

John W. Wilhelm, President



John W. Wilhelm was elected President/Hospitality Industry of UNITE HERE at the Union's founding Convention on July 9, 2004. He was elected President on June 30, 2009, at the Union's first constitutional convention.

Mr. Wilhelm has a long history in the labor movement. He has established a reputation as an innovative union leader. His career has been characterized by creative organizing and corporate strategies; a strong commitment to rank and file member participation; reaching out to workers across ethnic and language barriers; and building positive, mutually beneficial relationships with employers. He has negotiated many excellent collective bargaining agreements on behalf of union members, and has a history of tenacity when conflicts have arisen with employers.

Mr. Wilhelm started work with the former HERE (the Hotel Employees & Restaurant Employees Union) in 1969 as an organizer and business agent in New Haven, Connecticut, where he had graduated with high honors from Yale College two years earlier.

In the early 1980's, he led the organization into HERE of 2,650 clerical and technical employees at Yale. The successful 1984 strike for their first contract was a nationally known struggle for economic equality for working women.

From 1987 to 1998, Mr. Wilhelm led HERE's highly successful rebuilding in Las Vegas. Partnering with newly elected Local Union leadership, he directed a campaign that has become a national model. The hallmarks of that campaign are:

- Excellent contracts for Union members and their families.
- The fastest-growing private-sector Local Union anywhere in the American labor movement.
- A model program of rank and file membership participation and leadership.
- A positive, mutually beneficial relationship with most major gaming companies.
- Groundbreaking labor-management cooperative programs, especially in health care and job training.
- Successful campaigns against employers acting unfairly toward workers, including victory in the 6½-year Frontier Hotel and Casino strike.
- A rank-and-file-driven bipartisan political action program.
- Full cooperation with gaming industry regulators, resulting in an excellent ethical reputation for HERE in the gaming industry.

Mr. Wilhelm became President of HERE on August 1, 1998, elected by the Union's General Executive Board to fill a vacancy, and was elected to a full term at the Union's 43rd General Convention, July 17, 2001.

After Mr. Wilhelm was elected President, HERE became the first Union in the modern era to be released from government supervision, when the U.S. Justice Department and the Federal Court entered a Final Order of Dismissal in the Union's Federal consent decree.

During his HERE presidency, Mr. Wilhelm furthered the Union's reputation as an organizing union, and achieved net growth after more than 25 years of membership decline. The Union also substantially diversified its national leadership, including election in 2001 of the Union's first women General Officers, its first General Officer of color, its first Asian-American Vice President, significant increases in the number of African-American, Latino, and women Vice Presidents, and its first elected Canadian Director.

After the tragic events of 9/11, when 43 members of HERE Local 100 at Windows on the World Restaurant were killed and mass layoffs swept the hospitality industry, Mr. Wilhelm led his Union's relief efforts, worked with industry leaders to pursue Federal help for workers and companies, and led the Union's successful efforts to renegotiate five major-city hotel contracts in spite of the industry's depressed business.

In 2004, Mr. Wilhelm led HERE to join with the union formerly known as UNITE (Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees), to create UNITE HERE. The creation of UNITE HERE brought together two of the most dynamic and progressive unions in the North American labor movement.

Mr. Wilhelm has led city-wide hotel industry negotiations in San Francisco, Boston, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas, as well as several rounds of negotiations for the non-faculty employees of Yale University, and scores of other contract negotiations.

In September, 2007, Mr. Wilhelm was inducted into the American Gaming Association's Gaming Hall of Fame in Las Vegas, Nevada.