Shouting “The Incheon electrician’s strike is just,” 48-year old Jung Hae Jin set himself on fire on Oct. 27 in front of Youngjin Electrical Company in South Korea to protest the employer’s refusal to negotiate a collective bargaining agreement with the union. The union’s demands included union recognition, 44-hour work week (many electricians had to work 12 to 13 hours a day), and an end to illegal subcontracting. Jung Hae Jin died of his injuries. Story was reported by the Building and Woodworkers Union International.

Pensions are declining in the US. The total number of defined benefit plans has fallen from 128,041 in 1978 to 26,000 this year, Labor Notes reported. Only 55% of private sector workers in 2005 worked at companies that offered either a defined benefit or defined contribution plan.

Missed Meal Payments for PG&E groups one and two were scheduled to be made in late November or early December. Lawsuits have been filed against Mirant and Duke seeking back payments for missed meals.

Reorganizing Gas T&D and analyzing staffing levels is the focus of a new “Lean Six Sigma” group at PG&E.

Ron Weakley
Union Brother
1915–2007
Ronald T. Weakley’s first encounter with workplace injustice came on the day of his birth.

His father, a hardrock miner and member of the militant Industrial Workers of the World, had been blackballed for union activism. The only way Earl Lloyd McDoolin could work was under a phony name. When baby Ron came into the world on Jan. 24, 1915, the name entered on his birth certificate was the one his father had made up in order to hold a job: Robinson.

A stepfather, William Weakley, later replaced McDoolin as the center of Ron’s family life, but unionism remained central to Weakley’s childhood experience. William Weakley, initiated into the IBEW in 1905, worked as a lineman as well as a construction electrician.

“He was very active in the union, particularly in strikes,” Weakley once recalled. “The St. Louis car strike was a big one in which he participated.”

When his stepfather went broke during the depression, Weakley left home and wound up in the Sacramento Valley working on farms and orchards. There he witnessed firsthand the hardships faced by farm workers and developed a life-long sense of solidarity with the farmworker cause.

Next came a short stint at sea in the merchant marines. A short stint that made a lasting impression.

“They didn’t have any rights or anything else in those days,” Weakley said. “And the food was full of weevils. You washed with salt water. Bed bugs. Looked like hell. No air conditioning, hardly any decent potable water to drink, nowhere to wash your clothes except salt water. It was like Captain Bly.”

Weakley said he learned the hard way about discrimination against union members.

“I got fired off a ship because I was a member of the Marine Fireman’s union,” he said. “They didn’t give me a nickel. They kicked me off in Baltimore.”

He caught a freight to Mobile, Alabama and eventually found his way back to San Francisco, where he took a job as an oiler for Atlas Imperial Diesel Engine Co. in Oakland.

Weakley worked the graveyard shift, at straight time. His memories of the job were not fond ones.

“The wages were lousy, the company was lousy. I was getting $12 a week. I gave my mother $8 and I kept $4. It was hard work.”

But shortly after his 19th birthday, in 1934, Weakley found himself swept up in one of the epic labor struggles of the 20th century. Harry Bridges, the charismatic longshoreman leader, launched the San Francisco maritime strike, which was about to become the great San Francisco General Strike.

“We all went out on strike,” recalled Weakley. “We didn’t have a union, but we went out on strike anyway. The whole works just shut down and walked out. Everybody was fed up.”

The strike was serious business and would eventually culminate in the police shooting deaths of two strikers on “Bloody Thursday.” But for a 19-year-old kid full of working class moxie, it was the chance to fight on the side of the angels.

In one of many actions, strikers encircled the Howard Terminal in Oakland, charged, he landed a job with the Bay Area Key Transit System, working the 1939 Treasure Island World’s Fair.

Twelve years later Weakley would be leading a new union representing those Key System employees as well as thousands of workers at Pacific Gas & Electric and many other California employers.

Those 12 years were epic ones in the history of American labor. The journey began in 1940, when 25-year-old Ron Weakley walked into PG&E offices in San Francisco and got hired on as a laborer at $4 a day.

Formidable Challenge

PG&E was a formidable challenge to labor organizers seven decades ago, but it didn’t take Weakley long to find people willing to take the company on.

In early 1941 he met with a small group of men in the bar of a rundown hotel in Concord. Many of them, Weakley included, were watch engineers at PG&E steam plants in the East Bay. They were proud men who believed they got little respect on the job and that their wages and working conditions were obnoxious. They also agreed that to get the strength they needed to deal with PG&E, they would have to organize the entire company—top to bottom, north to south, east to west, men and women, physical and clerical. One big union on the system.

Weakley stood out.

“He acted like he had the experience and the background to know what to do and what to expect. And we just followed,” recalled Ray Michaels, one of the men attending the meeting.

“We were united in a single purpose to get a union,” Weakley explained in 1962. “We weren’t yakking about how unions had too much power and how we didn’t need one, like some poor misguided souls today. We sought a union to regain our dignity first and then to improve our wages and conditions.”

On April 17, 1941 Weakley and his fellow organizers obtained a charter from the Utility Workers Organizing Committee (UWOC), affiliated with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). A year later, they petitioned the National La-
for wages and benefits in the utility industry. The foundation for the labor agreement with PG&E, now recognized as setting the standard for wages and benefits in the utility industry.

**An Audacious Move**

Over the next couple of years, Weakley and the UWOC gained contracts at PG&E locations throughout the Bay Area, while IBEW organized the outlying areas. In 1944 both unions succeed in getting master agreements for all of the territory they controlled. The contracts weren't great, but they were a beginning. After the war, though, Weakley's dream of one big union seemed to be slipping away. The two unions had fought each other to a standstill. And there was trouble brewing within the UWOC, which in 1946 gained recognition by the CIO as a national union—the Utility Workers Union of America (UWUA). America after the war was in the grip of anti-communist hysteria, and the labor movement was not immune. At the UWUA's founding convention in 1946, Weakly and other California utility workers came under attack. "They depicted us on the West Coast as 'Red Hots' (communists) and so forth," said Weakley. "They created enemies in order to get control of the union." The abuse was even worse at the 1947 convention. Longshoremen leader Harry Bridges, under attack himself by "anti-red" forces within the CIO, sympathized with Weakley's position. He told Weakley that his union of utility workers could headquarter at the Longshoreman's hall if they got kicked out of the UWUA. Weakley, the former merchant marine and Navy veteran, began to think about jumping ship. He was accompanied by one of his close associates, Don Hardie, Weakley met secret- ly with IBEW officials in Oakland. They proposed a deal, which in essence was this: we'll try to convince our members to come over to the IBEW and help you organize PG&E if you let us run our local as we want it run.

"We decided to dump (the UWUA) and join the IBEW, with a view toward achieving what the company feared most of all, which was building one system-wide industrial union on these properties," Weakley said. In late 1948, IBEW headquarters in Washington DC established a new local to accommodate Weakley's forces: IBEW Local 1234.

It was an audacious move on Weakley's part, and full of risk. PG&E fought him every step of the way, red-hating him mercilessly during NLRB hearings to establish the scope of the proposed bargaining unit. The national leadership of the UWUA, outraged at the prospect of losing its foothold at PG&E, put up ferocious resistance. The leaders of IBEW Local 1245, which had been fighting Weakley tooth and nail since 1941, didn't want to have anything to do with him. But Weakley had support where it counted: from the rank and file leaders who shared his vision and recognized his leadership. Those stalwarts of the Utility Workers Organizing Committee included Don Hardie, Tom Riley, Bay Michaels, Mert Walters, Stan Dahlin, Les Glasson, Ed White, William Haars, Ed Hanlon, Bill Kennedy, Milt Ingraham, Gene Hastings, and many others whose names were never captured in print. Their job was to convince their fellow workers to follow them into the IBEW. "Many people got hurt in this process and much bitterness prevailed. We (faced) company finks, commies, imported industrial agents, and a hostile business community," Weakley said in 1962. "While we were at it we had a ball fighting among ourselves and I can assure you that at more than one meeting somebody called the cops." It took three years for the IBEW to completely defeat the UWUA in system-wide elections at PG&E, and to consolidate the old Local 1245 with the new Local 1234 (as well as some other IBEW jurisdictions). The name of the newly consolidated union would be Local 1245. A

The amalgamated staff of IBEW Local 1324 and 1245 consisted of, standing from left: Jerry Moran, Charley Massie, Mert Walters, Scott Wadsworth, Al Hanson, Gene Hastings, Ed White, Harry Bollard, Weakley, and Cy Yochem. Kneeling from left: Fred Lucas, Delbert Pettty, Al Kaznowski, Elmer Bushby, Lee Andrews, Jim Cribbs, Howard Sevey, and L.L. Mitchell (who is not shown because he was taking the picture.)

With L.L. "Mitch" Mitchell (seated right) as his chief negotiator, Weakley (standing left) laid the foundation for the labor agreement with PG&E, now recognized as setting the standard for wages and benefits in the utility industry.

**Weakley had “tough job”**

Frank Quadros started with PG&E in 1946, in the Gas Department in San Francisco, but was soon recalled to the reserves. When he returned to PG&E in 1952, Ron Weakley had just succeeded in uniting the workforce in a single union, the IBEW. The company had no systemwide contract, and not much power over PG&E. "Things were getting pretty raunchy. It was like there was no union at all, the company was doing whatever they wanted to do," says Quadros. He spoke with the Utility Reporter from his home in Scottsdale, AZ after Weakley's death in October.

Quadros quickly was appointed as a steward, and then to the grievance committee. Then Business Rep. Dan McPeak invited him to sit in on the 1953 general bargaining with PG&E.

"That’s when I was introduced to Ron Weakley. I told him it was like there was no union, ‘The guys want to see some action.’ Ron had quite a job on his hands trying to keep those people together."

