

# THE ELECTRICAL WORKER

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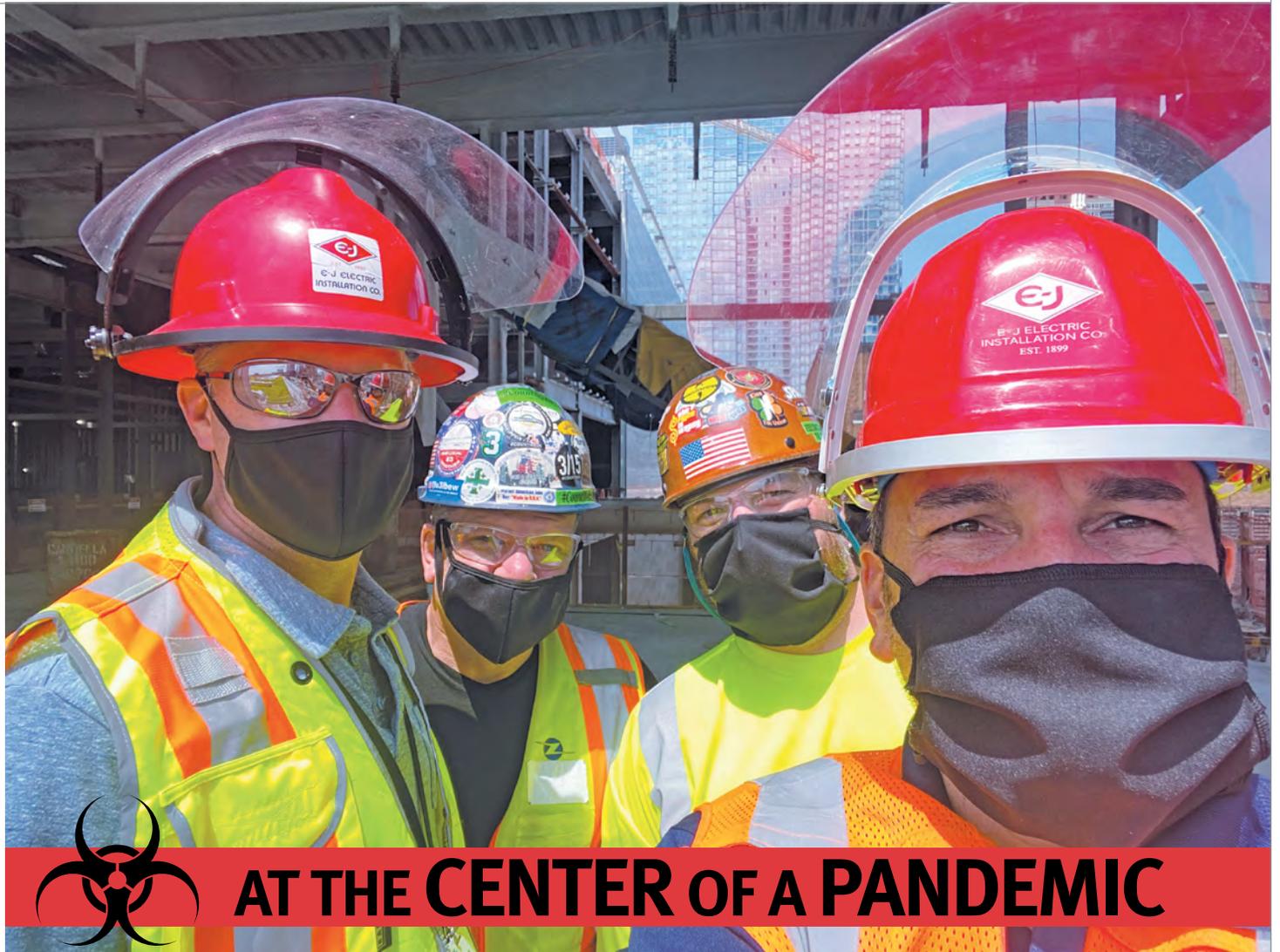
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## AT THE CENTER OF A PANDEMIC

Masks and other strict rules are part of the new normal for New York's building trades, as illustrated by Local 3 journeymen at the Javits Center addition. From left: Gene Nagle, Hank Soderlund, Robert Benenati and Alex "Archie" Alcantara. See page 2 for a letter from Alcantara about essential workers.

**C**RISES ARE A CALLING for the brothers and sisters of New York City Local 3. They were on the front lines when the towers fell. When Hurricane Sandy wreaked destruction. When other states and nations have cried out for help after storms and earthquakes.

Nothing prepared them for COVID-19.

By the end of March, the world's eyes had shifted from hotspots in Asia and Europe to the pandemic's new center: their hometown.

## RESILIENCE PREVAILS IN NYC

"There's nothing that's comparable," Business Manager Chris Erikson said nearly three months into a catastrophe he couldn't have fathomed. "Nothing."

Not even the unspeakable tragedy of 9/11, when Local 3 members ran toward the pile to aid rescue and recovery, then spent weeks in the toxic air of Ground Zero, rewiring Lower Manhattan. Not even the economic crash of 2008 that put 3,000 of Erikson's members out of work for a year.

Splice those nightmares and you get COVID-19. Sick and dying patients spilling out of emergency rooms. Hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers jobless. A noisy, crowded, manic metropolis silenced, vacant.

No one has been left unscathed. Like the city at large, IBEW members have experienced illness and death, layoffs and furloughs, fear that their jobs will be next, fear they'll be exposed to the virus, fear they'll infect their families. They've had to make hard decisions affecting their lives and livelihoods, just as billions of others around the world have had to do.

But as always, they've risen to the occasion. They've built temporary hospitals and kept essential jobsites running. They've done the agonizing work of powering mobile morgues. They've given generously to charities, staffed food pantries and even helped get urgently needed protective gear to area hospitals.

"We need you to lead by example," Erikson, a third-generation Local 3 leader and chairman of the IBEW's Executive Council, told members in a video message in early April.

He never doubted they would.

AT THE CENTER OF A PANDEMIC continued on page 3



## THE IBEW's 2020 PHOTO CONTEST

Deadline: Oct. 1

See page 2 for details

## FROM THE OFFICERS

# We Need Leaders



**Lonnie R. Stephenson**  
International President

**S**isters and brothers, if 2020 has taught us anything, it's that effective leadership is as important now as it's been in any of our lifetimes.

The COVID-19 crisis has exposed the best and the worst of us, and I'm proud that nearly every day I've heard of stories of IBEW members stepping up and leading in their communities, feeding first responders, the elderly and the hungry, and setting positive examples by protecting ourselves and those around us from the deadly effects of this virus.

I've also been heartened to see IBEW members and locals standing up and demanding change in the wake of the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis in May.

It's easy to think that the labor movement is just about securing work, good wages and benefits and safety on the job. But that's only part of it.

The very first line of the IBEW's constitution states, "Our cause is the cause of human justice, human rights, human security." As union members, we believe that standing together is stronger than standing divided, and that extends to racial as well as economic justice.

It's no accident that racial and gender pay gaps are least pronounced in workplaces where there is union representation. Treating people fairly and with respect is at the heart of what we stand for, and I'm proud to see IBEW members leading the fight for change.

I'm also proud to see IBEW members demanding accountability from leaders at every level of government, from the White House down to mayors and county commissioners, insisting that working people have a seat at the table on crucial decisions about how and when to reopen communities safely.

The COVID-19 crisis has shown us the power of effective leadership and the devastating consequences of a lack of it. Across the world, we've seen leaders who've attacked the virus head-on, providing citizens with adequate testing, ample economic support and open communication.

And we've seen the opposite: government officials who failed to take the threat seriously, failed to understand that an economic collapse required swift and generous action for people on every rung of the income ladder and failed to communicate, using distractions and misinformation to downplay the threat and sow division.

I don't need to tell you which approach has produced better results.

As we move through summer, there's an important election on the horizon for those of us in the United States. It's shaping up to be a choice between unity and division; between leadership that seeks to heal versus a "me first" ideology that has led us down a dangerous path to where we find ourselves now.

I hope that over the next few months you'll join me in demanding more from our nations' leaders at every level. You'll be hearing more from your local unions on how you can pitch in between now and November, and we're counting on IBEW members to make the difference.

Crises like the ones we're facing show us what true leadership looks like, and they expose those who lack the ability to lead. Pay attention, sisters and brothers, and thank you for being leaders. ■

# Now Is the Time to Organize

**E**ven before COVID-19 sent the world economy spiraling, unions were seen by more people as their best hope for a dignified life than at any time in recent years.

A Gallup poll from last year found that more than 60% of Americans support unions, the fourth highest result in nearly half a century.

The reasons are well known to anyone who works for a living. Older workers looked at the 401Ks or other accounts that held their hopes of retirement and wondered if they would ever be able to stop working.

Working families looked at the ever-larger bite health insurance took out of their paychecks, the impossibility of saving for college and wondered when they'd slipped out of the middle class.

And young people raised in the Great Recession and graduated into a gig economy wondered when their time would ever begin.

Then, the pandemic laid bare the true nature of the 21st century economy. More than 40 million people lost their livelihoods in a matter of weeks. A \$1,200 check may have delayed the full force of the blow, but the punch still came.

Whatever games the economists want to play with the unemployment rate, there's no hiding the fact that COVID-19 has turned the economic landscape into a desert for working people. All the job gains of the last 20 years disappeared. The slow rise in GDP we've seen since the bottom of the Great Recession evaporated. But who lost most? Those with the least.

We needed to shut things down to save lives, but as people in tens of thousands lined up at food banks, have you heard anything about a billionaire who lost his fortune? Or an investment banker forced to find honest work?

For people like us, where were the high spots protected from the fire? Union halls. What covered us and protected us from the storm? Union contracts.

Who got the PPE and safer working conditions first? Who saw layoffs last? Union workers.

On Page 12 of this issue, you'll read about your new sisters and brothers at Atlanta Gas Light who ratified their first contract in May. Those men and women are safer today than they were 3 months ago. They're more financially secure. And it's because they chose to join a union.

Brothers and sisters, this is your time. You know what union brotherhood has done for you: now tell your neighbors there is a better way.

Local union leaders, here's the truth: your No. 1 job is and will be organizing.

This isn't a wake-up call. The people are awake, and it's our job to show them the power of solidarity and a union contract. ■



**Kenneth W. Cooper**  
International Secretary-Treasurer

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Editor's note:

Local 3 journeyman wireman Alex Alcantara wrote the following letter to the editor in April while helping construct an overflow ward for COVID-19 patients. A version of it was published in the New York Daily News. Send your own letters about the important work you and your IBEW sisters and brothers are doing during the COVID-19 crisis to your local newspapers. It's a great way to share your IBEW pride in your communities.

## On the Front Lines

I splice another wire on a cold Monday morning outside Coney Island Hospital, the overflow tent. One ambulance after another pulls up. Young men and women medics risking their lives to save someone else's. I've been here four days. I've seen some of them multiple times. I wave at them to show respect, they wave back, showing me love.

It makes me think how many unsung heroes are showing up for work every day, making sure that we all can survive at home. We know what an unbelievable job the nurses and doctors are doing. But what about the porters keeping the hospitals sanitized? Or the engineers, electricians, carpenters and laborers keeping the hospitals running? Or the truck drivers delivering masks and essential supplies to protect hospital workers so they can keep saving lives? What about the sacrifices that security guards, police officers and firefighters are making to protect us?

In the building trades, we are always on the front lines, and proud to be there. I worked on the pile the first five days of 9/11, doing everything I could to save even one life. I wasn't able to. I think about that every day. Now, bringing power and light to this makeshift hospital, I'm honored to be doing my part to try to help save thousands of lives.

All of us at IBEW Local 3 are proud to help our city and state pull through this crisis. Our union teaches us that we don't work just for ourselves. We don't work just for a paycheck. We are here to serve.

So next time you see that electrician or plumber, carpenter, laborer, tin knocker, pipefitter, sanitation worker, police officer, firefighter, EMT — anyone out there on the front lines — give them a wave. No words are necessary.

