

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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“LIVING WAGE PAID HERE!” - COMMUNITY GROUP LAUNCHES LIVING WAGE EMPLOYER CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

Asheville, NC — On Thursday, March 13 Just Economics, a new grassroots community group working for economic justice in Western NC, will join forces with local businesses and non-profit organizations to make Asheville a living wage certified city. Mayor Terry Bellamy, City Councilmember Brownie Newman, and Asheville businesses and non-profits will celebrate the launch of this new program at Laurey’s Catering, one of the first living wage certified businesses.

Employers in Asheville and Buncombe County who pay workers at least \$11.35 an hour, or \$9.85 with health insurance benefits can be “living wage certified.” Certification is free and voluntary, and is monitored by Just Economics, an independent nonprofit organization. Living wage certified employers will receive free publicity and a “Living Wage Paid Here!” sticker for their store window. The program is one of the first of its kind in the country, and will raise awareness about the living wage issue, recognize businesses that pay a living wage, and ultimately encourage non-living wage employers to increase their workers’ wages.

Sarah Osmer, coordinator of Just Economics, explains the program’s aims, “This program is about community sustainability. If you work full-time, you should be able to support yourself and your family. One in four jobs in Buncombe County does not pay a living wage, that’s 30,000 workers here who are struggling to survive. We see this program as addressing the root cause of poverty in our community—low wages and lack of decent paying jobs.”

According to Osmer, the program is also about community education. She explains, “Businesses that do pay their workers a living wage should be recognized and rewarded. We want to raise up the living wage issue and connect consumers to businesses and organizations that pay a fair wage.” Twenty businesses and non-profit organizations have already signed on to the program, and dozens more are expected to join following the formal launch celebration.

Laurey’s Catering has signed up to be Living Wage Certified. Owner Laurey Masterton explains, “Basically, I am interested in the spirit of this program because I want to make it possible for people to live in this community. Many people with a lot of wealth are moving here but I fear, as has happened in so many other places, that regular people will soon not be able to afford to live here. It is the regular people who give the texture to this place, who make it an interesting place to be, and who make it the place people want to visit. If they can’t live here, what do we have?”

Employers that are interested in Living Wage Certification should contact Sarah Osmer at 828-301-7291 or sarahosmer@justeconomicswnc.org, or visit www.justeconomicswnc.org.

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