

...Bricklayers Local 1 celebrates 125 years

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When the Local began, bricklayers were making \$6 a day and working six 10-hour days a week. Over the next two decades, the union fought and won first the nine-hour work day, and then the eight-hour day.

That took strikes. Local 1's first strike was Nov. 22, 1894 at East Side Water Plant; it failed. Many more were to follow. In May 1902 they took part in a building trades wide strike in support of millworkers. In April 1903, they backed a strike of the painters. On Jan. 3, 1907, they struck the Wells Fargo building when a nonunion apprentice showed up on the job.

In 1917, tilesetters were added to the union, and on Dec. 16 that year, union members struck the 15-story Yeon Building, which was using nonunion workers to set tile.

Over the years, the trowel trades union expanded to take in many other "allied crafts." Today, BAC is a union of bricklayers, stone and marble masons, tilesetters, terrazzo workers, pointers/cleaners/caulkers, re-

fractory specialists, and finishers.

In 1975 Local 1 merged with BAC Local 5 of Salem.

In the mid-1990s, to combat the encroachment of non-union competitors, the local teamed up with union contractors to create a Market Recovery Program. Contributions of up to \$2.25 an hour created a pool to subsidize bids so that quality union contractors could win the work.

Brick by brick and tile by tile, BAC 1 members have left their mark on Portland and the region. If there's a local landmark building made of brick or with a brick facade, chances are it was union labor that laid it, from the Multnomah County Central Library to the downtown Nordstrom department store (and brick-built Pioneer Courthouse Square across the street from it) to the 15-story Portland Building where the Portlandia statue sits.

The 125 year mark arrives at a time when the local is thriving, with 648 members and full employment, new contractors signing up, and 113 apprentices entering the trade. In the last six years, overall compensation has

increased \$11.60 an hour, and the current contract will increase compensation another \$2.75.

On Sept. 22, Local 1 members and their spouses celebrated the local's 125th anniversary with a dinner at the union-represented Vancouver Hilton. The dinner — sponsored by Scott Wealth Management and Operating Engineers Local 701 — also honored longtime members with pins for their years of service.

Photos, tools, and other artifacts were displayed along the wall, and each attendee received a commemorative history book the local commissioned from Union Histories, a union-represented Cleveland-based company that specializes in researching and presenting the histories of local unions. To produce the account, company historian Calvin Jefferson spent several days combing through Local 1 archives and the records at the Oregon Historical Society and Multnomah County Library, including accounts in the union newspaper that is today known as the Northwest Labor Press.

—Don McIntosh

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