*Alex "Archie" Alcantara, Local 3 member  
New York*

## Giving Back

Thank you for the May issue of The Electrical Worker. The article on the Local 3 guys in Angola was very touching. On page 5 there is a picture of Lou Alvarez with a young patient. Next to that is the advertisement for our photo contest. Your 1st place winner should be that picture of Mr. Alvarez. It reflects who we are and what we do.

*Richard Hetherington, Local 164 retiree  
Chicago*



**We Want to Hear From You:** Send your letters to [media@ibew.org](mailto:media@ibew.org) or Letters to the Editor, The Electrical Worker, 900 Seventh Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001.



THE IBEW's  
2020  
PHOTO  
CONTEST

**Deadline: Oct. 1**

1 <sup>st</sup> Place:	\$200
2 <sup>nd</sup> Place:	\$150
3 <sup>rd</sup> Place:	\$100
Honorable Mention:	\$50

See official rules and submission instructions at  
[IBEW.org/photocontest](http://IBEW.org/photocontest).

Continued from page 1



# AT THE CENTER OF A PANDEMIC

## New York Members Endure the Latest Test of the City's Resilience

**BY THE END OF MAY**, more than 80 members of Local 3 had been hospitalized with COVID-19. Thirteen active members and 19 retirees had died.

Sean McDonald was one of the survivors, but only after a frightening 11-day hospital stay.

The virus was still creeping into the city when he started coughing. Seasonal allergies, he figured. He was a healthy 44-year-old looking forward to a week's vacation as he left his jobsite across from Grand Central Station on Friday, March 13.

By Sunday, he'd quarantined himself in an upstairs room in his Nassau County home, apart from his wife, a pediatric nurse, and their four children. Five days later he was in the hospital. Isolated, he prayed his family wasn't infected, prayed that he wouldn't need a ventilator.

"That was going through my head most of the time," said McDonald, a journeyman wireman and drummer in Local 3's Sword of Light pipe band.

If his oxygen levels didn't improve, he knew the lightweight nasal cannula sending air through his nostrils wouldn't be enough. A machine would have to breathe for him through a tube in his windpipe. He'd be sedated, unable to talk or eat. His odds of recovery would drop dramatically.

"What do I have to do to prevent that?" McDonald asked his medical team — nurses who were covered head to toe in protective gear; doctors who mainly checked on him by phone. They gave him a plastic device for breathing exercises.

"You blow in, you blow out, you suck in as hard as you can. It's a little plastic device. I would do it all the time."

**LEN COPICOTTO** didn't get ill. But he was shrouded by risk.

He was one year into a survey contract in March, testing and tracing every circuit and outlet at a Queens hospital to ensure that no critical equipment would fail during planned renovations.

"There are kiosks around the hospital with masks, Purell, Kleenex," said the Local 3 journeyman, who is carrying on the legacy of his father and grandfather. "For a



*Wearing the required PPE, a Local 3 crew works on security and alarm systems on the Bronx-Whitestone Bridge spanning the East River.*

year, I never saw anybody touch them."

In the blink of an eye, the kiosks were busy. Anxiety was palpable. The hospital had gone from signage asking visitors if they'd been in China recently to converting wings into triage units and filling one floor after another with COVID-19 patients.

Copicotto dove into science journals, educating himself about the disease without a media filter. Understanding what was coming was one thing. Arriving at work to find a mobile refrigeration unit in the hospital's parking lot was another.

"It was one of those wake-up calls. We could see it from the window of our shanty. I said, 'Oh my God, guys, I hope you know what's parked right next to us right now. This is going to get bad.'"

**THE SIGNS** stalked Erin Sullivan as she crossed the Hudson River en route to renovation work at a high-rise law firm near Rockefeller Center.

"I'd had a cough and a headache for several days and I kept seeing these blinking signs on the Tappan Zee Bridge: 'Stay at Home, Stay at Home,'" said Sullivan, a journeyman wireworker and the local's mentoring director.

"It was a really tough decision because we are so conditioned to show up and work," she said. "If we don't show up, we don't get paid, so a lot of us show up even when we don't feel all that good. It's the norm."

But there was nothing normal about COVID-19.

"It was scary because nobody knew what was going on," Sullivan said. "And people at this point were starting to die. I knew someone who'd been healthy who had passed away in three days. He was 52, just like me."

By that day, March 19, the city had recorded nearly 4,000 infections, double the day before. Concerned for her coworkers as much as herself, Sullivan called her foreman and headed home. Four days later, cases had tripled and her jobsite shut down.

**IN HIS MISSION** to protect lives and jobs, Erikson is rethinking everything. No detail is too small.

He has 30,000 members to consider, 300 employees, and his union's bottom line. Some 6,300 members were still laid off at the end of May, roughly 65% of the construction division. If the governor hadn't deemed many projects "essential," the pain would have been even greater.

Erikson had to lay off about half the local's clerical workers and said he and all officers and business agents have taken pay cuts.

A skeleton staff at headquarters and others at home kept Local 3 functioning as the virus paralyzed the city at large. "I'm proud

to say that not one retiree missed a pension check or annuity check through any of this," he said.

He is weighing the safest ways to revive the office and reopen the union hall — a gathering place as central to many Local 3 members as a parish church.

"We're going to try to limit the interaction as much as we can," Erikson said. "We've got to figure out how to work differently, how to have the least amount of person-to-person contact but not lose the sense that this is your union, that we work for you."

He can hear the voice of his legendary grandfather, Harry Van Arsdale Jr., who led Local 3 from the 1930s to the 1960s.

"Harry instilled in me that the only purpose of the union is to serve the mem-

bership," he said. "Work is getting done. I'm proud of that."

**KENNY COHEN**, a second-generation Local 3 journeyman, was assigned to high-voltage testing at New York University. When the virus closed his job, he had a choice: transfer to another site or take a furlough to help his family.

He had a baby and two school-age boys at home, along with their mom, a teacher juggling the kids, high-school English classes via Zoom and a looming deadline for her master's thesis.

Cohen took the reins of the household, grateful for priceless time with his 1-year-old namesake.

He found a way to pay it forward when a Local 3 brother running a food pantry asked him to help. Pained to see people still in line when the food ran out, he launched a GoFundMe page.

In two weeks, it raised \$9,000, mostly from Local 3 members, money Cohen distributed to food pantries



*Journeyman Kenny Cohen helped raise \$9,000 for NYC food pantries as job losses caused need to soar.*

around the city. "The need continues to grow," he said. "It's not going to slow down anytime soon."

That's all too clear to Bronx-based signatory contractor E-J Electric and its Local 3 workforce — about 1,000 members, most of whom install and repair the city's traffic signals and streetlights.

With the company's owner footing the bill, workers prepare some 2,000 meal kits weekly for a Catholic Charities pop-up pantry. Filled with fresh produce, bread and protein, the kits can feed a small family for several days.

"Our first week, a lot of people didn't want to risk coming out to volunteer," said Dave Ferguson, head of the company's Roadway Division. "But that's changed. I think we all needed a cause to believe in."

**FOR TWO DECADES**, shop steward Tom Mohan has wired at least a thousand convention exhibitions in New York City's mammoth Javits Center. Food, flowers, travel, the famous car show. And now a hospital.

Local 3 crews helped construct 2,000 rooms divided by wall panels that would have enclosed booths of beauty products, eyewear and restaurant supplies, among the canceled spring events.

With the Army Corps of Engineers in charge, safety was handled with military precision.

"If you were going to the hospital floor, there was only one way in," Mohan said. "You had to stop there and put on a gown, goggles, N95 mask and gloves. You would take it all off before exiting out the other side."

Even with all the precautions, "it was still a little nerve-wracking," he said.

## 'I Nearly Lost My Favorite Person in the World'

**E**rnie Miller hadn't seen his wife for 28 excruciating days. Melissa Miller, 49, spent half that time on a ventilator, 22 days in total at the Augusta University Medical Center ICU and another week in a rehab facility.

The journeyman wireman and 32-year member of Augusta, Ga., Local 1579 was working as a field engineer at Plant Vogtle nuclear station in late April when he contracted COVID-19. Vogtle is the largest ongoing project in the IBEW, employing nearly 2,000 electricians at its peak, and when the virus hit the massive worksite, it spread swiftly.

In a week, the number of confirmed cases at the site grew from a handful to 232. The 9,000-strong workforce was cut by 20% and many workers were given the option to quarantine for two weeks at first, then more.

"It started as a little cough, a sore throat," Miller said. Then Melissa, whose immune system was already weakened

from chemotherapy, started experiencing similar symptoms. "After a week and a half, we had fevers and couldn't take a deep breath. We were sleeping in recliners in the living room because we couldn't lie flat."

The time had come to go to the hospital on May 2. Melissa couldn't take more than a few steps, her breathing had become so labored. So, Miller dropped her at the door of the emergency room and headed to park the car. It was the last time he'd see her in person for another month.

"If it weren't for the incredible men and women of the ICU, I don't know what we'd have done," he said. "I nearly lost my favorite person in the world to this virus, and I brought it home to her. We don't know enough about this disease. We don't know if you can get it twice. I'm scared to death to give it to her again," he said as he faced the prospect of returning to work in early June.



*Ernie and Melissa Miller, pictured before COVID-19, contracted on the IBEW's largest jobsite, upended their lives.*

Miller has some advice for his IBEW sisters and brothers. "This is not just a big city virus, and it's not close to over. Keep wearing your masks and PPE. Do your best to keep distance on jobs. I don't want anyone to have to go through what we did." ■



*Assigned to a Queens hospital, journeyman Len Copicotto had the grim duty of wiring a mobile morgue.*

Continued from page 1



# AT THE CENTER OF A PANDEMIC

## New York Members Endure the Latest Test of the City's Resilience

"You were always afraid you might bring something home to your family."

Setting up trade shows at the Javits can employ 70 electricians or more. In late May, with no events and the hospital cleared of patients, Mohan's shop was down to a small maintenance team.

"Everything's been canceled through the summer," he said. "I'm extremely nervous for my brothers and sisters that got laid off."

**THE VIRUS** erupted in Westchester County when cases to the south in New York were still in the single digits.

It was the first week of March. Lou Sanchez, a business representative in Local 3's White Plains office and 20-year member, was interviewing political candidates looking for union endorsements when his wife called.

"A teacher she shares a classroom with tested positive — same room, same computer," Sanchez said. "We quarantined at home for 14 days. Luckily no one got sick."

But thousands of county residents rapidly did. On March 22, the Westchester County Center was one of four sites Gov. Andrew Cuomo designated for overflow hospitals, telling the Army Corps to forge ahead, "no red tape." The Javits and two Long Island sites were the others, all employing IBEW members.

In just three weeks, Local 3 crews had helped construct 110 rooms from the studs up.

"They knew it would be dangerous to put 100 guys there, so they broke it up into 12-hour shifts around the clock," Sanchez said. "Everyone had their N95 masks,

gloves, there was Purell everywhere. They were given their own space to work. Everyone was really proud to be there"

**MOST OF THE** safety protocols developed by the city's building trades and signatory contractors have become mandates for construction sites statewide.

They include rules for essential PPE, monitoring workers' temperatures, near-constant disinfection of surfaces, proximity to wash stations, and designating staircases as "up" or "down" but not both. And vital in a city of skyscrapers, elevator safety.

"Vertical transportation has always been a challenge for the construction industry, just getting hundreds of workers up 60 floors," Erikson said.

The waits for a ride are longer now, as workers keep their distance in the exterior lifts known as Alimaks. They face outside, their backs to each other.

He knows some contractors will be more diligent than others but has faith in his members.

"Electricians are smarter than the average bear," Erikson said. "I think they've got brains enough to know they've got to protect themselves and their families."

He said nonunion employers pose the greatest threat of COVID-19 spreading on jobsites, knowing desperate low-wage workers won't report them for failing to enforce the new rules.

But the building trades will. "We're going to be paying attention to those sites," Erikson said. "There's got to be compliance up and down the line. If there's not, that



*Local 3 crews helped turn the Javits Center into a 2,000-bed hospital, one of four overflow facilities built in April in and around the city. All employed IBEW members. At right, medical workers get ready to enjoy "Heroes for Heroes" from signatory contractor E-J Electric, which sends sandwiches to area hospitals on Fridays. Their workers also pack some 2,000 meal kits weekly, one of many food bank projects drawing Local 3 volunteers.*

could end up shutting down the whole construction industry again."

