



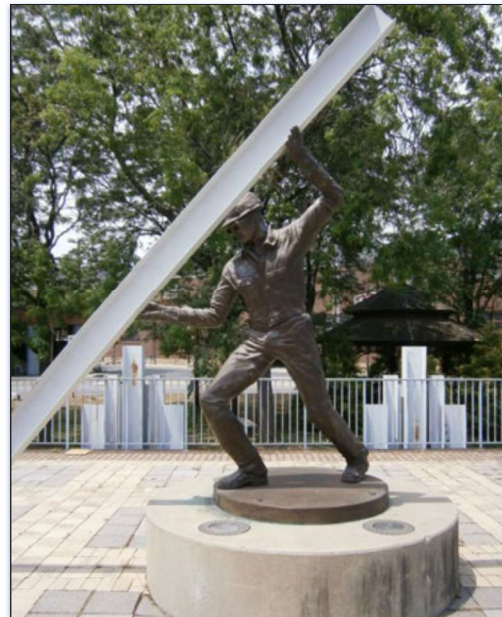
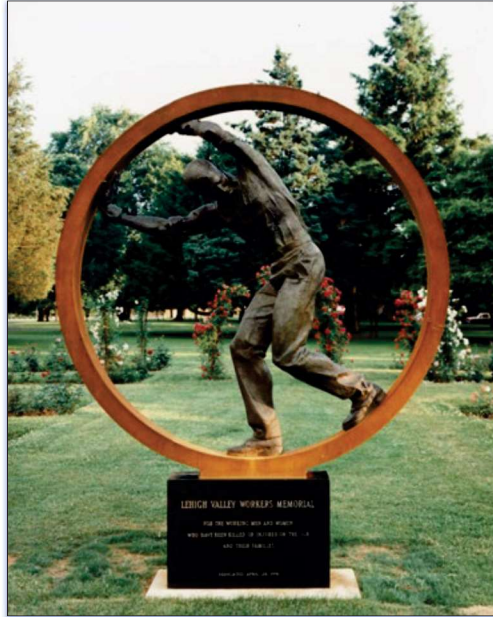
NEWS & VIEWS

LEHIGH VALLEY LABOR COUNCIL, AFL-CIO
"UNIONS JOINING TOGETHER AS ONE"

www.lehighvalleyclc.org



June 2024



Memorials to fallen workers dot the Lehigh Valley. Allentown Fire Fighters #302 (clockwise from top left), 2145 West Turner St., Allentown; Lehigh Valley Workers' Memorial, Eighth Ave. & Union Blvd., Bethlehem; Bethlehem Police Star Lodge #20, Fahy-New Street Bridge, Bethlehem; Bethlehem Steel Workers, Second and Northampton Sts., Bethlehem; and Lehigh Portland Sandts Eddy Plant cement workers, Mount Zion Church Hill Cemetery and Rt. 611, Upper Mount Bethel Township. Related stories on pages three and four.

Maurice Cobb unanimously elected PA AFL-CIO secretary-treasurer George Piasecki stepping down to pursue advocacy work

by the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO



Maurice Cobb
Sec.-Treasurer
PA AFL-CIO

The Pennsylvania AFL-CIO Executive Council unanimously voted to elect Maurice Cobb as its secretary-treasurer to fill the unexpired term until the next convention, succeeding George Piasecki. Piasecki was designated to the position when Angela Ferritto was elevated to become Pennsylvania AFL-CIO President in 2020. Piasecki recently resigned his position with the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO.

“The Pennsylvania AFL-CIO is grateful to George Piasecki for his service,” said Angela Ferritto, PA AFL-CIO, President. “George has been a dedicated union member and leader his entire career and was willing to serve when we called upon him.”

