



The Washington Connection

BY JIM HADEL, INTERNATIONAL VICE PRESIDENT AND WASHINGTON REPRESENTATIVE

What the Convention Means for Our Organization

On October 14th our organization will convene its Twenty-Eighth International Convention in Las Vegas, Nevada. As usual, the officers and delegates in attendance will be conducting the business as required every five years under our Constitution and By-Laws. There will be hearings on various resolutions, some of which recommend changes to our Constitution and By-Laws, and others that pledge our continued support for various issues and organizations such as immigration reform, project labor agreements, Helmets to Hardhats and the National Maintenance Agreement. Along with the requisite officer elections, there will be workshops to provide delegates an opportunity to learn more on topics such as marketing. The convention is an important time; not only does it chart the course and direction we will take for the next five years, but it is also a time to renew and strengthen the true mission statement that the United Union of Roofers, Waterproofers & Allied Workers was founded upon over one hundred years ago.

Our mission as stated in the Preamble of our Constitution and By-Laws hasn't changed over the years. Quite frankly I believe it still holds as true today as it did over one hundred years ago—specifically, the excerpt in the Preamble that reads, "...to broaden the scope of usefulness and extend the field of employment of each and every individual member; to protect and improve the economic conditions and quality of life

of our membership and all working people, their families and their communities; to confederate as far as practicable our somewhat rather spasmodical individual efforts into one continuous collective undertaking for the upbuilding and improvement of this International Union..." Basically restated, we need to organize the unorganized, and in doing so we will expand our market share which will result in improved wages, benefits and working conditions for our members. Membership and contractor growth is not only the key to improved economic conditions for our members, it is vital to our survival. This concept hasn't changed in the last century.

On the other hand, the techniques that were once successful in obtaining membership growth have changed dramatically over the decades. Popular bottom-up techniques, such as NLRB board elections and picketing, are not quite as successful as they once were. They can still be a useful tool in the right situation—and we continue to encourage their use where it warrants that strategy—but organizing tactics have evolved along with the changing economic and labor dynamics.

The political environment has changed dramatically as well. Organized labor is now constantly at odds with agendas on both national and state levels, where it's being met by legislators and anti-union organizations whose sole mission is to strike at the heart of the working class represented by unions. We must react, but the strategy that we implement must be appropriate to the needs of market.

As in any other business or orga-

nization, our growth and success is determined by our ability to adapt to variable market conditions and a changing environment. Businesses that fail to change as conditions warrant will eventually cease to exist. Our union is no different, and if we do not face the challenges of our industry straight on, we risk suffering the same fate.

There is no doubt that our local unions provide a value to our sig-

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natory contractors, as well as to the communities they serve. We all know that value exists. Today we should be marketing that value and service to non-signatory contractors and potential clients. The fact that we are "union" alone does not carry the same impact in this age as it did years ago. We must tie a value to our organization.

Our International Union has invested a substantial amount of time and money creating the training materials and resources necessary to develop the most-qualified, most-productive and safest-working roofers and waterproofers in the industry. Our local apprenticeship

training programs have made the same commitment, and their efforts should be publicized to every contractor and potential client possible. In addition, every local union should market its ability to provide qualified manpower, when needed, at all skill levels: foremen, journeymen and apprentices. We have the product; now we need to market it.

The environment to successfully

organize today is much different than it was in the past; however, the same principles stated in the Preamble that our organization was founded on still apply. We must increase our market and membership numbers. Our strategy on how we achieve that growth must change with the times. We need to try new and innovative methods where others have failed. The effort needs to be made by *all*

locals, big and small, no matter what capacity.

I look forward to working with all of the delegates at the convention. There will be a lot on the agenda to think about. But if there is one thing we must achieve at the convention, it is that we all leave with progress being made and a renewed energy and direction that will carry our Union into the future. ■

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