

UA Update



This is the latest in an ongoing series of UA Updates in the Reporter on issues of importance to both the UA and MCAA. Following is the text of the remarks that United Association General President Bill Hite delivered at the MCAA Convention at the closing session on Thursday March 23, 2006.

This morning I would like to start by giving you an overview of the UA. We have over 327,000 members in 317 local unions in the U.S. and Canada. In 1996, 10 years ago, we had 280,000, so we are growing year to year.

The makeup of the UA is 28 percent plumbers, 6 percent sprinklerfitters (fire protection), and 66 percent pipefitters, which includes HVAC techs. We have over 43,000 members in Canada. Currently, there are over 34,000 men and women in our various apprenticeship programs.

One thing I'm extremely proud of is the UA's commitment to training. Almost every local has their own training facility and we have four regional UA training facilities. Through our joint training initiatives with our contractors, the UA and our locals spend over \$120 million annually training our members. I've been asked this morning to address current issues that have arisen within the Building Trades.

The Building Trades was comprised of 15 international construction unions. However, the Carpenters, Teamsters, Laborers, and Operating Engineers have dropped out on the national level. They have their own agenda and working with the Building Trades evidently isn't part of it. The most recent defections took effect on March 1, when the Laborers and Operating Engineers officially withdrew from the Building Trades.

As to the future of the national Building Trades, we will be going forward without the four crafts. We have had meetings to address the issues raised by their departures. The owners and contractors who build and

maintain using union craft personnel do not deserve to experience problems on their jobsites, and there won't be any!

We will work side-by-side with our brothers and sisters and continue to build and maintain within the construction industry. We will allow the dissidents to participate in local, state, and provincial Building Trades. Ed Sullivan, the national Building Trades president who is here at your convention, is doing a good job keeping things held together.

I have always gotten along with the general presidents of these four Internationals, and I hope that will not change. I respect the fact that everyone is entitled to their views. That being said, we will not tolerate vertical agreements. The four unions have formed the National Construction Alliance, just as the mechanical trades have formed MAC, the Mechanical Allied Crafts.

The difference is that MAC will always be a part of the BCTD and will always promote BCTD ideals. For now, on the national level, the National Construction Alliance will be outside the BCTD. My personal opinion is that it was a mistake for the four international unions to withdraw from the Building Trades. Change should have occurred from inside the organization.

The UA is a classic example of that. We certainly didn't need a split in the organized construction industry at this time. However, these developments by no means spell doom and gloom for the union construction movement. Neither the UA, our contractors, or our loyal customers will be adversely affected. I can only hope that

these four Internationals will resume talks to repair this rift.

Next I'll touch on MAC—the Mechanical Allied Crafts. MAC was formed within the Building Trades to address specific issues regarding the mechanical industry. MAC consists of the UA, Boilermakers, IBEW, Sheet Metal Workers, Insulators, Ironworkers, and Elevator Constructors. It's comprised of approximately 1.4 million union craftsmen. Tom Panconi, my administrative assistant, is the UA point man for MAC.

The purpose of MAC is to show industry that we can work together to get their projects completed on time and within budget. We are starting to market MAC on the premise of no job disruptions, reciprocal agreements between crafts on benefits, shared training possibilities, and a new spirit of cooperation within the mechanical trades. There are plans to overhaul all existing jurisdiction between the MAC trades.

In the near future, we will be forming MAC councils around the country. It's our intention to prove to everyone that in the Mechanical Trades, we're going to be progressive and innovative to the needs of our contractors and owners. MAC will also give us a stronger force to be reckoned with, with all the turmoil in the Building Trades. I'm proud to announce that I was elected to be the president of MAC...and I'm committed to its success.

Within the UA, our hurricane relief effort has been ongoing. We have raised over \$2 million from UA member donations and our general fund, which is being used to

benefit our members. We've had several hundred plumbers working with Bechtel and Fluor on temporary housing for the past couple of months, hooking up sewer and water.

The major reconstruction work hasn't started yet, but we're gearing up for it. Once the work starts, the UA could probably put every plumber, HVAC tech, and sprinklerfitter in the Gulf to work and still be short.

