



## ***Wendell W. Young, III*** **2004 Peggy Browning Fund Honoree**

By John Lavin, *Director, Comey Institute  
of Industrial Relations*

In a revolutionary moment that the Pennsylvania food industry and the American Labor Movement will never forget, Wendell W. Young, III was elected in 1963 to lead the Retail Clerks International Association's (RCIA) Philadelphia Local Union.

He was a 23-year-old college graduate working as a part-time food clerk at Acme. His full-time employment was teaching social studies at Northeast Catholic High School. Wendell assumed his role as union leader with a fervor that upset the mainstream by promoting political and economic change.

His collective bargaining philosophy compelled racial integration of the workplace to create equity and equality for workers. Women and minority employees saw equal opportunities, as Wendell advocated human rights via labor contracts that made history for their guarantees on dignity in compensation and work rules.

Wendell continued to teach both literally and figuratively. He held students spellbound during the sixties as a lecturer in ethics at his alma mater, Saint Joseph's University.

In addition to landmark union organizing in department store as well as food retail industries, Wendell also spearheaded public sector union activism by establishing labor rights for Pennsylvania Wine & Spirits Shoppes employees in the early 1970s. In addition, he facilitated union bargaining power in the manufacturing sector during that time as workers in shoe and boot factories as well as food processing plants entered the fold of the expanding local union that Wendell directed. In 1979, he guided the local through its crucial and defining role in the merger that brought two International unions, the RCIA and the Amalgamated Meatcutters, together in a record-breaking merger.

With the 1980s, Wendell led innovative initiatives to save jobs by way of employee ownership strategies. Featured in *Business Week* as an icon of compassion and insight, Wendell instituted a gains-sharing agreement at Philadelphia's A&P that became the basis of the Super Fresh subsidiary.

In 1990, he coordinated the Acme Multi-Union Strategy Committee to bid for worker ownership of the company including eight local unions in six states. Although the company took the chain off the auction block, workers received an infusion of energy and organizational credit for their votes to keep their jobs and their company alive. Subsequent labor agreements revealed a union and a union leader that reflected new possibilities for excellence in labor-management relations.

In 1992, Wendell received his master's degree in labor relations at Rutgers University where he stimulated academics to test their intellectual powers in the world of practice. In 1992 he also assumed the key position of Vice President and Executive Board member of the International United Food & Commercial Workers, where he brought his experience in economic empowerment to the International's policy-making process.

Since 1995 Wendell has also hosted the radio program *Talking Unions* on WHAT 1340 AM, a forum for workers to have their voices heard in the midst of the media's clamor to silence the cause of labor. That program's distinctive dialogue has created the impetus for courage in organizing and negotiating. To quote Wendell directly, "*Talking Unions* is a means for people to encourage people. It's that simple."

Today, as President of United Food & Commercial Workers Local 1776, Wendell W. Young, III continues to inspire over 22,000 working men and women from more than 70 companies. He leads contract negotiations on the precedent that he has created over the past forty-three years for negotiating outstanding benefits such as full medical care, tuition reimbursements and childcare. In addition, he remains in the vanguard of the fight to keep anti-Union, anti-worker companies like Wal-Mart from invading the area and destroying the decent jobs for which workers have struggled.

Dividing his energies between loving duties as husband, father and grandfather, today Wendell continues to personify the cause for social justice that predicated his first days in union office.

As proponent of humanitarian values in church, school and workplace, Wendell has displayed models for labor advocacy that merge ancient traditions of human rights with the latest and most inventive thinking in organizational theory.

As such, Wendell W. Young, III, as this year's award recipient, represents the best of past, present and future ...

- *forever Young*