“I commend our Executive Council on electing Maurice Cobb as our new Secretary-Treasurer,” said Ferritto. “As a fourth-generation member of the United Steelworkers, Maurice understands our union values. He is known as a dynamic and thoughtful leader who tirelessly fights for the rights of steelworkers statewide – he will bring his passion and expertise to this important role. I look forward to working with Maurice and am energized by the possibilities he brings to his new position as unions across PA continue to expand and succeed.”



Angela Ferritto
President
PA AFL-CIO

Cobb worked as an overhead crane operator at Arcelor-Mittal (formerly Bethlehem Steel), the same plant where his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather worked. The four generations of steel workers were all proud members of United Steelworkers, AFL-CIO (“USW”). Cobb was first involved in its local union #1688, where he held several positions on the Executive Board and was involved in the union’s political action and education activities.

“My family taught me the value of hard work and the value of unions in safeguarding the rights of workers,” said Cobb. “Throughout my career, I have worked to advance our Union’s goals through legislative advocacy, collective bargaining, and arbitration. I am grateful to the Executive Council for electing me to this position and placing their trust in me. Together, we will build on our Commonwealth’s strong Union history as we build Union membership by welcoming new members who represent the rich diversity of our movement.”



George Piasecki
“Dedicated union member and leader his entire career” left the state federation to pursue advocacy work.

In 2019, Cobb was appointed as a USW international staff representative. In this position, he worked among multiple industries including manufacturing, aggregate, chemical, and transportation. He handled contract negotiations and disputes as well as grievances and arbitrations.

Cobb was appointed to serve as the USW District 10 Rapid Response Coordinator in 2022. In this position, he handled the district’s legislative needs and led the rapid response program, a grassroots legislative education initiative. Cobb was elected secretary-treasurer of the Central Pennsylvania Area Labor Federation in 2022 and vice president of the Harrisburg Region Central Labor Council in 2023.

The Pennsylvania AFL-CIO represents 700,000 workers from fifty-one international unions, and 1,422 locals in all of Pennsylvania’s 67 counties.



**Lehigh Valley Labor Council
AFL-CIO**
www.lehighvalleyclc.org
Phone 610-366-1358

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The Lehigh Valley Labor Council *News & Views* is published monthly by the Lehigh Valley Labor Council, AFL-CIO. We are proud members of the Pennsylvania Labor Communications Association, AFL-CIO.

The opinions expressed herein are those of the writers only and do not necessarily express the policy of the Council or any of its affiliates. All articles submitted for publication must be signed and received by the last Thursday of the month.

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Labor history comes alive June 14-15

Penna. Labor History Society celebrates fiftieth anniversary

by John Werkheiser, Treasurer
Pennsylvania Labor History Society



The Pennsylvania Labor History Society (PLHS) returns to the Lehigh Valley June 14 to June 15, sharing lessons of our state's storied labor history as we face the challenges of the twenty-first century. Our two-day event will visit some of our region's most historic and memorialized labor sites and pay recognition to local contributors to our labor movement.

The PLHS conference will begin by honoring our Society's founders, recall one of our area's earliest strikes, and explore how our changing economy challenges workers today. Following our afternoon session on June 14, we will gather at the United Steelworkers #2599 Van Bittner Hall and enjoy a buffet dinner beginning at 6 p.m. The union hall, located at 53 East Lehigh Street, Bethlehem, will also host our three award announcements. The Friday night dinner costs \$50 per person.

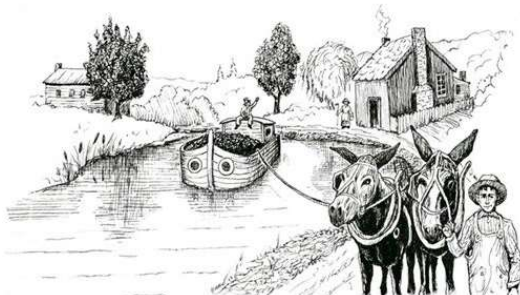
On June 15 beginning at 9:30 a.m., we will meet at the National Canal Museum and Park, 2750 Hugh Moore Park Rd., Easton, for coffee, tea and donuts. We will continue our 50th anniversary weekend with a one-hour canal boat ride and lecture on the Lehigh Canal starting at 10:30 a.m. The barge is limited to eighty passengers. The PLHS package, including Friday night dinner and Saturday morning canal boat ride, costs \$75 per person.

