

# Marching for labor: Organized labor gathers for annual Labor Day Parade

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer  
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**ALTON** - In keeping with tradition, Alton's **Labor Day Parade** occurred Saturday morning, a week before the holiday is officially celebrated nationwide. The parade takes place a week early so not to coincide with another march for organized labor in **Madison County** - the **Granite City Labor Day Parade**.

The Alton parade has occurred in this incarnation since the 1970s. It was being staged at **Alton Middle School** off **College Avenue** Saturday morning. Several representatives from local organized labor joined with elected officials in a show of solidarity for unions and organized labor from across the St. Louis Metro Area.

This year's parade grand marshal, **Madison County Board Chairperson Alan Dunstan**, said he appreciates what organized labor has done for the citizens of his county. Dunstan will also serve as the grand marshal for the Granite City Labor Day Parade next weekend.

"Organized labor has always been good to me," Dunstan said. "I will do anything for them. I am very pleased to be doing this today."

**Dean Webb**, of the **Madison County Federation of Labor**, was a part of the federation's board, which chose Dunstan as grand marshal. Webb said it was to assist Dunstan during this year's election cycle. Dunstan is running against **Madison County Treasurer Kurt Prenzler** for the position of Madison County Board Chair.

"He's got opposition this year," Webb said of Dunstan. "He's always been great to us. Alan has done a great job. Madison County is one of the few counties in the state operating in the black. I look forward to having him as a chairman for years to come."

Another county official facing opposition for reelection this year is **Madison County State's Attorney Tom Gibbons**. Gibbons was in attendance to support organized labor in Madison County, which he said helped aid in his work for public safety.

"I'm out to support the working families of Madison County," Gibbons said. "They help keep the community safe, and ensure schools are good and safe. Also, I'm out here today because it's a beautiful day. We couldn't ask for a better day than this."

**Illinois State Representative Dan Beiser (D-Alton)** also helped lead the parade. He said organized labor was a big part of his life, and vowed to support it until the day he died.

"Like I've done every year, I love getting out to support organized labor in Madison County," Beiser said. "My uncle and father worked in a union at **Owens Glass Illinois**. I was part of organized labor when I was a union school teacher. My daughter is in the IEA (**Illinois Education Association**) now. I've been a recipient, and my family has been a recipient of all the good things unions can bring to workers."

Most of the marchers in the parade were representatives from local organized labor groups. **Harold Brown Sr.** of the **Alton Laborers 218** said he has been to every Alton Labor Day Parade since the 1970s. He said the beginnings of the parade, which he could cite to 1955, had a bit of turmoil.

"This is the parade they said would never fly," Brown said. "They shot it down in '55 and brought it back around '70."



Brown said in-fighting between the unions prevented the parade from being the message of solidarity it has become.

"The fitters and the carpenters had an ongoing feud back then, but we haven't had that since the '70s," he said. "One year, an electrician's mother was even pushed down in a crowd, and no one fought. They called the police, but there was no fighting."

After joining the union in 1958, Brown said he served as its president for 38 years. He said unions were essential to an America trying to stay "good."

"They are the only ones who speak up for the working people," Brown said. "The rest of them are cowards with their tails between their legs. If this country is going to do anything good, the unions must survive and prosper."

Last year was the centennial of Brown's union, which currently boasts around 350 in its membership.

**David Weaver** of the **International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers District Nine** echoed Brown's sentiments regarding organized labor in the

United States. His association's membership claims as many as 8,500 members across the St. Louis area on both sides of the river. They represent dealership automotive technicians, airplane mechanics, tool and dye manufacturers and several other groups across the area.

"There would be no middle class without the unions," he said. "We're the only ones out there fighting for the wages and benefits of the workers."



**Patrick Kelly** of the **Laborers Local 338** said he has been with the union representing both municipal and private construction workers for about a decade. He said the biggest threat to organized labor in Illinois was "Right to Work."

"**Right to Work** is the biggest danger to organized labor," he said. "It gets rid of collective bargaining rights. It is a very big issue in Illinois. It's what is keeping the budget from being passed."

The parade takes place each year to show solidarity between the different organized labor groups in Madison County. **Greg Kamp** of the **International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Number 649** said he was marching with his fellow workers in a show of "brotherhood."

"Today, we are out here to support our union brothers and get all labor out here to show we are united."



Kamp's brotherhood supports electrical and communication workers across the county. Their current membership is more than 300 members, and they support commercial, residential and industrial electrical and communications workers.