CRISES 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.

“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.


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.
We Need Leaders

Sisters 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 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.

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 nation’s 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

Even before COVID-19 sent the world economy spiraling, unions were seen by more people as their best hope for a dignified life and a job with a future 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?

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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.

We are here to serve.

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.

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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 vacation as he left his jobsite across from Grand Central Station on Friday, March 13.

But by Sunday, he’d quarantined himself in an upstairs room in his Nassau County home, apart from his wife, a pediatrician, their新房，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 journeymen wireworker and drummer in Local 3’s Sword of Light pipe band.

If his oxygen levels didn’t improve, he knew he’d need a ventilator. 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 wore gowns and gloves, doctors who mainly worked from home.

“Try to stay healthy,” they said. Especially now that he worked in a hospital, apart from his wife, a pediatrician, their four children, 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.

“I was shocked,” said McDonald. “I was scared. I prayed that he wouldn’t need a ventilator.

“She was just a little nervewracking,” he said. “But there was nothing normal about it.”

LEN COPICOTTO didn’t get ill. But he was shocked by it.

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 journeymen, who is carrying on the tradition of safety with masks, Purell, Kleenex, “said the Local 3 journeyman, who is carrying on the tradition of safety with masks, Purell, Kleenex, “said the Local 3 journeyman, who is carrying on the tradition of safety with masks, Purell, Kleenex.”

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 we don’t lose the sense that this is your union, that we work for you.”

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 mentor, 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 members,” 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 booming 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 around the city.

“Everyone in the union was so generous,” Cohen said. “I’ve been really encouraged by the community.”

That’s all too clear to Bronx-based signatory contractor E&I 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 Jacob 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.

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I NEARLY LOST MY FAVORITE PERSON IN THE WORLD

Ernie 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 579 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, a number of confirmed cases at the site grew from a handful to 232. The 9,000-strong workforce was cut in half and many workers were given the option to quarantine for two weeks at a time.

“I 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 sit 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 I weren’t for the incredible men and women of the IBEW, 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.
“You were always afraid you might bring something home to your family.”

Setting up trade shows at the Javits Center 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 Jacobs 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 stud 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.”

THE VACCINE 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.

“I’m extremely nervous for my brothers and sisters that got laid off.”

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 working 14-hour shifts at the hospital to something that symbolized how devastating the outbreak was for workers in his industry, just getting hundreds of workers up and down 60 floors, ”Erikson said.

The waits for a ride are longer now, as workers keep their distance in the exterior lift shafts 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.”

If they’re nonunion employers pose the greatest threat of COVID-19 spreading on job sites, 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. “We’re going to be compliance up and down the line. If there’s not, that could end up shutting down the whole construction industry again.”

THE ELECTRICAL WORKER | JUNE 2020

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

Continuous panic hit the Bay Area early, prompting one of the nation’s busiest 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 continue to show up to work in critical jobs.

San Francisco Local 6 member Mike Henry is the shop maintenance supervisor 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 negotiated precautionary PPE use, a move that paid off when three drivers at the garage contracted COVID-19. The agency now requires every

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AT THE CENTER OF A PANDEMIC

New York Members Endure the Latest Test of the City’s Resilience

Continued from page 1

South to New York,

Setting up trade shows at 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 meals weekly, one of many food bank projects drawing Local 3 volunteers.

E-J Electric, which sends sandwiches for Heroes” from signatory contractors

DOING THE GRIM: Work of electrifying a mobile morgue, Len Copicotto flashed on his 101st birthday 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 out a howl, “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.

“When you know what the virus is doing, you know 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
Westchester County Center

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 he got 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.

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

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 member requests,” 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

Between spring and summer, in that brief window when neither heat nor air conditioning is on, it 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 down the fuel, replace 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, bump sniffed, you’d rest your hand on a scanner to match it with your ID, and everyone is sure to one of its most horrific chapters. To the casual observer, their work is not necessarily one that comes with the warm weather,” said Dulany.

“Something as simple as the security line at the beginning and the end of the shift, getting X-rayed, bump sniffed, you’d rest your hand on a scanner to match it with your ID, and everyone is sure to one of its most horrific chapters. To the casual observer, their work is not necessarily one that comes with the warm weather,” said Dulany. “We always take pride in what we do,” said Cleveland Local 38 member Steve Sinko.

