

Good evening and thank you for the opportunity to offer my testimony.

My name is Cheryl Bergman, and I am here to support renaming the corner of College and Elm Streets as John Wilhelm Corner.

I am a founding member of Local 34, Yale's clerical and technical workers' union.

I now serve as an Executive Board member and Treasurer of the Yale Unions Retirees Association after retiring from Yale in 2018 following 39 years of service.

In 1985, Local 34 won its first contract with Yale University after a long, hard-fought struggle that included a 10-week strike.

Last January 2025 marked 40 years since that milestone contract. As current and former members considered how to commemorate the occasion, one thing was clear: honoring John Wilhelm was essential, because without his vision and leadership, Local 34 would not exist.

In fact, New Haven's union and community successes in the decades since 1985 would not have been possible without the organizing lessons, perseverance, and example he provided.

In 1964, John came to New Haven to study history at Yale. Unlike most undergraduates, he didn't live on campus. Instead, he lived in the Hill, where he came to understand the economic struggles facing his neighbors. After graduating in 1967, he took a job as a union organizer working with Local 35, Yale's Service and Maintenance workers' Union.

Yale and Local 35 had a notoriously acrimonious relationship, marked by four strikes in ten years as the union fought subcontracting and union-busting. The strike in 1977 lasted for 13 weeks.

John knew that ending the cycle of strikes and securing Local 35's future required organizing Yale's clerical and technical workers and uniting them with Local 35 to challenge the university. So began the organizing drive to form Local 34 that started in 1980.

John Wilhelm is a visionary leader known for his creativity and strong commitment to fairness.

He believed that Yale's predominantly female clerical and technical workforce, could, with proper training and support, unite and become a powerful force capable of confronting the university—and his belief proved true.

He also knew that Yale was a formidable opponent, with vast resources and the power to obstruct the organizing effort. But his years of experience with Local 35 had taught him that Yale also had a weakness: its global reputation, embodied in its motto, "*Lux et Veritas*" - Light and Truth- that could be used against it.

So, when Yale said they didn't have a room large enough to accommodate the University and Union negotiating committees, John arranged for the two groups to be invited to meet in the sanctuary of the First and Summerfield Methodist Church on the corner of College and Elm.

And when Yale refused to pay the union negotiating committee members for time spent in bargaining sessions, John created the Day Bank Card, allowing employees to donate vacation and sick time so their representatives would not lose pay.

John's genius came through though when he framed the low wages of Yale's predominantly female workers as a pay equity issue and challenged Yale to correct the long-standing inherent discrimination in its salary structure.

Throughout the campaign, he publicized to the Yale and New Haven communities and to the broader public, the absurdity of Yale's actions, while enlisting allies across the academic, social and political spectrum.

These are just a few of the many ways John Wilhelm's creativity empowered Yale workers and helped them to see that they deserved respect and a voice in their working lives by giving them the tools to make that possible.

Local 34's first contract was historic. Its wage and benefit gains set a lasting standard, even 40 years later, for employers in Greater New Haven and across the region.

In 1998, John Wilhelm was elected president of the International Union and later expanded the one-on-one, grassroots organizing model used in the Yale campaign to UNITE HERE locals nationwide.

In New Haven, John Wilhelm's influence has continued to spread.

His organizing model has endured on campus and in city neighborhoods, where residents have successfully challenged Yale's dominance in New Haven's civic life.

For all these reasons, I urge you to vote to name the corner of College and Elm Streets- John Wilhelm Corner.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.