Weakley’s reception at unit meetings in San Francisco on a couple of occasions "was not that good," Quadros recalls. "I have to hand it to him, he handled himself very well. He took a lot of crap, but he didn’t run from it. He answered questions but he didn’t let it get to him."

In 1955 Weakley hired Quadros as a business representative for the North Bay. Meetings there could get just as rowdy as the ones in San Francisco, he recalls. At one meeting Quadros spoke up in Weakley’s defense. He recalls Weakley taking him aside afterward and telling him, "Quadros, you don’t have to jump in like that. That’s what I’m here for."

"He had a tough job at the beginning there. As soon as we got more organized it got more difficult for him. You had newer people coming on and they didn’t understand a lot of the things that were going on. They said, ‘This is what I want and you can’t get it. You’re a sell-out artist.’"

But Weakley had a knack for navigating his way through troubled waters. "Ron was a very intelligent person. He knew how to read people.”

Weakley expected his representatives to stand up to management. "He said, ‘One thing I want you to understand—you are equal to that division manager. The first thing you do is go to the division manager’s office, tell him who you are and what you expect. Don’t let him put you off to someone else.’"

Toward the end of Weakley’s 20 years as business manager, many of the older employees were gone, replaced by new people. In many cases, Quadros recalls, “They didn’t understand the working functions of the union and didn’t care.”

Their attitude seemed to be, “I have my continued on next page
“We cancelled all our contracts (in 1953), took strike votes and took on the PG&E and all other employers in our jurisdiction and the world in general.”

–Ron Weakley

Mixing It Up with Members

As leader of the union, Weakley didn’t seal himself off in the castle tower. He attended unit meetings when he could, and he wasn’t shy about mixing it up with disgruntled members.

At a unit meeting in San Francisco, with 300 members in attendance, Weakley was confronted by a member upset by something he had written in the Utility Reporter.

“I had written a column wherein I pointed out that our people were not only skilled utility workers but also skilled musicians, photographers, artists and had all other types of attributes.”

As Weakley recalled it, a member stood up and said, “Hey Weakley, what’s all this intellectual stuff I’ve been reading in your column in the Utility Reporter? As far as I’m concerned you’re an intellectual asshole.”

People applauded. Weakley knew he had to respond. “So I said, ‘Well, I’m better off than you because you’re just a plain asshole,’ and people applauded that, too.”

Weakley and the member were able later to patch things up.

On another occasion Weakley was publicizing the death benefit the union had just established. He was proud of it, figured it would help solidify members’ support for the union.

“I trumpeted that at a meeting once down south, I think in Fresno, and a guy got up and said, ‘Big deal, you gotta die to get it.’ ”

Weakley learned, as all business managers do, that members sometimes ignore everything the union has accomplished for them—all the wages and benefits—in order to focus on a single complaint.

Weakley attended a unit meeting in San Jose to discuss a change in the way wages were determined—a change that ended up benefitting troublemen.

“This guy got up—he was half gassed—and he said, ‘It costs me just as much to get a bottle of milk as it does the

Ron Weakley, right, meeting in the 1960s with US Senator Alan Cranston, middle, and IBEW Local 1245 President Leland Thomas.

Local 1245 staff, in 1960 or 1961. Front row, from left: Howard Sevey, office manager; Mark Cook, business rep; Larry Foss, business rep; Jack Wilson, business rep; John Wilder, business rep; and Mert Walters assistant business manager. Back row: Norm Amundson, business rep and Utility Reporter editor; Roy Murray, business rep; Jim McMullin, business rep; Gene Hastings, business rep; L.L. Mitchell, assistant business manager; Ron Weakley, business manager; Ed James, business rep; Al Kaznowski, business rep; Scott Wadsworth, business rep; Dan McPeak, business rep; Al Hansen, assistant business manager; Frank Quadros, business rep; and Spike Emley, business rep.

Ron Weakley, left, greets Vice President Hubert Humphrey in Tracy, CA in 1968. Humphrey, a strong labor supporter, was campaigning for President.

continued from page 3

Weakley was the obvious choice for Business Manager of this mammoth new union, but a representative from the old Local 1245 contested for the position.

“My people wanted me, and some of his wanted him,” Weakley recalled many years later. “So finally they said you two go out and talk it over and come back and tell us which it’s going to be. They gave us a bottle of liquor and said go up to your room and talk about it.”

Weakley emerged as business manager. The bottle was still mostly full.

Taking on the World

In 1952 Weakley beat back a last challenge from the UWUA. Finally unified, the new IBEW Local 1245 was ready to march.

“We cancelled all our contracts, took strike votes and took on the PG&E and all other employers in our jurisdiction and the world in general,” Weakley said.

The IBEW, which had subsidized the long organizing drive, said it was now time for the local union to fly on its own.

“So we had to get a dues increase the same time we were trying to get our first system-wide contract,” Weakley recalled in 1990. “And I was faced with running for election in the middle of all this.”

Having a unified membership gave the union new clout with PG&E. L.L. Mitchell became Weakley’s lead negotiator.

Wages began to climb. An ambitious program to improve “fringe benefits” was launched. The union gained the power to take grievances to arbitration.

Weakley never wavered from his early belief that workers everywhere had an inalienable right to be in a union. In the 1960s, under Weakley’s leadership, Local 1245 organized Pacific Gas Transmission, the United States Bureau of Reclamation, Merced Irrigation District, Nevada Irrigation District, Richvale Irrigation District, the City of Healdsburg, the City of Redding, the City of Santa Clara, Truckee-Donner Public Utility District, the Tri-Dam project, and Plumas-Sierra Rural Electric.

Line clearance tree trimmers working on PG&E property were also organized: Davey Tree and Pacific Tree (later known as Asplundh).

In 1964 Local 1245 gained jurisdiction for Outside Line Construction work.

“If they wanted to be organized, we organized them,” Weakley said.

Under Weakley, Local 1245 also organized attendants, porters and food service workers at a Navy hospital. The union organized part of the Naval air station in Alameda, a group of x-ray workers, the Citizens Utilities phone company, and BART technicians.

In some cases the International office took away these new units and reassigned them to other IBEW locals. Weakley was outraged by this interference. But he was the consummate practical politician, never so concerned about saving face that he would shoot himself in the foot. He saved his energy for serving the members who elected him.

At PG&E, the union bargained a percentage contribution toward employee health premiums. It also bargained a stock savings plan—the first in the gas and electric utility industry.

Vacation allowance was increased. Sick leave was expanded. Time-and-a-half for overtime was negotiated. A new Master Apprenticeship Agreement formalized the training for 12 different classifications at PG&E. Safety conditions were improved.

Paid meals was a big issue. “It used to be they just worked you and dumped you and that’s it,” said Weakley in 1990. “Now they have to provide a meal, or money in lieu of” after a certain amount of time worked.

The union won larger pensions, now fully paid by the company. The union also negotiated a new fully-paid long-term disability plan—the first in the industry.

And after decades of disputes over hours, the union negotiated an historic Hours Clarification Agreement.

Ron Weakley, right, meeting in the 1960s with US Senator Alan Cranston, middle, and IBEW Local 1245 President Leland Thomas.
Troubleshooter so why should they get a wage settlement?"

"If you didn't buy so much wine," Weakley responded, "you might be able to afford more milk."

The member, Weakley said, "stormed out and drove away—in a Mercedes."

Members were always full of surprises. When the phone rang, there was no telling what might be in store.

"Once we got a call from a woman in Salinas wanting a thousand dollar check. She said she was the wife of a guy who just died," Weakley recalled. She wanted the death benefit. Weakley told the woman that the union required a death certificate as proof.

"She said, 'I don't need any proof because I shot the guy last night.'" The death certificate as proof.

When the phone rang, there was no telling what might be in store.

"One of the members I had to cut staff. "One of the members I had to lay off committed suicide," he recalled. "That wasn't very easy for me to take."

Another committed suicide after leaving the staff. "I always felt a sort of personal responsibility for some of these things that happened to some of the guys. There's been a lot of tragedy along the road," said Weakley.

The stresses of union work probably contributed to several divorces. Weakley's own first marriage fell apart in the 1950s.

But Weakley, always resilient, married again in 1955, to Ethel Loesch. It was easy to see why they might end up together. Like her husband, Ethel Loesch Weakley came from fighting stock. Her mother, a Russian immigrant living in Connecticut, once sheltered a group of West Virginia union miners who were hiding from Pinkerton goons.

Ethel was still with Ron 52 years later, when he died on Oct. 11 at their home in Molokai, HI.

Weakley remained keenly interested in union and world affairs to his last days. In 2003, Local 1245 named its new headquarters in Weakley's honor. At the grand opening, invited to make a few remarks, Weakley showed he hadn't lost his combative edge.

"I note that another Ronald—Ronald Reagan—has his name on a federal building, and an airport, and now an aircraft carrier. That's quite a distinction, very impressive. But there's one thing that I have over him: he'll never have his name on a union office building!"

But Weakley's true legacy is not contained in a building. His legacy is the union itself, and the strength it continues to give working people to act together for the betterment of all.

Democracy for Members

Weakley was a personable man, comfortable among the members. But he was also a man with an eye on the big picture. When Local 1245 was being established under his leadership, he thought long and hard about how the union should be structured.

"The old 1245 was a centralized thing, the executive board had all the power and that was it," he once said. The CIO locals that he helped organize in the early 1940s, on the other hand, "were very democratic, but so democratic that it was hard to make any decisions.

More than 50 years later Local 1245's structure still embodies this principle, with a democratically elected business manager, officers and executive board. Local units based throughout the union's jurisdiction give members an opportunity to participate on a regular basis and to elect their own unit officers.

But the crown jewel in this democratic structure, and Weakley's pride and joy, was the creation of an Advisory Council of rank and file members who are elected by region and who have the power to challenge Executive Board decisions.