**THE DAY** that Sean McDonald first felt ill, New York City had logged just 137 cases of COVID-19. One week later, there were 5,683.

In between, McDonald had gone from a nuisance cough to a brutal one; he had headaches, fever and eye pain. He lost his



sense of taste. Minor exertion left him huffing and puffing.

"Once or twice that week I was quarantining, my wife got called in to work at the hospital. I'd put a T-shirt over my face — we didn't have masks yet — and go downstairs and check on the kids. Just going up and down a flight of stairs, I'd be out of breath."

On March 20, McDonald pulled into a drive-in testing site where a doctor pushed long swabs up his nose and checked his oxygen with a finger monitor. Alarmed, he sent him inside for a chest X-ray. "You need to go to the hospital," the radiologist told him.

For hours he sat with a half-dozen others in an enclosed waiting room for likely COVID-19 patients. More filled the ER halls, where McDonald went in search of a nurse around 1 a.m.

"Where am I supposed to pass out?" he asked her with as much good humor as he could muster.

**DOING THE GRIM** work of electrifying a mobile morgue, Len Copicotto flashed on his time powering a hospital in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico.

"We were doing something that was going to be helping a lot of people," he said. "Now we were pulling power from a hospital to something that symbolized how devastating this situation was going to get."

Yet even in his own circle, there were still COVID-19 doubters. That day he let loose on social media.

"I was feeling a sense of duty to reach out to friends and family who were still

posting a lot of joke memes about the virus and were parroting a lot of cable news pundit shows that were saying it was the flu, it was a hoax, it was just alarmist paranoia," he said.

He'd been on the front lines as Queens became "the center of the center of the hottest part of the outbreak." For weeks, he threw his clothes in the wash and showered as soon as he got home, where he slept in a spare room to protect his wife.

Copicotto opted eventually to take one of the temporary furloughs offered, sheltering at a family cottage in Connecticut. He missed his union activities, including serving on the Local 3 election board. Its last meeting had been held in a nearly empty hall.

"I told people, 'This will be the only time you'll ever hear me say this in my entire career: please do not go to the union meeting.'"

**WHILE SULLIVAN** self-quarantined, she finished out the semester of the trade unionism classes she teaches at Empire State College in lower Manhattan.

Her students are Local 3 apprentices, who are required to earn an associate degree in labor studies. Sullivan asked what they'd liked better: the virtual classroom or the real one.

"Every one of them said they missed the in-class experience," she said. "I was surprised because it's so much easier to get on the computer in your shorts and T-shirt than it is to go all day to work and

## Bay Area Transit Workers: Virus Brings New Stress to Tough Times

**C**oronavirus hit the Bay Area early, prompting one of the nation's hasty shelter-in-place orders on March 17. And while the quick action worked, resulting in a San Francisco mortality rate nearly 35 times lower than that of New York, the last several months have been no less stressful for IBEW members who continued to show up to work in critical jobs.

San Francisco Local 6 member Mike Henry is the shop maintenance superintendent at the Portrero Electric Trolley Bus facility, where he manages 75 workers, 50 of them IBEW members, who maintain a portion of the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency's fleet of electric buses.

"The drivers are really on the front lines," Henry said, "But the second they step off that bus at the end of their shift, our team is at risk."

Every bus, he said, is treated as "hot;" every surface has the potential to transfer the life-threatening virus. It's why he recommended early on, ahead of public officials, that his IBEW team adopt precautionary PPE use, a move that paid off when three drivers at the garage contracted COVID-19. The agency now requires every



*Mechanics at Portrero Electric Trolley Bus Facility, two-thirds members of San Francisco Local 6, take extra care to keep one another safe.*

bus to be completely wiped down before driving or servicing it.

And the early action extended to officials at SFMTA, Henry said. "Communica-

tion has been key. The agency has been on top of the science and worked hard to keep everyone well informed."

But the added stress hasn't only been health-related, he said. Almost 11 weeks into a citywide lockdown — two weeks longer than most other major cities — the toll has been laid bare. Relationships have been strained; several of his members have separated from their partners. Like everywhere, homeschooling and childcare have added additional family obligations. And mental health and substance abuse issues have been magnified under the extra pressure.

And with ridership on the MTA system at historic lows, the agency's workers are concerned for their jobs in a region with some of the highest housing costs in the U.S.

"It's a lot to manage all at once," Henry said. "Our management, shop stewards, supervisors, they're doing important work to keep people safe. Right now, we need to support one another. Thankfully, it's not management versus union. This virus has brought us together. There's a lot of understanding and appreciation right now." ■



North of NYC, Local 3 members in White Plains pose proudly outside the Westchester County Center they helped transform into an overflow hospital. The facility, along with the Javits and two on Long Island, went up in a matter of weeks.



A healthy Sean McDonald, shown with his family and the drum he plays in Local 3's pipe band, was hospitalized with COVID-19 for 11 days in March.

then get to class. But they missed the camaraderie of each other."

They'd learned the biggest lesson of all: the power of solidarity.

"I was so proud of them," she said. "They understood the importance of being with each other, how good solidarity feels, and how much you miss it when you don't have it."

**WESTCHESTER** was making progress against COVID-19 as New York's cases skyrocketed. The world saw media reports of overwhelmed ERs, ICUs, and supply shortages that forced many nurses to reuse PPE that they'd normally discard between each patient.

On a labor call, Sanchez learned that a charity in Yonkers that ships protective gear to impoverished countries had inven-

tory, but not enough hands. "Usually they have retired nurses who volunteer, but all those retired nurses got called back to work," he said.

That left PPE piling up in the Afya Foundation's warehouse while New York and other U.S. hotspots were in dire need.

Sanchez delivered Local 3 volunteers to sort, count and pack gowns, surgical masks, gloves, booties and more. "We shipped out thousands of pieces of PPE to local hospitals," he said.

**AFTER TWO DAYS** in a private room, McDonald was moved to the COVID ward when it was confirmed he'd tested positive. He was there nine days. A month later, he was working the night shift on a fast-tracked project adding a floor to a local hospital.

The virus also struck his sister and their father, a retired Local 3 journeyman. All of them, now negative, have donated blood plasma to help other patients recover.

They don't know who infected whom, or if they contracted the virus separately. "Taking the train, riding the subway, going to the deli, eating lunch outside with the guys. I could have gotten it anywhere," McDonald said.

**THE REPERCUSSIONS** of COVID-19 will be felt for years, if not decades, to come. Some \$63 billion worth of construction work may already be impacted in New York, Erikson said. Major subway and airport projects, among others, are up in the air.

While safety is paramount, he sees the workplace debate around COVID-19 entering uneasy territory. "They're talking about having workers download apps onto their personal phones for tracking," he

said. "We're concerned about that. There's no reason an employer should have the ability to track you when you're not at work. It's bad enough on a worksite."

It's one of Erikson's many worries in an uncharted era.

"We're still in a time when this whole thing is evolving," he said. "Where is it going to go? Where are we going to end up? We don't know what the post-COVID world is going to look like." ■

## Betting on Safety Pays Off in Nevada

The "new normal" of COVID-19 first hit Shannon Skinner the morning she walked into an empty show-up room at NV Energy.

Silence in a space normally humming with activity and cheer. "Our south yard is one big family," Skinner said. "You love going to work."

The veteran journeyman lineworker, foreman, and president of Las Vegas Local 396 found her crew and others outside, everyone keeping their distance.

"I'll never forget that first day," she said. It was March 13. Only eight infections had been reported so far in Clark County, but neither union nor employer were taking any chances.

Skinner lives and breathes safety on the job, active on every committee, laser-focused at every training. She remembers thinking, "Oh my God, the things that we deal with every day, and now this." It kind of brought tears to my eyes."

That week, she got a text from NV Energy's CEO asking her thoughts on balancing work and safety. The gist of her message back was, "You give us the tools to stay safe and we will keep the lights on in Las Vegas. Our community needs to see us. They need to see the big white truck."

And they have, in Las Vegas and at jobsites all over the desert, where Skinner's crew spends most of its time. They are as busy as ever with call-outs and maintenance, often opting to work seven days a week.

Without fail, they follow every rule COVID-19 has inspired. They travel separately and don't get any closer to customers than they do to each other. "If we don't feel safe, we have the authority to say, 'We can't work here,'" she said.

Only a handful of cases likely tied to personal travel, not work, have been reported at NV Energy. But Skinner's crew knows how deadly the virus can be: a brother on their team, an apprentice, lost a relative to it.

"That totally made it real for us," she said.

So they are vigilant, even as they long for the camaraderie of the yard.

"We're very bonded," Skinner said. "We know that there are five families that could be affected if one of us screws up." ■



Local 396 President and NV Energy foreman Shannon Skinner, center, says she and her longtime crew are sticklers for rules to protect each other.

## Seattle: The Challenge of Being First

Christine Reid didn't have a playbook when COVID-19 arrived in Seattle, the original epicenter of the virus in the United States.

A customer service agent and shop steward at Puget Sound Energy, she handled the service orders that dispatched crews to fix broken meters — crews made up of her Local 77 brothers and sisters.

"They have to go into people's houses," Reid said. "I thought, 'How do we do this safely?' We were the first, there wasn't any model to follow."

The nation's first recorded death from COVID-19 came at the end of February at a suburban Seattle nursing home. The virus raced through the facility with deadly speed, dominating media coverage the first half of March.

Reid's husband was working just a mile from the outbreak, and the couple live near the first high school that shut down when a student tested positive. "It was spreading like wildfire," she said. "People weren't comfortable going to the mailbox."

She praised PSE for swiftly canceling all non-emergency service orders, but that still meant risks for workers responding to



As Seattle dealt with the nation's first COVID-19 outbreak, Local 77's Christine Reid worried about keeping frontline workers safe.

suspected gas leaks.

"They used some very creative tools to keep people safe," she said. "They rotated shifts — they were able to go into two or three shift groups that would work for two or three weeks and then self-isolate for 14 days."

On the office side, she and her colleagues were relieved, if a little surprised, by how quickly PSE transitioned to telework. Within 48 hours of starting a pilot program with a few workers, they sent everyone

home with their desktop computers.

"It was a policy we'd asked for that they'd completely pooh-poohed: 'How can people be trusted to work at home?'" Reid said. "Given the opportunity, we outperformed being at the office. Some people were commuting three hours a day. It's no wonder their productivity increased."

Local 77 operates statewide in Washington, where the virus has cost an estimated 1 million jobs. But 90% of members work for utilities and are considered essential.

"We are blessed," Reid said. "We've had no deaths among members and most are still gainfully employed."

A busy labor and community activist for many years, Reid recently moved to a new job as the local's director of membership development and political action.

Her union's response to the crisis makes her even prouder to be part of the Local 77 family.

"I'm thrilled by the way our leadership responded to protect members," she said. "And by the courage and strength that everyone showed, standing strong and holding it together in light of all the challenges." ■

# Essential Nuclear Refuels Add Extra Challenges During Pandemic

**B**etween spring and summer, in that brief window when neither heat nor air conditioning is on, is maintenance and refueling season at the nation's nuclear power plants.

Every 18-24 months, thousands of craft workers and engineers descend on a reactor, shut it down, replace some of the fuel rods and shuffle the rest around, and hammer out a punchlist of maintenance and repairs that are all but impossible to perform while the reactor is running.

Wilkes-Barre, Pa., Local 163 Business Manager John Olejnik used to work outages at the twin reactor Susquehanna Steam Electric Station in Salem Township, and now that he runs the local, those outages are a huge source of man-hours.

But even before the COVID-19 pandemic struck the U.S., nuclear refueling outages were a petri dish for the transfer of all manner of illness, Olejnik said.

"We called it power plant flu," he said.

And it wasn't just the tight workspaces common to all construction sites. It was the requirements of the nuclear shutdown itself — the timing, the security, the quality control — that made it, in his words, "a breeding ground."

