documents the benefits of joint labor/management career training programs.

CPI is probably best known in San Diego for helping to bring about the Living Wage Ordinance in 2005 at a time when downtown redevelopment was in full swing. In 2007 the San Diego City Council unanimously approved CPI’s package of proposals to strengthen and extend the Living Wage Ordinance.

Another CPI publication, Target San Diego: The Right Wing Assault on Urban Democracy and Smart Government, exposed a right-wing plan for pouring resources into several regions of the U.S. including East County. Neo-conservatives targeted area school boards and other public entities in an effort to cement long term control and become a nationwide model for testing conservative strategies such as outsourcing public jobs and privatizing public education, CPI revealed.

Recently East County Magazine reported on CPI findings that El Cajon has the highest poverty rate in the County, with 46% of El Cajon residents economically challenged and 21% living below the federal poverty line.

“After a long drought we are finally taking real action on labor laws,” Donald Cohen, Executive Director of CPI, told the sold-out crowd of approximately 700 people at the Gala (photo, right). “With new hope from Washington D.C. the opportunities for real progress on the big issues is very exciting.”

The pro-labor audience responded with a standing ovation when he proclaimed, “The Employee Free Choice Act will pass.”

Looking ahead, Cohen announced that CPI’s focus has shifted to emphasize emerging jobs as America shifts toward a green economy. “With the new opportunities opened to us we have joined the national stage,” he said. “Our Construction Careers Program is included in the federal Climate Change Act.”

In a letter published in the event program, Cohen noted that this spring CPI succeeded, against staunch opposition from contractors, “in ensuring that the thousands of workers who build and renovate our schools will have access to health care, and that the construction projects will create career opportunities to help lift people out of poverty.” He concluded, “We’ve got many more ideas for making San Diego a leader in creating green jobs, good jobs and a healthy and sustainable environment.”