“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 Piotrowski, Amy Metzgar, Keith Carpenter, Chris Carpenter, Tim Grabowski, Dominic Kosley, Bob Gaye, John LeBlanc, Jamie Miller, John Cigas, Dan Darling and Steve Sinko. Credit: John Schalk

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 Dower’s Grove, Ill., Local 15.

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 Steve 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. Construction and Maintenance Department Director Mike Richard. “There’s no open cable — it’s all piped — and that means a lot of great conduit work for our apprentices.”

Nine separate suites are ultimately planned for the Astrup buildout, including a
tocha on the workers. The nonprofit has just been the recipient of a $13 million project, including himself and 30 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 toxic.

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 Sunflowers” 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.

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 Piotrowski, Amy Metzgar, Keith Carpenter, Chris Carpenter, Tim Grabowski, Dominic Kosley, Bob Gaye, John LeBlanc, Jamie Miller, John Cigas, Dan Darling and Steve Sinko.

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Traffic Controllers Provide Safety, Security in BC

Vicki 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 on site.

"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-heeled one. That's the only way I can put it. Now, I 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 outage occurs or concrete pouring to repair work when a power outage occurs. It's all too common.

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 an infection rates lower than neighboring Washington state, where Seattle was an infection rates lower than neighboring Washington state, where Seattle was an infection rates lower than neighboring Washington state.

"It's one of the most dangerous jobs," said Gill, who has worked as a traffic control person since 2006. "You're managing the 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 control 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."

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 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."

In 2018, between 2009 and 2018. More than half of those incidents involved traffic controllers, with Flett being one on the 100 ver. 2018. Verbal abuse from passing drivers is all too common.

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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 critical work on 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 50 days later and increased Renown’s ability to handle COVID-19. In Reno, Nev., members of Local 401 performed that critical work in an especially unique place – a parking garage.

“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 to 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 helped, 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’ve 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 front-line workers and hospitals in the Granite State and around New England.

"Dan has really gone the extra mile," said Local 400 Business Manager Denis Beauclair 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.

"For me this is a great passion," Cozzo said. "I wanted to do something for the greater good."
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 $50,000 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 a.m. 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 733 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 effort and who also an alternative care facility at the McGregor 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 job sites.

“We want to thank our first responders, doctors and nurses, but just as importantly our IBEW Local 73 members and the entire union construction industry who have been frontline essential workers since this pandemic erupted,” said Business Manager Don Finn. “We appreciate you and our members since this pandemic erupted,” said Business Manager Don Finn. “We appreciate you and our members and our community, thank you.”

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

“Local 1 is so well respected throughout Missouri that it’s fitting some-one 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 IBWE 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 20 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 IBWE, 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.

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Wind power will be a key component of the 21st century energy portfolio, but a new partnership between the IBWE, 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.

The FRONTLINE: POLITICS & JOBS

St. Louis Member, Former Lawmaker is New Head of 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 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. “It was an appointment 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 employers 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, 45, 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 majorities 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 up on 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 some-one 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.”

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

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 formed 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.”

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**POLITICS & JOBS continued**

“*The energy sector is a key driver of the American economy, providing good jobs across a wide range of technologies,*” said AFI-CIO president Richard Trumka in announcing the latest update on how to return to work safely and begin to lift ourselves from the worst economic crisis of our lifetimes, one of our most important responses should be significant federal support for high-quality energy jobs and infrastructure.

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 our solutions that preserve and create jobs while protecting our planet for our kids and future generations.**"
Navy Commitment Puts New Jersey Member on COVID-19 Duty in South Pacific

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 union member for nearly two decades. “I picked it.”

Toward the end of last year, Nowak’s commitment with the reserves took him on a months-long deployment to Guam, the farthest point west of Hawaii where you can fly to. The tour was to bridge and ferry system that’s used to off ships in the South Pacific island of Guam.

For Nowak, whose home state is New Jersey, it was a couple of months longer: 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 for another couple of months.

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 “expedient 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 reservists, 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. 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.”
AGL Employees Ratify Contract, Become Full IBEW Members Amid Pandemic

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.

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 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, 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.”

“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 ever 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. “Such as 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 week. In early May, the new pay checks with the new scale began to drop and Galloway says 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.”

AGL Employees Ratify Contract, Become Full IBEW Members Amid Pandemic

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