"Something as simple as the security line at the beginning and the end of the shift, getting X-rayed, bomb sniffed, you'd rest your hand on a scanner to match it with your ID, and everyone is touching that scanner," he said. "Every outage, everyone got sick."

This spring, 32 of the nation's 96 nuclear reactors had outages scheduled just as the novel coronavirus spread wildly out of control. Nearly all of the electrical work was done by IBEW members, representing millions of man-hours. In recent years, for Olejnik's local, those 30 days represent about one-third of his annual man-hours and he is far from alone.

The work is planned nearly a year in advance. Nuclear Regulatory Commission rules require every job, down to the torque specification on every bolt, to be planned out and written in advance. Everything is written in mountains of paper that might as well be stone: maintenance schedules, life cycles, the fuel itself. Nothing is flexible. Nothing can be put off or the lights go out. Emergency rooms go dark. Home offices, home schools? All impossible.

"If these reactors aren't up and running by the projected end date, they have to start thinking about Plan B, which could include scheduled rolling brown outs, especially considering the high power demand that comes with the warm weather," said Construction and Maintenance Department Director Mike Richard. "There is no more essential work than keeping nuclear plants safe and running. It's a huge challenge and the dangers are real."

And yet, Richard said, reports from plant owners, contractors and his conversations with business managers tell him a story of craftsmen and craftswomen rising to the occasion under enormous pressure.

Two of Exelon's four Illinois plants, for example, recorded their fastest-ever

refueling outages.

But there were flare-ups at nearly every job, Richard said, and work had to be delayed at some sites, including the Enrico Fermi Nuclear Generating Station in Newport, Mich.

There was an outbreak in a unit known as a torus, a large steel doughnut-shaped water containment vessel that had painters and electricians in close quarters on walkways with a restricted air flow. It forced a work slowdown, impacting members of Toledo, Ohio, Local 8, said Utility Department International Representative Mark MacNichols, a career nuclear worker.

"That could have happened anywhere; it happened in the torus, but it could have been cleaning the tubes and condensers or installing a power box or just pulling wire when it isn't possible to be six feet apart," he said. "The hard thing with nuclear is keeping people safe requires changes to punchlists that took a year to write and cannot be changed without approval from federal regulators."

At the onset of the outbreak, there was concern that the outage workforce, which includes a substantial number of trav-

elers who go from outage to outage during the high seasons, would not be able to get from place to place in a quarantine. And if they did get to the site and tested negative, no one quite knew where they would stay and how they would stay virus-free.

The Fermi workers, for example, were put up at the Motor City Hotel and Casino in Detroit, vacant at the time, Richard said. Everyone drove in their own cars, but had a certain window to get from the hotel to the plant to make sure no one exposed themselves to someone outside the quarantine.

"The utility has timed out how long it should take to get there. You are outside the window, you are pulled and can't work," Richard said. "If you need to get gas, you better let people know. They were very serious about avoiding another outbreak."

But IBEW members responded in the way they always do, Richard said. "Our members showed up, did the job with professionalism and kept the lights on. And they did it in the face of enormous challenges and personal risk. I couldn't be any prouder to be a member of this great union." ■



A rare look inside the reactor core of a nuclear plant during the refueling process, this from Exelon's Byron Nuclear Generating Station in Byron, Ill. Many of the plant's year-round workers are represented by Downer's Grove, Ill., Local 15.

Credit: John Schalk

## Cleveland Members' Work Helps a Community Heal

**A** group of IBEW electricians is working on a major redevelopment project that, when finished, could end up helping a Cleveland neighborhood bring some closure to one of its most horrific chapters.

"We always take pride in what we do," said Cleveland Local 38 member Steven Sinko. "We're putting just a little extra pride into this project, because it really will have an impact on this community."

To the casual observer, their work is part of the complete revamp of an old awning factory building in the city's Tremont neighborhood. But most everyone in Northeast Ohio remembers how the building served as a looming backdrop in countless news stories and photos shot on the front lawn of a house nearby: the nondescript yet notorious site where three local women were discovered to have been held captive for nearly 10 years.

In 2002, 42-year-old Ariel Castro offered to give Michelle Knight, 21, a ride home. Instead, he drove her to his Seymour Avenue house and hid her away inside. A year later, he did the same thing to Amanda Berry, 17, and then to Gina DeJesus, 14, in 2004.

All three young women endured Castro's beatings and mental abuse for years, until one day in 2013, when he briefly left them alone in the house. Berry seized the opportunity to cry out for help, managing to gain the attention of some neighbors, who helped her and the 6-year-old daughter Castro had fathered escape. After a phone call to the police, Knight and DeJesus were soon freed as well, and Castro was arrested, later pleading guilty to the kidnappings and other charges — including nearly a thousand counts of rape.

Castro also agreed as part of his plea bargain to forfeit his house; it was demolished that August and the lot has remained vacant ever since. A month later, his life-plus-1,000-years sentence barely underway, he hanged himself in his cell.

Meanwhile, the three women have worked hard to move on with their lives. DeJesus and her cousin, Sylvia Colon, founded the Cleveland Family Center for Missing Children and Adults, an organization that helps police locate kidnapping victims and comforts families dealing with the trauma of a loved one's abduction. The nonprofit will soon move its offices into the newly remodeled factory, an 80,000-square-foot building that had



A group of Cleveland Local 38 apprentice and journeyman wiremen are helping to turn a historic factory property into a vibrant community center. From left: Joe Smith, Ryan Piontkowski, Amy Metzgar, Keith Carpenter, Chris Carpenter, Tim Grabowski, Dominic Kosley, Bob Gaye, John LeBlanc, Jamie Miller, John Cigas, Dan Darling and Steve Sinko.

served since 1911 as the manufacturing center for Astrup Awning Company.

The Astrup family closed the Cleveland operations in 2007 and sold the building to local developer Rich Foran, who brought in the Snavely Group to turn the space into the Astrup Community Arts Center.

"It has a lot of historical significance, and it got funding for historic preservation," said Sinko, who noted that a mix of union and nonunion labor has been working on the \$13 million project, including himself

and 10 or so other Local 38 journeymen and apprentices who work for Ullman Electric.

"We're installing brand new service through and through to the last cover plate," he said. "There's no open cable — it's all piped — and that means a lot of great conduit work for our apprentices."

Sinko believes his crew may not have been the first from Local 38 to have ever worked on the building. "I found an old IBEW sticker on a three-phase gearbox," he said.

But he also thinks non-IBEW electricians may have wired the facility at various times over the years. "Services were a mess," Sinko said, with a mix of single- and three-phase power running to and through the building.

It actually took a lot of prep work to get the building ready for its new life, Sinko said. "There was woodblock flooring everywhere used to absorb cadmium," he said. The element is used as an awning coating to prevent corrosion, and because it can be dangerous in large quantities, Sinko said the building had to go through an abatement process similar to asbestos removal.

The Astrup project is just one part of the recent renaissance of Tremont, a traditionally Latino neighborhood that's just west of downtown Cleveland. "A lot of young people now want to live here," Sinko said.

Nine separate suites are ultimately planned for the Astrup buildout, including a rape crisis center, a dance studio, a theater and other arts space.

But given the "Seymour Survivors" chapter of Tremont's history, Sinko thinks DeJesus's missing-persons nonprofit is the part that will have the most significance for the surrounding neighborhood. "It's her way of giving back," he said. ■

# NORTH OF 49° | AU NORD DU 49° PARALLÈLE

## Traffic Controllers Provide Safety, Security in BC

**V**icki Flett worked in an office environment when she was an employee of Telus, the Vancouver-based telecommunications company.

Yet, she turned her back on that six years ago for something much more physically demanding — work as a traffic control person on the roads and byways of British Columbia.

Drivers recognize traffic control people as the workers holding a sign and directing traffic during construction projects, but that scrapes the surface of their responsibilities to drivers, themselves and skilled workers across the province.

“There was just something about it,” said Flett, now a shop steward for Vancouver Local 258. “I knew I was more suited to a work-boot industry than a high-heel industry. That’s the only way I can put it. Now, look at what I’m doing.”

Flett currently works on the Canadian side at the Pacific Highway border crossing, helping her country deal with the COVID-19 pandemic from the front lines. She also works with other Local 258 leaders to gain more respect for traffic control persons, who perform dangerous and vital work — even though it often feels like citizens and even political leaders don’t seem to realize it.

“We touch base with every single industry that has to be on the road,” Flett said. “We go from road paving to hydro to concrete pouring to repair work when a gas line breaks to utility when a power line collapses. We need to know how every single trade does their job so we can do our job effectively.”

More than 800 Local 258 members work as traffic control persons for 18 signatory companies. A recent successful organizing campaign at Domcor Traffic Control International added to their ranks. About 90% are women, assistant business manager Dayna Gill said.

Most drivers view traffic control people as the individual who holds a sign telling them to “slow down” or “stop” or “go” during construction projects. Flett’s current job plays a role in national security.

With travel between Canada and the U.S. limited during the pandemic, she and a colleague are in charge of directing incoming cars to a designated area, where they are questioned by a screening officer from Canada’s Border Services Agency.

Depending on the day, between 20 and 35% of those cars are denied entry. That’s helped keep British Columbia’s infection rates lower than neighboring Washington state, where Seattle was a center of the coronavirus early this year.

“I know I’m doing my part to help keep my country safe,” she said.

Commonly called “flaggers” in the United States, traffic control people have a myriad of responsibilities even in normal times.

They provide a safe workplace for crews and workers on the scene. Directions to motorists must be clear so they easily understand their meaning, often in areas with high levels of noise because of both construction and passing traffic. They do both of these things while staying in radio contact with supervisors on the jobsite, who are constantly informing them of when to expect a slowdown or to give an all-clear.

As if that isn’t enough, they’re understandably worried about staying safe themselves.

According to the British Columbia Federation of Labour, 13 roadside workers in the province were killed on the job and another 63 suffered serious injury between 2009 and 2018. More than half of those incidents involved traffic controllers, with two being killed on the job in 2018. Verbal abuse from passing drivers is all too common.

“It’s one of the most dangerous jobs,” said Gill, who has worked as a traffic

control person since 2006. “You’re maintaining the flow of traffic while protecting workers, bicyclists and pedestrians.”

Gill hopes to see a day when they earn Canada’s Red Seal certification, awarded to journeyman tradespersons as a sign they can perform their work at the highest level. On a jobsite, traffic control people work with skilled tradesmen and women from virtually every other industry.

That also might lead to more respect. Gill said Local 258 members working as traffic controller persons make \$25-\$30 per hour — far better than nonunion traffic control people but significantly less than a journeyman tradesperson.

“With the Red Seal, training and apprenticeships across the country would be just the same,” she said. “Now, we’re relying on that company to train you.”

Organizing is a priority for Gill since becoming an organizer and assistant business manager in March. She’s working with Business Manager Doug McKay and other IBEW leaders in Canada to develop a



Vancouver Local 258 shop steward Vicki Flett, left, and fellow member and traffic control person Wendy Lawson at the Pacific Highway Border Crossing in May.

master traffic control agreement.

“We’re very proud of the work our traffic control people do and the organizing success of them by Local 258,” First District International Vice President

Thomas Reid said.

“I’m very proud of the traffic control people that we represent,” McKay said. “It’s a dangerous job that they do and they do a great job protecting our line workers.” ■

## Les signaleurs routiers veillent à la sécurité en C.-B

**V**icki Flett travaillait dans un environnement administratif lorsqu’elle était une employée chez Telus, l’entreprise de télécommunication basée à Vancouver.

Il y a six ans, elle a décidé de laisser tomber ce poste pour travailler dans un environnement beaucoup plus exigeant sur le plan physique comme signaleuse routière sur les routes et sur les embranchements de la Colombie-Britannique.

Les usagers de la route les reconnaissent comme les travailleuses et travailleurs qui tiennent des panneaux de circulation pour diriger le trafic pendant les travaux de construction, mais cela ne fait qu’effleurer la surface de leurs responsabilités envers les usagers de la route, eux-mêmes et les travailleurs qualifiés à travers la province.

