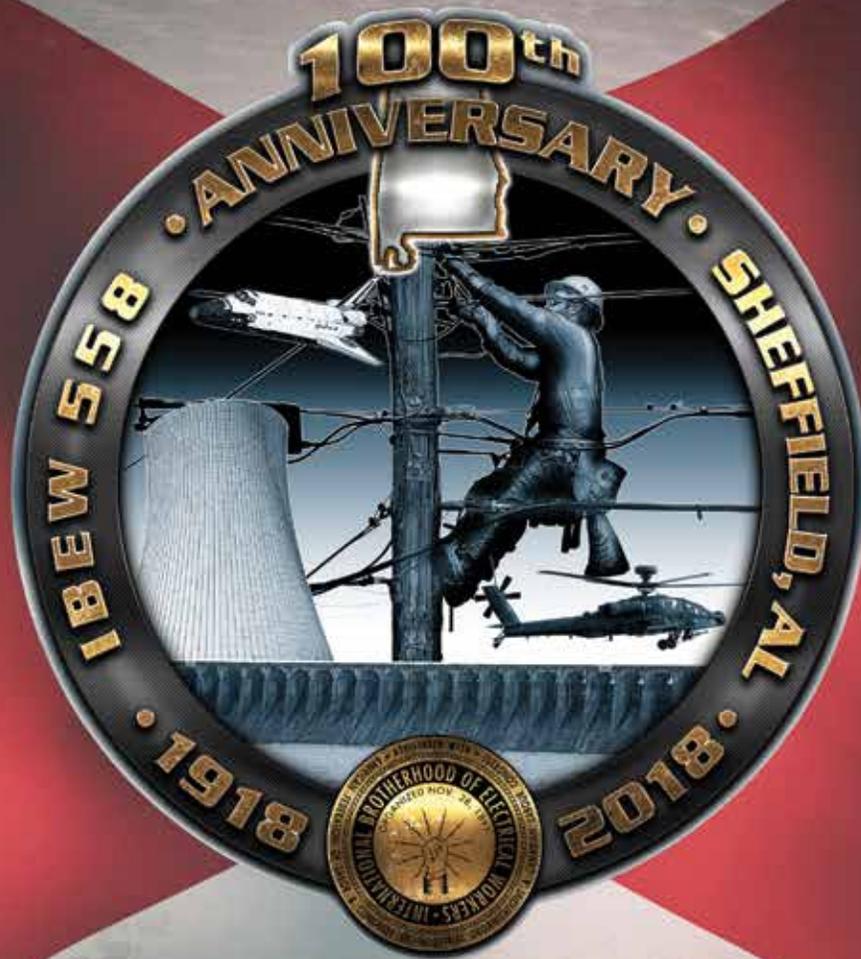
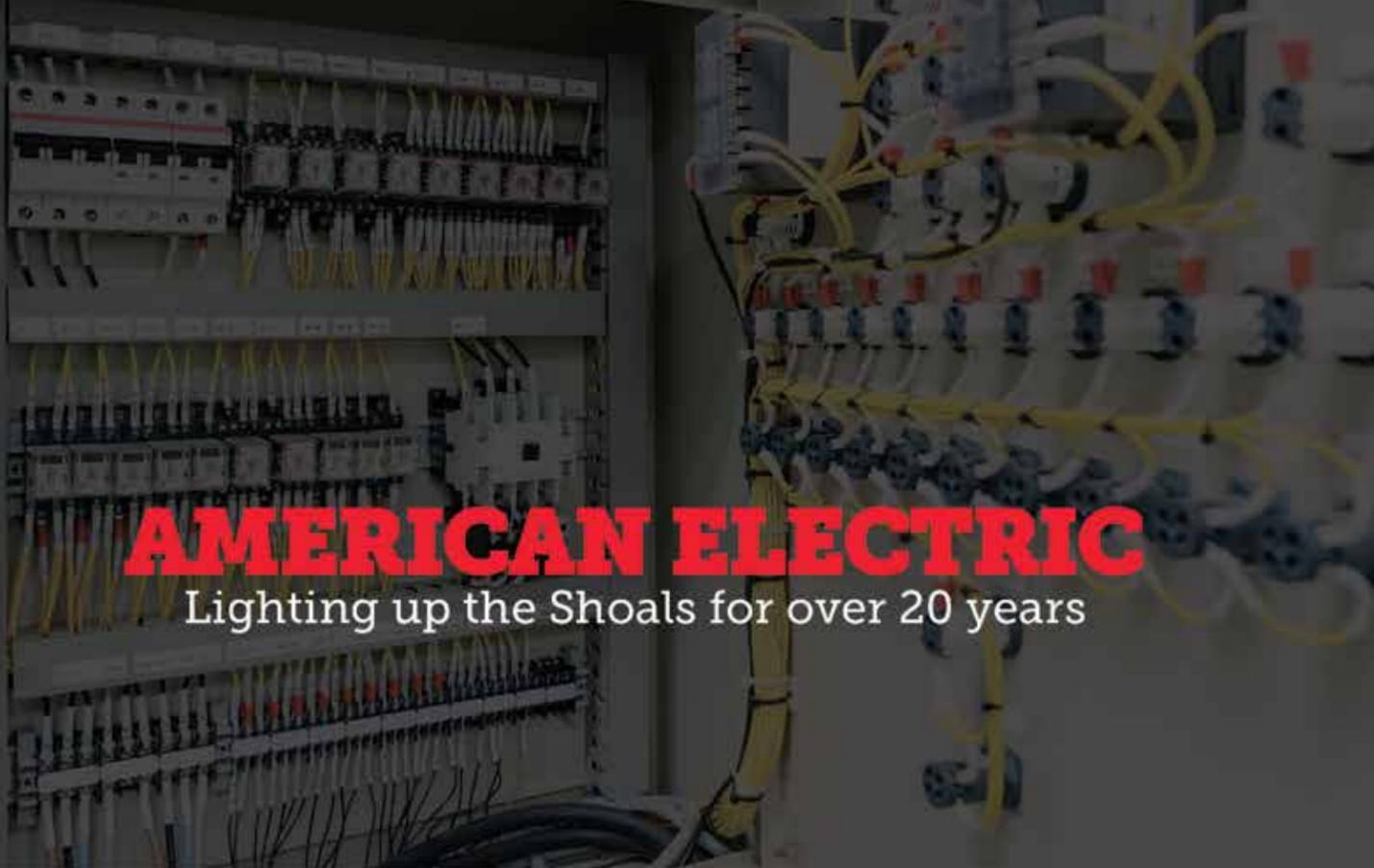


INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD OF ELECTRICAL WORKERS  
I.B.E.W. LOCAL 558, SHEFFIELD, ALABAMA



100<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY  
COMMEMORATIVE HISTORY BOOK





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OF KEEPING ALABAMA  
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# IBEW Local Union 558

Congratulations on your  
centennial anniversary!



