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A Division of the WV State Building Trades, AFL-CIO | Chuck Parker, *President* | Dave Efaw, *Secretary-Treasurer* | Steve White, *Director*

# Tax Fraud Days of Action Hosted by EAS Carpenters

As part of an ongoing awareness campaign, the Eastern Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters (EASRCC) held the 2021 Tax Fraud Days of Action April 14-17, bringing attention to the issue of worker misclassification and tax fraud.

“What we’re talking about here is wage theft and tax fraud,” said William Sproule, Secretary-Treasurer of the EASRCC. “When workers are intentionally misclassified as independent contractors, wage and tax revenue is stolen by bad actors who cheat to win bids against honest businesses playing by the rules.”

According to their website and supported by a study from Harvard University Law School, the EASRCC explains Americans lose \$8.4 billion annually due to construction industry worker misclassification.

The Tax Fraud Days of Action event included a virtual speaker series on April 15 with three panels dedicated to enforcement, social justice, and legislative issues.

During the social justice panel, Clayton Sinyai, Executive Director of the Catholic Labor Network, ex-

plained that when it comes to worker misclassification most workers do not realize a problem exists.

“Many workers who are affected by this problem don’t even know and aren’t really aware of their rights as workers on a job site,” said Sinyai.

Other panelists for the speaker series included Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro, Delaware County District Attorney Jack Stollsteimer, and WV State Senator Mike Romano (D-Harrison).

Senator Romano explained the problem of worker misclassification will only get worse with attacks coming from legislatures in the form of worker reclassification bills.

SB 272 which passed in West Virginia earlier this year makes it easier for businesses to call workers independent contractors and shift all taxes and liability to the worker.

“This has been a long effort to diminish the wages and income of the middle class and people who work for a living,” said Romano. “[SB 272] is just an anti-worker piece of legislation.”

Senior Council Representative

Mike Jenkins said the problem is real and growing in West Virginia.

“We meet workers who are told they are independent contractors, or they don’t have a job,” said Jenkins. “They are forced to give up workers compensation and unemployment

and half of their social security too.”

For more information on the campaign to stop tax fraud, log on to EveryoneIsAVictim.com and find out what you can do to help stop worker misclassification and wage theft in your area. ■



The Eastern Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters held a virtual day of action to raise awareness about tax fraud on April 15. Americans lose \$8.4 billion annually due to construction industry worker misclassification.

## Near Disaster at US Methanol Plant Site

On Tuesday morning, April 27, a 5,500-pound piece of pipe temporarily tied off at the US Methanol plant in Institute broke free from its cables and plunged through the plant like a torpedo.

That news, and any scant details, of the accident came from workers on the job and have not been verified.

Workers also reported the pipe crashed through the pipe rack, cable tray and scaffolding and came to rest bent into a horseshoe shape in the air suspended by an I-beam.

The closest worker was approximately three feet away and miraculously nobody was hurt.

According to the company an “in-

cident involving piping” at the facility occurred, work was paused and “all safety protocol was followed” but no details were given.

“Earlier today, there was an incident at the US Methanol construction site in Institute when piping was being installed,” wrote the public relations representative for US Metha-

nol. “Fortunately—and most importantly, there were no injuries. At the time, all safety protocol was followed, including a safety time out work pause to refocus construction crews to ensure safe completion of work tasks as the project progresses.”

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# North Central WV Building Trades Council Volunteers Rebuild Public Shooting Range

North Central WV Building Trades Council volunteers rebuilt a public shooting range at the Pleasant Creek Wildlife Management Area in Barbour and Taylor Counties during April.

The effort was part of a long-standing partnership with the Union Sportsman Alliance which has funded several other volunteer efforts in the state.

Kenny Perdue, former WV AFL-CIO President and retired Sheet Metal Worker (SMART) Local 33 member, coordinated the effort.

The roof on two shelters was replaced, seven shooting benches were rebuilt and five target racks were set

in the range which involved more than 200 hours of volunteer time.

Materials for the roof were donated by SMART Local 33.

Materials for the target racks were donated, built and set by volunteers from UA Local 152.

The shooting benches were built by volunteers from Carpenters Local 436.

IBEW Local 596 members also volunteered.

“We had a good group of volunteers and got most of the work done on a Saturday,” said Jim Jackson, President of the North Central WV Building Trades and representative of Sheet Metal Local 33. ■



(From left) SMART Local 33 members John Young, Jim Jackson, Jeff Fry, Chris Garrett and Steve Perdue volunteer to replace a roof at the public shooting range in the Pleasant Creek Wildlife Management Area.