By a majority vote, members of the Council "have the authority to order a referendum—it goes out to the entire membership to vote on it," Weakley explained. "So that's a pretty heavy hammer on centralized dictatorship."

The Advisory Council rarely exercises this authority, but did so earlier this year when it challenged the Executive Board over two decisions concerning qualifications for serving on the Executive Board. The members, voting at over 100 unit meetings, sided with the Advisory Council on one decision, and with the Executive Board on the other.

While Weakley clearly loved the challenges of leading a progressive union, the job also took its toll. Once in the early 1950s, before the dues structure was fully worked out, Weakley had to cut staff.

"One of the members I had to lay off committed suicide," he recalled. "That wasn't very easy for me to take."

Another committed suicide after leaving the staff. "I always felt a sort of personal responsibility for some of these things that happened to some of the guys. There's been a lot of tragedy along the road," said Weakley.

For more on Local 1245 history, go to:
www.ibew1245.com/history-pages/historyPGEinintro.html

Orrf Owen remembers

A great man

As a young Sierra Pacific Power employee in 1952, Orville Owen hadn't joined the union yet but thought he'd attend a meeting in Reno to check it out. That's the day he met Ron Weakley, the day his life took a new direction.

Ron came up from the Bay Area to talk about negotiations they were going to start at Sierra Pacific Powe

Weakley and Owen in the 1990s

Quadros continued from page 3

car and my boat and my house and you need to get me a raise so I can make my financial commitments," Quadros says. "That used to bug the hell out of me."

It bugged Quadros that newer employees didn't understand the hard work that went into creating their contractual wages and benefits. And Weakley, he believes, was instrumental to it all.

"He knew how to handle himself, knew how to handle a big employer, knew how to handle his staff and his membership. He knew what was going on. He was real smart. To me that union would not have survived without him."

Ron Weakley is received at the White House by President Lyndon B. Johnson, May 23, 1966.
SMUD member Jonathan Bik tests himself in triathlon

Across the finish line

By Eric Wolfe


Bik lost his right leg above the knee in a fall while attending climbing school at the Sacramento Municipal Utility District in early 2005. It was a tough break for an aspiring lineman and the father of two young children.

But Bik clearly doesn’t know the meaning of the term “tough break.” Even before leaving the hospital, he decided he wanted to run. Bik wrestled fate to the ground and quickly sprinted on with his life.

In early September of this year, Bik was standing on the winners’ podium at the world triathlon competition in Hamburg, Germany. On Oct. 27 he was greeted by the Local 1245 Advisory Council with a standing ovation for a returning hero.

Losing a leg is serious business. Bik makes no excuses for his accident.

After climbing a few years for a local telephone company, he was ready for a new challenge and found it at SMUD. He liked the idea of “being a lineman and doing something that people would be scared to do.”

During climbing school, he had to build a double crossarm. On the way down the pole, his right foot cut out. He fell about 35 feet, dislocating his right knee, severing two major arteries, puncturing a lung, and breaking the femoral bone.

Doctors’ efforts to save the leg were taxing and ultimately futile. The amputation was almost a relief,” Bik says.

“Then he died,” says Bik. “They built that socket from scratch. It’s a pretty cool process. They fit me with a knee mechanism and foot that attaches to that.”

The new limb put Bik on the starting line for his next challenge: becoming a triathlete.

Feature yourself doing this: swimming for nearly a mile, hopping on a bike and pedaling nearly 25 miles, then tossing a prosthetic limb built for speed. You contact Hanger Prosthetics and Orthotics, which designs “comfort flex” systems for people who aim high.

“The socket fits over the residual limb,” says Bik. “They built that socket from scratch. It’s a pretty cool process. They fit me with a knee mechanism and foot that attaches to that.”

The new limb put Bik on the starting line for his next challenge: becoming a triathlete.

Bik discovered you don’t walk into the neighborhood pharmacy and pick up a prosthetic limb built for speed. You contact Hanger Prosthetics and Orthotics, which designs “comfort flex” systems for people who aim high.

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The new limb put Bik on the starting line for his next challenge: becoming a triathlete.

Bik credits Local 1245 Business Rep. Sam Glaro and SMUD Director Phil West for the smooth transition back to the workplace.

“They were steering me toward this job because they knew it would be a good fit for me physically,” says Bik, who is invariably generous in his praise for the people who have helped him along the way. “The shop is a very cool environment to work in.”

But resting on his laurels isn’t what makes Jonathan Bik tick. In the hospital he had dreamed of running. Now he was determined to test himself against challenges beyond securing his new job and a measure of stability for his young family.

Bik discovered you don’t walk into the neighborhood pharmacy and pick up a prosthetic limb built for speed. You contact Hanger Prosthetics and Orthotics, which designs “comfort flex” systems for people who aim high.

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The new limb put Bik on the starting line for his next challenge: becoming a triathlete.

As many as 100,000 people watched him run in New York. He believes it was triple that number in Germany.

Bik crossed the finish line in a personal-best time of 3 hours and 5 minutes. The Americans swept the top three spots in their class.

Bik doesn’t disguise his pride in representing his country well. But he also identifies with his rivals from France, Canada and Mexico.

“I think we all respect each other because we know how much work goes into it, and we know how many times we’ve fallen and had to go back and get surgeries, but still get out there.”

At times I feel too old to be doing this stuff. I feel like I’m away from my family doing things that maybe a 22-year-old should be doing,” says Bik, who is 33. His girls are now 6 and 4.

“But I didn’t get to choose when this happened in my life. If I was 45 when this happened, I’ve got to think that I would still be challenging myself.

He doesn’t see the athletic competition as his only challenge. Maybe not even the main one.

When Bik thanked the Executive Board for the union’s contribution to his trip to the Hamburg Olympics, the appreciation seemed to be flowing both ways.

“I’m challenging myself as a husband, as a dad, and as an employee, and I think I’m doing better than I was before I was hurt.”

On October 27, Bik appeared before the Local 1245 Advisory Council to share his story and offer his gratitude for the union’s support.

“I wasn’t even in the union yet—I was a pre-apprentice. But (Sam Glaro) took me on like I was a dues-paying member.”

Following his remarks, Advisory Council members crowded around to have their photo taken with Bik—the man who would still be challenging himself.

Bik discovered you don’t walk into the neighborhood pharmacy and pick up a prosthetic limb built for speed. You contact Hanger Prosthetics and Orthotics, which designs “comfort flex” systems for people who aim high.

“They built that socket from scratch. It’s a pretty cool process. They fit me with a knee mechanism and foot that attaches to that.”

The new limb put Bik on the starting line for his next challenge: becoming a triathlete.

By the end of his appearance at IBWE’s Weakley Hall, it was clear that this union member had more than repaid the Council’s cash contribution with a currency far more precious: a contagious spirit for living life to the fullest.

Bik credits Sam Glaro, left, for supporting his Olympic ambition. Bik describes union activist Katharine Reeves, right, as a “special friend.” Reeves said her daughter, also a runner, has been inspired by Bik’s accomplishments.

The Advisory Council honors Bik with a victory salute.

Bik credits Sam Glaro, left, for supporting his Olympic ambition. Bik describes union activist Katharine Reeves, right, as a “special friend.” Reeves said her daughter, also a runner, has been inspired by Bik’s accomplishments.

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The Advisory Council honors Bik with a victory salute.
Paradise ID agency shop

Members of Local 1245 at Paradise Irrigation District voted 21-1 for an agency shop provision in the labor agreement. Agency shop assures that all employees covered by the collective bargaining agreement pay their fair share for union representation.

First agreement at Shingletown/Colusa

Members of Local 1245 employed by Frontier Communications in Shingletown and Colusa, Ca. ratified a first agreement on Oct. 1. This first agreement provides these members with union work rules, grievance procedure and binding arbitration.

Retirement improved at City of Willits

Local 1245 members at the City of Willits ratified a new three-year agreement that improves retirement and increases wages.

Mt. Wheeler medical plan

Members of Local 1245 at Mount Wheeler voted 22-2 to support adoption of an HRA medical plan.

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Cecelia De La Torre

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High regard for Weakley

Editor’s note: This letter was received just prior to the death of union founder Ron Weakley.

To the editor:
As a daughter of the late Tom Riley, member of Local 1245, I read your conversation with Ron Weakley in the September-October issue of Utility Reporter with a great deal of interest and considerable nostalgia.

My father was a dear friend of many years standing of Mr. Weakley and of Don Hardie, who was also mentioned in the article. It brought back memories of my father’s loyalty to Local 1245 and the many hours he devoted to it. You may be pleased to know that he taught his daughters to never cross a picket line, and we never have!

My father had such a high regard for Mr. Weakley and considered him one of the smartest men he had ever met. He was honored to call him a friend.

Thank you for a great article. I always read the Reporter in honor of my father.

Barbara Riley, Concord, CA

BARGAINING
Seminars will be available to I.B.E.W. / P.G.&E. employees 40 and older and those on LTD. Your spouse or significant other is also welcome to attend. These seminars are provided to you free of charge. Please call Merrill Lynch in Walnut Creek, CA at 800-234-5858 and ask for Yi Seeman if you have any questions.