Lonnie R. Stephenson  
*International  
President*

Kenneth W. Cooper  
*International  
Secretary-Treasurer*

Joseph S. Davis  
*International Vice President,  
Fifth District*



## CHARTER MEMBERS AND ALL WHO FOLLOW SET THE COURSE FOR LOCAL 558'S PROSPERITY

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

First and foremost, I wish to welcome all of our members, spouses and special guests who took time out of their busy schedules to celebrate this great event, the 100th Anniversary of I.B.E.W. Local Union No. 558. I also would be remiss if we did not recognize all of our sponsors who helped make this celebration possible.

As we look back over the past 100 years, we must acknowledge our charter members who started Local 558 in February 1918, as well as the members who have followed in their passing. They are the ones who fought for better conditions and wages, the benefits of which our members enjoy today.

Our charter members also laid the foundation for our work ethic and instilled the pride we take in our craftsmanship. I will always remember coming up as a young journeyman and learning the saying "8 for 8."

Let us also remember how far we have come in safety and education. Our partnership with NECA and other signatory contractors has developed one of the finest apprenticeship programs in North America. Our young future journeyman will be the ones who continue to pass down the knowledge for future generations to come.

And let us never forget the I.B.E.W. will always be the strongest labor organization in the country.

So today, we must all, as I.B.E.W. Brother and Sisters, stand together and united if we are to survive what the future holds.

In closing, words cannot describe what a pleasure and honor it is to be a part of this great union and to have the privilege of serving the members of Local No. 558 as business manager and financial secretary since 2012.

Fraternally yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Ralph Mayes'.

Ralph Mayes, Business Manager/Financial Secretary  
I.B.E.W. Local Union No. 558



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**I.B.E.W. Local 558 and Union Histories give special thanks to the following for their contributions to this book:**

Local 558 office staffers Patricia Byrd and Kathy Williams  
I.B.E.W. Museum Manager and Curator Curtis Bateman  
Local Historian Betty Dyar, Alfred H. Moses Local History Room, Sheffield Public Library  
Local 558 retirees Bud Blackstock, Bill Bowen, Doug Watkins

**Sources cited:**

*The Civilian Conservation Corps in Alabama, 1933-1942: A Great and Lasting Good*, Robert Pasquill

Head Historian: Calvin Jefferson  
Art Direction: Andy Taucher  
Layout & Design: Steven Demanett





## OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS ARE A TESTAMENT TO LOCAL 558'S PROUD PAST, PROMISING FUTURE

With great joy and excitement, I welcome members and special guests to the 100th anniversary celebration of I.B.E.W. Local Union No. 558! We are honored and grateful that you are attending this monumental event and helping the local celebrate its rich history.

Records show that 1918 was one of the coldest years on record in our area; however, 15 brave men ventured out that year and helped charter one of the strongest locals in North America. We all know it is an honor and a privilege to be a member of the I.B.E.W., but it is also a little more special to be a member of No. 558.

Our local has played a pivotal role in our nation's defense, it has helped mankind set foot on the moon and – just as importantly – it has powered many homes, helping mothers and fathers raise their families. As one, the local had given the breadwinners of each Local 558 family dignity in their careers.

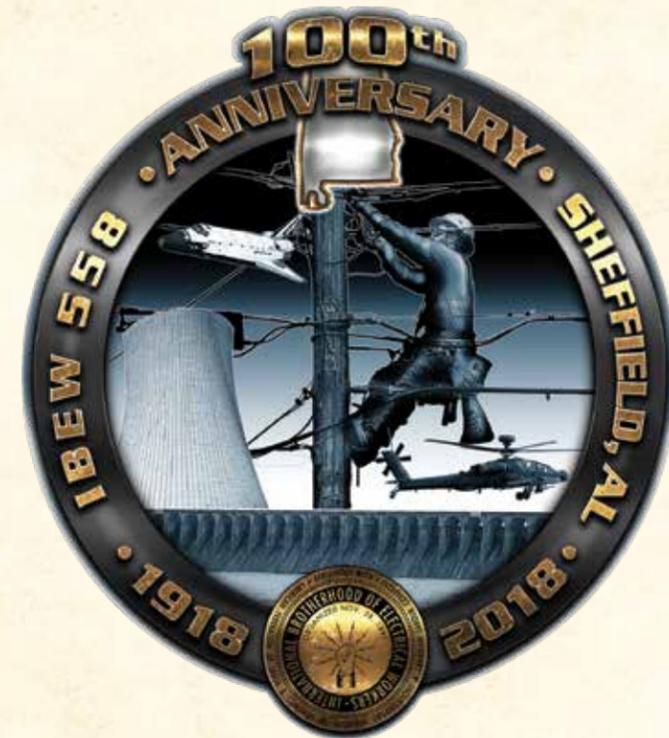
Each and every member of this Local Union has laid a brick on our foundation and placed a fingerprint on the local's DNA. From the original 15 members to the most recently obligated, each one has in some way helped shape the local into what it is today. As members, we have stood together, side by side, during some great victories and shed tears on each other's shoulders during the most difficult of times. Yet today, we can reflect back and hold our heads high, knowing that we have come a long way in 100 years.

Reaching a milestone of this nature in the South is something in which we can take great pride. But there is still much more work to do, and we are not letting up. Each generation is a product of its respective predecessor, and that is why it is imperative that we pour everything we have into the next generation. What can we do during these next 100 years? How can we mold a stronger and brighter future for those to come? These are self-examinations we must take on collectively, and I truly believe in my heart that we will continue on that path.

