

The IBEW SPARQ

A quarterly newsletter highlighting IBEW values

Vol. 4 | Issue 1 | Winter 2020

Building a Culture of Safety on the Job

Good wages, benefits and working conditions are hallmarks of the IBEW's strong contracts. But there's one condition more fundamental than anything else: ensuring that members return home healthy and unharmed every day.

as our industry has changed so dramatically," said Kim Greene, president and CEO of Atlanta-based Southern Company Gas. "Maintaining our safe operations is absolutely paramount. Having trained, skilled, confident workers is the key to that."

finally asked workers for their opinions, responses poured in.

"People care about safety. They had something to say, and boy did they say it," Greene said. "They let us know that we were paying way too much attention to the small stuff and were being distracted from the big stuff...that we were operating in many ways by being lucky, not necessarily by being smart."

Management realized that "we'd created a culture where people weren't reporting, a culture of being hard on people who tripped and fell, being hard on people who smashed their finger, being hard on people who got an insect bite and might have blown a period of time of no injuries for a work group," she said.

Partnering with the IBEW and safety experts, Southern Company Gas began concentrating on critical risks, the tasks most likely to cause serious injuries or fatalities. The result, along with the company's response, might surprise you.

"This year, the recordable incident rate is as high as it's been in 10 years," Greene said. "But I feel like our company is safer than ever. I don't think we're having more injuries, I think that people are telling us about it now."

Working with the IBEW, she said, "We're creating a learning environment where it is clear that we really care about keeping people safe."



Beyond the bargaining table, the IBEW is partnering with employers to build a true culture of safety.

"Our members do an excellent job looking out for each other and minimizing risks. But that's not enough," International President Lonnie R. Stephenson said. "Employers have to be every bit as committed to job safety as we are."

With the IBEW's input and encouragement, they increasingly are.

"We've had the privilege to work side by side with our IBEW partners

Greene told the audience at the IBEW Membership Development Conference in Chicago in August how her company changed its approach to safety after consulting with workers.

For years, management focused on an OSHA metric known as the "recordable incident rate" that measures work-related deaths, injuries and illnesses. Deciding the rate was too high, they cracked down on employees, demanding they "work smarter." The rate dropped, but something wasn't right. When the company



What does SPARQ mean to you? Have an idea for the newsletter? Email theSPARQ@ibew.org



Safety 'Stars' Shine Bright in Nebraska

The members of Lincoln, Neb., Local 2366 embrace all the values in the Code of Excellence, but a reputation for safety has garnered them special recognition.

The members make circuit breakers for Schneider Electric, which participates in OSHA's Voluntary Protection Programs. For 11 years running, Schneider's low workplace injury numbers have earned it OSHA's "Star" status.

"Being a Star site means you're going above and beyond the basics of safety," said Dianna O'Brien, a second-generation Schneider employee—her mother worked there too—who is serving her second term as Local 2366's business manager.

Of nearly 10 million U.S. worksites, only about 2,000 manufacturing plants participate in the VPP. "Star certification is pretty elite," she said.

As Schneider's assembly line runs from molding to stamping to welding, safety observations take place

around the plant. Every minor injury—or near miss—gets reported, and scheduled non-routine work receives a thorough safety evaluation before it begins.

"Employees can put safety ideas up on a board and the issues will be addressed," O'Brien said. "If we see a problem, we go to the safety director. We speak up and take action."

A 14-member safety committee of employees from different areas and shifts meets weekly. If a worker gets hurt, an investigation involving the employee, a Local 2366 shop steward and management takes place almost immediately.

"We even have the authority to stop work if we observe something unsafe," O'Brien said. "Management might not always agree, but they do listen."

By taking the Code of Excellence to heart, IBEW members can help ensure that all of us get to go home safe at the end of our shifts.



SPARQ GOES LOCAL



IBEW 2019 RENEW/NextGen Conference

More than 500 young leaders attended last year's IBEW RENEW/NextGen Conference and learned about the difference they can make every day in their workplaces and in their union when they commit to the IBEW Code of Excellence. RENEW and NextGen members are serious about their roles in building a strong IBEW—and demonstrating the core values of SPARQ is part of making that future a reality.