« Il y avait quelque chose à propos de ce métier », dit Flett, maintenant déléguée syndicale pour le local 258 de Vancouver. « Je le savais que travailler dans des bottes me convenait mieux que de travailler dans de talons hauts. C’est la seule façon que je peux l’expliquer. Et regarde mon métier aujourd’hui. »

Flett travaille présentement au passage frontalier de la route du Pacifique du côté canadien, elle aide son pays à faire face à la pandémie de la COVID-19 depuis les premières lignes. Elle travaille également avec les autres dirigeants du local 258 pour faire mieux respecter les signaleurs routiers qui effectuent un travail dangereux et essentiel même si les citoyennes et citoyens et les dirigeants politiques ne semblent pas le réaliser.

« Nous entrons en contact avec

chaque industrie qui doit être sur les routes, » mentionne Flett. « Nous passons du pavage de route à l’hydroélectricité, au coulage de béton jusqu’à la réparation d’une rupture d’un conduit de gaz, aux services publics lorsqu’une ligne électrique s’effondre. Nous devons connaître les tâches de chaque corps métier pour nous permettre d’effectuer le nôtre de manière efficace. »

Plus de 800 membres du local 258 travaillent comme signaleur routier pour 18 entreprises signataires. Domton Traffic Control International a récemment joint les rangs grâce à une campagne de syndicalisation réussie. Environ 90 pour cent sont des femmes, mentionne l’assistante gérante d’affaires Dayna Gill.

La plupart des usagers de la route perçoivent les signaleurs routiers comme la personne qui tient un panneau pour les avertir de « ralentir » ou d’« arrêter » ou de « rouler » pendant les projets de construction. Le travail récent de Flett joue un rôle dans la sécurité nationale.

Les déplacements entre le Canada et les États-Unis étant limités pendant la pandémie, elle et un collègue sont responsables de diriger les véhicules entrant vers un endroit désigné où ils seront interrogés par un agent de l’Agence des services frontaliers du Canada.

Selon les jours, entre 20 à 35 % de ces véhicules se voient refuser l’entrée. Ceci a permis de maintenir le taux d’infection de la Colombie-Britannique à un niveau inférieur que celui de l’État voisin de Washington, où Seattle était l’épicentre du coronavirus plutôt cette année.

« Je sais que je contribue à garder

mon pays en sécurité, » dit-elle.

Souvent appelés « flaggers » aux États-Unis, les signaleurs routiers ont de multiples responsabilités même dans un temps normal.

Ils offrent un lieu de travail sécuritaire aux équipes ainsi qu’aux travailleurs sur les lieux. Les consignes données aux automobilistes doivent être claires pour qu’ils comprennent leurs significations, elles sont souvent données dans des endroits où le niveau de bruit est très élevé en raison de la construction et de la circulation. Ils font ces deux choses tout en restant en contact radio avec les superviseurs sur les chantiers qui les informent constamment du moment où ils doivent ralentir ou de donner le feu vert.

Comme si cela ne suffisait pas, ils sont naturellement inquiets à rester eux-mêmes en sécurité.

Selon la Fédération du travail de la Colombie-Britannique, 13 travailleuses et travailleurs aux abords des routes de la province ont été tués sur le lieu de travail et 63 autres ont subi de blessures graves entre 2009 et 2018. Plus de la moitié de ces accidents étaient des signaleurs routiers, dont deux tués sur le lieu de travail en 2018. La violence verbale provenant des usagers de la route est fréquente.

« C’est un métier qui figure parmi le plus dangereux », dit Gill, qui travaille comme signaleuse routière depuis 2006. Tu maintiens la circulation tout en protégeant les travailleurs, les cyclistes et les piétons. »

Gill espère voir le jour où ils pourront obtenir leurs certificats avec la

mention Sceau rouge du Canada. Ces certificats sont décernés aux compagnons pour souligner que leur compétence dans leur métier est reconnue à travers le pays. Les signaleuses routières et les signaleurs routiers sur les chantiers travaillent avec tous les gens de métiers provenant de pratiquement toutes les industries.

Cela pourrait mener à plus de respect. Gill mentionne que les membres du local 258 qui travaillent comme signaleurs routiers gagnent entre 25 \$ et 30 \$ canadiens de l’heure, ils sont mieux payés que les signaleurs routiers non syndiqués, mais gagnent beaucoup moins que les compagnons.

« Le programme Sceau rouge permet aux formations et aux apprentissages d’être les mêmes partout au pays, » dit-elle. « On dépend maintenant sur cette entreprise pour nous former. »

Le recrutement est une priorité pour Gill depuis qu’elle est devenue une organisatrice et assistante gérante d’affaires en mars. Elle travaille avec le gérant d’affaires Doug McKay et d’autres dirigeants de la FIOE au Canada pour élaborer un contrat-cadre de signaleurs routiers.

« Nous sommes très fiers du travail effectué par nos signaleurs routiers et de la campagne de syndicalisation réussie par le local 258, » mentionne le vice-président international du premier district Thomas Reid.

« Je suis très fier de représenter les signaleurs routiers, » déclare McKay. « C’est un métier dangereux et ils font un excellent travail en protégeant nos travailleurs de première ligne. » ■

# CIRCUITS

## Reno Local Transformed Parking Garage Into Temporary Hospital

Across the United States, empty facilities have been converted into much-needed hospitals for patients suffering from COVID-19. In Reno, Nev., members of Local 401 performed that critical work in an especially unique place — a parking garage.

“It’s like a feat of human ingenuity and effort,” said Reno City Council Vice Mayor Devon Reese in a Facebook video when he toured the area. “When we put our minds together as a community ... we can do anything.”

The Mill Street parking garage, part of the Renown Regional Medical Center in Reno, is now home to 1,400 beds on two floors that will serve overflow patients suffering from COVID-19. The location allows caregivers to remain on campus and still have accessibility to existing hospital infrastructure such as labs, pharmacy, imaging, food services and other critical services.

About 20 members worked on the project in two shifts, which began in early April, said Local 401 Business Manager Jacob Haas. It finished just 10 days later and increased Renown’s ability to handle patient care by about 173%.

“It was basically a 24-hour project,” Haas said, adding that the work isn’t entirely unlike what members would do for a tradeshow or other temporary structure.

Members were given all necessary personal protective equipment, including masks purchased by the local, and got daily temperature checks, Haas said. They also practiced social distancing as much as possible and increased hand-washing.

“Our members are being really good and really safe throughout all this,” Haas said.

Local 401 also had members working on conversion of a GM plant for ventilator production, featured on IBEW.org. The project included travelers from Detroit Local 58, who worked 70-hour weeks alongside the locals over two shifts. Production was completed in early May. ■



Members of Reno, Nev., Local 401 provided the power to a temporary overflow hospital in a parking structure that’s part of a local medical center.

## IBEW Members Make Face Shields to Help Fight COVID-19

With personal protective equipment in short supply, enterprising IBEW members have stepped up to make face shields and masks for health care workers with their personal 3D printers.

Trevor Harding, a member of Halifax, Nova Scotia, Local 1928; Daniel Ruckus, a member of Dover, N.H., Local 490; and Sammy Cozzo, a member of Chicago Local 134 all originally got their printers for personal use, for the fun of making things like Star Wars figurines and chip clips. But when the coronavirus hit, they realized they could use the devices for a greater purpose.



IBEW members have been spending their spare time 3D-printing face shields to fight the coronavirus pandemic. Pictured: Halifax, Nova Scotia, Local 1928 member Trevor Harding, right, and his son, Rylan.

“I just wanted to help,” Harding said. “PPE is such an important thing.”

With N95 face masks still scarce, both the Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control suggest the use of face shields that cover the entire face when no masks are available.

Harding first started making the face shields at the end of February, printing the plastic headband and bottom portions and attaching them to a clear plastic shield with a fastening device, around the same time as Cozzo. Ruckus says he started around the end of March. All worked tirelessly at it for months.

“Normally I would be printing figures and toys,” Ruckus said. “But this is important.”

Cozzo made plastic face masks with an air filter as well as face shields, and has given them to nurses and nursing homes as well as less expected recipients like the Guatemalan Consulate and the National Guard. Some have even gone to people in other states.

“Some people were in tears telling us how grateful they were because they have a family member with cancer or asthma,” Cozzo said.

Harding, a Prince Edward Island resident, has had a helping hand — his son, Rylan.

“It feels amazing to be able to help,” said the meter reader for Maritime Electric. “And it’s been wonderful to have my son doing this with me.”

Cozzo has also had help, from his friend Carlos Salinas as well as other Chicago-area residents with 3D printers. In all, they had about 10 people working with about 40-50 machines.

“The feedback and support has been really great,” Cozzo said. “It’s definitely not just me.”

Harding first shipped his face shields to the U.S., though he has since switched to making the equipment for health care workers in his home area and for Nova Scotia Power. After that, he planned to ship some to Ontario and more to the U.S. In May, he said they’d printed about 350 so far.

“It is a lot of work, but it’s such a great learning experience for my son,” Harding said.

Ruckus says he can produce about one mask every three hours and has given them to various frontline workers and hospitals in the Granite State and around New England.

“Dan has really gone the extra mile,” said Local 490 Business Manager Denis Beaudoin Sr.

Cozzo says he and his team had printed over 3,000 masks and close to 2,000 shields by May. Some were even customized.

“Brother Cozzo has really stepped up to the plate. He and his volunteers have done a tremendous amount of work and all for the safety of the community,” said Local 134 Business Manager Don Finn. “Brothers and sisters, this is what organized labor is all about. We not only take care of our own but more importantly, we make communities better.”

The three members are all donating their masks. ■

## New Mexico Local Powers Overflow Hospitals for Coronavirus Patients

Members of Albuquerque, N.M., Local 611, with help from a handful of travelers, completed work on two hospitals to help deal with the COVID-19 pandemic in the Southwest.



Members of Albuquerque, N.M., Local 611 worked on two alternative care hospitals to help fight the spread of the coronavirus, including one in Chinle, Ariz., pictured, on the Navajo Nation.

“I am extremely proud of our Local 611 members and travelers, whose skill set and determination are vital to our state during this pandemic,” said Business Manager Carl Condit. “Our members have worked around the clock to ensure we have adequate and dependable health care facilities, operated and maintained our power generation and transmission capability and are diligently providing critical support to our national security mission.”

About 16 members worked to rehabilitate the old Lovelace hospital at the Gibson Medical Center in Albuquerque into a 200-room facility covering about 75,000 square feet. The project ran from April 3 to April 18 with three crews working 24 hours a day. The facility includes 20 rooms to accommodate severely ill patients and 180 rooms for “non-acute infectious” patients.

Members also worked to repurpose a gymnasium in Chinle, Ariz., part of the Navajo Nation. The project included bringing in a temporary generator and automatic transfer switch to the 35-bed facility. Work began around April 20 and finished in early May.

“These have been two of the most successful projects in terms of morale and production because of what’s at stake,” said Clinton Beall, senior vice president of signatory contractor B&D Industries. “We had people asking to work on these projects because of their importance, especially on the Navajo Nation.”

The Nation, which spans parts of Arizona, Utah and New Mexico, has the highest per capita rate of infections in the U.S. At the beginning of June, there had been more fatalities than 13 states, in part due to a lack of hospital infrastructure.

Members on both projects received daily temperature checks and were given full face masks and gloves, as well as normal personal protective equipment, Beall said.

“Everyone did a really good job of staying safe, including distancing,” Beall said.

Both projects were done with the Army Corps of Engineers. The Gibson project was estimated to cost around \$500,000. ■

## Member’s First-Ever Solo Marathon Raises Money, Inspires Community

Josh Horan had never in his life run anything close to a marathon. But the physically active Windsor, Ontario, Local 773 member felt so compelled to do something to fight the worldwide spread of COVID-19 that he recently challenged himself to train in only three weeks for a long-distance solo run, and to turn the effort into a fundraiser to help buy personal protective equipment for health care providers.



Windsor, Ontario, Local 773’s Josh Horan recently challenged himself to run a near-marathon distance — something he had never done before — to raise money for a local hospital foundation.

“I was joking with my wife one day while we were taking a walk in our neighborhood, and I suddenly had the feeling like I could just run to the Ambassador Bridge,” Horan said. The privately owned international connection between Windsor and Detroit is about 20 miles away from Horan’s home in Belle River, just a few miles shy of a marathon’s 26.2 miles. “The most I’d ever run was maybe a mile or mile-and-a-half,” he said.