In closing, I cannot express how grateful and indebted I am for the support and encouragement I have personally received from Local 558 along the way. It is humbling to be a small part of something so much bigger than one individual. Serving as an officer of our great local has been the reward of a lifetime.

God bless the I.B.E.W. and God bless Local 558.

Tony Quillen, President and Assistant Business Manager  
I.B.E.W. Local Union No. 558



## I.B.E.W. Local No. 558

*100-Year Anniversary Celebration*

**Friday, March 2, 2018**

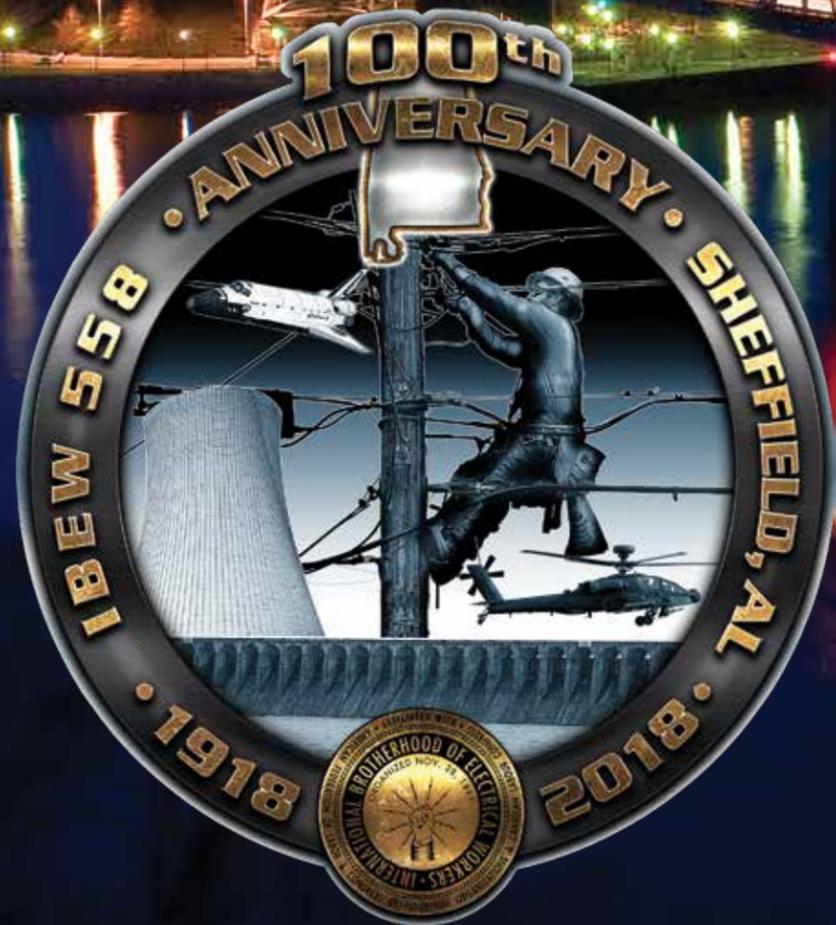
**Marriott Shoals Hotel & Spa**

10 Hightower Place  
Florence, Alabama

Cocktail Reception.....	6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.
Welcome Remarks.....	7:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.
Heavy Hors D'oeuvres Reception .....	7:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.
Live Entertainment & Dancing.....	7:30 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.

*The Century-Long Story of I.B.E.W. Local 558, Sheffield, Alabama*

# KEEPING THE 'ELECTRICAL CENTER OF THE NATION' CONNECTED FOR 100 YEARS



*“Our boys are giving their best to the cause and showing the stuff that men are made of.”*

Soon after the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (I.B.E.W.) chartered Local No. 558 on February 28, 1918, to serve northwest Alabama, Local 558 Press Secretary G. M. Campbell made that declaration in a letter to the July 1918 *Journal of Electrical Workers*, the union’s monthly journal. Indeed, by that time, the local was already making an impact and would continue to do so – as its charter members had undoubtedly envisioned the local would even before they were organized.

Those men were working in the electrical department of the U.S. Nitrates Plant No. 1 that was under construction in Sheffield for just three months and, when completed after only eight months, would produce munitions for World War I and commercial chemicals. (Nitrates Plant No. 2 was being built at the same time in nearby Muscle Shoals.) As charter member Brother Joe M. Stutts recalled in a letter in the March 1949 I.B.E.W. *Journal*,

“What a winter we had when construction first began! There were three very small towns here at the time. Every available space was filled! No rooms! No place to eat! Mess halls and barracks began springing up everywhere.”

Shortly before applying for their charter with the union earlier that February, they had selected a committee to present a list of demands for improved pay and conditions to Air Nitrates Corporation, which was overseeing construction of the \$80 million plant for the U.S. Army Ordnance Corps. The electrical employees were seeking 90 cents per hour for foremen, 75 cents for journeymen, 37-1/2 cents for helpers and double-time pay for all overtime, Saturday afternoons, Sundays and holidays.

However, upon presenting the petitions for improved wages and working hours, the committee was informed that if the workers did not like the employment conditions, they could

*Continued after next spread.*



I.B.E.W. founder and first president Brother Henry Miller reportedly went without food and other necessities and instead used his earnings to travel the country to organize local unions in various cities after he and a small group had officially formed the **National Brotherhood of Electrical Workers** during a convention on November 21, 1891 in St. Louis. (During the 1899 convention in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the union's name was officially changed to the **International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers**.) Brother Miller passed away on July 10, 1896, while working as head lineman for the Potomac Electric Power Company when he was electrocuted and fell from a pole; he was only 38 years old.



seek work elsewhere. Having been informed of the company's response, just about every man proceeded to walk off the job – although the electrical department's superintendent eventually convinced them to return to their work "pending adjustment of their grievance." The following day, however, the committee was discharged and removed from the plant grounds by the police.

The next morning, all of the men held a mass meeting during which they appointed another committee to demand the superintendent reinstate the dismissed workers. That committee was also escorted off by the police, but one

member was able to "sneak" back onto the grounds and meet with the superintendent of the Air Nitrates Corporation, who reportedly stated that he had never seen the list of demands and agreed to meet with the electrical workers' committee that afternoon.

