

AFL-CIO: Launches 'Union Mask Brigade' to keep workers safe with solidarity and American can-do tradition

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(MILWAUKEE, WI, TUESDAY, JUNE, 16, 2020) — As part of the Workers First Week of Action to adopt America's Five Economic Essentials, the Wisconsin AFL-CIO is unveiling a new initiative to keep workers safe on the job and in the community. The Union Mask Brigade is an effort that speaks directly to keeping front-line workers safe and secure during the coronavirus pandemic – a core pillar of a workers first recovery with America's Five Economic Essentials.

The Covid-19 pandemic exposed a number of areas in which our nation was simply not prepared. Nowhere is this more true than in the workplace, where far too many men and women have been asked to do their jobs without the personal protective equipment needed to keep themselves and those around them safe.

"The mission of the Union Mask Brigade is simple: mobilizing workers to protect workers," said **Stephanie Bloomingdale, President of the Wisconsin AFL-CIO.** "Wisconsin union member mask sewers are helping to provide virus protection to front line workers who are without. No sewing skills? No problem. You can be part of the Union Mask Brigade effort without knowing a thing about needles and thread. From delivering supplies, to posting our safety decree at your workplace, and more, everyone wanting to help keep workers safe can get involved at unionmaskbrigade.org."

At unionmaskbrigade.org, volunteers can download patterns and instructions to make at-home pleated masks and face shields, share their homemade masks, print

and display the Wisconsin AFL-CIO safety decree, and more.

Hear testimonies from Union Mask Brigade members at unionmaskbrigade.org:

Connie Smith, Wisconsin Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals, AFT: *I am a Surgical Tech and President of the Tech Unit at St. Francis Hospital. It's great to have a cloth mask to wear in-between our cases. I've enjoyed handing out the home-made masks made by fellow union members. This shows the power of solidarity and the strength in standing together.*

Ezoda Whitlock, National Association of Letter Carriers: *I'm a letter carrier at Wauwatosa Station and a member of the WI State Association of Letter Carriers. I'm sending thanks to the Union Mask Brigade for delivering these beautiful masks. It made our day.*

Linda Sadowski, OPEIU Local 9: *I'm a founding member of the UMB and an Administrative Assistant at the Wisconsin AFL-CIO. I have enjoyed being able to put my skills to work when the pandemic hit. It has been rewarding to be part of the "war effort" so to speak. I've experimented with lots of different patterns and types of fabric and had a few broken needles along the way.*

James Macon, Amalgamated Transit Union Local 998: *Thank you to the Union Mask Brigade for the donation of masks. Our bus drivers loved the masks, they are made really well and are super comfortable to wear.*

Carla Miller, OPEIU Local 9: *I'm a founding member of the Union Mask Brigade and an Accountant at the WI AFL-CIO. My mother taught me to sew when I was a child. Sewing was always a part of our home when growing up and I continue to sew on a regular basis. When the pandemic hit and there was word that masks were needed, it was an opportunity to use my sewing skills, but more importantly to help people.*

Sue Voelker, AFSCME retiree: *I'm a retired union member of AFSCME Local 3055. My husband Tim, who just recently retired from NALC, Branch 619 and I are long time union supporters and excited to volunteer our efforts to help make masks for those in need.*

Scott Van Derven, Wisconsin State Association of Letter Carriers President: *I'd like to thank all the volunteers at the Union Mask Brigade for having the backs of Letter Carriers by making these fantastic masks. Our carriers have been on the front lines*

delivering normalcy to the American public since Day One of the COVID-19 pandemic and will continue to be there to help deliver the recovery of our nation as well.

“When it comes to helping keep our fellow workers and those around them safe and healthy, there’s a role for everyone,” said **Dennis Delie, Secretary-Treasurer of the Wisconsin AFL-CIO**. “The Union Mask Brigade welcomes everyone wanting to advance our mission of protecting workers on the job with solidarity and the American can-do tradition.”