

### United they stand, unions, clergy and more

#### KATHLEEN MERRYMAN; THE NEWS TRIBUNE

Two refrigerator technicians from Seattle stood by the Greater Tacoma Convention & Trade Center on Sunday, ready to direct 18 bus loads of people to the Sound Alliance Founding Assembly inside.

They'd come, said Ean Thompson, 28, and Matt Thompson, 26, because they're excited about the Sound Alliance vision.

"It's bringing together union and faith groups to form an alliance," Ean said.

The partners work and lobby together for affordable housing, accessible health care, effective education, equitable immigration and civil rights policies, and good jobs that contribute to a sustainable environment.

There's nothing revolutionary in that list. The change here, Ean said, is in the approach.

"In the past, everybody seemed divided," he said.

"Now we're uniting to build strength," Matt said.

The idea is to have one organization that partners with business, negotiates with legislators and solves problems ranging from a stoplight at a school crossing to affordable housing.

Though Sunday was the official launch, the people behind Sound Alliance have been working for 21/2 years to get it grounded. They've gathered the backing of 80 unions, churches, synagogues, mosques and nonprofits. We're talking nuns, plumbers, rabbis, teachers, Teamsters, electricians, immigrants.

A good many of the estimated 2,000 people who gathered at the convention center had a history with the project.

They'd gone to leadership training, then fanned out in a "listening campaign" to hear what ordinary people consider their most pressing issues. Based on what they heard, they built the five-item "Agenda for the Common Good" Ean described.

Beyond that, they've been working on solutions.

Take the juxtaposition of sustainable jobs and the environment.

Eric Anthony drove over with members of a sister group, the Spokane Alliance. Through one of its programs, he entered an apprenticeship program. Now he's a member of Ironworkers Local 14 and, thanks to the Spokane Alliance's lobbying efforts for "green" construction projects, is rebuilding his old high school into an environmentally sound structure.

Spokane teacher Joe Ramos said he likes the Spokane Alliance's style. It starts with research, comes up with a plan and then launches into negotiations with the people who can make that plan happen.

Sound Alliance members have taken the same approach in the Bethel School District, where they're making it easier for young people to connect with union apprenticeships.

In a ceremonial celebration of that partnership, Tom Cruver of the Bethel Education Association and Doug Nugent of the Washington Sheet Metal Joint Apprenticeship Training Council signed an agreement to continue it.

"This is a real opportunity in the Puget Sound for a career and a secure future," Cruver said. "We can identify 18-year-olds to go into sheet metal and get a job that starts at \$30,000, with full benefits."

In another staged negotiation, Dusty Hoerler of Plumbers and Pipefitters Local 32 proposed a program to retrofit a block of middle-class homes in Western Washington and a block in Eastern Washington with energy-efficient windows, insulation and appliances.

“Will you meet with us to discuss this pilot program?” he asked Senate Majority Leader Lisa Brown.

“It’s a win for families, for the environment and for tradespeople,” she replied. “Yes, I will meet with you.”

Terry Addison and Patti Beaver of the Puyallup School District had been fuzzy on the Sound Alliance concept when they arrived. By the end of the program, they were sold.

“We made history today,” Addison said.

And they got a good start on rethinking the future.

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