Last month, I was summoned to the White House to attend a meeting chaired by the President on the rebuilding of the Gulf. I was put on the Gulf Coast Recovery and Rebuilding Council. The Council is made up of contractors, labor groups, and community representatives. The main focus is recruiting and training people for the skilled construction jobs along the Gulf. The Council is meeting on an ongoing basis. I think it's important that there's union representation on this Council to look out for all of our interests, and I'm honored to be a part of the Council.

Labor Shortages—I know one of the major concerns of everyone is the shortage of skilled labor, not only along the Gulf, but throughout the country. The outlook for industrial work hasn't been this good for some time. In fact, in all aspects of our work—plumbing, service, and sprinkler work—we expect to be booming for the next 5-10 years.

A good way to recruit qualified people into our trade is through the Helmets to Hardhats Building Trades program. That's a federally financed program where discharged military personnel are recruited into the union construction trades through direct entry into the apprenticeship program, with credit given for service. It's not only a good way to recruit, but it's the right thing to do—real jobs with fair wages and good benefits for our men and women who are serving our country.

I have instructed all of our locals to increase apprentice classes and to think outside the

box so we can recruit people with special skills such as welding, ASAP. We have reached out to various welding schools and we have also started our own intense welder qualifications to fill demands. We will bring in prospective members to our schools and teach them pipe welding and get them certified on UA welding procedures.

We will also give them the OSHA training and workplace awareness classes to get them ready to be put to work. If an individual completes the training (which could take several months), they would be given two years credit toward their apprenticeship and placed in a third year class.

We are determined not to be caught off guard by failing to have people who possess the skills necessary to get the job done. Going forward, organizing and recruitment will go hand in hand. We have the chance of a lifetime to grow our membership and increase market share. Speaking for the entire UA, this is a top priority.

UA Political Scene—On the political scene, we have been and will continue to be taking a non-partisan approach. We will support those politicians who support us, regardless if they are Republicans or Democrats. Like it or not, the Republicans control Congress and the White House. Does anyone believe if the word wasn't out that we truly are non-partisan, that I would have been put on the Gulf Coast Recovery and Rebuilding Committee and met with the President? We've gone from the out-house to the White House in one year!

We worked with the Republicans to get the Energy Bill on track and nobody worked harder than the UA to get it through Congress. This legislation will mean millions of manhours of work for our membership and our union contractors.

My plan was to work with the Republicans on the Energy Bill and ANWR, to build a working relationship, which we did. ANWR hasn't been passed by Congress, but we're hoping it will pass soon. It's imperative

we get less dependent on foreign oil, and ANWR also has a large national gas reserve we could certainly use. We will be looking for help from the Republicans on the pension fund bill focusing on the multiemployer funds, which will be part of the bill.

It's our plan to focus on legislation that benefits UA members—the Energy Bill, ANWR, asbestos legislation, Pension Bill, and the Fire Sprinkler Bill. These are some of the important pieces of the UA's political agenda. We are expanding our political action campaign for one reason—the benefit of our members. It's all about expanding work opportunities for our members and contractors.

Another program we're putting together that I'm extremely proud of is the UA Standard for Excellence. The UA Standard for Excellence is a policy that is a labor-management commitment to uphold the highest industry standard in the workplace and ensure customer satisfaction.

During the past year I have traveled to all parts of the United States and Canada. I have met with hundreds of UA members and officers, dozens of our contractors, and many owners. Through these meetings I have gained invaluable insight into what is right and what is wrong with our approach to the jobsite.

On the positive side of these meetings, the UA gets high marks for overall craftsmanship. There can be no doubt the training and certification provided for UA members is world class. On the negative side, the complaints I hear are virtually universal: low productivity, absenteeism, lack of training and certification for supervisors, poor work place attitudes. These "hot button" issues pervade on far too many major jobs we are involved with. Yet the majority of our membership is doing the right thing from job to job.

