

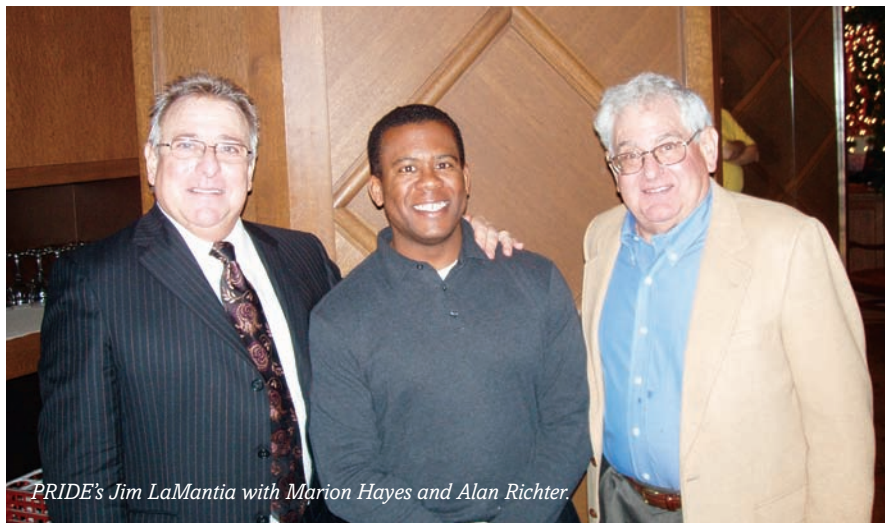
SAFETY IS A COMPETITIVE BUSINESS ASSET

words JIM LAMANTIA



We know the sobering statistics all too well. According to the **U.S. Department of Labor**, construction is annually ranked among the most hazardous industries. The government agency reported that fatalities increased 2.8 percent in 2006 to 1,226 — up from 1,192 in 2005. In a typical year, construction accounts for roughly one out of every five fatal work incidents.

That human toll spurred the **PRIDE** construction labor-management organization in St. Louis to mobilize the region's union construction industry to become 100 percent **OSHA** 10-hour certified. Not only are lives saved through OSHA 10, but studies by the **Associated General Contractors of America** also show that contractors with OSHA 10-certified workers have seen a drop of up to 66 percent in lost-time injuries.



PRIDE's Jim LaMantia with Marion Hayes and Alan Richter.

PRIDE's industrywide call for safety really is a no-brainer. It's not only the right thing to do, but safety clearly is a competitive asset. By mitigating risk, OSHA 10 certification presents construction companies with a powerful bargaining tool to meet the demands of buyers of construction. But what has been most impressive is how the industry has embraced the safety standard — particularly **International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW)** Local No. 1 journey workers, who are exceeding expectations given the myriad of complex safety concerns that affect their industry. In fall 2007, all 3,400 members of the IBEW Local No. 1 workforce achieved OSHA 10 certification. More importantly, more than 70 percent achieved an even higher standard: OSHA 30-hour certification. This was a dedicated \$1.7 million, 14-month effort by the **Electrical Connection**, a partnership of IBEW Local No. 1, and the **National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA)** St. Louis Chapter.

The training was conducted at the renowned St. Louis Electrical Industry Training Center — a learning laboratory operated by the Electrical Connection. Tailored instruction focused on safety and health standards. The curriculum covered electrical safety, fall protection, personal-protective and lifesaving equipment, materials handling, power tool safety, scaffolding, heavy equipment operation, and excavation.

All IBEW Local No. 1 supervisors, including foremen, general foremen and project managers, were required to take OSHA 30-hour training. Most IBEW Local No. 1 journey workers chose to align to that higher standard as well. Some of the highly specialized OSHA 30 electrical safety courses include “lock out/tag out” procedures to prevent accidental energizing of electrical circuits. It also includes instruction from the **National Fire Protection Association** manual detailing proper installation of electrical equipment.

The Electrical Connection has mounted an aggressive safety program for decades, but in going above and beyond the industrywide call for heightened safety, it actually anticipates and exceeds owner demands.

Earlier this year, the **St. Louis Council of Construction Consumers**, which represents buyers of construction services, recommended requiring OSHA 10-hour certification in all construction contracts. One of the region's largest employers, power supplier **Ameren UE**, already requires OSHA 30 training for supervisors and foremen.

Accomplishing safety-training goals requires an unprecedented level of commitment from both labor and management. To date, dedicated efforts, such as those from NECA electrical and communication contractors and IBEW Local No. 1, have helped more than 70 percent of the local union construction work force attain OSHA 10 certification.

St. Louis companies invest \$26 million annually in training, and the city is widely regarded as the home of the best-trained work force in the U.S. Now, St. Louis is adding another arrow to its quiver — the designation as the city with the safest work force. □