I.B.E.W. Local 1245 and Merrill Lynch Present:

Retirement Planning Seminars

**Bakersfield**
Friday, February 1st
6:30 PM to 8:00 PM
Presenter: Dave Brantley
Doubletree Hotel
3100 Camino Del Rio Ct.
Bakersfield, CA

**Fresno**
Saturday, February 2nd
9:00 AM to 10:30 AM
Presenter: Dave Brantley
Piccadilly Inn
2305 W. Shaw Ave.
Fresno, CA

**Concord**
Saturday, February 2nd
9:30 AM to 11:00 AM
Presenter: Bob Gallo
Concord Hilton
1970 Diamond Blvd.
Concord, CA

**Oakland**
Tuesday, February 5th
6:30 PM to 8:00 PM
Presenter: Dave Brantley
Hilton Oakland Airport
One Hegenberger Rd.
Oakland, CA

**San Jose**
Saturday, February 9th
9:00 AM to 10:30 AM
Presenter: Dave Brantley
Hilton San Jose
300 Almaden Blvd.
San Jose, CA

**Sacramento**
Saturday, February 9th
9:30 AM to 11:00 AM
Presenter: Bob Gallo
Holiday Inn
300 J. Street
Sacramento, CA

**Foster City**
Tuesday, February 12th
6:30 PM to 8:00 PM
Presenter: Dave Brantley
Crowne Plaza
1221 Chess Drive
Foster City, CA

**Monterey**
Thursday, February 21st
6:30 PM to 8:00 PM
Presenter: Dave Brantley
Hyatt Regency
One Golf Course Dr.
Monterey, CA

**Redding**
Saturday, February 23rd
9:00 AM to 10:30 AM
Presenter: Bob Gallo
Best Western
2300 Hilltop Dr.
Redding, CA

**Chico**
Saturday, February 23rd
1:00 PM to 2:30 PM
Presenter: Bob Gallo
Holiday Inn
685 Manzanita Ct.
Chico, CA

**San Luis Obispo**
Saturday, February 23rd
9:00 AM to 10:30 AM
Presenter: Dave Brantley
Madonna Inn
100 Madonna Road
San Luis Obispo, CA

**Stockton**
Tuesday, February 26th
7:00 PM to 8:30 PM
Presenter: Bob Gallo
Stockton Grand Hotel
2323 Grand Canal Blvd.
Stockton, CA

**Ukiah**
Friday, February 29th
7:00 PM to 8:30 PM
Presenter: Bob Gallo
Holiday Inn - Ukiah
1720 N. State Street
Ukiah, CA

**Santa Rosa**
Saturday, March 1st
9:30 AM to 11:00 AM
Presenter: Bob Gallo
Hilton - Santa Rosa
3555 Round Barn Blvd.
Santa Rosa, CA

**Eureka**
Saturday, March 1st
9:00 AM to 10:30 AM
Presenter: Dave Brantley
Red Lion Inn
1919 Fourth Street
Eureka, CA
Written tests were on the 12th and the practical tests will be scheduled at a later date.

A Personal Protective Grounding Class was held Oct. 24 at the Northern Satellite Training Facility, Sacramento, CA. The class was presented by California-Nevada JATC. Power Lineman Apprenticeship.

The November Unit Meeting has been moved to Saturday, Nov. 3. Meeting starts at 9:00 a.m. followed by Construction Organizing Members Education Training Class 10:30. Lunch provided at noon. We will finish COMET training after lunch.

Outside Line members and staff are invited to attend a First Aid/CPR training session hosted by the California-Nevada JATC. The eight-hour class will be held at Weakley Hall in Vacaville beginning at 9:00 a.m.

Negotiations set for eight tree contracts


The eight labor agreements expiring at the end of the year cover approximately 1000 line clearance tree trimmer and vegetation control employees.

Davey Tree Surgery, Asplundh and Utility have decided to commence negotiations as a single negotiating committee, according to Local 1245 Senior Business Rep. Ray Thomas, who will lead the union’s negotiating effort. Local 1245 offered 21 dates for conducting negotiations, but these companies have only offered four so far: Nov. 20 and 30, and Dec. 4 and 5.

Negotiations will begin on Nov. 20 in San Francisco. The talks will then move to Weakley Hall in Vacaville.

Representing the unionized workforce at the bargaining table will be: Peter Ely, Roy Hayes and Jose Torres of Davey Tree Surgery Co.; Sergio Munoz and Dale Everson of Asplundh Tree Expert Co.; Octavio Perez and Juan Amezcua of Trees, Inc.; and Robert “Casey” Burtch of Utility Tree Service, Inc.

“Our committee has met and prioritized membership proposals,” said Thomas.

Negociaciones programadas para ocho contratos de poda de árboles.

Las negociaciones para los nuevos contratos de IBEW con los contratistas de limpieza de líneas eléctricas y control de la vegetación comenzarán en noviembre.


Los ocho convenios laborales que expiran al final del año cubren aproximadamente 1000 empleados de poda de árboles y de control de la vegetación.

Davey Tree Surgery, Asplundh y Util-
tierra han decidido comenzar negociaciones como un solo comité negociador, según el Representante General de Negocios del Local 1245, Sr. Ray Thomas, que dirigirá el esfuerzo de negociaciones del Sindicato. El Local 1245 ha ofrecido un total de 21 fechas para llevar a cabo las negociaciones, pero estas compañías han ofrecido sólo cuatro fechas hasta ahora: Nov. 20 y 30 y Dic. 4 y 5.

Las negociaciones comenzarán el 20 de noviembre en San Francisco. Las reuniones se moverán entonces a Weakley Hall en Vacaville.

Representando las fuerzas del Sindi-

“Nuestro comité se ha reunido y ha priorizado las propuestas de nuestros miembros”, dijo el Sr. Thomas.

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Utilities Reporter
Renovations at PG&E’s East Shore Substation in Hayward took some heavy lifting on the part of contractor IRH/ABN.

The Salt Lake City-based contractor, working under a project agreement with Local 1245, dismantled a tower structure, dismantled two transformers and relocated a third.

“This kind of demolition only takes about three days. It used to take a lot longer,” says Local 1245 Assistant Business Manager Ron Cochran. The whole job was completed within a week.

The muscle is provided in part by 100-ton hydraulic crane, but the demolition and salvage operation requires more than brute force. The steel laminated transformer core is high-dollar material, probably worth more as salvage than the transformer’s original cost.

Dismantling the tower structure is a precision operation.

“They have to disassemble the nut-bolt system, with a wrench on one end and an impact gun on the other,” says Jimmy Love of IRH/ABN.

Removing a beam is always a two-man job, with one on controls to position the lift and one to perform the extraction. Both men are responsible for rigging—hooking up the piece to be removed.

The crane operator, watching from below, locates the cable ends in close proximity to the bucket so that the crew in the air can hook up the beam to be extracted. Keeping the right amount of tension on the cable is critical to the safety of the operation.

“The crane operator knows when to take up slack so there is slight tension on (the cable), so as soon as the bolts are removed from the beam it will still be suspended in close proximity to where it was,” explains Love. “You don’t want any movement.”

A tag line enables crew members in the bucket to have a bit of manual control over the beam after it’s been hooked up. When the beam is about to be lowered, they drop the tag line so that crew members on the ground can exert some control as the beam comes down.

“It’s real important to shackle correctly so that the weight of the I-beam does not cut the cable,” Love notes. “Any cut cable can’t be used.”

The IRH/ABN operation, performed under a project agreement with the union, could be a model for future substation work at PG&E.
After being cut free from the tower, the “bridge” is carefully lowered to the ground.

The transformer is being relocated so IRH/ABN can cut it up for salvage.

Photos by Eric Wolfe

New Apprentice

First-year Apprentice Electrician Nickey Dillard lent a hand during the transformer replacement at the East Shore substation, pulling old dead wire among other tasks.

Hired in January, Dillard began her two-year apprenticeship in mid-summer. Prior to coming to PG&E she was doing office work but her sights were set higher.

“I wanted to get into construction,” she explains, and PG&E provided that opportunity. She was informed of the apprenticeship program when she was hired and it didn’t take her long to seize the opportunity.

When she spoke with the Utility Reporter in early fall she was getting ready for the electricity course, part of the apprentice curriculum. And she wasn’t having any doubts about the path she has chosen.

“I’m not going anywhere,” she says. “This has more than doubled my income. I’m very grateful to be part of PG&E.”
Employee empowerment key to customer satisfaction

Contact Center of the Future

Pacific Gas & Electric is looking to its employees for help in transforming company call centers into high functioning “Contact Centers of the Future.”

The joint effort by company and union to rethink this crucial front-line work reflects renewed company interest in transforming the rhetoric of customer satisfaction into the reality of satisfied customers.

In November the group was putting the finishing touches on recommendations to be reviewed in December by company and union leadership. Ideas have ranged from improving efficiency, to targeted consolidation, to resolving customer inquiries on a “first call” basis through enhanced training for customer service representatives.

PG&E President and CEO Bill Morrow, attending a preliminary roll-out of the committee’s findings in early October, praised the group “for bringing the people who actually do the work to the table” to deal with the issue.

The issue is satisfied customers. While PG&E has seen some recent improvement in ratings that compare people who actually do the work to the table to deal with the issue.

The issue is satisfied customers. While PG&E has seen some recent improvement in ratings that compare its performance to other utilities, the company still falls short of its very ambitious goals.

Lasting Impressions

PG&E’s call centers are a strategic concern for the company. For many members of the public, their first contact with the utility is the customer service representative. It’s a crucial moment, when lasting impressions are made.

In the utility industry today, making a good impression involves a lot more than just being polite or referring the customer to another employee who might know the answer. The most successful customer contact is one that resolves the customer’s issue right on the spot.

“Customer satisfactions” are often defined as either “first call satisfaction,” or “no further contact,” but no matter what slogan you use, in the end you’re talking about the flesh and blood people who take the calls. They can resolve customer problems only to the extent that they are given the training to do so.

Richard Vasquez, a Customer Service Rep in San Jose and 5-year member of IBEW, told Morrow that employees have seen many new ideas and slogans through the years. “Too often it’s the flavor of the month.” The important thing, Vasquez said, is “following through with what is being said.”

“We would like to see the employees get the tools they need to make the customers happy,” Assistant Business Manager Dorothy Fortier added.

