

## IBEW Convention

St. Louis

September 15-23, 2016

Those delegates in attendance were as follows:

President Rick Johnson, Business Manager Lou Walter, myself – Walt Aho, Recording Secretary Damien Hernandez, Suzanne Brunner, Nicole Reedy, Brady Hansen, Caelin Hickey, Rick Luiten, Bill Schaffer and Rick Kenny.

Also representing RENEW, as guests in attendance, were Shaunie Wheeler, Matt Cain, Matt Reese, along with spouses/others that joined the events.

Thursday, the 15<sup>th</sup>, some of our group performed in the IBEW Member's Day of Volunteer Service and our volunteers can tell you about their experience. All in all, the volunteers that numbered more than 400 members got up early that morning and went to 26 different sites and logged more than 1600 hrs. in volunteering that day.

Also that day was the dedication of the Henry Miller Museum. It was actually the cutting of a wire ribbon by the IBEW leaders from the United States and Canada using lineman pliers. For more than two years, the building that was once used as a boarding house was turned into a museum to honor the founding father of the IBEW. IBEW Local 1 purchased the building after finding out its location and significance and completely renovating it. Inside contains numerous story boards that tell you about the history of when Henry Miller once boarded there and he and nine other delegates of the first convention held in 1891. Outside to commemorate their memory are 10 poles adorned with some statues on the poles with overhead lines and each a plaque with each of the ten names of the founders. Also in the courtyard where the poles structures are located there is a large paving stone that the local purchased as well as other locals did the same prior to the dedication. Later that evening a RENEW reception was held.

Friday was the IBEW Women's Caucus and it was led by Carolyn Williams, Director of the IBEW's Civic and Community Engagement, and included panel discussions on inclusion and organizing, and personal stories of IBEW women, or as it they

were called “her stories.” One of the panel discussions was moderated by Alice Phillips, Business Manager for IBEW Local 483 of Tacoma. One of the memorable speakers there for the women’s caucus was Stacy Abrams, House Minority leader, Georgia General Assembly and State Representative for the 89<sup>th</sup> House District. One of the lines on politics I found amusing, being a father of two daughters, was, “Politicians are like 15-year-old girls, they enjoy money, peer pressure, and attention.”

Later that day in the afternoon session there was the Political Conference. The focus on that session was of course keeping your eye on the prize for this election year. One memorable speaker was the U.S. Representative Donald Norcross of New Jersey. He was a former Business Manager for Local 351. Jim Hunter, Director of IBEW Utility Department, addressed the body. Both of these men had the courage to tell the President of the United States that in regarding the views the President held on energy, the IBEW is there for us. They felt it was more important to disagree with the President’s views on the elimination of some of the sources of energy at the costs of jobs. Stacy Abrams also addressed the Political Conference, as I stated moments ago she addressed the Women’s Conference earlier. She didn’t say how to vote this fall but urged each of us to vote for the person that is going to help your family the most.

That evening our Local plus Local’s 3, 47, 103, 125, 258, 349, 401, 613, & 1158 were invited to the Band of Brothers II Convention Party. And to spice it up, Local 3’s sword and light drum and bagpipe corps played a few numbers and was enjoyed by all.

Saturday the Electrical Worker’s Minority Caucus was held the morning. The motto for the Caucus was “Forever lifting up, forever moving forward.” Keith Edwards, President of the EWMC, touched on the courage of the founding fathers and believed that in those early days the founding fathers probably would have been part of RENEW. Another speaker at the Caucus was Robbie Sparks. She is 75-years young and President Emeritus of the EWMC. She’s a great person and a fiery speaker. Most of the speakers there spoke on honoring the men and women that help form the EWMC and for the progress that they made in the past since their beginnings. Just to let you know the EWMC started just 42 years ago and 77 would like to get more interest in the organization. Currently we have

one member working with Local 46 attending to meetings. Later on that Saturday there was a great picnic held with all kinds of great food and entertainment. Later that evening across the street at the Scottrade Center, we were all entertained with the comedy of Bill Engvall and after that there was a concert by Steve "Guitar" Miller and his band. It was absolutely fantastic. Sunday was pretty much a free day until the evening, there was a delegate reception at the Convention Complex.