Program sponsorship opportunities are also available. Program advertisements in the dinner booklet are:

Outside back cover	\$600
Full page (5 1/2 x 8 1/2)	\$500
Half page (5 1/2 x 4 1/4)	\$300
Quarter page (5 1/2 x 2)	\$150

Forward all camera-ready ads to: jw1776@aol.com.
Deadline for advertisements is May 31 at the close of business. The application form for the conference, dinner and canal barge ride can be found on the Lehigh Valley Labor Council's website at: lehighvalleyclc.org

Please make checks payable to:
Pennsylvania Labor History Society
John Werkheiser, Treasurer
1943 Catasauqua Road
Bethlehem, PA 18018



(Credit: Howard Scott)

Prevent heat illness at work

Outdoor and indoor heat exposure can be dangerous

by the Occupational Safety & Health Administration

Millions of U.S. workers are exposed to heat in their workplaces. Although illness from exposure to heat is preventable, every year, thousands become sick from occupational heat exposure, and some cases are fatal.

Most outdoor fatalities, fifty to seventy percent, occur in the first few days of working in warm or hot environments because the body needs to build a tolerance to the heat gradually over time. The process of building tolerance is called heat acclimatization. Lack of acclimatization represents a major risk factor for fatal outcomes.

Occupational risk factors for heat illness include heavy physical activity, warm or hot environmental conditions, lack of acclimatization, and wearing clothing that holds in body heat.

Hazardous heat exposure can occur indoors or outdoors, and can occur during any season if the conditions are right, not only during heat waves. The following is a list of some industries where workers have suffered heat-related illnesses.

Outdoors

Agriculture
Construction, especially road, roofing, and other outdoor work
Construction, roofing work
Landscaping
Mail and package delivery
Oil and gas well operations

Indoors

Bakeries, kitchens, and laundries (sources with indoor heat-generating appliances)
Electrical utilities (particularly boiler rooms)
Fire Service
Iron and steel mills and foundries
Manufacturing with hot local heat sources, like furnaces (e.g. paper products, or concrete)
Warehousing



Prevent Heat Illness at Work

Outdoor and indoor heat exposure can be dangerous.

Twenty-fifth anniversary of the Concept Sciences' disaster

The February 19, 1999 explosion killed five workers. Worst industrial accident in Lehigh County since 1920

by Ron Ennis, Editor
Lehigh Valley Labor Council

This year's Lehigh Valley Workers' Memorial marked a special occasion as the ceremony remembered the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Concept Sciences blast that took the lives of five workers and injured fourteen others, including five firefighters.



Fig. 1: Under bright, sunny skies, the gathering at this year's Workers' Memorial Day ceremony heard the story of the 1999 Concept Sciences blast. The disaster took the lives of five workers, the worst industrial tragedy in Lehigh County since 1920.

On February 19, 1999, a volatile chemical mix exploded killing Anthony Mondello, his son Paul Mondello, Ruben Soto, Paul Wanamaker and Terry Bowers. All but Bowers worked for Concept Sciences. Bowers worked for a vending company next door. Paul Mondello had a wedding planned with his fiancé in a few weeks. The other four men left behind widows and a total of twelve fatherless children. The Concept Sciences blast remains the worst industrial accident in Lehigh County in over a century. (*Fig. #1*)

Fig. 2: Jake Ladd, OSHA director for Northampton, Lehigh, Bucks and Montgomery counties, spoke at the 33rd annual Workers' Memorial Day ceremony on April 28. Previously assigned in Delaware, he recently took over the position left by the retirement of Jean Kulp.