Horan is a Red Seal-certified electrician who likes to stay busy professionally as well as personally. His résumé includes a range of residential and commercial projects, and before COVID-19, he was even helping to revitalize Local 773’s political action efforts.

But a lot of job opportunities for IBEW members, Horan included, have stalled during the novel coronavirus pandemic. He’s tried to remain physically fit in his down time by working out and running. He also goes on regular, local walks with his wife, Jessica.

After that one inspirational stroll

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near the two-lane bridge over the Belle River where it empties into Lake St. Clair, Horan sat down and planned out what became the “Bridge to Bridge” run. He set a GoFundMe goal to raise at least CA\$10,000 to buy protective masks, gloves and other supplies for the Windsor Regional Hospital Foundation. And he marked May 1 as the run’s date, three ambitious weeks away.

A triathlete friend helped Horan develop a training plan, and the electrician managed to get in eight miles on one of his last training sprints before Run Day. “I learned a lot about running — about form, training and discipline,” he said.

As ready as he ever would be, at 9 o’clock that Friday morning Horan set out west from Belle River and toward the Detroit skyline, one of his favorite sights. His route to Windsor kept him on sidewalks and less-traveled roadways along the Lake St. Clair and Detroit River shorelines.

He ran non-stop for the first half of the course before switching to intervals of running and walking, keeping safely socially distant from pedestrians along the way so he could run without wearing a mask and breathe more freely. “The weather cooperated,” he said. “It was a beautiful day. I couldn’t have asked for better.”

A fellow Local 773 member, Glenn Marshall, drove a support vehicle bearing an IBEW banner and magnet, while other friends and family members provided encouragement along the course, along with water and energy-boosting snacks.

Inspired by Horan’s effort, Marshall’s hockey-enthusiast 14-year-old son, Jayden, raised money for the cause by practicing his shooting and stick-handling skills in the family’s driveway while the electrician ran.

A fellow Ontarian whose wife works in health care heard about Horan’s run and decided to support the IBEW member by running the route from the opposite direction. “We crossed paths somewhere around the halfway point and exchanged a mutual peace sign,” Horan said.

Horan had estimated it would take him five hours to reach the Ambassador Bridge, but he only needed four. “I surprised myself,” he said. “It went off without a hitch.” Friends and family were waiting for him at the finish line, watching as he reached through a fence to physically touch one of the span’s support columns.

Since then, several other people have also made the Bridge to Bridge fundraising run, with some even turning around and running back to Belle River. “I’m happy to see that the positivity is contagious and the support from strangers that I now consider friends,” he said.

Horan would like to see the event become an annual fundraiser for issues such as mental health or homelessness. “It was never about one person,” he

said. “It’s been about our community, since Day 1. It’s great to see the community pull together.” ■

## Chicago Member Snaps Pics of Blue Angels Flyover

When Joseph Glynn saw that the Blue Angels flight path over Chicago would go over his union hall, he made sure to grab his camera before he went out to catch the show dedicated to honoring essential workers during the coronavirus pandemic.

“I just thought it would be cool,” said the Local 134 member and amateur photographer of the show that took place on May 11. “When I saw the jets coming, I ran out and took about six or seven shots.”

He captured the impressive skills of the U.S. Navy pilots flying in close formation framed by the Local 134 sign on one side and the American flag on the other. In one of the shots, the sign’s digital scroll is displaying, “Thank You” with a heart.

Messages on the sign have been interspersing words of thanks to essential workers and other coronavirus-related information along with the more typical union messages. Included on the rolling scroll are “Clean Hands Save Lives,” “Thank You Front-line Workers,” “Proud Union Home,” and “All in Illinois.”



Chicago Local 134 member Joseph Glynn snapped a shot of the Blue Angels flying over the local’s hall on May 11.

“We want to thank our first responders, doctors and nurses, but just as importantly our IBEW Local 134 members and the entire union construction industry who have been frontline essential workers since this pandemic erupted,” said Business Manager Don Finn. “We continually demonstrate why we are the best of the best.”

Local 134 members are working in hospitals across the city and helped power an alternative care facility at the McCormick Place Convention Center.

Members and union staff have also lent a hand to retirees by offering care packages of non-perishable foods and toiletries. The local has also delivered masks and gloves to retirees and members on jobsites ■

# THE FRONT LINE: POLITICS & JOBS

## St. Louis Member, Former Lawmaker is New Head of Missouri AFL-CIO



St. Louis Local 1 member Jake Hummel, new president of the Missouri AFL-CIO.

Jake Hummel has been a longtime successful advocate for Missouri’s working people, so it came as no surprise when he was asked to assume the top post in the state’s labor movement.

A former legislator and key figure in the fight that squashed a proposed Missouri right-to-work law, the St. Louis Local 1 member and journeyman inside wireman took over as president of the Missouri AFL-CIO on July 1 following the retirement of current president Mike Louis. Hummel has served as the group’s secretary-treasurer since 2014.

“This is something of a natural progression but I’m really pleased by the confidence shown by our executive board,” he said. “I was approved unanimously and I truly appreciate that.”

Hummel served nearly 10 years in the state Legislature and joined with his Democratic colleagues and a handful of Republican members to fight proposed right-to-work legislation. But they were overwhelmed after the GOP won the governor’s office and huge majorities in the House and Senate during the 2016 election. A right-to-work law was passed and signed soon after the Legislature began its 2017 session.

The battle was far from over, however. The Missouri constitution allows for a referendum on statewide legislation if approximately 100,000 voters across the state’s eight congressional districts sign a petition requesting one. Opponents of the right-to-work law gathered more than three times that, setting up an election in August 2018.

By a 2-1 margin, voters said “no” to Proposition A, which repealed the law passed by the Legislature.

“I was so impressed by Jake when I joined him and other friends knocking on doors for the right-to-work referendum, asking voters to side with working families,” International President Lonnie R. Stephenson said. “He not only has a passion for the IBEW and the rest of the labor movement but also knows how to build alliances and get things done. He’s well-suited for this new responsibility and I’m thrilled for him and all our brothers and sisters in Missouri.”

Hummel noted Missouri also has not done away with prevailing wage laws or successfully implemented so-called paycheck protection laws — two other favorite targets in GOP-dominated states. The percentage of Missouri workers

belonging to a union also has increased during the last two years.

Prevailing wage laws, commonly called Davis-Bacon laws on the federal level, guarantee workers a higher wage on projects receiving public financing. Paycheck protection laws, on the other hand, are an attempt to weaken unions by requiring workers to re-sign cards to verify their membership more often, usually on an annual basis.

“When we beat right-to-work, we had a majority of both Republican and Democratic voters come out and vote with us,” Hummel said. “I think that when you put an individual issue before the people, the party lines fade away. When you can show them how something affects the bottom line for them and their families, they start to think about things a little differently.”

Hummel, 44, was first elected to the state House in 2008 and served four terms, rising to the rank of floor leader. In 2016, he won a special election to finish out the term of a state senator who had resigned in a district that includes parts of St. Louis City and St. Louis County.

Despite the success in helping to beat back right-to-work, Hummel was defeated in the Democratic primary for the seat in 2018. He stayed active in state affairs, however, through his work with the AFL-CIO.

“I wanted to stay in Jefferson City [the state capital] and stay active in politics and keep working for working people,” he said.

A top priority for him and others at the state AFL-CIO is convincing Missouri voters — and even some union voters — who are against issues like right-to-work not to vote for politicians who consistently support them.

Even after the referendum vote, some state legislators said they would like to pass the legislation again. Missouri used to be a swing state on the national level with Democrats controlling the state lawmaking bodies, but that has changed significantly in the last two decades. The GOP has supermajorities in both the state House and Senate and controls all the statewide offices except one.

“That is a problem nationally for the entire labor movement,” Hummel said. “Workers are with us on the issues.

We have to find a way to connect them with the people that support us. That’s been a struggle.”

Eleventh District Vice President Mark Hager also congratulated Hummel on his appointment.

“Local 1 is so well respected throughout Missouri that it’s fitting someone of Jake’s ability and character has this position,” Hager said. “He and others have shown we can win even in a state where the odds are stacked against us. I’m just so proud of him and join with all our members in wishing him the best.” ■

## IBEW, AFL-CIO Announce Earth Day Initiative to Plot Future of the Energy Industry

The IBEW and the AFL-CIO in April announced an innovative partnership with former Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz aimed at protecting jobs while moving the U.S. toward a carbon-free energy future.

The arrangement, called the Labor Energy Partnership, will bring together Moniz’s Energy Futures Initiatives with the AFL-CIO’s more than 12.5 million working men and women to develop policy proposals for a 21st century energy system that creates and preserves quality jobs while addressing the climate crisis.

“As the vice-chair of the AFL-CIO’s Energy Committee, I’m thrilled to be a part of this new effort to find solutions to one of the greatest challenges of our time,” said International President Lonnie R. Stephenson.

“At the IBEW, we represent tens of thousands of members who depend on low-carbon natural gas and zero-carbon nuclear energy, and Secretary Moniz understands that climate solutions that don’t take into account the jobs and communities that depend on those fuel sources are unrealistic and shortsighted.”

Announced on the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, the initiative will focus on “all of the above” energy solutions that make preserving jobs its guiding principle.

**POLITICS & JOBS** continued on page 10



Wind power will be a key component of the 21st Century energy portfolio, but a new partnership between the IBEW, the AFL-CIO and former Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz will explore ways to preserve quality jobs in nuclear and natural gas while working toward a zero-carbon energy future.

**POLITICS & JOBS** *continued*

# SPOTLIGHT ON SAFETY

## How to Avoid Heat-Related Illness This Summer

“The energy sector is a key driver of the American economy, providing good jobs across a wide range of technologies,” said AFL-CIO president Richard Trumka in announcing the LEP. “As we look at how to return to work safely and begin to recover from the worst economic crisis of our lifetimes, one of our most important responses should be significant federal support for high-quality energy jobs.”

The partnership will focus on the future of energy issues, including but not limited to: offshore wind; carbon-capture and sequestration; the viability of existing nuclear generation and the rollout of next-generation nuclear; hurdles to new electricity transmission projects; the expansion of energy efficiency technologies; the production of minerals and materials necessary for domestic production of low-carbon technologies, including rare earths and other essential minerals; and a roadmap for implementing carbon dioxide removal at scale.

“The IBEW has always been a leader in the energy industry, and this initiative, together with Secretary Moniz and our sisters and brothers at the AFL-CIO, will help to ensure that we remain leaders in our industry for many years to come,” Stephenson said. “We’re proud to be a part of it and look forward to contributing to solutions that preserve and create jobs while protecting our planet for our kids and future generations.” ■

As temperatures continue to rise this summer, remembering the keys to avoiding heat-related illness is essential to IBEW members’ safety.

“It’s important that our members know the signs of heat illness and that they keep an eye on their brothers and sisters this summer,” said International President Lonnie R. Stephenson. “And just as important, we all need to know our rights under OSHA and that no one should be working under unsafe conditions.”

This summer is expected to be hotter than normal for most of the lower 48 states in the U.S., according to Weather.com, all the more reason for members to know the signs of heat-related illness, how to prevent it and what a worker’s rights are in terms of heat safety on the job.

While there is no federal standard for heat safety, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration does have guidelines, as well as its “Water. Rest. Shade.” Heat Illness Prevention campaign. The campaign’s website states:

Under OSHA law, employers are responsible for providing workplaces free of known safety hazards. This includes protecting workers from extreme heat. An employer with workers exposed to high temperatures should establish a complete heat illness prevention program.

- Provide workers with water, rest and shade.
- Allow new or returning workers to gradually increase workloads and take more frequent breaks as they acclimatize, or build a tolerance for working in the heat.
- Plan for emergencies and train workers on prevention.
- Monitor workers for signs of illness.