Monday the 19th was the opening day of the 39<sup>th</sup> International Convention. To kick things off first Local 3's Sword of Light Pipe and Drum Band along with the St. Louis Police Color Guard then later along with Canada's Black Watch Pipe and Drum group ushered in both countries flags and national anthems were performed. They were truly inspirational. Lonnie Stephenson was presented two hand crafted gavels, one for opening the convention and the other one was also handcrafted using two pieces of primary insulating glass was for the closing of the convention on the final day. Lonnie Stephenson was unanimously elected the 17<sup>th</sup> International president for the IBEW. International Secretary-treasurer Salvatore "Sam" Chilia was reelected and New York City Local 3 Business Manager Christopher Erikson was selected to be the chairman of the International Executive Council. We heard from Jay Nixon, the Governor of Missouri that stressed to try to hold the line on right to work. There is a constant threat from the right to get in legislation supporting it, depending on the results of this election results this fall. He also stressed to stay involved, united and strong. At the end of the day we broke out into caucuses in our 9<sup>th</sup> District and nominated John O'Rourke as Vice President and later caucused in our 7<sup>th</sup> District International Executive Council to nominate Pat Lavin as our representative.

Tuesday we were addressed by Liz Schuler, AFL-CIO Secretary Treasurer, whose origins are from Local 125 out of Portland, and also Lindell Lee, Secretary Treasurer Emeritus, and is a resident of Missouri. He spoke about the world that the founding fathers faced. No collective bargaining rights, no safety program, poor wages, you were in a profession that was considered very second class job, facing a workplace that just staying alive everyday was a blessing. We also took action to support the international general fund and to ensure the health of the pension benefit fund. We adopted the recommendation to amend the constitution and increase the per capita by \$2 over the course of the next five

years, the PBF contributions by \$3 a month over the same period. So in 2018 the per capita will increase by a dollar in January and then again in 2020. The pension benefit fund would increase by two dollars in January 2017 and by an additional dollar in January 2019. So in terms of Membership, we have added about 133,000 A members and 120,000 BA members, but we have lost about 250,000 members due to deaths, dropped members and retirements. So that is a small net gain, and that's all the more reason to organize even more. We are encouraged to support our RENEW/Next-Gen and the Electrical Worker's Minority and Women's Caucuses. The IBEW will also unveil a core code of excellence program that will standardize training across the IBEW. The code of excellence is specialized for the different IBEW branches, but holds values that unite all the brotherhoods 725,000 members. Those values are the acronym SPARQ. Safety, professionalism, accountability, relationships, and quality. In the midst of all the daily sessions we were also considered resolutions that were brought forth before us and one of them was the that the IBEW renew its commitment to the Electrical Workers Without Borders. Our very own Brady Hansen rose and addressed the delegates with an impassioned speech and we were all proud of what he had to say on the resolution and of course it passed. Brady made a lot of contacts there at the Convention and I think it's safe to say his efforts are going to be rewarded from across the states and abroad.

Wednesday's session featured speaker Richard Trumka, AFL-CIO President. I had the opportunity to hear him speak at the Washington State Labor Council Convention earlier this year in Wenatchee and he gave another great speech at the IBEW Convention too. He spoke on the importance of unions, not just to members but to all working people. When we stand strong wages go up for everyone. He also said that our nation is rediscovering unionism right now. When we win, the country wins. Also during that session, the delegates put their seal of approval on all of their nominations of all the district caucuses.

Thursday's session offered us speakers like former Iowa Senator Tom Harkin. In 2014, Senator Harkin was made an honorary member of the Brotherhood. He stressed that if Donald Trump is elected as president a dark curtain will fall over America. Citing choices for the Supreme Court and for the National Labor Relations Board. In all, it would undo decades of progress of the labor movement. Some of the most memorable parts of his speech struck me in a humorous way.

Simple advice from a farmer, like some of my in-laws that farm in the Kennewick area. He said, "Money is like manure, if you pile it all up, it kills everything underneath, but if you spread it all around nice and even like. Everything flourishes everywhere its spread." He also said that you don't fertilize a tree from the top on down, you need to fertilize the roots to make it grow. And in a very touching moment hit me because his brother lost his hearing and they both learned to use sign language. I knew a little because I grew up with a neighbor that was my same age and he too lost his hearing at a young age but could sign and read lips. The simple sign for America is really wonderful. You interlock your hands and move it in a circular motion. Like in the circle of life. That is America. Well like I said earlier we worked on resolutions during the sessions on up to the end of the week and our own Nichole Reedy knocked it out of the park by getting up and addressing the delegates about call centers and spoke on our CSR summit too. The resolution called on delegates to request a call center employee based in the United States or Canada when contacting a company. Nichole had a lot of interest from other delegates on our CSR summit. That resolution also passed.

The final session on Friday we had the past Governor of Hawaii Neil Abercrombie and I had the pleasure to hear him at one of the past 9<sup>th</sup> District Progress meetings. He's a gentleman of short stature but he delivers a powerful punch of a speech and he didn't hold back at the convention. He too spoke on the importance of the need to stand up and organize. The choice is up to you, to recognize who is on your side. We may not have money power but we have people power and we do know how to organize. We may be able to win collective bargaining rights but legislation can take it all away. That's how important your vote is this November.