During that meeting, which was also attended by the head of the company's electrical contractor, **Westinghouse Church Kerr Company**, the electrical employees were assured that their wage demands were being considered by government and company leaders in Washington. The employers also assured the men that if they returned to their work pending the wage adjustment, improvements in living conditions would be given to them immediately. After the committee reported that offer to the men, they voted to return to work the following morning and wait for the wage adjustment.

Three days later, however, the company posted a wage scale of 60 cents per hour for journeymen, time-and-one-half pay for overtime and Saturday afternoons, and double time for Sunday and holidays – well below what the workers had requested. What's more, the company made no mention of wages for foremen or helpers.

Exasperated, the electrical department employees appointed **H. J. Gregory** as their

business agent and assessed themselves to pay him a salary. According to Brother Campbell, "Even the men who were not carrying (union) cards voted for and paid this assessment."

They then met on February 17, 1918, during which the outside linemen and inside wiremen working at the plant wrote to the I.B.E.W. informing the international office (which was located in Springfield, Illinois, at the time) that they were "desirous of forming a local union." The letter went on to state, "We think that if an international organizer could help in that he could get a good many applications at the other plant and there are some men in town who have signified their desire to come in."

Sixteen men signed the letter and the application for a charter, which were sent along with a \$10 application fee.

Brother Stutts later remembered, "We knew very little about a union, so of course, some of the old-timers had to come in to organize us."

Soon after, Local 558 was chartered as a "mixed" inside wiremen and outside linemen local and its officers were installed on March 13, 1918, with **Brother A. D. Hughes** serving as recording secretary and Brother Gregory as business agent and financial secretary. Meetings would be held in the **Independent Order of Odd Fellows Hall** in the city the second and fourth Wednesdays of each month.

## LOCAL 558 CHARTER MEMBERS

Harry J. Gregory  
James Parker  
F. J. McCoun  
H. C. Halley  
Frank Priest  
G. H. McKinstry  
Samuel Butcher  
L. E. Givens  
Sherman Newman  
J. C. Giles  
A. D. Hughes  
J. P. Cross  
David Richardson  
M. L. Garrett  
W. W. Moon

## BUILDING UP A LOCAL AND A DAM

Even with its plant's electrical department fully organized and I.B.E.W. Local 558 operational, Air Nitrates posted a wage scale of 60 cents for journeyman electrical workers on the same day the local was installed. In response, the local sent Business Agent Gregory to again inform the company that the electrical workers stood by their original demands while noting that the plumbers, steamfitters and structural iron workers on the job had been given their request of 75 cents per hour after being out on strike for a week.

U.S. Nitrates Plant No. 2 in Muscle Shoals, July 1918





During World War I, Local 558 "backed up our Brothers in this craft and in others who have joined the colors across the pond" by purchasing U.S. Liberty Bonds, making "liberal" donations to several organizations "assigned to war work" and working 10 hours a day, seven days a week for nearly 10 months.

Press Secretary Campbell subsequently announced in the April 1918 *Journal*, "If we do not receive this adjustment within a short time, we will be compelled to strike the job, so (we) would not advise any floating brother (*that is, I.B.E.W. travelers*) come this way at this time."

Unable to "get any satisfaction ... in regards to our demands," Local 558 went on strike in late May – or as Brother Campbell explained in the July 1918 *Journal*, "The boys decided to take a much needed vacation." After one week, the local returned to work "to keep what little influence we had on the job" but also continued negotiating.

Then on June 9, 1918, the local's demands were finally ratified at 75 cents per hour for journeymen, 85 cents for foremen, 40 cents for helpers, one-and-one-half time for overtime and Saturday afternoons and double-time for Sundays and holidays.

By that time, Local 558 had grown to more than 200 members strong, many of whom would soon be working on construction of the new, coal-fired *Wilson Steam Plant* in Muscle Shoals. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had begun building the plant in 1918 to provide urgently needed power while construction of the *Wilson Dam*, which also began that year to provide power for the two nitrate plants in the

area, would continue over the next six years. Accordingly, the Steam Plant began generating electricity just 10 months after the project commenced. (*According to the Tennessee Valley Authority, the plant was used intermittently during the 1940s and 1950s, was eventually retired in 1966 and was demolished in 1968.*)

But during the early stages of construction, on October 15 that year the local sent a committee to Washington to present the War Board with its new grievances for better conditions, an increase of 10 cents in the hourly scale and double time for all overtime. The local then on October 20 voted to strike on Thursday, October 24, if it "did not get some consideration."

After continued stalling and negotiations, Local 558 went on strike again on November 18, halting the government projects in its jurisdiction. After being out for 10 days, the local received an agreement that provided better hospital service; assurances in cases of death that employees not to be buried in unknown graves (as had taken place); that the conditions of the restaurants and mess halls be adjusted to "suit the present set scale of wages paid and be kept in a sanitary condition;" that the men will not have to stand in line in the rain and mud to get their time cards and pay; that the bunk house be furnished with heat to be comfortable "and be kept in a sanitary condition for the protection of our health;" that free transportation to and from camp "in heated cars" be provided; that the employers "shall have a closed shop job;" that an increase in wages be assured; and that an answer be given no later than December 15.

At that time, Local 558 journeymen were making \$33 for a 44-hour week. The Air Nitrates Corporation was offering men on maintenance work a flat salary of \$45 per week, for eight hours, seven days per week.

"There are very few of our men falling for this line of stuff, for they know as soon as the

construction work is over this salary will be cut probably to \$15 or \$20 per week, but if we can hold them on a straight hourly basis it will mean more money in the future," Local 558's press secretary explained in the December 1918 *Journal*. "The above named corporation has broken their promise to the closed shop clause in our agreement. All crafts are very much dissatisfied with everything in general. Some have struck the job and others (are) just waiting to pull it when things get right."

