



Electricians undergo training at IBEW Local 102's headquarters in Parsippany.

Thinking Outside the Electrical Box

How IBEW Local 102 strives to make members and contractors succeed.

By Anthony Birritteri, Editor-in-Chief

Parsippany-based IBEW Local 102 is putting its 3,000 electricians back to work by thinking outside of the electrical box. Not content with business as usual in a sluggish construction industry where 3-million-man hours of work had disappeared between 9-11-01 and the most current recession, the union has been implementing new strategies in an effort to be “developer and contractor friendly.”

“The loss of 3 million man hours was of great concern,” says IBEW Local 102 President Bernard Corrigan. “We said to ourselves, ‘We have to restructure the business model, with this [economic climate] being the new normal.’”

The union had to be more flexible in delivering its product - the services of 3,000 electricians - to the more than 300 licensed electrical contractors it works with in its Northern New Jersey jurisdiction. In this effort, it was able to bypass some rigid union work rules.

As an example, Pat Delle Cava, IBEW Local 102 business manager, mentions the union standard second- and third-shift rate increases of 10 percent and 15 percent, respectively: “We couldn’t change [the rates], but what we did do was create an off-shift rate of 3 percent so that we can, for example, conduct retrofit lighting work when retailers close,” he explains. For work at schools during the academic year, a rate was developed for late evening hours when no

students or teachers are present, rather than wait to work during the summer months when most schools are closed.

The progressive stance that Local 102 took garnered the attention of Dr. Perry Daneshgari, founder of MCA, Inc. and author of “Agile Construction for the Electrical Contractor.” In his book, Daneshgari applies proven managerial techniques from other industries to electrical construction. Basically, agile construction scientifically tracks on-the-job dynamics and the bottom-line impact of three sources of cost drivers: money, materials and manpower.

“Dr. Daneshgari found that we have been doing most of the things he has been recommending around the country for the construction unions,” explains Delle Cava.

Now, IBEW, in conjunction with MCA, is pushing the efficiency envelope further by offering courses at its vast headquarters building in Parsip-

pany, which boasts a 16,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art training facility. The first rounds of classes, ending this past February, were:

- Vendor Partnership in Electrical Contracting Design, which is designed to establish better partnerships between the electrical contractor and their distributor partners.
- Principles of Job Productivity Assurance and Control, which teaches the principle of measuring productivity from the operator’s viewpoint, rather than from an accounting perspective (which alienates labor).
- Prefabrication: A Tool for Maximizing Profitability, which provides an understanding of how to design and implement a prefabrication process as part of an overall strategy to develop an optimal electrical construction business model.
- Implementation of Short Interval Scheduling, in which participants learn - hands-on - the methods and tools that can be used to schedule jobs, identify obstacles and reduce waste, and improve job productivity by more than 30 percent.

One would think the courses are for IBEW Local 102’s member electricians. However, they are designed more for owners of electrical contracting companies, executive managers, project managers, estimators, foremen and high-level

field supervisors.

"The contractors need to buy into this. They are the guys who employ our men," Corrigan explains.

As for the benefits of the agile construction classes, Harold Post, owner of Hawthorne-based Post & Kelly Electric Co., comments, "Our company's biggest concern right now is finding projects, so we are trying to find more efficient ways, and these classes are another way of making us more competitive."

Bob Delle Cava, vice president of marketing at Star-Lo Electric, Inc., Whippany, and Pat Delle Cava's brother, comments that his company received much insight as to where it was losing productivity. A lot of it was rushed job planning due to today's fast paced technology: faster blueprint or document generation means general contractors want to start jobs immediately. It also means rushing bid proposals. "We need to tell our general contractors there is time we want to spend, up front, planning the project ... that is part of the challenge," he says.

According to Heather Moore, the MCA instructor of the agile construction classes, the underlying stratum she has discovered in all of this training is "the importance of the foreman - the guy in the field - to be able to break down the

work, plan the way he is going to build the job, and give that information to the project manager or contractor and say, 'Here is how I am planning to build, and I need your support on this.'"

Because of IBEW Local 102's initiative to not only be competitive, but to forge stronger relationships with electrical contractors, its members are working in more than 70 percent of its market area. "This is a bit of an anomaly in a declining construction market," Delle Cava says.

Though members may be working for slightly lower wages, "at least they are working," he says. "We have had members who, at some point, were out of work for almost two years. Then they would work for three months, and be jobless for another year. So any shot at going to work and getting benefits is good. Our philosophy has changed from getting everyone a job at a fixed rate of pay, to getting everyone some kind of a job."

Are the other IBEW Locals in New Jersey happy with what Local 102 is doing? According to Corrigan, "A lot of our counterparts in the state don't agree with us, but we feel they will have to follow us sooner or later, or else we will be the only one surviving." **NJB**

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Scott Bradbary – Scott Bradbary, M.Ed., vice president and senior consultant for The Rainmaker Academy, will be giving a keynote session on "Creating Sustainability in Your Firm."

Rolfe Carawan – Rolfe Carawan is the founder of the Carawan Global Group, which helps organizations sustain unity through change and challenges. His many real-world experiences include entrepreneur, political campaign manager and associate pastor. He will be giving a keynote session on "Creating a Raving Clientele."

Janine Driver – Janine Driver is: *The New York Times* best-selling author of "You Say More Than You Think;" keynote

speaker; media expert for "NBC's Today," "20/20," CNN and the Dr. Oz Show; and founder, president and lead instructor for the Body Language Institute.

Augustus Faucher – Augustine Faucher, Ph.D., is the vice president and senior macroeconomist for The PNC Financial Services Group, where he is responsible for contributing to the preparation of PNC's US economic forecast and alternative economic scenarios.

David Fishof – David Fishof is the founder and creator of Rock 'n' Roll Fantasy Camp and author of *Rock Your Business: What You and Your Company Can Learn from the Business of Rock and Roll*.

Jeffrey D. Mechanick – Jeffrey D. Mechanick, CPA, M.B.A., is an assistant director at the Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB).

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