The history of Workers' Memorial Day began on April 28, 1971, when the Occupational Safety and Health Act went into effect, promising every worker the fundamental right to a safe job. The law granted the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) the right to establish and enforce workplace safety and health regulations, and the AFL-CIO chose April 28 beginning in 1989 to observe Workers' Memorial Day. Since 1991, family survivors, friends and coworkers have gathered at the Bethlehem Rose Gardens, Eighth Ave. and Union Blvd., Bethlehem, to remember those lost to a workplace accident or disease. (*Fig. #2*)

The Lehigh Valley's Top Ten Industrial Accidents (as of April 2024)

March 26, 1942	Lehigh Portland Cement - 31 killed	premature dynamite explosion
January 6, 1881	Allentown Rolling Mill - 14 killed	boiler explosion
August 17, 1905	Lehigh Portland Cement - 11 killed	landslide
July 14, 1877	Lehigh Iron Ore Mine - 8 killed	boiler explosion
June 2, 1910	Coplay Cement - 8 killed	premature dynamite explosion
October 18, 1945	Bethlehem Steel - 8 killed	toxic gas leak
June 21, 1879	Lehigh Iron Ore Mine - 7 killed	boiler explosion
April 13, 1910	Nazareth Portland Cement - 7 killed	premature dynamite explosion
April 19, 1920	Lehigh Portland Cement - 7 killed	premature dynamite explosion
April 25, 1890	Unicorn Silk Mill - 6 killed	fire
March 2, 1894	Williams & Son Slate - 6 killed	cave in
March 24, 1948	Bethlehem Steel - 6 killed	blast furnace spill
February 11, 1959	Ingersoll-Rand - 6 killed	compressor explosion

Fig. 3: The Lehigh Valley's top ten industrial accidents, as of April 2024.

Although the Concept Sciences disaster does not rank in our area's top ten worst accidents, it remains the deadliest in Lehigh County since an April 1920 premature dynamite explosion killed seven workers at Lehigh Portland Cement's Ormrod quarry in North Whitehall Township. Northampton County was the scene of the worst industrial accident when thirty-one workers died in a premature dynamite blast at Lehigh Portland Cement Co.'s Martins Creek quarry in March 1942.

Notably, explosions often caused the worst disasters. The Concept Sciences tragedy resulted from a volatile chemical mix with a force of 700 pounds of TNT.

The explosion from the volatile chemical mix produced at Concept Sciences had a force of nearly 700 pounds of TNT felt as far away as Tobyhanna to the north and Topton to the west. It spread an unknown dust cloud over the most densely-populated area of our region, sent debris over a thousand feet away and brought at least 400 first responders to the disaster scene. OSHA cited the company for twenty alleged violations totaling \$641,200, the state Department of Environmental Protection sought three-quarters of a million dollars to clean up the site, and a federal grand jury indicted the owner on twelve counts. But in the years that followed, the company owner paid only forty percent of OSHA's penalties, paid only forty percent of the clean-up costs, and had all federal charges dismissed. (*Fig. #3*)

The deadly explosion prompted changes. Police, fire and other emergency unit departments improved regional communications to respond to catastrophes that can overwhelm a single community's resources. Townships reviewed their zoning laws to prevent a company's operations from threatening the surrounding community and nearby businesses. And public outrage sparked changes to the state's Right to Know Law. Concept Sciences had moved into the industrial park near the ABE Airport and Rt. 22 only weeks before the tragedy. Weak regulations had given companies months to disclose their inventories of hazardous chemicals housed at their worksites. But thanks to the leadership of Steve Samuelson, the state lawmaker for the district who demanded stronger regulations, Harrisburg passed a law after the tragedy that compelled companies to disclose their inventories of dangerous materials within days of taking receipt of the products. (Fig. #4)

The 1999 Concept Sciences tragedy reminds us of the importance of laws, zoning requirements and regulations that protect, not just workers and their families, but first responders and the community at large. The lessons of this disaster should never be forgotten.