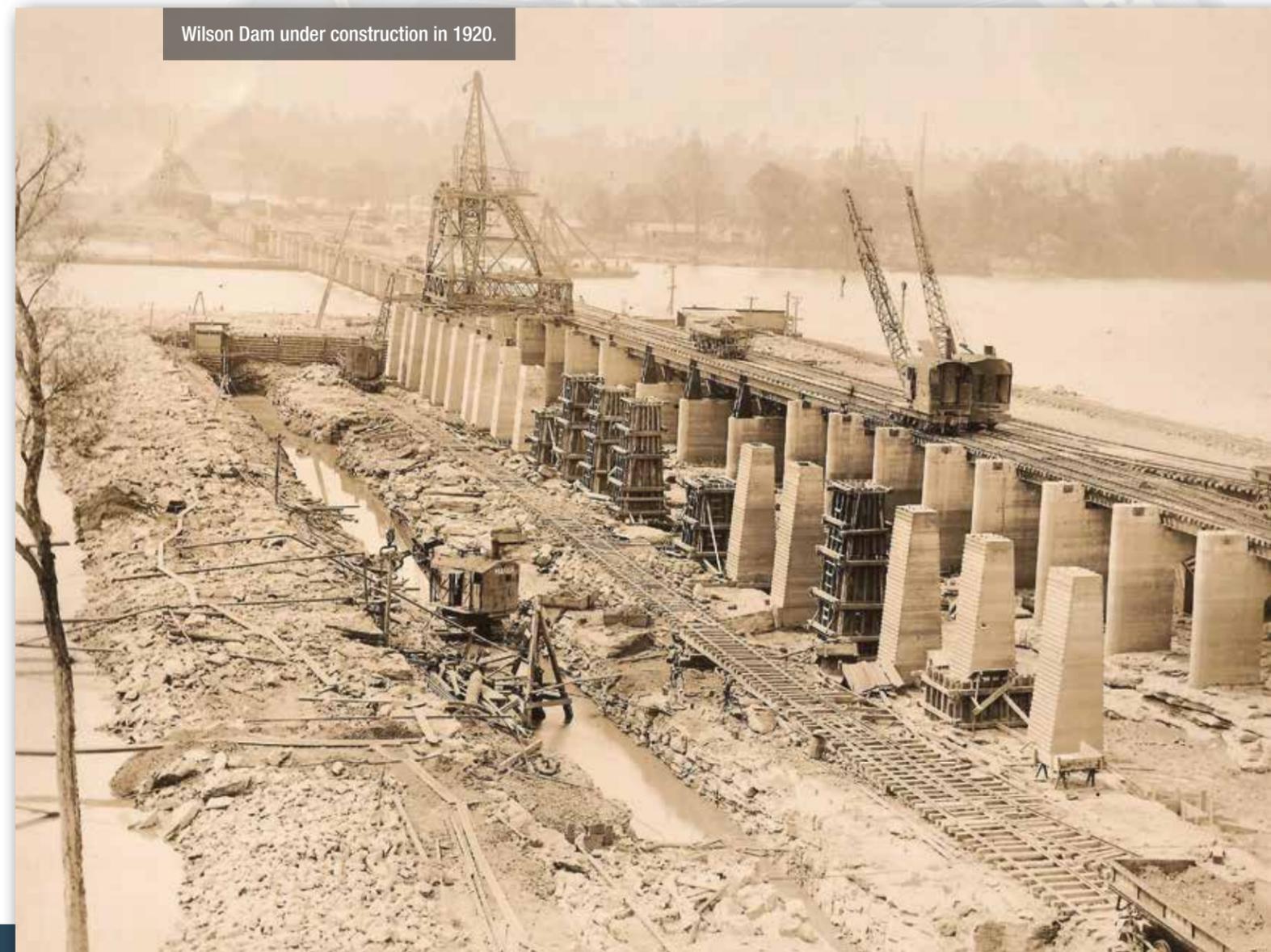
But after World War I ended in November 1918, many Local 558 members left the Tri-Cities area of Florence, Tuscumbia and Sheffield, leaving only about 75 union electrical workers to complete the Wilson Steam Plant. Once the plant was up and running in mid-

1919, more members left the local as there was no work in the area, and soon after, only 50 members remained and the local's treasury was nearly empty.

### **A STRONG FIGHT AND A NEW LOCAL**

**A**s 1919 progressed, Local 558 members were working at the Air Nitrates Plant No. 2 in Muscle Shoals, which was now producing non-military chemicals such as farming fertilizers. Construction of the \$47 million Wilson Dam, spanning the Tennessee River between Lauderdale and Colbert counties, under the Corps of Engineers had also begun to pick up, and a few Local 558 members were also put to work there.

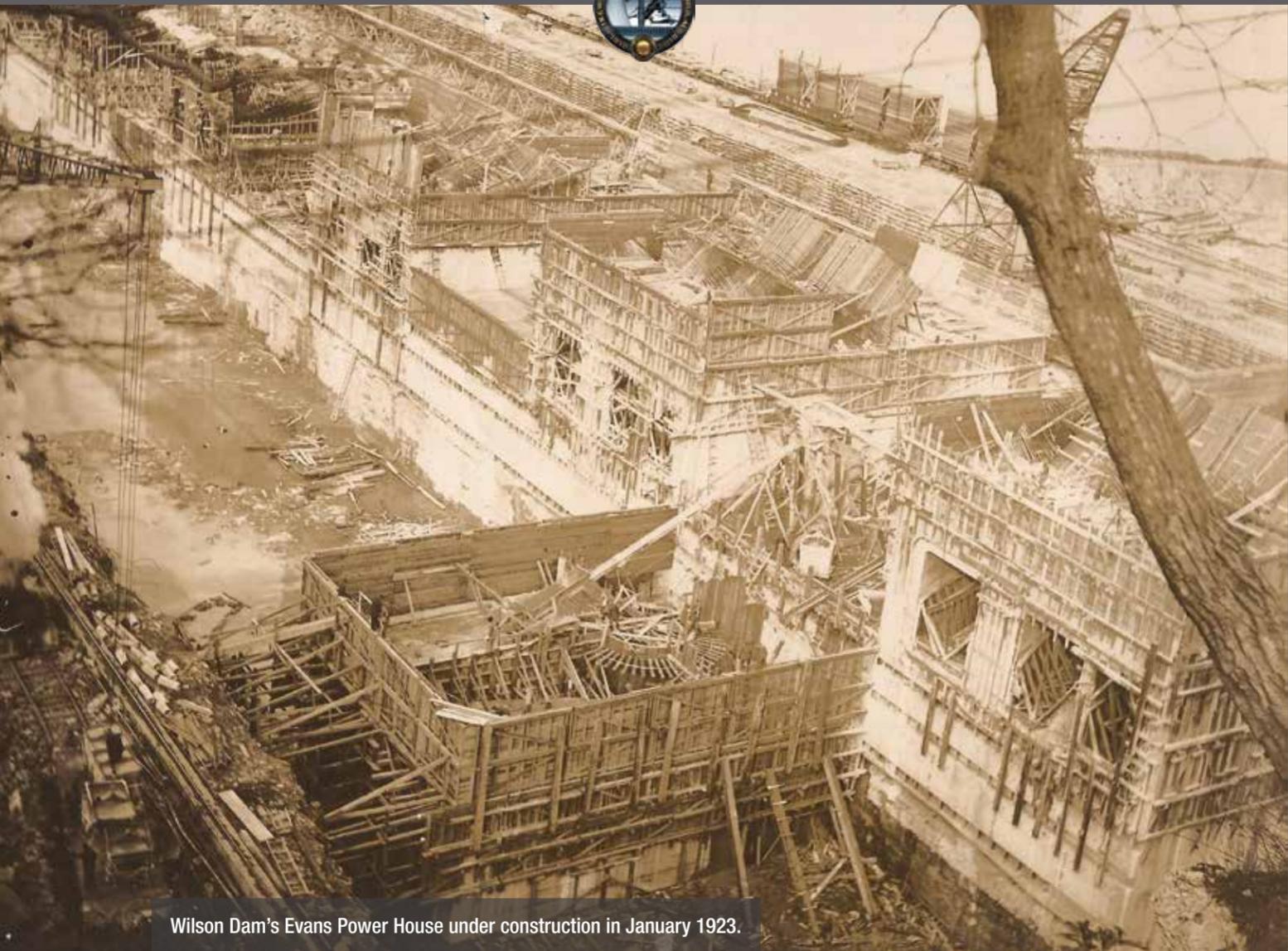
Wilson Dam under construction in 1920.