Morrow acknowledged that the role of customer service rep has been viewed in our society as an “entry point,” where no formal education is required and employees are sometimes accorded little respect. Morrow recalled one phone center he visited where employees “had to put out a frog (toy) to indicate they needed a bathroom break.”

He contrasted that view of customer service reps with the view held in Japan. “In Japan,” Morrow said, “supervisors put CSRs almost on a pedestal” because they are the link to the customer.

“No Boundaries”

PG&E has made it clear through the work of this joint committee that it wants real participation from its customer service reps in shaping the Contact Center of the Future.

“We’ve given this team no boundaries and they’ve taken advantage of it in several positive ways,” said Phil Balistrieri, Contact Center Director.

Members of the committee “came together as strangers,” noted Local 1245 Business Representative Arlene Edwards, but were able to work together to address this issue:

“How do you find an operating model where employees want to come to work, and how do you provide them the tools to take care of the customer?”

To gain some perspective, members of the joint committee visited several call centers operated by other companies in California and Nevada. They looked at everything from employee training opportunities, to facility layout, to expanding the use of reader boards for safety, training, rewards and recognition—not just call statistics.

Culture of Service

Ideally, these things add up to a “culture of service,” and the committee spent a fair amount of time trying to describe what such a culture looks like, based on practices they observed at some of the facilities they visited.

“It’s being proud of who you are, looking at the business as a whole but also at the employees who do the work,” said Vasquez.

At the more successful centers, employees “really believed in the message that was being communicated—it wasn’t just words on the wall,” said Cecelia de la Torre, a customer service rep in Stockton and IBEW Local 1245 Treasurer.

Local 1245 Business Rep. Debbie Mazzanti noted that corporate terminology sometimes works at cross purposes with employee empowerment.

“It’s when you have to get employees to “buy in” to something that you have a problem,” she said, because it implies that you’re trying to sell somebody something that’s already been decided rather than trying to develop a model together that everyone can believe in.

The committee is schedule to meet a final time in San Ramon on Nov. 8, ending “Phase 1” of the project. Its recommendations will go to a Steering Committee that includes Business Manager Tom Dalzell on Dec. 17.

Edwards believes the committee will be able to identify “quick wins” that can be implemented through policy changes, such as emphasizing the resolution of problems on the first call rather than creating arbitrary time limits for completing a call whether the customer’s problem is solved or not.

Other changes could involve the consolidation of facilities, which would raise significant budget issues for company management.

But even if the company does not incorporate all of the joint committee’s ideas into its final plan of action, Edwards believes the exercise has been a valuable one.

“They solicited input, they’re trying to actually listen to what the bargaining unit members are saying. And I think they do want to act on most of those things, but the budget could change a lot of it or put it on hold,” she said.

In any case, change is in the air for union members at PG&E’s contact centers. In phase two of the project, teams of committee members will visit PG&E’s own call facilities to engage in dialog with employees and discuss policy changes on the horizon.

“We’ll be looking for indications the committee is heading in the right direction, or if there are things that need to be looked at that this committee hasn’t seen,” Edwards said.
## Service Awards

**Merced, California**

March 23, 2007

- 65 Years
  - Clifford Smith

- 40 Years
  - James Duncan
  - Tom Hunt
  - B. B. Lagan

- 35 Years
  - Michael Belloli
  - Edward Deldotto

### THE HONOREES

- Robert Delgado
- Michael Dessauer
- Otha Harris
- Kenneth D. Hill
- Geraldine Hinson
- Steve Landers
- Louis Padilla, Jr.
- John Rhoades
- Manuel Romero
- Larry Waggerman
- Robert C. Williamson
- Antonio Gutierrez
- Brian Haygood
- Arthur Mendes
- James Petersen
- Michael Sakaguchi
- Dennis Slocum
- Robert Telles
- Loren Unruh
- Jose Urena

- 30 Years
  - Johnny Carrasco, Jr

- 25 Years
  - Mike Jameson
  - Catherine Wilson-Blackmon

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**San Luis Obispo, CA**

April 28, 2007

- 40 Years
  - J H Hoffman
  - Alfred Moore

- 35 Years
  - L J Alves
  - James Boatman
  - Frank Dalcerri
  - Lazaro Estrada
  - R J Fiscalini
  - Wesley Nail, Jr
  - Raymond Rademacher
  - Don Wilson

- 30 Years
  - Richard Angel
  - Johnny Apodaca, Jr.
  - Samuel Bailey
  - Douglas Cates
  - Steven Ebel
  - John Elder

### THE HONOREES

- Brenda Friesen
- Gary Giess
- Mark Hedlund
- CW Kendrick
- Randall Kern
- Maryann Koons
- Greg Lugo
- Benjamin Luna
- Gary Martin
- Gregory Morasca
- Alfred Nunez
- Doug Paslay
- Bill Pope
- Harmon Rider
- Lorene Rodriguez
- Craig Smith
- Phillip Summer
- Dennis Van Meter
- Rich Vandeneihof
- Hector Wilson
- Robert Wilson III
- Kim Biondo
- Stephen Burket
- James Ewani
- Mavlynn Goble
- Patrick Goodyear
- Irene Greenelsh
- Gary Hartig
- James Haynie
- Rick Jaime
- Donald Johnson
- James Knight
- Barbara Larcom
- Cathleen Mazzacavallo
- John Mercurio
- Chris Rademacher
- Sandra A. Smith
- Gregory Sturgeon
- Robert Wathen
- Thomas Weaver
- Martin Wefald
- Michael Whiting

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Hard hat saves the day
By Art Torres

How many of us complain when we are required to wear our hard hats? They are cumbersome, hot, and cold. They fall off. All in all they are at times a pain to wear. But think of the pain if we weren’t wearing one when we needed to.

Our heads are not designed to take much trauma. At SMUD we have a troubleman by the name of Ed Hall who is very grateful for having worn his hard hat. There was a fault on an underground line. He re-closed a 65 amp Universal feral type fused disconnect on an underground riser.

Ed was in his one-man bucket. He was using a 16-foot extendo hot stick to close the disconnect. Upon closing the disconnect the fuse failed. From the bottom of the fuse holder a piece of lead flew out striking the cross arm, ricocheting off the crossarm and striking Ed’s hardhat.

Let’s not forget that Ed was roughly 14 feet from the disconnect. The piece of lead was flying with enough energy to penetrate the hardhat and lodge itself in Ed’s scalp. The piece of lead broke the skin on his head and obviously left a sizeable welt. If Ed had not been wearing his hard hat the injury would most likely have been much more serious. His hard hat saved the day.

How many of us check the integrity of our hard hats? They are hopefully worn everyday, exposed to the elements, thrown around. Do we ever clean our hard hats? Do we ever test the integrity of our hard hats?

There is a test we can perform on hard hats to test their resiliency. Try folding the hat in half. If it springs back to its original shape chances are it’s good. If it stays folded get rid of it for a new one.

Has your hard hat lost it’s luster, that new hard hat look? Change it for a new one. Most hard hats have a life expectancy of about 5 years. Check with your tool room or whoever issues the hard hats. Ask them for information.

For those of you that work around energized equipment make sure your hard hat has the appropriate stickers inside stating that this PPE is designed for the intended usage.

Remember: using the appropriate hard hat could save your day.

Being aware
By Art Torres

A basic technique to troubleshoot is a visual inspection of whatever we’re working on. Upon entering an energized substation, a confined space, opening the door on a transformer, a breaker cabinet, it’s vitally important to be aware of your surroundings. Look for potential hazards.

Danger lurks around every corner. Don’t walk around with blinders on like a horse pulling a wagon. Don’t ever assume that your environment is warm and fuzzy.

This not only pertains to work but also our environment in our personal lives. Driving, walking through the parking lot at the mall, especially at night. Walking past some folks that look like trouble.

One of my fellow co-workers was seriously injured during a home invasion. There’s a knock at the door, next thing he knows he’s fighting for his life. It’s questionable whether this incident could have been avoided, but it’s an ugly example that a life-altering event could happen to anyone at any time. In a matter of minutes this man’s life has changed forever.

It’s impractical to say that we can be prepared for every possible situation at every possible moment, but one thing for sure, the more we prepare the better our chances of not being a victim of a situation because we were not aware.

Respirator-fit employees
By Larry Pierce

Letter Agreement 99-76 established the ground rules concerning Pacific Gas & Electric compliance with OSHA regulations for emergency responders in the Gas Department.

The letter agreement sets the minimal number of employees in each headquarters who will be respirator-fit and capable of emergency response.

Over the past seven years the actual number of respirator-fit employees has fallen significantly below the agreed to level because of retirements and other attrition related causes. The PG&E has recently notified Local 1245 of their intent to reestablish the levels previously agreed to.

This will involve seeking volunteers first and possibly, if there are an insufficient number of volunteers, directing some employees to be designated emergency responders.

The company has informed the union that increased respirator use will be required for other than emergency responders as well, due to changes in OSHA’s permissible exposure level to Hex/Chrom vapors when welding.

Hexavalium Chromium is in the flux and manufacturers have not yet found a way to remove or replace it. The concerns involve welding on stainless steel, electrical arc welding, and oxycetylene welding indoors or in a confined space.

PG&E believes that Hydro Generation and Diablo Canyon Power Plant will be the most highly affected areas.

Larry Pierce is Assistant Business Manager for Local 1245.

Harness safety
By Art Torres

Falls are the number one cause of fatalities in the construction industry. Of the 1224 deaths in construction in 2004, 441 (36%) were from falls. Many thousands more are injured each year in falls.

These are serious statistics for the American worker. Federal OSHA and Cal-OSHA have implemented statutes to help reduce these injuries.

That brings us face to face with another problem, which occurs when an individual falls while wearing a fall restraint harness. Yes, the harness may keep the worker from impacting the ground, but it leaves the worker suspended. This new problem we face is called suspension trauma or orthostatic intolerance.