## \$50 Million Bridge Project Advances

A deal to purchase and renovate the Memorial Bridge in Parkersburg is one step away from approval by the city council after a committee voted unanimously to bring the matter to the full city council.

The committee met on Thursday, April 30 and heard details about the \$50 million proposal made by United Bridge Partners, a Colorado based toll bridge operating company.

United Bridge has committed to use Kokosing Construction as the contractor if the deal goes through.

Kokosing uses local union workers for their projects.

In attendance were several craft representatives and members in support of the project.

“The deal would provide good paying jobs for local union workers in the area,” said Jessie King Business Manager for Laborers’ Local 1085.

United Bridge would purchase the 65-year-old bridge from the City of Parkersburg and complete a renovation project over the course of 21 months.

The Affiliated Construction

Trades commissioned an economic impact study from Marshall University which estimated the project would use 176,000 hours of construction labor valued at close to \$9 million.

With local spending and other support jobs from materials and supplies the total gain would be 285 jobs and an estimated \$38 million economic impact on the region.

“We want to see the bridge improved and the jobs to stay with local workers,” said Brad Winans, Business Manager for Iron Workers Local 787. “This will save taxpayers money, it’s a good deal all around.”

In addition to the support of the Laborers’ and Ironworkers, members of Operating Engineers Local 132, Painters Local 1144, the Eastern Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters and the Parkersburg-Marietta Building Trades were present.

The Parkersburg City Council is expected to hold a deciding vote on the project at their Tuesday, May 25 meeting. ■

## US Methanol Plant

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On-site workers – who don’t want their names used for fear of reprisal – dispute the claim that safety protocols were followed.

Workers say the pipe was improperly rigged.

The pipe had been hoisted up by a crane and tied off to the pipe rack.

However the crew working for Aptim did not use the proper weight rated cable to tie it off with.

Aptim is the piping contractor on the project from Louisiana.

MMR, the electrical contractor, is also from Louisiana.

The cables broke under the weight sending the pipe crashing through the structure which has been under construction for four years.

The job was shut down for the day shift, but night shift went on as usual.

The following morning workers expected OSHA to be at the job and were shocked and disappointed they were not.

The impression of at least one

worker was that “the plant jobsite does not put safety at the top of its list.”

The company statement said “USM[ethanol] is proud of its team and its commitment to safety. This is a core value for the company.”

Craig Mosteller, Business Agent for Plumbers and Pipefitters Local 625 Charleston, gets mad when reading the company statement.

“To say all safety protocols are being followed and talk about safety being a core value without explaining the accident is just spin in my opinion,” said Mosteller.

“If I were living next to this plant, I would be concerned about who is building it, how it is being built and the potential for a catastrophe when it is placed in operation.”

Local workers have complained about the large number of imported workers and lack of jobs for locals, qualified construction workers at the project. ■

# Worker's Memorial Day Observed

On April 28th the labor community observed Worker's Memorial Day, when the WV AFL-CIO held a event honoring fallen workers.

During 2020, 17 West Virginia workers lost their lives while at work.

As a part of a virtual ceremony each name was read aloud to honor and remember the lives which were lost too early.

50 years ago the Occupational Safety & Health Act went into effect promising safe jobs and working conditions for all American workers.

The law was championed by the labor movement who demanded government ensure safe working conditions at all worksites.

This year was the 33rd annual Worker's Memorial Day which is held every April 28 to remember and honor those who have died on the job or because of a workplace injury.

Josh Sword, President of the WV AFL-CIO, explained the work is not

done, as too many workers still die from job-related causes.

"The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the connection between workplace safety and the health of our community," said Sword. "Unions have led the way to demand and win job protections from this highly contagious virus."

With attacks against unions being carried out across the country, Sword went on to explain that the labor movement must also continue pushing for legislation such as the Protect our Right to Organize Act (PRO Act).

Sword described the Act, which is currently being considered in the US Senate, as essential to organized labor remaining effective in fighting for the safety of all workers.

"We will fight for the right of every worker for a safe job until that promise is fulfilled and until one day, on April 28th, there are no more names to read," said Sword. ■

# WV Methanol Plant Permit Approved

A proposed \$350 million methanol plant slated for Pleasants County moved one step closer to a reality after receiving preliminary approval for an air permit.

A virtual public hearing was held by the Division of Environmental Protection on May 4 to go over the permit and seek public comment.

The plant would produce 1,000 tons of methanol per day from natural gas.