**NOTICES.**  
Any union man working within jurisdiction of L. U. No. 558, that does not put T. C. in this Local Union will have to pay \$1.00 per day for each day he works.  
J. R. Lovett, B. A.

Announcement in the September 1918 I.B.E.W. Journal ("T. C." referring to "travel card").





Wilson Dam's Evans Power House under construction in January 1923.

With the increasing work, more Local 558 men were added to those projects until the local was 325 members strong.

But the local continued to struggle with gaining fair conditions from its employers, who refused to raise wages from 70 cents to 87-1/2 cents per hour and also promoted an "open shop," and on May 16, 1919, again went out on strike at Plant No. 2. After making every effort to get its "just and rightful demands," the local appealed to the War Department and to the U.S. Congress, whose Military Affairs Committee ordered an investigation, prompting the electrical workers to return to work on June 10 under the condition that there

would not be any discrimination against them.

However, the union was informed that the plant would be shut down about the first of July whether it was completed or not. To compound conditions, the Wilson Dam was not hiring more journeymen and was only taking on helpers at 55 cents per hour.

Meanwhile, Local 558 was also on strike against the Sheffield Power and Light Company in an attempt to gain better conditions and wages for members working for the municipal utility.

Having moved its offices from Sheffield to

Florence by the end of 1919, Local 558 did make some gains with its private contractors within its jurisdiction, all of which were "closed" union shops by 1920. On March 31, 1920, the local reached a new agreement with those shops giving journeyman linemen and wiremen a 20-cent raise to a new scale of \$1.10 an hour and apprentices 85 cents per hour.

Meanwhile, nearly every member of the local was working on the Wilson Dam, which was under the supervision of J. G. White Corporation – allowing [Press Secretary A. W. Kruge](#) to declare in the July 1920 *Journal*, "Things look good on our part in this fight."

The local had almost fully organized its jurisdiction by the end of 1922, and its membership list continued to grow as the local was taking in new members at almost every meeting. "It isn't a very pleasant place for the scab or open shop advocate," [Press Secretary W. S. Spiegel](#) wrote in the December *Journal*. "We have completely whipped the open shop advocates. Now, instead of fighting us, they are calling on us to help them do some fighting. ... At present, all the contractors of any importance are working union labor and asking for cards for themselves. So, boys, you see we have converted them by putting up a hard, clean fight."

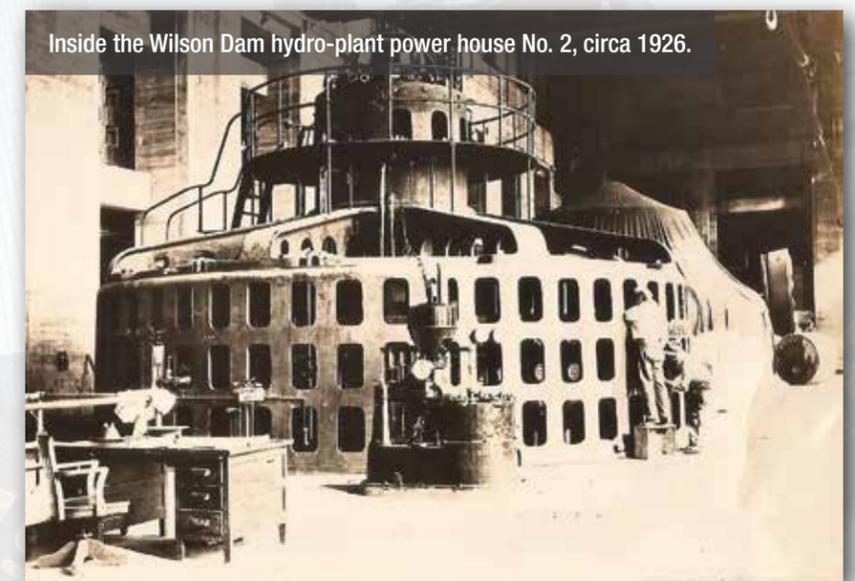
The union was still at odds with the government over wages on its projects in the Tri-Cities region, however. That year, skilled labor working on federal construction was making about \$119 per month – "just a meager pittance," Brother Spiegel proclaimed – and had to pay their own transportation and for house lights and water on the government housing reservations.

In response, the local and even the area Chambers of Commerce sent petitions to U.S. representatives in Washington "in order to have this matter adjusted."