Following a fall, a worker may remain suspended in a harness. The sustained immobility may lead to a state of unconsciousness. Depending on the length of time the suspended worker is unconscious/immobile and the level of venous pooling, the resulting orthostatic intolerance may lead to death.

Such fatalities are sometimes referred to as “harness-induced pathology” or “suspension trauma.”

Unconscious/immobile workers suspended in their harness will not be able to move their legs and will not fall into a horizontal position, as they would if they fainted while standing. During the static upright position, venous pooling is likely to occur and cause orthostatic intolerance, especially if the suspended worker is left in place for some time.

Venous pooling and orthostatic intolerance can be exacerbated by other circumstances related to the fall. For example: shock or the experience of the event that caused the fall, other injuries, the fit/positioning of the harness, the environmental conditions, and the worker’s psychological state. All of these may increase the onset and severity of the pooling and orthostatic intolerance and could result in serious or fatal injury, as the brain, kidneys and other organs are deprived of oxygen.

The amount of time spent in this position, with the legs below the heart, affects the manner in which the worker should be rescued. Moving the worker quickly into a horizontal position, a natural reaction, is likely to cause a large continued on page 15

Safety Credit
By Keith Hopp

Keith Hopp is a member of the Local 1245 Safety Committee.

Safety Committee
Members of the IBEW Local 1245 Safety Committee are Al White, Pacific Gas & Electric; Bob Burkle, City of Santa Clara; Keith Hopp, Pacific Gas & Electric; Michael Gomes, Modesto Irrigation District; Art Torres, Sacramento Municipal Utility District; Sergio Munoz, Asplundh Tree; Tom Greer, Frontier; and Assistant Business Manager Larry Pierce.

Check out the safety information on our website at: www.ibew1245.com/safety-section/safety.html
Retirees hope to coordinate efforts in support of bargaining

The five chapters of the Local 1245 Retirees Club appear to be moving toward increased coordination of their efforts as 2008 bargaining with Pacific Gas & Electric looms ever larger on the horizon.

The San Jose chapter at its November meeting discussed “the urgent need for representatives of the five retiree chapters to meet and organize proposals for 2008 negotiations,” President Jack Hill reported. The object of these proposals would be to “stress improvements in benefits of pensions and health care for current and future retirees.”

North Bay retirees meeting in Santa Rosa adopted several motions at their September meeting calling for increased coordination among Retiree Club chapters. The chapter proposes having the leaders of all five chapters meet at Weakley Hall in Vacaville to “put all the clubs ideas together and brainstorm ideas for upcoming 2008 negotiations.”

The Santa Rosa chapter also proposed having more than one retiree representative on the negotiations committee. A third motion called for all pre-1995 retirees to receive their medical plan fully paid, “just as they had it paid under their contract with PG&E while working.”

Retirees’ Corner

Retirees hope to coordinate efforts in support of bargaining

The Local 1245 Retirees Club congratulates these recently-retired members of the union. We invite you to participate in a Retiree Club chapter in Dublin, San Jose, Vacaville, Santa Rosa, or Merced. If you don’t have a chapter nearby, call the union at 707-422-2718 and find out how you can help start one!

Max Bakke
37 years
Aerojet, Redding, CA
Alberto Beltran
34 years
San Jose, CA
Randolph Cannarozzi
29 years
Auburn, CA
Tito Castillo
33 years
Rio Vista, CA
Gail Crowell
22 years
Manteca, CA
Daniel Dennis
37 years
Stockton, CA
Barbara Dyer
32 years
Cottonwood, CA
Elroy Edwood
19 years
Santa Rosa, CA
Thomas Fonseca
31 years
Concord, CA
Steve Gearhart
35 years
Durham, CA
Marcus Gibson
33 years
Stockton, CA
Ronald Giorgi
35 years
Pt Reyes Sta, CA
David Greer
35 years
Livermore, CA
Michael Hamasaki
31 years
Dinuba, CA
Hector Hernandez
33 years
San Francisco, CA
Dennis Heyeck
34 years
Redwood City, CA
Erik Larsen
41 years
San Mateo, CA
Joseph Mann
35 years
So Francisco, CA
Richard Mendez
34 years
Pittsburg, CA
Thomas Monson
37 years
Lincoln, CA
Kenneth Owens
35 years
Richmond, CA
Alfred Patrick
37 years
Clearlake, CA
Jerry Runswick
24 years
Vacaville, CA
Harry Skemp
35 years
Quincy, CA
Jo Ann Thurman
21 years
Chico, CA
Gerald Trudeau
15 years
Mesquite, NV
Robert Turney
32 years
Paso Robles, CA
Carlos Vasquez
34 years
San Bruno, CA
June Wells
29 years
Pen Valley, CA
Ping Wong
30 years
San Francisco, CA
Clyde Been
7 years
Clovis, CA
Randolph Bennett
38 years
Livermore, CA
Patrocino Calingo
32 years
Berkeley, CA
William Cannon
23 years
Pismo Beach, CA
Michael Carrera
33 years
Shingle Springs, CA
Calvin Cazier
36 years
Antioch, CA
Wayne Champion
35 years
Fresno, CA
Rusty Cook
12 years
San Luis Obispo, CA
Robert Crane
23 years
Ewa Beach, HI
William Dilbeck
26 years
Redding, CA
Sandra Dukes
0 years
Paso Robles, CA
Louie Gaeta
37 years
Fresno, CA
William Gann
28 years
Sanger, CA
Douglas Gordon
39 years
Georgetown, CA
Howard Gover
27 years
Antioch, CA
Patrick Haentjens
Pismo Beach, CA
Emmett Havemann
16 years
Trail, OR
Robert Hinson
28 years
Salinas, CA
Dennis Holcomb
29 years
Fresno, CA
Ronald Kohler
28 years
Pismo Beach, CA
Patricia Calingo
32 years
Pismo Beach, CA
Alfred Patrick
37 years
Clovis, CA
Trudy Ciarcia
31 years
Livermore, CA
Karolyn Reeves
28 years
Livermore, CA
Max Bakke
37 years
Aerojet, Redding, CA

Congratulations newly-retired members

Harness Safety, from page 14
volume of deoxygenated blood to move to the heart if the worker has been suspended for an extended period. The heart may be unable to cope with the abrupt increase in blood flow, causing cardiac arrest. Rescue procedures must take this into account.

Additional information is available at www.osha.gov/dts/shib/shib502404.html.

Bring up the topic of suspension trauma/orthostatic intolerance at your next safety meeting. If you have a joint labor-management safety committee, bring it up there also. This new problem that we are facing can be manageable with the proper training, the proper equipment and the motivation of union members to make it work.