We are developing a program to focus on work place attitudes that is in line with what our contractors and owners expect. We will be offering the UA Standard for Excellence as a guide for all parties—labor,

management, and owner—to use as a means of smoothing job completion. We are not alone in this approach as some of the other construction unions are applying the same strategy. It's our intent to respond to jobsite problems and focus on changing bad attitudes.

We have been working with the national Construction Users Roundtable, or CURT, to gain the owner perspective as well as increase our exposure to owners and contractor associations. I am the co-chairman for the CURT Workplace Attitudes Committee. We recently constructed a survey to better understand the perceptions of the owners, contractors, and union members on construction sites. The information acquired will give us better insight on how to correct the problems that plague too many jobsites. The survey is a link on our UA closed website and I have encouraged our membership to take the 15 to 20 minutes it takes to complete the survey. Contractors and owners can participate in the survey through the CURT or MCAA website. [Editor's note: The survey is available in the Business News section on the home page of MCAA's website at www.mcaa.org.]

Our goal at the UA is to increase UA market share. The growth of market share is paramount to me and the entire UA brain trust. The past has proven that a union can diminish its market share, but I feel it's our responsibility to work with our union contractors to grow back that market share.

Union contractors are union because they feel we give them the best chance to succeed. Contrary to what some people may think, contractors have choices. We have to be receptive to our contractors' needs and keep them competitive.

Thirty years ago, we had a large market share and there was a perception that it was us against them—us the union—they our union contractors. How wrong we were—today we have to be on the same page as our contractors, or we're destined to fail.

The UA is committed to the mechanical industry. I believe that the future lies in the tripartite approach. If owners, contractors, and labor are on the same page, we're virtually unstoppable.

Again, at the UA it's all about fair wages, good benefits, and increased market share. Thirty-eight years ago, when I started my

apprenticeship, we had the market share. Unfortunately, we watched that share decline and virtually did very little to turn it around. Well, that's the past and now is the future. The new UA is focused on the future with a new sense of urgency and commitment to create more opportunities for our contractors and members.

On a personal note, I'm proud of the fact that my grandfather started with my home local in Chicago in 1898, my father in 1937, my three brothers and myself in the sixties, and my son in 1992. That's four generations of my family and over 107 years of being involved with the UA. I can tell you that nobody wants this organization, the membership, and our industry to prosper and grow more than I do. I'm committed to it and I'm going to get the job done!

In closing, I want to congratulate Stanley for a job well done. And I'm looking forward to working with your new president, Mike Cullinane. We're both from Chicago and Mike and I have been friends for many years. I see great things ahead for the relationship between the UA and MCAA. Thank you for the invitation and your hospitality! ♦

MCAA Mourns Past President Charles H. (Chuck) Carlson



Charles (Chuck) Carlson, who served as MCAA's president in 1987, passed away on March 27 at age 66.

Born in Ironwood, MI, he graduated from Luther L. Wright High School in Ironwood in 1957 and from Michigan Technological University in 1961. He spent three years in active duty in the United States Army, 10 years in the Michigan National Guard, and eventually retired from the U.S. Army Reserve as a Lieutenant Colonel after 30 years of service.

He opened Industrial Piping in Marquette, MI, in 1965 and he served as president and CEO for 30 years.

Active in the industry, he served as president of the MCA of Michigan and was a professional trustee of the U.P. Plumbers and Pipefitters Fringe Benefit Funds. After retirement, he was co-chairman of their national pension fund.

He served the community on the boards of Child and Family Services and the Marquette Golf Club. He was also active on the Session of the Presbyterian Church and was a former director of the First National Bank and Trust Company.

He is survived by his wife, Georgia (Racine) Carlson; five children, Robert (Kathy) Weber, Kevin Weber, Kirsten (Gene) Solmos, Melissa Carlson, and Barry (Julie) Carlson; and seven grandchildren. He is also survived by his mother-in-law, Rose Thompson; sister-in-law, Retha LaChance; brother-in-law, Robert (Judy) Racine; and cousins, Kathy (Don) Blainy and Chuck Flanagan.

Funeral services were held on Thursday, April 6 at the First Presbyterian Church in Marquette. Memorial donations may be made to the First Presbyterian Church in Marquette or the American Cancer Society. ♦