

The Laborers' International Union at 100 Looking Back, Moving Forward

The Laborers' International Union will mark its 100th anniversary on April 13, 2003, commemorating the union's growth from 8,186 laborers in 1903 to its present day position as one of the largest, strongest and most progressive unions in North America. Here's the history of the union at a glance:

- 1903** With dangerous working conditions, poor wages and little respect on the job pervasive in the construction industry, what would become the Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA) is formed as the International Hod Carriers and Building Laborers Union on April 13. Delegates representing 8,186 members attend the founding.
- 1905** Laborers vote to contribute more funds to "be thoroughly prepared to meet the combined, organized opposition of the employing class."
- 1906** Laborers see economic gains; for example, wages nearly double in Pittsburgh and the workday is reduced from 10 hours to 8.5 hours.
- 1907** Membership reaches 11,000 workers, many of them immigrants, as overall immigration to the U.S. reaches an all time high of 1.3 million people in the year.
- 1913** First funds are authorized to hire organizers as membership reaches nearly 25,000, buoyed by addition of road construction workers.
- 1916** Calling for a fair share of economic prosperity, Laborers in Boston, Philadelphia and St. Louis go on strike.
- 1919** Laborers demonstrate their solidarity by assisting steelworkers who are trying to organize a union.
- 1920** As membership climbs to 96,000, Laborers win wage hikes – in New York, from 30 cents an hour in 1917 to 75 cent an hour, and in Chicago, from 45 cents an hour to \$1 an hour.
- Laborers back efforts by African-Americans to win equal treatment in U.S. unions; the following year, the union would deny petitions for segregated local unions in Cincinnati and Kansas City.
- 1931** A law to encourage and protect family-supporting wages for construction workers on government financed projects is passed. Known as Davis-Bacon, the law continues to the present, preventing unscrupulous contractors from using public projects to force wages and community standards down.

- 1933** Membership plummets to 27,000 as the Great Depression takes its toll.
- 1936** Laborers hire 30 new organizers to rebuild membership.
- 1937** Membership rebounds to 101,000.
- 1942** Membership reaches 200,000, one half of which will serve in World War II.
- 1944** The Federal Highway Act is passed, creating thousands of new jobs for laborers.
- 1946** While a strike wave involving 4.6 million workers rolls across the country, Laborers opt to open discussions with employers on cooperating to increase the market share of union contractors.
- 1948** The union breaks from its tradition of not making political endorsements – and the same year Laborer Leonard Irving of Local 264 in Kansas City wins the Congressional seat previously held by President Harry Truman.
- 1949** Laborers sign the first National Pipeline Agreement, protecting wages, benefits and safety conditions for thousands of workers.
- 1950** Laborers build their own training center in Kansas City, opening the era of high-quality training to help workers advance and find more opportunity for themselves and their families.
- 1951** Chicago Laborers create a multi-employer pension plan, one of the first in the nation, ensuring retirement security for workers who regularly move from one employer to another.
- 1952** Northern California Laborers strike successfully to win health care benefits.
- 1957** The union launches an intensive education effort to promote development of health and pension programs in local unions.
- 1962** The union helps found the AFL-CIO Building and Construction Trades Department Safety Committee, and promotes a war on construction site cave-ins through intensive membership education and pushing protective legislation.
- Northern California Laborers win pension benefits after a six-week strike, leading to pension benefits for thousands of Laborers through the West.
- 1963** Membership reaches 420,000.

- 1964** The union launches organizing efforts among public employee, winning an early success with Laredo Air Force base workers. The mostly Hispanic members strike in 1965 and later win a contract improving working conditions.
- The union ends its tradition of neutrality in national elections, endorsing Lyndon Johnson for president and pledging strong support for his War on Poverty.
- 1965** The union changes its name to the Laborers' International Union of North America.
- 1966** The Laborers Political League is established to strengthen Laborers' voices in the political process and encourage member participation in politics and government.
- 1968** Members support new training opportunities with paycheck deductions for training funds.
- The National Association of Post Office Mail Handlers, representing Postal Service employees, and the Journeyman Stone Cutters Association, affiliate with the Laborers. Membership reaches 550,000.
- 1969** The Laborers Associated General Contractors Education and Training Fund is established to promote more training opportunities. The labor-management partnership is supported by funds negotiated in workers' contracts and through federal grants. Regions will follow suit, establishing training funds to provide even more intensive and diverse training opportunities.
- 1970** Intensive lobbying by Laborers and other unions results in creation of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.
- 1973** The Labor Council for Latin American Advancement is organized to help Latino workers speak out; the first president is Ray Mendoza, a Laborer.
- 1981** Laborers begin offering training in asbestos abatement, and within three years begin full hazardous waste removal training.
- 1985** Laborers are in the national spotlight as a documentary about Laborer stone cutters at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., wins an Academy Awards Oscar.
- 1988** The first of its kind in the union movement, the Laborers Health and Safety Fund is established to protect the health and safety of laborers.
- Laborers-AGC Education and Training Fund launches a new program to train members for hazardous waste removal, training at least 2,500 Laborers at six sites in the first year. The fund also launches a literacy program for members.

- 1989** The union creates the Laborers-Employers Cooperation and Education Trust, which, with the union's safety fund and training fund, will come to be known as the LIUNA Tri-Funds. The fund, also known as LECET, aims to increase market opportunities for union contractors and Laborers.
- 1994** A recognition of the high skill level required to perform the various jobs in the Laborer craft, the U.S. Labor Department certifies construction craft laborer as an apprenticeable occupation.
- Laborers complete the reconstruction of Interstate 10 in Los Angeles in record time following a devastating earthquake.
- 1995** The Laborers launch VOICE – Volunteer Organizer in Community Empowerment – to mobilize rank and file members to help on organizing campaigns.
- 1996** More than 2,000 asbestos workers and 1,500 demolition workers, struggling for safer jobsites and family-supporting pay and benefits, organize with the Laborers' Mason Tenders in New York City. The landmark campaign helps union workers capture 75 percent of the interior demolition market in New York.
- 1997** The Midwest Regional Organizing Fund is created and will quickly help more than 4,000 members join the Laborers. The Eastern Region Organizing Fund is created, and starts with a base of 3,100 volunteer member organizers.
- 1998** The Public Employee Department is created and successfully helps 5,200 workers with Riverside County, California, organize a union.
- 1999** The Laborers form the National Retirees' Council to mobilize members after their working career ends and to benefit from their knowledge, skill and energy in organizing, political action and grassroots lobbying.
- 2001** The commitment to organizing is strengthened further with a \$9 million investment to hire 90 more organizers, and by organizing grants to local unions, district councils and regions. Membership reaches 818,000.
- 2002** More than 3,000 Laborers work 12-hour days to clean up Ground Zero, the site of terrorist attacks in New York City. The cleanup is completed three months ahead of schedule and under budget.
- A construction charter school opens in Cranston, R.I. The innovative project offers high schoolers the opportunity to earn diplomas while learning the construction craft, and then attend college or begin a Laborers apprenticeship. As the driving force behind the school, General Secretary-Treasurer Armand Sabitoni is named one of 25 "top newsmakers of 2002" by Engineering News Record, the leading industry publication.