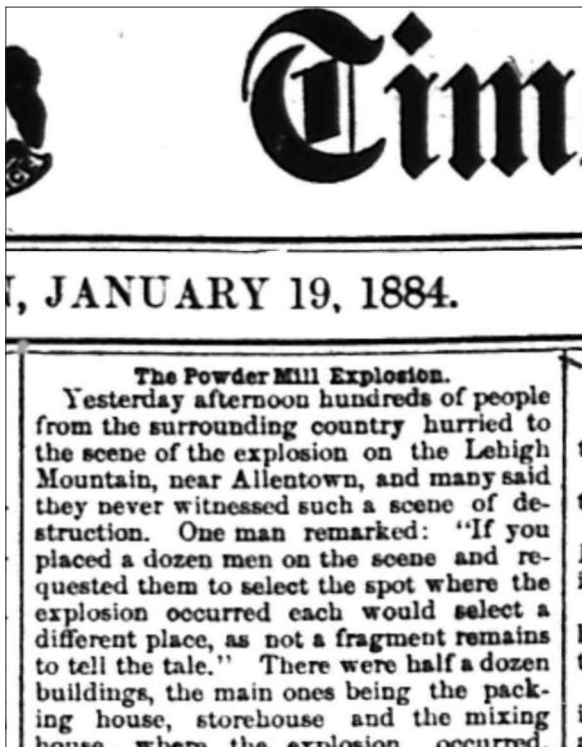


Fig. 4: Vulcan Dynamite Company disaster, January 18, 1884. Like the Concept Sciences blast, weak regulations in the nineteenth century allowed companies to engage in dangerous operations near residential communities.

Jacob Heffner, Isaac Kramer and John Druckenbrode met instant death at 10 a.m. January 18, 1884 when an unexplained explosion happened in the mixing house. The men were "mixing glycerin with a hoe when the explosion took place." The blast tore apart their bodies "almost to atoms."

The explosion also damaged homes near the disaster scene. "Window panes were shattered, and pictures and ornaments in the houses were thrown from their places and damaged." Workplace regulations not only protect the lives of workers, but also prevent a company's operations from threatening surrounding communities and nearby businesses. (Credit: Bethlehem Daily Times, January 19, 1884)

Mourn for the dead, but fight for the living

Workers' Memorial Day, April 28

by the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO

On April 28, 1971, the Occupational Safety and Health Act went into effect, promising every worker the fundamental right to a safe job. In 1989, the AFL-CIO chose this date to observe Workers Memorial Day.

The law was won because of the tireless efforts of the labor movement, which organized for safer working conditions and demanded action from the government to protect working people. Since then, unions and allies have fought hard to make that promise a reality—winning protections under the law that have made jobs safer and saved lives. But our work is not done.

This election year, worker rights to a safe job are seriously threatened. Congressional Republicans are attempting to defund the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and remove job safety enforcement funding. Anti-regulatory attacks have put our working conditions in danger—threats that would remove protections on the books we take for granted.

President Biden has strengthened job safety enforcement numbers to hold bad-acting employers accountable and has issued worker safety rules, such as the asbestos ban and the rule to protect workers and communities from explosions at chemical facilities.

Our unions need elected officials who care about providing good, safe jobs for all workers.

Unions and our allies are fighting hard every day — winning protections that have made jobs safer and saved lives — but our work is far from over. Each year, thousands of workers are killed, and millions more suffer injury and illness because of dangerous working conditions that are 100% preventable.

Workers Memorial Day is a day to remember workers killed, injured, or made ill on the job and renew the fight for strong safety and health protections.

While we mourn for the dead, we will continue to organize and fight for the fundamental right of every worker to a safe job.



Lehigh Valley Workers' Memorial, April 28. People gathered at the Bethlehem Rose Gardens to remember loved ones, friends and coworkers lost to workplace accidents. John Werkheiser (*far right*) opened the ceremony.