Speaking in support of the project and job potential were Brad Britton, Business Manager of Plumbers and Steamfitters Local 565 and Matt Kennedy, Business Agent with Boilermakers Local 667. "We are in support of this project," said Britton. "Our members want and need the work."

Kennedy agreed saying "We want to see local jobs in our community, and we want to help this project be-

come a reality."

According to Buddy Malone, Business Manager for the Parkersburg-Marietta Building Trades there have been discussions with both the project developer and the equipment manufacturer who will build the major portion of the project.

"They are still working on design details and have not yet decided if the construction will be under one contract or several, but we appreciate the communication and willingness to consider local union contractors and workers," said Malone.

The project is totally different from the US Methanol plant at Institute near Charleston. "Those are different owners with different technology," said Malone.

Details about the construction contractors and timetable are expected around the end of the year. ■

## UA Local 625 Holds New Contractor Seminar



Tom Bigley (standing), UA Director of Plumbing Services, leads a discussion during a New Contractor Seminar held at Local 625 in Charleston on April 12-13.

The day and a half training examined several topics such as writing up a business plan, banking, insurance, estimating, fringe reports and more. "If we help members start a company that's more work opportunities for all," said Bigley.

## Rally for PRO Act



Painter District Council 53 representatives Harold DJ Keller (left) and Tony Phillips hold a banner during a Protect our Right to Organize Act (PRO Act) 'Honk and Wave' led by the Painters on Wednesday, May 5 in front of their union hall on East 7th Street.

Members of the Parkersburg-Marietta Building Trades, Parkersburg Area Labor Council and WV AFL-CIO joined in.

"We wanted to show support for one of the most important pro-labor bills in decades," said Brian Stanley, Business Manager for Painters DC 53.

According to Stanley the PRO Act, which is pending in the US Senate, would remove barriers in federal law that often unfairly prevent workers from joining a union.

# Plumbers & Steamfitters Local 83 Becomes Regional Rigging Certification Site

Plumbers & Steamfitters Local 83, Wheeling, has become a regional instructor training center for a new rigging certification program.

The first instructor course was held on April 5 at Local 83 with Scott Wadford as the trainer who also administered testing for the Industrial Rigging/Crane Signal Certification Course.

Wadford, who currently works for Bechtel at the Shell Cracker as the Bull Rigging Instructor, is also a member of Local 83, and an instructor nationally for the United Association (UA) – Union of Plumbers, Fitters, Welders and Service Techs.

The UA established the Industrial Rigging Examination/Certification Program in partnership with the Electric Power Research Institute.

The UA/EPRI Industrial Rigging Certification Program is a valuable tool for determining an individual's capabilities and competences.

This ensures their on-going training needs are provided and validated in a structured environment.

The Industrial Rigging Certifica-

tion Program uses EPRI's Third Party "Standardized Task Evaluation" program. Both written knowledge tests and skills-based, hands-on proficiency evaluations.

The certification program undergoes a rigorous third-party accreditation process.

The program provides trained, experienced, certified riggers throughout the United States at no cost to contractors or their clients.

UA instructors John Fowler, Local 486 in Baltimore, MD and Justin Bennett, Local 602 in Washington, DC tested to become certified EPRI Industrial Rigging instructors.

According to Eric O'Donnell, Local 83 Training Coordinator, before taking the written and hands-on class the two instructors had to take two 40 hours classes and pass two written tests in preparation.

Two tests are administered for this course: an online written exam and a performance evaluation.

Both exams must be passed to receive certification.

For the performance exam, indi-

viduals are required to properly rig two different fabrications and give the operator proper signals to fly the fabrications inside the rigging module safely.

Both Fowler and Bennett were successful in passing both tests and

will be conducting Rigging Certification courses at their home locals.

"We really appreciate Charlie Savage from Savage Construction, Co. for donating the crane and Local 132 Business Agent Eran Molz for operating the crane," said O'Donnell. ■



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Justin Bennett (from left) an instructor from Local 602, Washington, DC takes a test as part of his certification to become a rigging instructor. Assisting from Local 83 are apprentice Roy Rayl; Rigging Instructor Scott Wadford; Welding Instructor Nicholas O'Donnell; and volunteer Crane Operator, Local 132 Business Agent Eran Molz. Use of the crane was donated by Savage Construction.

## Wellsburg Bridge Floats Down the Ohio River



An 830-foot span of the new Wellsburg Bridge weighing around 10 million pounds floats down the Ohio River as crews barged it into place on April 26. Construction started on the segment in 2018 as part of a \$131 million design-build contract awarded to Colorado based Flatiron Constructors in 2016. Triton Construction built the approaches. Completion is expected in the fall of 2022.