A government shutdown of the Wilson Dam for lack of funding in late 1922 that lasted into early 1923 nearly eradicated Local 558. Even after money was appropriated to finish the project over the next three years, pay was only \$135 per month for all classes of electrical work and the local, even with a dwindled membership of 69 men in good standing, had two men for every one job available.

By April 1923, about 20 or 30 electricians and about 8 or 10 linemen were working on the dam for those unsatisfactory wages and under the management of the government's anti-union U.S. Army Col. W. J. Barden. Accordingly, as the local's press secretary reported in the May *Journal*, "When they ask for a raise in wages, all they get is, 'If you don't like the present scale of wages, seek employment elsewhere. We do not care to have in our employment men who are dissatisfied.'"

Col. Barden was relieved of his duties on the Wilson Dam that spring, and in his place a Lt. Col. Spalding took over and "opened up his



Inside the Wilson Dam hydro-plant power house No. 2, circa 1926.



Wilson Dam, early 1930s

heart to the common labor,” raising wages for workers to \$3 and \$3.20 per day starting June 1. Soon after, the local’s members were “going ahead at breakneck speed with this work,” with crews on the north and south sides of the dam of about 17 electricians, 12 linemen and 14 electrical helpers each engaged in the work.

During the height of construction of the Wilson Dam, some Local 558 members were dissatisfied with “what members from the other side of the river were doing.” While the local’s charter was in Florence, some members ask for a separate charter for Sheffield which was granted on August 20, 1924, and the new

I.B.E.W. Local No. 746 of Sheffield was chartered August 20, 1924, and was amalgamated into Local 558 on December 31, 1930, while Local 558 was still located in Florence.

I.B.E.W. Local No. 746 was organized with the 50 percent of the local’s membership that lived on the south side of the dam.

When the dam was completed in late 1924 with only 40 percent of its electric generating capacity installed (its first electricity generating unit would not go into service until September 1925), there were only about 60 members in each Local 558 and Local 746. The two locals would coexist for the next couple of years, but “one by one, members failed to pay their dues” and Local 746 eventually transferred all of its members back into No. 558 on December 31, 1930.

Elsewhere, during the mid- and late-1920s, little construction work was going on in Local 558’s jurisdiction. What’s more, the local was not inclined to work with the Alabama Power Company, which had some projects in the area, as it was an English corporation and the local preferred to work for American employers.

### ENTER THE TVA AND NEW LIFE

The entire State of Alabama was already in financial distress when *The Great Depression*, one of the worst economic collapses in the history of the United States, officially took hold with the stock market crash of October 29, 1929 – history’s “Black Tuesday.” By 1930, only about half of the state’s population was employed full time and its vital cotton industry was on the verge of being nearly wiped out.

The Depression severely impacted the northern Alabama electrical construction industry and Local 558, as well. As such, three years into the historic catastrophe, the local had diminished to just seven dues-paying members by 1933: brothers E. M. Smith, W. A. Bloss, C. A. James, G. C. Spence, Joe M. Stutts, A. Cooper and Jimmie Lummus.

Federal relief programs, particularly those created by President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s “New Deal,” alleviated some of the problems throughout the country and in Alabama caused by the economic catastrophe. In particular, the federal government’s *Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA)* agency, which was established in May 1933, created new economic activity in northern Alabama including the production of electrical power along the Tennessee River and its tributaries – which would prove to be a boon for Local 558, which had no work whatsoever during the early 1930s and into mid-1933.

Soon after President Roosevelt inspected Muscle Shoals in January that year and signed the bill creating the TVA just a few months later, the agency took over the Wilson Dam as the keystone of its energy program and the idle nitrate plants for fertilizer production, each of which would soon employ Local 558 members.



The TVA then began its massive program of building new dams, hydroelectric generating stations and flood-control projects, beginning locally with the \$88 million [Wheeler Dam](#) on the Tennessee River between Lauderdale and Lawrence counties in Alabama on November 21, 1933, eventually employing many more I.B.E.W. electrical workers. (*Wilson and Wheeler would be two of nine dams on the river owned and operated by the TVA.*)

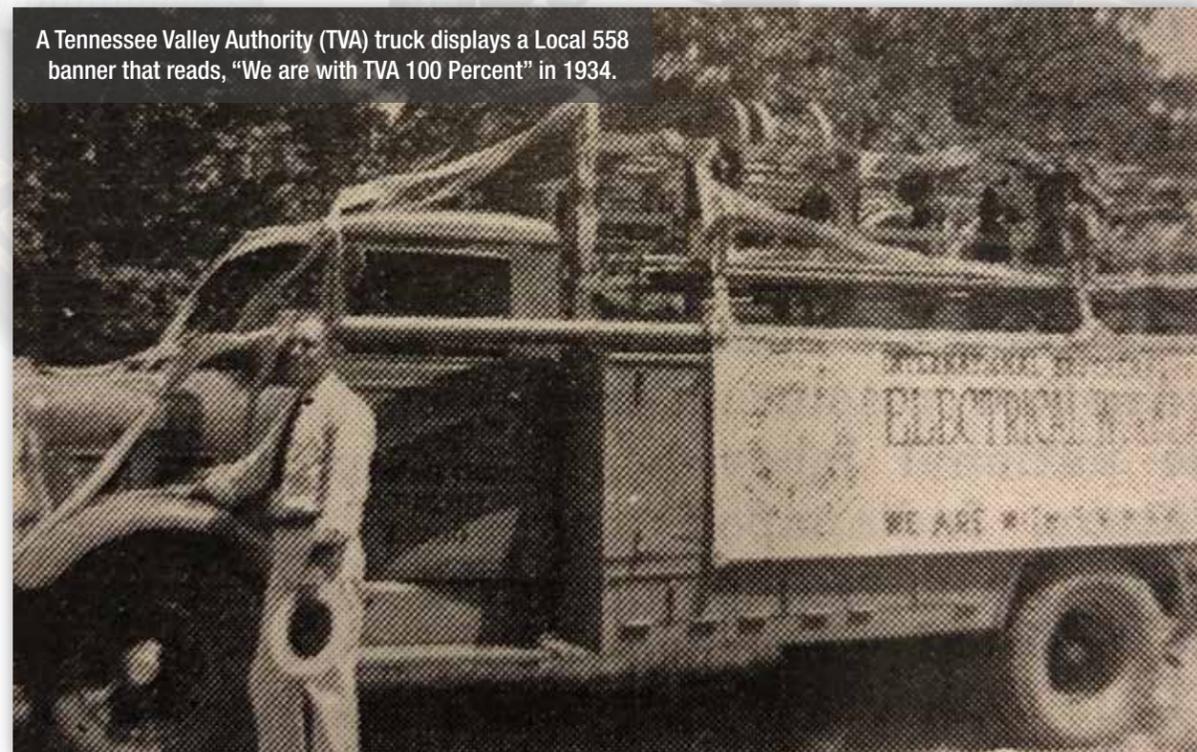
Wages set by the TVA were \$1 per hour, which would go up to \$1.10 after two years and then up to \$1.25 after another two years.