US Rep. Wild keynote speaker at Labor Council dinner

Congresswoman applauded repeatedly during her April 13 speech.

by Ron Ennis, Editor
Lehigh Valley Labor Council



The April 13 Lehigh Valley Labor Council Awards dinner began as a night of mutual attraction. Calling the 300-plus attendees “my favorite people,” US Rep. Susan Wild gave the night’s keynote address, attracting approving nods, applause and cheers throughout her fifteen-minute speech.

Congresswoman Wild, who represents the Lehigh Valley in the US House, began her speech as she often does by describing how fortunate she feels to have been living in the region for the past thirty-seven years. It’s “where my children were born and raised,” she said. This kinship with her listeners provided Wild with a starting point to address recent headlines.



US Rep.
Susan Wild

Wild explained how hard she has worked to see that the Lehigh Valley receives its fair share of federal tax dollars. Her position stands in sharp contrast to some of her predecessors who refused government aid for badly needed local projects.

Wild told the audience that she, too, could not help notice the rise in prices at the supermarket. “Recent price increases have been the result of price gouging by corporations,” she explained and demanded that corporations “don’t gouge the American people.”

Wild expressed her disappointment with Mack Trucks’ decision to build a plant in Mexico. Like other Lehigh Valley political and community leaders, she learned of the truck manufacturer’s decision only minutes before the company released a public statement. “It makes me truly sad that they will build a plant in Mexico,” she lamented. “I suspect that they will not find the same kind of worker as they have in the Lehigh Valley.” She had noted earlier in her speech that union workers, like the United Auto Workers #677 members at Mack Trucks, “bring a higher-value with their labor.”

Wild also described the hostility she witnesses as a minority member on the US House Committee on Education and the Workforce. Historically, the committee was known as “Education and Labor,” but Republicans find the word “labor” distasteful, and replace its historic name every time they seize control of the House. Should Democrats win in November, she told her audience that the name will revert to its historically correct US House Committee on Education and Labor.

The dismissal of history is only the beginning of what US Rep. Wild sees on the committee. The relentless “attacks on worker rights and pensions . . . can be depressing,” she said. As the only Pennsylvania Democrat seated on the committee, she feels it necessary to fight for Pennsylvania workers in a state steeped in labor history.

Wild is running for re-election this November.



Michele Kessler honored with Lifetime Service Award

UFCW #1776 secretary-treasurer receives honor at the April 13 Labor Council dinner

by John Werkheiser, UFCW #1776
Lehigh Valley Labor Council



Saying a few words about Michele Kessler is probably the greatest honor I have ever had. I started thinking about what I would say tonight and thought it would probably be easiest thinking about words that describe her as the person I truly know.

I worked with Michele for over 20 years. . . ., because you only work *with* her, you never work *for* her.

Michele is *dedicated*. She has thirty-eight years with her local the United Food & Commercial Workers #1776 and is currently the secretary-treasurer to the 35,000-member local.

Michele is *empathetic*. She continues to work with everyone that reports to her and helps them through any rough times in order for everyone to succeed.

Michele is *compassionate*. She consistently pushes to do everything within her control as a trustee on many health and pension funds to keep costs down and benefits up for the members.

Michele is *conscientious*. When asked why something is done a certain way, she replies, “Because it’s the right thing to do.”

Michele is *caring*. On countless occasions, she has shown concern for a union member or fellow officer, especially when they were battling a health or family issue.

Michele is a *fighter*. She will be out there with workers on a picket line while many in her position of leadership would assign or watch others do the picketing from afar.

Michele has exhibited *fairness* in her incredible work over many, many years with the AFL-CIO’s Pride at Work and the UFCW’s OUTreach, and treats everyone – Gay, Lesbian, Straight, Black, Hispanic, white, etc. with the common decency we all want for ourselves and every member we represent. Governor Tom Wolf appointed her to serve on the Pennsylvania Commission on LGBTQ Affairs, and she continues serving by appointment of Governor Josh Shapiro. Her leadership in fighting for basic respect and fairness for all people, not just workers, is who she is!

