

# The IBEW SPARQ

A quarterly newsletter highlighting IBEW values

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## Building a Culture of Safety on the Job

Good wages, benefits and working conditions are hallmarks of the IBEW's strong contracts. But there's one condition more fundamental than anything else: ensuring that members return home healthy and unharmed every day.

as our industry has changed so dramatically," said Kim Greene, president and CEO of Atlanta-based Southern Company Gas. "Maintaining our safe operations is absolutely paramount. Having trained, skilled, confident workers is the key to that."

finally asked workers for their opinions, responses poured in.

"People care about safety. They had something to say, and boy did they say it," Greene said. "They let us know that we were paying way too much attention to the small stuff and were being distracted from the big stuff...that we were operating in many ways by being lucky, not necessarily by being smart."

Management realized that "we'd created a culture where people weren't reporting, a culture of being hard on people who tripped and fell, being hard on people who smashed their finger, being hard on people who got an insect bite and might have blown a period of time of no injuries for a work group," she said.

Partnering with the IBEW and safety experts, Southern Company Gas began concentrating on critical risks, the tasks most likely to cause serious injuries or fatalities. The result, along with the company's response, might surprise you.

"This year, the recordable incident rate is as high as it's been in 10 years," Greene said. "But I feel like our company is safer than ever. I don't think we're having more injuries, I think that people are telling us about it now."

Working with the IBEW, she said, "We're creating a learning environment where it is clear that we really care about keeping people safe."



Beyond the bargaining table, the IBEW is partnering with employers to build a true culture of safety.

"Our members do an excellent job looking out for each other and minimizing risks. But that's not enough," International President Lonnie R. Stephenson said. "Employers have to be every bit as committed to job safety as we are."

With the IBEW's input and encouragement, they increasingly are.

"We've had the privilege to work side by side with our IBEW partners

Greene told the audience at the IBEW Membership Development Conference in Chicago in August how her company changed its approach to safety after consulting with workers.

For years, management focused on an OSHA metric known as the "recordable incident rate" that measures work-related deaths, injuries and illnesses. Deciding the rate was too high, they cracked down on employees, demanding they "work smarter." The rate dropped, but something wasn't right. When the company



What does SPARQ mean to you? Have an idea for the newsletter? Email [theSPARQ@ibew.org](mailto:theSPARQ@ibew.org)



# The Commitment to Safety Starts at Home

Seattle Local 89 members thought some of the companies they worked for weren't taking safety seriously enough. One company prominently posted a sign listing its values, such as customer service and worker productivity.

"Nowhere on there was safety," Local 89 assistant business manager Richard Murray said.

In response, Local 89 members started their own safety committee. They got a boost from the Code of Excellence, which lists safety as the first quality of SPARQ, and used it to enhance their own training instead of relying on employers.

Some companies noticed and worked with Local 89 to put more emphasis on safety. They found that productivity actually increased, Murray said.

"It's all about safe work, quality work," he said. "If you have that, [the company] has a hard time jumping on you about productivity. What are they going to do, make it

about unsafe work? ...All of [SPARQ's five qualities] go together but safety is really what started it for us. You can't have one without the rest."



Members are taught that safety begins with them, Murray said.

"If you're messing up, you should want someone to say to you, 'We care,'" he said. "That's part of accountability. You're watching out for the other guy and calling him out if he's doing something incorrectly. It's not about getting someone in trouble. It's about getting someone home safely."

Murray calls ongoing efforts a work in progress. Some companies still aren't receptive, but progress has been made overall.

Local 89 members didn't wait for their employers to create a safe environment. They did so on their own—all while living the first tenet of SPARQ.

## SPARQ GOES LOCAL



### IBEW 2019 RENEW/NextGen Conference

More than 500 young leaders attended last year's IBEW RENEW/NextGen Conference and learned about the difference they can make every day in their workplaces and in their union when they commit to the IBEW Code of Excellence. RENEW and NextGen members are serious about their roles in building a strong IBEW—and demonstrating the core values of SPARQ is part of making that future a reality.