The Centers for Disease Control has also posted information on heat stress in construction. Published on May 21, the blog post includes a note on COVID-19 and recommends that workers not share water bottles or cups and maintain social distancing. It also noted that the “buddy system” may be harder to do under such circumstances and, especially with everyone wearing masks, that, “workers may need to ask each other questions about how they are feeling during the workday to assess for signs of heat-related illness among their co-workers.”

Each year, an average of about 658 people succumb to extreme heat, according to the CDC. Heat-related illnesses include heat stroke, heat exhaustion, heat cramps, heat rash and severe dehydration — all of which are preventable.

Acclimatization is particularly important. Research shows that it can take one to two weeks to adjust to the heat, and a 2016 study found that, of 23 heat-related deaths, 17 happened within the first three days on the job.

**Protect Yourself Against Heat Exposure.**

**You are at risk if you:**

Are new to the job ☀️ Work in hot and humid conditions ☀️ Do heavy physical labor ☀️ Don't drink enough water ☀️

**Dress Appropriately**

Wear clothes that are:

- ☀️ Light-colored (white, etc.)
- ☀️ Loose-fitting
- ☀️ Lightweight

If you need to wear protective clothing or personal protective equipment, like impermeable clothing, you may need more frequent breaks for water, rest, and shade.

**Drink Water & Take Breaks**

- ☀️ Take frequent breaks out of the sun
- ☀️ Drink 1 cup (8 ounces) of water every 15-20 minutes.
- ☀️ **DO NOT** wait until you are thirsty to drink water.
- ☀️ **DO NOT** drink alcohol and **AVOID** caffeine.

**Know the Warning Signs**

**Heat Exhaustion:**

- ☀️ Weakness & Wet Skin
- ☀️ Headache, Dizziness or Fainting
- ☀️ Nausea or Vomiting

**Heat Stroke:**

- ☀️ Excessive sweating or red, hot, dry skin
- ☀️ Confusion or Fainting
- ☀️ Convulsions or Seizures

**Seek Medical Assistance**

**Heat Stroke is a medical emergency**

Look out for your co-workers—if you see the warning signs take action!

**Call 911**

Getting help can be the difference between **life and death.**

Learn more about heat-related illnesses and how to prevent them at <http://bit.ly/CPWRHotWeather>

The Center for Construction Research and Training offers various resources for workers to stay safe during the summer heat.

Signs of heat exhaustion include muscle cramping, fatigue, headache, nausea or vomiting, and dizziness or fainting. If left untreated, heat exhaustion can lead to heat stroke, a potentially life-threatening condition.

**Heat stroke symptoms include:**

- A body temperature greater than 103°F (39.4°C)
- Rapid, strong pulse
- Throbbing headache
- Red, hot, and dry skin (no sweating)
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Confusion
- Unconsciousness

Along with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, OSHA developed an app, available for iPhones and Androids, that calculates the heat index in your location and gives you a corresponding risk level. The app also provides information on symptoms of heat-related illness and first aid.

For more information on how to stay safe, visit OSHA’s heat safety page. Additional information can also be found at the Center for Construction Research and Training. ■

## —In Memoriam—

### Members for Whom PBF Death Claims were Approved in April 2020

Local	Surname	Date of Death	Local	Surname	Date of Death	Local	Surname	Date of Death	Local	Surname	Date of Death	Local	Surname	Date of Death	Local	Surname	Date of Death
1	Huskey, K. V.	1/12/20	24	Sawczuk, W. E.	1/14/20	103	Oliver, D. Y.	8/10/19	332	Swiderski, C. J.	2/11/20	547	Bentele, N.	8/16/19	959	Huss, T. E.	1/27/20
3	Baronofsky, H.	10/17/19	24	Zepp, R. T.	1/23/20	106	Long, E. W.	12/18/19	340	Wiant, J. M.	10/26/19	558	Qualls, B. E.	3/3/20	993	Kuharski, D.	1/24/20
3	Bottcher, J. B.	3/9/20	26	Johnson, R. L.	1/24/20	110	Savageau, R. L.	12/21/19	347	Mealey, M. L.	12/8/19	569	Worabel, M. E.	10/31/19	1186	Asuka, R. I.	12/6/19
3	Caputo, V.	1/16/20	35	Paskov, K. S.	12/7/19	111	Harshman, F. J.	2/6/20	349	Domasky, J. T.	1/7/20	570	Stewart, B. J.	1/19/20	1224	Whitacre, R. D.	1/18/20
3	Conklin, W. J.	1/31/20	38	Yadlovsky, J.	2/8/20	125	Ellsworth, D. P.	11/1/19	349	Newman, P. N.	1/1/20	584	Davie, P. E.	12/26/19	1245	Scott, J. W.	1/11/20
3	Dwyer, J. M.	1/8/20	41	Arendt, M. K.	1/18/20	126	Snair, F. B.	1/30/20	351	Bonney, W. H.	1/24/20	595	Collins, J. T.	11/13/19	1362	Wiegand, D. E.	2/26/20
3	Fox, R. A.	1/8/20	41	Majeski, D. V.	12/11/19	127	Buciuni, G. C.	1/4/20	353	Harris, A.	1/24/20	601	Limp, W. J.	12/30/19	1393	Pitters, S.	1/9/20
3	Illustrato, A. F.	11/28/19	46	Brisendine, J. R.	1/24/20	131	Boulter, K. S.	10/26/19	353	Lappin, A.	9/24/17	606	Lynch, M. O.	1/17/20	1501	Deiman, F. O.	1/3/20
3	Kavanaugh, W. F.	1/27/20	46	Magnusen, C. M.	1/18/20	131	Hausermann, M. W.	12/17/19	357	Gaskin, L. L.	8/19/19	613	Beasley, D. E.	12/2/19	1579	Yarbrough, T. S.	11/18/19
3	LoBianco, S.	12/25/19	48	Burgess, B. J.	1/2/20	134	Finnegan, D. P.	11/27/19	357	Watkins, J. L.	2/4/20	617	Radetich, J.	12/9/19	1852	MacLeod, A. K.	6/22/19
3	MacDonald, C. R.	12/4/19	48	Laverdure, J. L.	1/5/20	134	Kowalewski, R. S.	2/6/20	369	Baize, W. C.	12/24/19	640	Looney, J. D.	2/1/20	2085	Hendrichs, B. K.	10/24/19
3	Marciano, R. J.	12/27/19	48	St. Jacques, C. O.	10/3/19	134	LaRocco, R. J.	1/31/20	369	Tompkins, D. W.	12/3/19	648	Downs, R.	12/19/19	2150	Mlodzik, B. A.	10/3/19
3	Minkwitz, A. H.	12/6/19	53	Halstead, J. B.	2/9/20	134	Palcey, W. M.	2/4/20	375	Maisenhalter, R. S.	1/6/20	649	Hinners, C.	10/31/19	2166	MacDonald, A. F.	12/27/19
3	Muraca, R. L.	1/23/20	57	Young, P. L.	2/13/20	143	Sweitzer, S. L.	11/29/19	379	Wilson, J. T.	1/12/20	649	McCord, R. L.	1/23/20	I.O. (134)	Gara, K. M.	1/11/20
3	Pink, V.	11/16/19	58	Bradford, D. F.	12/15/19	164	Callari, J. P.	12/19/19	396	Wheeler, G. T.	12/10/19	659	Dungan, W. T.	10/31/19	I.O. (134)	Zawilinski, R. W.	6/22/19
3	Porfidio, F. J.	1/11/20	58	Deaton, R. A.	2/20/18	164	Heydt, R. W.	12/31/19	424	Palutke, O. G.	1/17/20	659	Struebing, J. T.	12/5/19	I.O. (700)	Storey, M. A.	12/15/19
3	Renzo, J. M.	1/22/20	60	DeLeon, S.	12/13/19	164	Stutz, R. T.	12/29/19	424	Samson, D. C.	1/11/20	666	Luff, K. W.	11/30/19	Pens. (1470)	Ciparro, J. R.	1/11/20
3	York, J. C.	1/17/20	64	DeLullo, J. J.	1/8/20	175	Mansfield, B. M.	2/5/20	440	Johnson, H. C.	12/23/19	666	Wilde, L.	1/3/20	Pens. (1788)	Labelle, R.	12/29/19
3	Younghese, M.	12/13/19	64	Gentile, J.	11/24/19	175	Smith, C. D.	1/24/20	440	Sherman, G. L.	1/6/20	676	Chambers, T. R.	10/7/19	Pens. (I.O.)	Beams, D.	12/4/19
5	Petersen, U. D.	12/2/19	66	Keirse, L. G.	12/20/19	180	Meyer, G. F.	5/28/19	441	Snyder, F. D.	1/8/20	697	Spott, H. J.	9/21/19	Pens. (I.O.)	Benjamin, P. W.	10/23/19
8	Edwards, N. A.	11/1/19	66	Marier, L. M.	12/28/19	191	Sharpe, D. E.	1/4/20	444	Archer, F. L.	1/2/20	702	Colaw, D. W.	6/23/19	Pens. (I.O.)	Corr, E. J.	12/5/19
8	Walker, L. D.	12/31/19	68	Batchler, J. G.	7/19/19	204	Engler, S. F.	11/17/14	444	Mallory, I. E.	12/25/19	716	Delsanter, T. C.	2/7/20	Pens. (I.O.)	Donelson, R. N.	1/24/20
9	Marino, J. M.	12/19/19	68	Rademacher, G. L.	2/10/20	212	Hiance, N.	1/18/20	445	Vickery, G. S.	10/7/19	728	Hagenberger, J. W.	1/26/20	Pens. (I.O.)	Johnson, J.	12/31/19
9	Meyer, R. G.	2/5/20	68	Stewart, R. W.	12/3/19	213	Pitterna, M.	1/15/20	456	Balas, P.	12/25/19	728	Mechaw, H. F.	2/6/20	Pens. (I.O.)	Mandersen, F. B.	8/7/19
9	Olsen, J. F.	1/31/20	77	Smith, S. L.	8/31/19	213	Schulz, R. K.	1/1/20	456	Klimik, W. J.	1/3/20	756	Becker, J. H.	1/24/20	Pens. (I.O.)	McCartney, J. D.	1/1/19
11	Vejsz, G.	12/10/19	80	Marshall, A. M.	9/18/19	213	Zant, B. R.	1/8/20	474	Carsley, R. L.	4/23/19	760	Morris, J. P.	1/8/20	Pens. (I.O.)	Mickelsen, M. C.	1/10/20
17	Eckhout, M. B.	12/25/19	82	Frye, T. E.	12/4/19	229	Nagle, R. W.	1/19/20	479	Reinhold, R. R.	2/6/20	769	Margist, J.	7/9/19	Pens. (I.O.)	Van Tassel, R. E.	12/15/19
17	VanDyck, J. V.	10/3/19	86	Hauck, R. L.	12/29/19	231	Daniels, D. R.	1/3/20	479	Roccaforte, D. P.	7/22/19	773	Cappelletto, M.	2/20/20	Pens. (I.O.)	Walton, W. T.	11/21/19
18	Rudek, J. N.	11/22/19	99	Smith, G. W.	12/22/19	241	Jackson, F. H.	2/22/20	483	Smith, E. L.	2/7/20	773	Mako, D. E.	1/16/20	Pens. (I.O.)	Wheeler, E. R.	1/30/20
20	Bacon, R. N.	1/26/20	100	Dunlap, C.	11/10/19	242	Thibault, C. P.	11/28/19	488	Sabatino, A. V.	3/1/20	852	Smith, B. C.	1/13/20			
20	McGlaun, K. W.	1/17/20	102	Cacchio, J. A.	12/8/19	275	Cooper, R.	12/22/19	490	Lariviere, J. J.	6/13/19	873	Graves, T. M.	1/10/20			
24	Bermel, E. W.	1/21/20	102	Kovalcik, J.	5/17/19	305	Slain, D. V.	12/22/19	520	House, J. G.	12/11/19	934	Hopkins, W. W.	3/14/20			
24	Pospisi, T. T.	12/22/19	103	Murphy, P. P.	1/1/20	332	Pritchett, D. F.	1/30/20	531	Fetrow, R. V.	1/24/20	953	Olson, M. G.	1/24/20			

## WHO WE ARE

# Navy Commitment Puts New Jersey Member on COVID-19 Duty in South Pacific



Credit: U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Nathan Carpenter

Senior Electrical Technician Ed Nowak., left, a member of Trenton, N.J., Local 269, works with Boatswain's Mate 1st Class Reynaldo Castro on a way to transfer field hospital construction materials off a Navy vessel and onto the shores of the South Pacific island of Guam.