(Editor’s note: Speech made at the April 13 Lehigh Valley Labor Council Awards dinner. Edited for length and clarity.)



Michele
Kessler

Dates to remember for 2024

June 14-15— Pennsylvania Labor History Society Conference

September 1—Labor Day Picnic

November 5—General Election



Anne Radakovits recipient of Werkheiser Award

Presented April 13 at the Lehigh Valley Labor Council annual awards banquet

by the Lehigh Valley Labor Council



Anne Radakovits

If there is one outstanding quality of most union members, it is their care and concern for their community and their coworkers. This year, the Lehigh Valley Labor Council presented the William Werkheiser Community Service Award to Anne Radakovits at its April 13 Annual Awards dinner.

The award is named after its first recipient, who dedicated most of his union career to many local non-profits, and is given at the council's annual dinner to a person or persons demonstrating strong community service.

Radakovits started as a revenue enforcement agent with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania over twenty years ago. As a state employee, she joined her union, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) #1979. She quickly got involved in her local, first serving as its treasurer and then president.

Radakovits is also a vice-president to the AFSCME Council #13 Executive Board representing District #88. She has been overwhelmingly elected and reelected to this position by members of District #88, which represents over 13,000 members. She is a member of the AFSCME Women's Committee and has served on the last two statewide negotiating committees representing her local and 40,000 state employees.

Radakovits has worked as a release staffer for her union's political campaigns. She began her political work during the 2020 presidential campaign and again during the 2022 gubernatorial election, where she was very instrumental in helping run her union's program in southeastern Pennsylvania.

In addition to her union work, Radakovits's efforts toward community service are exemplary. She has been very active in the United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley's Annual Day of Caring, and the Lehigh Valley Labor Council's annual holiday toy drive and parade. She volunteers her time for numerous events, such as the labor council's annual Labor Day Picnic and the annual Awards Banquet. She currently sits on the Teen-Works Board and has served as an Adult Chair of the Board.

Radakovits has served as a Lehigh Valley Labor Council board officer since 2014 and its recording secretary since January 2018. She has been a tireless advocate for AFSCME members and working families in the Lehigh Valley. Her selfless giving of her time to help others makes her a worthy recipient of this year's William Werkheiser Award.

(Editor's note: Speech made at the April 13 Lehigh Valley Labor Council Awards dinner. Edited for length and clarity.)





**LEHIGH VALLEY LABOR COUNCIL
AFL-CIO**

62nd Annual Awards Dinner 

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Thank you to all our Annual Awards Dinner sponsors! Lehigh Valley Labor Council President Jim Irwin thanked all those who sponsored our April 13 event. Our Diamond Sponsors also included American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees #88 and United Auto Workers #677.

“ ”

■ ■ ■

“Did your sister have an illegitimate baby when she was 15? Did you fail math in junior high? Are you divorced or living in a common-law relationship? Do you pay your bills promptly. . . ?

“The answers to these intimate questions and hundreds more like them have always been available to a persistent investigator with enough time and money to sift the paper trail we leave behind in file cabinets around the country. But now, for the first time, in this age of computers, it is becoming possible for any snooper to get such information quickly and cheaply, without leaving his office chair.”

Jack Star, in a June 25, 1968 *Look Magazine* article entitled “The Computer Data Bank: Will It Kill Your Freedom?” The article feared a centralized collection and storage of personal information by the government, but failed to understand the rise of corporations in their ability to gather a detailed background of every American.





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THE NEXT MEETING WILL BE HELD ON
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 19, 2024

Executive Board @ 7:00 PM – Delegate meeting @ 7:30 PM

Teamsters #773 3614 Lehigh Street, Whitehall PA 18052

(One block east of the Whitehall Township Police Department)

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