Art Torres is a member of the IBEW Local 1245 Safety Committee.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CITY</th>
<th>UNIT LOCATION</th>
<th>UNIT CHAIR</th>
<th>DAY</th>
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<tr>
<td>Alturas (Frontier)</td>
<td>4013 The Brass Rail, Hwy 395</td>
<td>M. Nelson</td>
<td>Weds 5:30pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angels Camp</td>
<td>2512 Mike's Pizza, Hwy 49/Murphy Grade Rd.</td>
<td>G. Day</td>
<td>Thurs 4:00pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Antioch</td>
<td>2317 Aladino's Pizza, 1324 Sunset Dr.</td>
<td>D. Tucker</td>
<td>Tues 5:00pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Auberry</td>
<td>1129 Daddy Joe's Java, Auberry Road</td>
<td>C. Riggs</td>
<td>Tues 5:00pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auburn</td>
<td>3511 Round Table Pizza @ Auburn-Folsom Road</td>
<td>K. Davis*</td>
<td>Thurs 5:00pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bakersfield</td>
<td>1112 Labor Hall, 200 W. Jeffrey</td>
<td>M. Rolow*</td>
<td>Weds 6:00pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buellton</td>
<td>1221 Firestone-Walker Brewing Co., 620 McMurray Road*</td>
<td>B. Swanson</td>
<td>Mon 4:30pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burlingame/Peninsula</td>
<td>1512 TVU Local 505, 1521 Rollins Blvd., Burlingame</td>
<td>B. Quinn</td>
<td>Weds 5:30pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burney</td>
<td>3213 Sam's Pizza, Hwy 299, Johnson Park</td>
<td>P Baker*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Burney (Frontier)</td>
<td>4015 Sam's Pizza, 38077 Hwy 299 East</td>
<td>D. Washburn*</td>
<td>Weds 6:00pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chicolet</td>
<td>3514 Last Chance Saloon, Highway 70</td>
<td>T. Wolf*</td>
<td>Weds 6:00pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concord/Davey Tree</td>
<td>4716 Round Table , 3383 Port Chicago Hwy</td>
<td>J. Sims*</td>
<td>Thurs 5:00pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concord/Walnut Creek</td>
<td>2316 Round Table Pizza, 2960 Treat Boulevard</td>
<td>R. Lassus</td>
<td>Thurs 5:00pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Davis General Construction</td>
<td>3000 Steve's Pizza</td>
<td>K. Goodner</td>
<td>Weds 4:30pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Donner</td>
<td>3309 Best Western Hotel, Hwy. 267, Truckee</td>
<td>S. Camara*</td>
<td>Thurs 5:00pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elk Grove (Frontier)</td>
<td>4014 Round Table Pizza, 5110 Laguna Blvd.</td>
<td>S. Lawton</td>
<td>Tues 5:00pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elko, NV</td>
<td>3318 Stockman's Casino</td>
<td>J. Peterson*</td>
<td>Thurs 5:30pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ely, NV/Mt. Wheeler</td>
<td>3315 Ely Fire Dept, Meeting Hall</td>
<td>M. Venturino</td>
<td>Tues* 4:30pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eureka/Tree Trimmers</td>
<td>3111 Labor Temple, 9th &amp; &quot;E&quot; Street</td>
<td>W. Holleson*</td>
<td>Tues 6:00pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fallon, Nevada</td>
<td>3316 Fallon Country Club, 2655 Country Club Drive</td>
<td>C. Robertson</td>
<td>Tues 5:30pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fort Bragg/Pt. Arena</td>
<td>3717 PG&amp;E Yard, 3539 Walnut Street*</td>
<td>G. Fernandez</td>
<td>Thurs 5:00pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fresno</td>
<td>1111 AMF Sierra Lanes, 6450 N. Blackstone</td>
<td>P Sandoval*</td>
<td>Thurs 5:00pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fresno/Trees Inc.</td>
<td>4712 Round Table Pizza, First &amp; Bullard</td>
<td>R. Ramos</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grass Valley</td>
<td>3513 Miner Mike's, 716 Freeman Lane Ste C*</td>
<td>M. Fitting*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hayward/Fremont</td>
<td>2314 Bronco Billy's Pizza, 3940 Smith St., Union City</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hinkley</td>
<td>1311 Clubhouse, Hinkley Compressor Station</td>
<td>P Earl</td>
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<td>Hollister</td>
<td>1219 Paine's Restaurant, 421 East St.*</td>
<td>J. Schlegel*</td>
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<td>Jackson</td>
<td>2513 Mountain Mike's Pizza, 525 S. Hwy 49</td>
<td>R. Boitano</td>
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<td>Klamath Falls, OR</td>
<td>3022 Mia's and Pia's Pizza, 3545 Summers Lane</td>
<td>J. Rojas*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lapekore</td>
<td>3715 Senior Center, 527 Komori Ave.</td>
<td>B. Dawson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lemoore</td>
<td>1128 Fleet Reserve, 788 &quot;D&quot; Street</td>
<td>R. Ramirez*</td>
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<td>Livermore</td>
<td>2315 Round Table Pizza, 1024 Stanley Blvd.</td>
<td>J. Pruett*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lodi, City of</td>
<td>2516 Cheezee's Pizza, 1040 W. Kettleman Lane*</td>
<td>D. Schulz*</td>
<td>Weds 5:00pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Los Banos</td>
<td>1115 Me-N-Ed's Pizza, 2160 E. Pacheco, Suite A*</td>
<td>P Danieli*</td>
<td>Thurs 4:00pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Madera</td>
<td>1113 Madera Valley Inn, 317 &quot;G&quot; Street</td>
<td>R. Danieli/D. Camarena*</td>
<td>Weds 4:30pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marysville</td>
<td>3611 Stassi's, Fourth Street</td>
<td>M. Anderson</td>
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<td>Merced</td>
<td>1123 Branding Iron, 640 W. 16th St.</td>
<td>M. Jameson</td>
<td>Weds 5:30pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Merced ID</td>
<td>1122 Branding Iron, 640 W. 16th St.</td>
<td>C. Tatsumi*</td>
<td>Thurs 5:00pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mirant</td>
<td>2319 Skipolino's Pizza, Fitchuren Drive, Antioch</td>
<td>J. Ricard</td>
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<tr>
<td>Modesto</td>
<td>2515 Days Inn, 1312 McHenry Blvd.</td>
<td>T. Fortune</td>
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<tr>
<td>Modesto/Modesto Irr. Dist.</td>
<td>2518 Hero's Sports Lounge, 821 &quot;L&quot; Street</td>
<td>M. Gomes*</td>
<td>Weds 5:00pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Napa</td>
<td>3716 Round Table Pizza, 3331 Solano Ave.</td>
<td>J. Kent</td>
<td>Thurs 6:00pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>North Lake Tahoe/Kings Beach</td>
<td>3320 Carpenter's Hall, Kings Beach (Deer Street)</td>
<td>B. Warmuth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Novato/Marin County</td>
<td>3711 Round Table Pizza, S. Novato Blvd.</td>
<td>I. Snyder</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oakland Physical</td>
<td>2311 Francesco's, Hegenberger &amp; Pardee</td>
<td>M. Swain*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oakland, City of</td>
<td>2211 Francesco's, Hegenberger &amp; Pardee</td>
<td>A. Fortier</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paradise</td>
<td>3417 Round Table Pizza, 6038 (J) Clark Road</td>
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<td>Placerville</td>
<td>3813 Spanky's Pizza, 197 Placerville Dr.</td>
<td>G. McNamara</td>
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<td>Placerville/Davey Tree</td>
<td>4714 Round Table Pizza, 512 Main Street, Placerville, CA</td>
<td>S. Speak</td>
<td>Tues 5:30pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portland, OR</td>
<td>3026 TC Headquarters, Portland, OR</td>
<td>L. Mitchell*</td>
<td>Thurs 12 noon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Red Bluff</td>
<td>3214 Casa Ramos, 2001 Main Street, Red Bluff</td>
<td>J. Johnstone</td>
<td>Thurs 5:45pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Redding</td>
<td>3217 Round Table Pizza, 2808 McMurry Dr., Anderson</td>
<td>R. Bylee</td>
<td>Weds 5:15pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Redding, City of</td>
<td>4419 Round Table Pizza, 900 Dana Drive, Redding</td>
<td>R. Bodner*</td>
<td>Thurs 4:30pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Redding/Davey Utility</td>
<td>4419 Round Table Pizza, 900 Dana Drive, Redding</td>
<td>R. Bodner*</td>
<td>Thurs 4:30pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Redmond, OR</td>
<td>3028 TC Headquarters, Redmond, OR</td>
<td>J. Kisse*</td>
<td>Thurs 5:10pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Redwood City/Ashland Valley</td>
<td>4711 Mountain Mike's Pizza, 120 El Camino Real, Redwood City.</td>
<td>D. Urbina</td>
<td>Tues 5:30pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reno, NV</td>
<td>3311 IBEW LU 401, 2713 E. 4th St.</td>
<td>D. Moler</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richmond</td>
<td>2318 La Strada Rest., 2215 Church Lane, San Pablo</td>
<td>T. Vernelon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richmond/E. Bay Clerical</td>
<td>2301 La Strada Rest., 2215 Church Lane, San Pablo</td>
<td>D. Ambeau</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roseville, City of</td>
<td>3512 Fast Freddie's Pizza, 130 Main Street, Roseville</td>
<td>D. Willford*</td>
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<td>3811 Florin Rebecca Hall, 8360 Florin Rd., Sacramento</td>
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<td>Sacramento/Trees &amp; Davey</td>
<td>4717 Pizza Bell, 8591 Elk Grove Blvd. Elk Grove, CA</td>
<td>O. Perez*</td>
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<td>Sacramento Clerical</td>
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<td>D. Ryan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sacto. Muni Utility District</td>
<td>3911 Dante Club, Sacramento</td>
<td>J. Basili*</td>
<td>Weds 4:30pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sacto. Regional Transit</td>
<td>3011 Espanol Restaurant, Sacramento</td>
<td>vacant/tbd*</td>
<td>Weds 4:30pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Salinas</td>
<td>1211 Mountain Mikes Pizza E. Aliscal, Salinas</td>
<td>D. Montanez</td>
<td>Tues 5:00pm</td>
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HELP IS AVAILABLE TO FIGHT ELDER ABUSE

BY FELICIA CURRAN

SPECIAL TO THE UTILITY REPORTER

YOU probably think it is unlikely that you or a family member will ever spend time in a nursing home. Well, think again. The United States General Accounting Office estimates that more than 43 percent of all Americans over the age of 65 will wind up in one at some point during their remaining years. After a hospitalization, many people will also need to spend time in a rehab center or convalescent hospital before going home.

Unfortunately, many of these facilities provide very poor care. In 1998, the federal government reported that one in three California nursing homes was cited for serious or potentially life-threatening problems. Many cases of medical neglect result from corporate owners of nursing facilities trying to cut corners to widen their profit margins.

The corporate owners of care facilities have legal liability for understaffing their facilities. The less staff at a care facility, the higher the probability of injury to elderly patients. The patient may go in with one medical problem, and acquire other medical problems in the facility as a result of neglect by staff.

Care facilities that are short staffed often leave elderly adults lying in bed unattended, which can lead to pressure ulcers. Elderly adults are more likely to suffer from falls because no one is around to assist them getting in and out of bed or up from a chair. Elderly adults are more likely to be malnourished because no one takes the time to assist them with eating or monitor their consumption of food. Overworked staff may not notice a change in the patient’s condition, and consequently, may not call the doctor in time to get the resident needed medical help.

For incidents of abuse or neglect in either a nursing home or other care facility, file a complaint with the local Ombudsman. Call 1-800-231-4024 to find the location of your office.

If you can also complain to the agency that licenses the care facility. Call the state Department of Health Services (Licensing and Certification Program) for nursing homes, skilled nursing facilities, group homes and home health agencies. Their telephone number is 1-800-236-9747, and their website is www.dhs.gov/lnic.

Call the state Department of Social Services’ Community Care Licensing Division for residential care facilities and assisted living facilities. Their telephone number in Sacramento is 916-657-2592. Their website is http://ccl.dss.ca.gov.

For abuse or neglect outside of a facility, call your local Adult Protective Services. For your local number call 1-800-510-2020.

You should also consult a lawyer. The threat of a lawsuit often gets more of a response from care facilities than action by a licensing agency. This is because the licensing agency can only fine the offending facility for a comparatively small sum. Unscrupulous owners often would rather pay the small fine or simply gamble they will not be caught than adequately staff their nursing homes. A lawsuit is often the most effective way to force the nursing home or care facility to abide by proper regulations and provide for a sufficient number of staff.

