

LABORPRESS New York

Full Employment - For Now

Rebuilding the World Trade Center brings jobs to ironworkers, but not forever

By Bendix Anderson, LaborPress Senior Editor

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Terry Moore, business manager; John Skinner, president and George Fernandez, recording secretary for Local 46

One World Trade Center is now easily visible from much of Manhattan and Brooklyn, towering more than 90 stories over the City.

Full employment has returned to unions like the Metallic Lathers and Reinforcing Ironworkers Local 46, thanks almost entirely to the work of rebuilding. More than a third of Local 46's members now work at Ground Zero.

But the project is now at its peak, and will be finished in a few years. To create new construction jobs for union workers, Local 46 has joined with the rest of the building trades to negotiate project labor agreements that offer concession to developers in return for commitments to build union.

"We've got hard decisions to make," said Terry Moore, the new business manager for Local 46.

More than 700 metallic lathers are now at work on at the World Trade Center. Thanks to the massive project, 100 percent of the Local 46's 1600 active members are employed. That's a huge improvement compared to 2010, when unemployment peaked at 35 percent for the Local 46.

But these workers can't build the Freedom Tower forever. This year, construction teams will "top out" the 1776-foot skyscraper at 105 floors. Three World Trade Center and the Transportation Hub now under construction are also making progress. Union officials expect that at least 250 to 300 Local 46 members will be busy at the WTC for the next three years. But that's less than half the current number at work at the site.

To make up the difference, union organizers and negotiators are working to turn more construction jobs into union jobs.

For example, building trades, including Local 46, recently signed a project labor agreement with Equity Residential, a national real estate investment trust founded by Chicago billionaire Sam Zell. In return for a 20 percent cut in the total wage package for workers, Equity agrees to use union labor to build in New York City.

To get Equity's attention, Local 46 hired an outside firm, **Locker Associates**, that among other things tracked Sam Zell so that whenever Zell visited New York for a speaking engagement, the union could demonstrate. "I picketed them for eight months," said Moore. Now that the PLA is signed, Local 46 workers at Equity Residential projects will receive the same pay and benefits as their fellow workers at other union projects. That's because of a "target fund" created by Local 46 that pays to make up the difference between the PLA rate and the regular rate for each effected worker. All Local 46 members now contribute \$3.85 per hour into the fund.

Construction unions seek to negotiate more PLAs, concentrating on projects in Manhattan and the outer boroughs that can sustain the wage rates of union construction workers, said Moore. He is now settling into his position as business manager for Local 46 after a recent election, taking over for prior business manager Bob Ledwith.

"We've got big shoes to fill," said Moore. "Our union has always been aggressive... We're going in the same direction, even more aggressive."