

New leadership at Iron Workers Local 29

Longtime business manager Kevin Jensen retires, Joe Bowers steps in

Kevin Jensen retired June 30 as business manager and financial secretary of Iron Workers Local 29.

To serve out the second half of his three-year term, the union's Executive Board appointed Local 29 president Joe Bowers. It also appointed vice president Robert Camarillo as the new president.

Executive Board member Shane Nehls was appointed vice president, and Jason Fussell was named to the Executive Board.

Headquartered in Portland, Local 29 is an affiliate of 124,000-member International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers. Their work includes placing and tying re-bar in concrete forms, erecting and welding iron beams, and installing handrails, windows, doors and other metal architectural structures.

With 1,318 members, Local 29 has a jurisdiction that extends to all of Oregon plus six counties in Southwest Washington. Under the area master agreement, Local 29 journeyman make \$35.85 an hour plus benefits.

As of 2014, Local 29's membership included 649 journeymen, 182 apprentices, 52 proba-



Joe Bowers, Local 29's new business manager.

tionary members, and 282 pensioners, plus 153 honorary members—members who are permanently disabled or incapacitated as a result of working at the trade.

That fact speaks to how physically demanding iron work is; safety is a big part of the union's four-year 6,400-hour apprenticeship program.

"There's not a lot of ironworkers falling off buildings," Jensen says, "but a lot whose knees, shoulders, and backs are hurting from doing this trade for 35 years."

Jensen, 56, is a second-generation ironworker, the second of

five kids of union ironworker Ralph Jensen.

"We always knew that the union was what provided us the lifestyle we had," Jensen said.

Jensen grew up outside of Boring, Oregon, and graduated from Sandy High School in 1977. He joined the union in June 1978, and became a journeyman in 1981. He worked many projects over the years, including the 30-story PacWest Center in downtown Portland and the second powerhouse at Bonneville Dam.

"One of the most appealing things about the job," Jensen said, "is the ability to look back



Kevin Jensen (right) will finish out his term as president of the Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council in August. He is seen above talking to U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley.

at the end of the day and see what you've done."

Following the path of his father, who served as union vice president and executive board member, he got involved in the local, and was elected to the Executive Board in 1984 and later, recording secretary and district council delegate. He worked for Carr Construction from 1994 until March 2004, when he was hired as a dispatcher by then-business manager Jeff Carlson. When Carlson left as business manager Oct. 1, 2004, Jensen was appointed to replace him.

Jensen said he felt fortunate to be part of the union movement, which is about improving the lives of working people.

"We not only make lives better for our members, but for all workers in the industry," Jensen said. The labor movement's future, Jensen said, "comes down to members being involved and caring about what's happening in their organization and all of organized labor. It's pretty obvious there's a concerted effort in certain parts of the political spectrum to weaken the union voice."

Retiring after 37 years in the union, Jensen will continue to serve on the board of directors of the State Accident Insurance Fund (SAIF), Oregon's non-profit workers' comp insurer; then-governor John Kitzhaber appointed him to a three-year term in February 2014.

He also will finish out his term as president of the Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council, which expires later this month.

Jensen says he wants to get

reacquainted with fishing, hunting, and golf. He is married with four grown daughters and three grandchildren.

Local 29's new business manager, Joe Bowers, got his start on the nonunion side of the trade and was recruited to the union in 1996. Bowers, 41, lived in Saint Croix Falls, Wisconsin until moving to Oregon with his family in 1992. Bowers graduated from the apprenticeship program in 2000, and worked in the field at R2M2 before he was recruited by Jensen as a union organizer in October 2004. As an organizer, he met with nonunion contractors and workers in the industry to pitch the merits of signing with the union. Instead of hunting for workers on Craigslist or the Oregon Employment Department, union iron contractors have access to a skilled and ready labor pool through the union hiring hall.

"There's no parallel on the nonunion side to our training program," Bowers says.

In 2005, Bowers was elected to Local 29's Examining Committee, which tests apprentices when they're ready to become journeymen. In 2008, he was elected vice president, and in 2013, president. He's also secretary-treasurer for the Iron Workers District Council of the Pacific Northwest, and president of the Salem Building Trades Council.

Bowers said he'll continue to focus on procuring more work for members. He'll also reach out to nonunion competition and try to dispel myths they may have about what it's like to sign with the union.

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