



**Charles Wowkanech**  
**President**  
**New Jersey State AFL-CIO**

**BIOGRAPHY**

Charles Wowkanech became President of the New Jersey State AFL-CIO, the one million-member statewide labor federation, on January 5, 1997 and was unanimously elected to four-year terms in 2000, 2004, and 2008. A second-generation member of Local 68 of the Operating Engineers, Charlie joined the New Jersey State AFL-CIO in 1990 as Assistant to the President. He then served as Secretary-Treasurer, the number two position of the state's largest labor organization, before assuming his role as President.

"He is reflective of what's going on at the national level, with his energy and outreach, and he has been able to unite the labor movement because he speaks the language of progressive unionism," is how the public issues magazine *New Jersey Reporter*, described Charlie's first year in office adding that he was "...the first new direction of the AFL-CIO in New Jersey in 40 years."

"I look upon my work and position as State Federation President as an honor and perhaps, without exaggeration, it is the greatest job in America. It's a work in progress with limitless possibilities for enhancing the quality of life for the hard working families in our great state," said Charlie. "The credit for our success belongs to the dedicated and tireless staff of the New Jersey State AFL-CIO, along with the leadership of our state's affiliated unions."

Charlie immersed himself in union activities at an early age. His first assignment for the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 68 was as a member of a start-up crew at a Newark Airport terminal where he quickly gained a reputation as an aggressively hard worker. Promoted to shop steward, he eventually earned the title of chief engineer. By age 21, he was the youngest member ever appointed to the local's Executive Board in its more than 100-year history.

Charlie is a graduate of the AFL-CIO's George Meany Institute in Washington, DC where he was formally trained in labor law, grievance arbitration and other skills.

Looking to the future, Charlie makes it his priority to reach out and educate young people about the history and goals of the labor movement and considers the opportunity to meet with college and high school students one of his most important roles as President. Passionate about mentoring young people interested in becoming active in the labor movement, he often appears as a guest-lecturer or speaker at colleges, universities and high schools throughout the state.

Over the years numerous state and national organizations have recognized Charlie for his work and achievements on behalf of the labor movement. *New Jersey Monthly Magazine* ranked him No. 11 on its list of the "25 Most Powerful People in New Jersey" and *PoliticsNJ*, New Jersey's premiere website for political news, listed him as one of the state's top five most politically influential personalities.

Charlie Wowkanech is married to the former LuAnn Mercadante of Elmwood Park, New Jersey. They reside in Ocean City, New Jersey and are the proud parents of two children, Charles and Michael.