Keep in mind as well that elderly adults (i.e., 65 and above) and adults with disabilities have a right to monetary compensation under the Elder Abuse and Dependent Adult Civil Protection Act for their injuries due to abuse or neglect. The elderly victim’s family may have a right to compensation for wrongful death of their loved one.

Nursing homes are required to post the number of staff on duty each day. If you are concerned that the facility may be understaffed, contact the appropriate licensing agency, or your lawyer.

Felicia Curran is a lawyer at Boxer & Gerson, LLP, in the firm’s elder abuse and medical neglect practice areas. She provides legal analysis on preventing nursing home abuse and elder abuse in her blog www.elderdvocacyblog.com. Visit the firm’s website at www.boxer-gerson.com or call 510-835-8870 for more information.

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Choose logo: IBEW Lightning Bolt or IBEW Gas logo
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Corona Polo Pique Sport Shirt with Striped Trim, Blend 50/40 double pique, no pocket
Shirt colors: Navy or White
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Denim Sweatshirt Jacket
Choose logo: IBEW Lightning Bolt or IBEW Gas or IBEW Traditional Logo
Item #68
100% cotton laundered denim with quilt lining, gray fleece insert drawstring hood, full zip/snap front, raglan sleeve, accent stripe trim.
Colors: Light Blue Denim or Charcoal Denim
S, M, L, XL: $91
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S, M, L, XL: $91
2X: $94, 3X: $97

Portland Fleece Jacket
Choose logo: IBEW Lightning Bolt or IBEW Gas or IBEW Traditional Logo
Item #85
Poplin outer shell, arctic fleece lining, zipper front.
Color: Navy with Gray
S, M, L, XL: $84
2X: $92, 3X: $96, 4X: $99, 5X: $104

Champ Jacket
“Retro” Logo: “Strength Through Unity”
Item #84
Sanded cotton 10 oz duck shell with quilt lining. Full zip front with contrasting distressed shading sleeves.
Color: Black
S, M, L, XL: $72
2X: $75; 3X: $78; 4X: $81; 5X: $84

Solid Color Beanie
Choose logo: IBEW Lightning Bolt or IBEW Gas or IBEW Traditional Logo
Item #24
Red (acrylic) or Dark Spruce (wool)
$7

(All pictures are mockups of items now in production.)

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November/December 2007
St. Bernard continued from page 20

Fourteen of them lived on-site, crowded together in a doublewide trailer provided by the company.

You'd think, two years after the apocalypse, the Louisiana parishes ravaged by Katrina would be surging with employment opportunities. The need is vast—for hospitals, for schools, for transportation, for sewers, for housing. For the fundamental building blocks of community.

President George W. Bush stood in the French Quarter less than three weeks after Katrina struck her blow and pledged after Katrina to orchestrate “one of the largest reconstruction efforts the world has ever seen.”

It took the federal Marshall Plan to help a devastated Europe recover after World War II. It's increasingly clear that St. Bernard Parish and other Katrina-ravaged communities will require federal leadership on that order.

They're not holding their breath in St. Bernard Parish. Two years after Katrina, the community Chet Held once called home remains largely a ghost town.

Still, work for electricians has bounced back. Chet will tell you with some pride that their union—the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 130—now has 1100 members serving the New Orleans area, about the same number as before Katrina.

But it's a displaced workforce, housed by relatives or friends or FEMA trailers. Many no longer live anywhere near the communities they serve.

Chet, a rank and file union leader before Katrina, now works full-time for Local 130 as an assistant business manager. It makes sense. His great-uncle, grandfather, father, and various cousins were in the IBEW before him. His oldest son, Bradley, is a first-year apprentice.

Chet wants you to know that the IBEW surrendered no one to Katrina. “All our members are accounted for.”

At Southern University of New Orleans, some of those IBEW members are installing a dehumidification system. They're trying to dry one of the buildings and kill the mold. The foreman is Sandy Theriot, a woman 27 years in the trade.

Recovery work is “caught up in red tape,” Sandy says.

She has first-hand experience with red tape. After Katrina, she stayed in a fishing camp 70 miles from her home. She wanted to get a FEMA trailer, but no dice. So she called the White House directly.

“I spent $14 in phone calls. I got my trailer,” she says. She thinks about this for a moment, then adds: “I’m a voter. I don’t miss elections.”

Sandy has two sons in the Navy. One is an airline electronics technician. Unfortunately, Louis Armstrong Airport still isn't hiring.

“He asked me if he should move back here and I couldn't tell him yes.”

Sandy says she feels sorry for all the professional people thrown out of work when their companies left town after Katrina. “I was very fortunate that I had a skill—I could go back to my trade.”

And work was a welcome distraction—all that overtime after the storm.

“When you’re busy working you just come home and collapse,” she says. “But when you go back to 40 hours and have time to think about it, you cry.”

There's commotion nearby, at the university's library. Workers in respirators and hazard gear are starting to haul out ruined computers, rusty cabinets, and things made unrecognizable by mold and neglect. After 25 months, the doors of this building are just today being opened for the first time since Katrina. “...one of the largest reconstruction efforts the world has ever seen.”

Let's talk about guns.

Chet had a lot of them—all lost in the flood.

One of Chet’s neighbors decided to continue living at home after the flood.

“He would put his garbage out at night with a pistol in his hand,” Chet recalls. “It’s not clear whether Chet regards the man as a hero or a crazy fool. Maybe both.

“Hey, I’m a voter. I don’t miss elections.” — Sandy Theriot

Jeffrey Johnson at work. IBEW Local 130 now has 1100 members serving the New Orleans area, about the same number as before Katrina.

There were 161 homicides in New Orleans in 2006. Many of the victims as well as the suspects were teenagers.

New Orleans fired its education workforce in the months following Katrina—7,000 teachers and other school employees. The state is trying to impose a system of charter schools, an approach already discredited in California. Investigators there found millions of dollars were spent on huge executive salaries, perks and questionable contracts awarded to the friends and family of the CEO.

Flooded buildings aren’t the only place you find toxic mold.

In the Chalmette neighborhood of St. Bernard Parish, Chet pulls up to the place he used to call home. It’s not as bad as the first time, when he confronted an unspeakable toxic mess, “like a Port-O-Let turned upside down and then put through a blender.”

He pauses at the front door, lowers his head.

“This is really hard for me, guys.”

The inside is gutted, just studs and memories. The brick base of the stove that he built just before the storm. The remnants of a fireplace.

Chet doesn’t say much, just moves among the studs, alone behind his sunglasses.

An hour later, along the shoreline of the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet near Shell Beach, Chet points out the name of a childhood friend.

“I grew up with him. We were almost exactly the same age.”

It’s one of about 150 names on a monument to victims of Hurricane Katrina from this parish of St. Bernard, the 12th century Catholic abbot who viewed the world as a place of banishment and trial. Behind the shrine, a golden metal cross is anchored in cement next to the water, catching sharply angled rays from the lowering sun.

In one direction is the bayou where Chet’s father hunted alligators. In another, the waters where he caught oysters and crabs in boats that he built with his cousins.

Boats in Shell Beach have personalities. Miss Bonnie. Pretzel Logic. Brothers. In Shell Beach, losing a boat is like losing a relative.

Katrina took a terrible toll here. But somehow, seeing the deep feeling Chet has for this place, it’s impossible to think that Katrina will have the last word.

The performance of local, state and federal officials in the aftermath of Katrina is not likely to be judged kindly by history. There's plenty in government that’s bent, and people never seem to catch on quick enough to straighten it out.

Chet suggests a shrimp po’ boy at Rocky & Carlo’s, although oyster is good too. It’s a big noisy place where you’re really missing out if you don’t like it battered and fried. T-shirts abound, tooting the horn for various candidates for local political office.

Old friends stop by Chet’s table. There’s real joy in these hugs.

The Ninth Ward has received the lion’s share of media attention in Katrina’s aftermath. Chet understands this. But St. Bernard Parish has suffered, too. More than Chet can say, perhaps more than any outsider could ever understand.

“Black or white, Katrina didn’t discriminate,” he says. “Tell people what happened here.”

Story and photos by Eric Wolfe.

Ed Maher contributed to this report.
Chet Held finds the name of a friend on a memorial to Katrina’s victims from St. Bernard Parish.

Two years later, Chet Held still hasn’t escaped that massive wall of water that rolled over two levees and swept away St. Bernard Parish.

He wasn’t there, he evacuated his family the night before. But he experiences those apocalyptic hours like an amputee revisits the pain of a missing limb. The overtopping of the levees, the loss of power, the rush of water, people fleeing to their roofs.

Katrina is part of him now.

A neighbor told Chet the first thing he saw after making it to the roof was Chet’s truck floating by.

Chet is driving through that neighborhood now, a vast cemetery of gutted houses and lingering debris. His voice is measured, a personal levee against a flood of feelings, as he thinks about those long nights that people spent clinging to their roofs.


Some were rescued. Too many were lost. Chet points out their houses, in memoriam. There. There. And there.

St. Bernard Parish remained submerged for 10 days.

Chet lost his home and nearly everything he owned. But he knows he’s among the lucky. Along with 25 members of his extended family, he ended up at his wife’s cousin’s place in Tampa, Florida.

A week later, Chet moved his family to St. Louis, where they were sheltered by members of IBEW Local 1—union brothers Chet had befriended a decade earlier while working at a car plant.

Chet and his family returned the day after Hurricane Rita, staying in a travel trailer on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain.

Despite the massive economic dislocation inflicted by Katrina and Rita, his skills as a journeyman electrician gained him temporary work at CCI Carbon, a co-generation plant that sells its surplus power to the area’s utility company. Lines were down between the generators and the substation. Chet worked alongside 30 other men on repairs.

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Chet Held finds the name of a friend on a memorial to Katrina’s victims from St. Bernard Parish.

Two years after Katrina, the doors of this university library are just now being opened to reveal a toxic mess.