Trenton, N.J., Local 269's Ed Nowak is among the thousands of IBEW members who have stayed on the job as COVID-19 has spread across North America and around the world. But unlike most of his union brothers and sisters, Nowak found himself fighting the coronavirus pandemic on the other side of the planet.

That's because he's not only an electrician, he's also a Navy reservist. "It's an interesting balance," said Nowak, who has been a member of that branch of the U.S. Armed Forces as well as an IBEW wireman for nearly two decades.

Toward the end of last year, Nowak's commitment with the reserves took him on a months-long deployment to Guam, the U.S. island territory that's just about the farthest point west of Hawaii where you can go and still find yourself on American soil.

"Just like the commercials said: Join the Navy and see the world," Nowak quipped. "I was out there to handle construction and logistics to help move stuff off ships in the South Pacific."

There, Chief Construction Electrician Nowak was assigned to work with Naval Base Guam's construction battalions, better known as "Seabees" (from the initials "C.B."). "I'm what they call a 'deck-plate leader,'" he said, "similar to a foreman on a job or road supervisor. I'll still get my hands dirty, fixing broken things and building things."

While he was on Guam, Nowak was

promoted to Senior Chief Construction Electrician. But any celebration surrounding the milestone would end up being short-lived: just as the end of Nowak's deployment at Naval Base Guam approached, COVID-19 developed into a global pandemic, and the Navy decided to extend Nowak's South Pacific duties a couple of months longer.

Guam has so far been fortunate compared with other places around the world, having reported only about 200 COVID-19 cases among the island's 160,000 or so residents. But the island's four hospitals would be quickly overwhelmed if they had to deal with a massive outbreak of the disease, and Guam's remote location makes it difficult to take quick deliveries of already scarce supplies such as masks, gloves and gowns.

So, the Navy, with its large and historic presence on the island, was assigned to build an "expeditionary medical facility" as a backup to Guam's hospitals. EMFs are essentially massive field hospital construction kits that get loaded onto ships for deployment around the world as needed. They can gradually become large, functioning facilities, capable of offering care that rivals any city's hospitals or trauma centers.

But even in the best of times, managing construction of an EMF can be a logistical challenge, and the urgency of the COVID-19 threat further intensified things for Nowak and his team of reserv-

ists, who were working alongside active-duty sailors and Marines. "There was lots of stuff we had never done before, or done that way before," he said. "It gave us a chance to use our problem-solving skills and figure it out."

For Nowak, whose home state is second only to New York in number of cases in the U.S., building facilities to help deal with potential COVID-19 cases was personal. "My uncle got it and passed away," he said. "It hits home."

One of Nowak's more daunting tasks was helping with construction of what's called an Improved Navy Lighterage System — essentially, a floating bridge and ferry system that's used to transfer cargo from ship to shore when access to an actual port may not be feasible for one reason or another. "But it's like an apprenticeship," he said. "We train to do something and then we do it."

Fortunately, Nowak was wrapping up his assignment on Guam as this article was being prepared, and he was in transit back to New Jersey where a variety of projects awaits him. And while he's not scheduled for any long-term deployments for now, he'll continue to balance his civilian electrician duties with his service to the reserves for the foreseeable future, reporting to a local Navy facility for the standard commitment of one weekend a month and two weeks a year.

"I must like it," he said of his dual-service career. "I picked it." ■



*The Electrical Worker* was the name of the first official publication of the National Brotherhood of Electrical Workers in 1893 (the NBEW became the IBEW in 1899 with the expansion of the union into Canada). The name and format of the publication have changed over the years. This newspaper is the official publication of the IBEW and seeks to capture the courage and spirit that motivated the founders of the Brotherhood and continue to inspire the union's members today. The masthead of this newspaper is an adaptation of that of the first edition in 1893.

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# AGL Employees Ratify Contract, Become Full IBEW Members Amid Pandemic

One of the largest organizing victories in the South in recent years reached a crucial milestone when the members of Atlanta Local 1997 voted overwhelmingly to approve their first contract with Atlanta Gas Light.

The final votes were cast May 1 after failed organizing drives in 2006 and 2012, a change of ownership in 2015 when Southern Company purchased AGL and the ultimately successful organizing drive in 2018.

Negotiations were often contentious, said Utility Director Donnie Colston, who gives all of the credit to the seven-member negotiating committee and their support team, international representatives Chris Harris and Anna Jerry.

“There are a few milestones in the creation of a union. Collecting cards. Calling and then winning the election. Starting negotiations and reaching an agreement on that first contract. Each is a victory, but it is victory on the way,” Colston said. “The true finish line is getting that first contract ratified by the membership and hammered in stone. I know the work doesn’t end there, but for the term of that agreement, it is a truth that cannot be ignored, a truth with the power to change lives.”

**“I turned to one guy ... and he said, ‘I can buy a house.’”**

— Atlanta Local 1997 Business Manager Steve Galloway

The deal covers everything from the companywide pay scale — and a promise that people will actually advance through the pay scale — to training, disciplinary procedures and rare language that gives Local 1997 right of refusal for any work and any overtime that would go to contractors.

“This is an excellent first contract and they would not have gotten there without the steadfast unity of the membership,” Colston said. “They earned this in the negotiating room and on the job.”

Negotiations began in January 2019 and negotiators met more than 60 times, Jerry said.

“We thought it would be a couple of months,” said Local 1997 Business Manager Steve Galloway. “We thought we could take language from other Southern Company-IBEW contracts and put something together, but it wasn’t that way.”

Before negotiations, Galloway and the newly appointed members of the bargaining team (Jim Higgins, Edward Leland, Tim Dasher, Cyril Watnes, Brent Goring and Mark Ellis) asked the membership for their priorities. They were helped by the other members of the volunteer organizing committee, many of whom were transitioning into quasi-stewards since there

are no actual shop steward roles until a contract is in place.

By far the highest priority, Galloway said, was the pay scale. AGL’s overall pay scale was lower than unionized utilities nearby. Jerry described it as “egregious.”

That wasn’t too much of a surprise. What was a surprise was how few of the members of the bargaining unit were making the top of the scale.

“We found out that only about 10% were making the top wage on the sheet they posted on the bulletin board,” Jerry said. “And then there were people there six years who topped out and people who were there 26 years who had not.”

It was all at the whim of the supervisor, Galloway said, and every one of the 23 service centers ran like its own little company with its own rules.

What the membership wanted was fairness. Everyone who did the same job should be paid the same for doing it.

But hopes for a quick resolution quickly evaporated.

Harris has been negotiating contracts with Southern Company for a decade. He wasn’t quite as optimistic as the less experienced negotiators, but he still thought it could be wrapped up in a few months.

“The problem is that when you are used to being in full control over everything like AGL was — from controlling workforce and rules to benefits and wages — it’s tough to suddenly have to live up to a contract. And they didn’t want some of that language from 50, 60-year-old contracts,” Harris said. “We had to build a relationship, a trust factor.”

“Basically, they wanted to do business as usual, but written in a contract,” Jerry said.

There was no single moment when the logjam of “noes” broke, Galloway, Harris and Jerry agreed. With every new section of the contract, IBEW proposals were met with a wall of rejections, and a compromise days or weeks away. Then they did it again.

“It was ‘no, no, no, no, yes, no, no, no, no, no, yes,’ again and again,” Harris said.

Crucial to holding the membership together over the long negotiation was the size and variety of the negotiating committee. AGL workers had been part of a union before, but they had voted to decertify. Under the previous union, the negotiating committee had been too small, Galloway said. Too many classifications or parts of the state were unrepresented, and the deals they signed left too many feeling unheard.

“Chris and Anna brought someone from every department,” he said. “That meant when we sent out word about some new tentative agreement, every member saw the name of someone they knew.”

The diversity mattered at the table too. Timothy Dasher was in his second stint at AGL when he joined the negotiating committee. He started with the company in 2002 as a meter reader, but in 2005 the company contracted out all



The AGL contract was overwhelmingly approved by the membership after more than 30 in-person and a dozen virtual presentations led by international representatives Chris Harris and Anna Jerry and the negotiating committee.

meter reading. He went to work for the contractor, but the pay scale dropped and he lost his insurance.

“We even had the pension frozen,” he said.

He never forgot how that affected his family, Harris said, and the final agreement includes protections for AGL workers that are nearly unheard of. Contractors can only work when AGL workers are working, and AGL workers get first right to the work and first right to the overtime.

“We got it because of what happened to him,” Harris said. “It was Tim telling how it impacted his family; it really set him back.”

Dasher and Galloway said the low point was at the end when they finally talked wages. Harris said he tried to warn them that AGL’s first offer would be insulting if they let it affect them, but that it was just a tactic. Nevertheless, Dasher said it stung.

“It was way below what we already had. That was hard not to get mad. Chris was saying ‘Hold on. Don’t lose your cool. This is the game and they are playing it well,’” Dasher said. “But we are playing it too.”

As bad as it was, though, Harris said they were never close to an impasse, and didn’t have to call on the good relationship between Southern corporate brass and the IBEW senior leadership.

“It was as it should be. A hard negotiation that leaves everyone in favor of the deal,” he said.

Immediately after the last tentative agreement was struck, the negotiating committee hit the road. The utility covers the entire state, and there are service centers from Rome in the Appalachians to Savannah on the Atlantic Coast. Harris said they put thousands of miles on their cars doing two presentations. Every available worker was assigned and paid by the company to attend.

“It is unusual to pay wages for the committee to travel and 700 employees to listen, but by that point the company wanted the contract as much as we did,” Harris said.

After every presentation, they collected ballots.

Jerry explained, Harris ran the pre-

sentation and the negotiating committee answered questions.

“I loved watching the countenance of these peoples’ faces, from wondering to pure amazement at all the things we were able to get for them. And then we described new classifications and told them their new pay ... I loved that part of the process, seeing the ‘ah ha’ moment,” Jerry said.

“I turned to one guy in Augusta and asked what he thought, and he said, ‘I can buy a house,’” Galloway said.

By then, the coronavirus pandemic had gone from an overseas headline to a threat no one could ignore.

First the meetings were made smaller and went from twice to three times a day.

After 30 in-person meetings, following the guidance of the state of Georgia, they were shut down. They decided to do virtual presentations followed by a virtual vote through online survey software.

And then they started to fall ill. In the end, five of the seven members of the negotiating committee got sick, as did Galloway, Higgins and Harris. Dasher just lost his sense of taste and smell for a few days. Galloway, Higgins and Harris were hospitalized — Harris spent two days on

a ventilator. Higgins spent months in the ICU and was recovering at a rehabilitation center when this issue went to print in early June.

“All the negotiating committee members that weren’t in the hospital were on the call,” Jerry said. “It was so disappointing that we had to finish with calls. You can’t see their faces or read people. That was a huge disappointment. But we were adamant that we wanted to get it done.”

And by then, with the pandemic unleashing a hurricane of layoffs nationwide, the contract presentation added a new component.

“If the economy bottoms out, if the company even loses money because of the pandemic, this contract is fixed and cannot be reduced,” Jerry said. “That really drove things home.”

In the end, nearly 90% of the bargaining unit voted and more than 70% voted “yes.” (“It was 72%,” Harris said. “I want that 2% counted.”)

“It really came down to this: people were sick of not being paid appropriately for the work they were doing,” Jerry said.

Now the work of running and keeping a local begins. For now, dues are low, Galloway said, and there will be no full-time local staff. Elections for new officers are scheduled for September.

Georgia is a right-to-work state and the local leadership is signing up members. More than a quarter signed up in the first weeks. In early May, the new paychecks with the new scale began to drop and Galloway says that he expects a lot of people to start signing up when they see that new number. But internal organizing is just the next stage in the process.

“I am giving everyone two pay periods before we really reach out to the ones who haven’t joined,” he said. “Let them see the new money. That’s life-changing money there.” ■

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