Consequently, with the construction of a large Civilian Conservation Corps camp in Muscle Shoals and the TVA beginning its numerous projects, older members and new electrical workers began coming into Local 558. Within two years, most all electrical work in the Tri-Cities area and the TVA were unionized, including all electrical workers on the Wilson and Wheeler dams.

Meanwhile, over an eight-month period from early spring to fall 1934, the TVA built 160 miles of rural electric line in Lauderdale County with Local 558 linemen under the supervision of [Brother William H. Perry](#). Rural electrical line and house wiring work continued to “boom” throughout the rest of the year, including installation of a new, 36-mile high-line in Athens, Alabama. In fact, the entire TVA outside division was “100 percent I.B.E.W.” and Local 558 had the two largest electrical shops in its jurisdiction signed to its agreement.

As a tangible display of organized labor’s sudden and palpable gains, Labor Day in the Tri-Cities “witnessed the largest union parade ever put on in these parts,” according to [Press Secretary John Graham](#) in the October 1934 *Journal*.

“This local is going ahead by leaps and bounds,” [Brother Graham](#) continued. “Less than one year ago, this local had seven members. Last night we took in 10 new members, making 120, and with all members on the bustle, 558 will be one of the largest locals in the South.”



A Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) truck displays a Local 558 banner that reads, “We are with TVA 100 Percent” in 1934.



Local 558 members construct a transmission line for the Wheeler Dam in 1935.

The I.B.E.W. local in late 1934 also joined in the formation of the TVA Workers’ Council with delegates from all union trades. The council’s purpose was to represent the needs and concerns of all union construction employees before the agency.

The following year, the abundant employment continued as Sheffield, Tusculumbia and Florence had each obtained government loans to build new electrical systems. The TVA was also building the [Pickwick Landing Dam](#) in Tennessee, which began in March 1935, and a Local 558 crew of about 100 men built the dam’s high line early that year, while the local’s members were also rerouting the Wheeler Dam’s 44,000-volt line from the dam (instead of its old steam plant) to Wheeler Dam and rerouting the [Gorgas-Wilson Dam](#)’s 164,000-volt line.

Work using Local 558 members had also begun by June 1935 on the erection of a new, 126-ton crane for loading barges at Wilson Dam.

Before the end of the year, Local 558 had become so busy and had grown so quickly that it hired its first full-time business agent, [Brother L. O. “Lo” Petree](#). “He has been needed badly,” [Brother Graham](#) wrote in the January 1936 *Journal*, “and if we could have had him when TVA started, many things could have been accomplished for the good of organized labor.”

## CONTINUED COOPERATION AND GAINS

**B**y 1936, with construction of the Wheeler Dam nearing completion, Local 558 experienced some unemployment for the first time in a while. However, by the time it was finished on November 9, 1936, many Local 558 members were working on other TVA projects, such as the old fertilizer plants, the [Pickwick Dam](#) and the [Guntersville Dam](#) on the Tennessee River in Marshall County, on which construction began December 4, 1935.

Meanwhile, Local 558 linemen were kept very busy throughout the jurisdiction during the mid-1930s on several TVA projects, including one in Fayetteville, Tennessee, in late 1935. According to a report to the January 1936 *Journal*, the local’s crew was building lines for the TVA on one side of the road while the rival Tennessee Electric Power Company crew was building lines on the other side of the road.

That year, the local also completed an 81-mile-long line from Pulaski to Dickson, Tennessee, for the rapidly growing TVA. The line went through Columbia, Tennessee, where the local was also constructing a large electrical substation for the agency.

With most all of the local’s men being kept employed most all of the time, on January 1, 1937, all journeymen working for the TVA received a general wage increase of approximately 10 percent. Those favorable conditions in which Local 558 existed compelled Business Manager [Petree](#) to reflect

In 1937, the wives and girlfriends of Local 558 members joined the I.B.E.W. Women’s Auxiliary of the Muscle Shoals District that had earlier been formed by I.B.E.W. Local 765 of Sheffield. On November 23 that year, the group held a banquet and dance at the Wilson Dam Club to officially launch the auxiliary.



Local 558 crew of the TVA's Pickwick Dam Electrical Department in 1937.

in the March 1937 *Journal*:

*“Upon a number of occasions it has been clearly demonstrated that 100 percent cooperation has proved to be profitable both to the management and the organization. On several projects where we cooperated with each other, the labor cost has been reduced to as low as 50 percent of the original estimate, with the result that now we are constantly being called upon to furnish mechanics for the various projects within our jurisdiction, and at the same time we are maintaining the most pleasant relationship between the management of the various projects and our members.”*

Meanwhile, crews were working for the City of Florence on its municipal electric system to upgrade it from 2,300 to 4,000 volts. Other crews were installing the distribution system for Sheffield, a 100-percent union job under **Universal Electric Company** that included construction of an office and warehouse and employed several additional Local 558 members for a few weeks, as the contract

would eventually call for 1,600 residential and commercial services.

In Tuscumbia, the city purchased the Alabama Power System and took full charge of it on April 1, 1937, giving its municipal I.B.E.W. employees additional responsibilities.

Then on April 15, when the local's agreements with all contract shops expired, it submitted new agreements asking for an increase of 12-1/2 cents per hour, raising the scale for journeymen in the Tri-Cities and surrounding territories to \$1.12-1/2 per hour.

Continuing to flex its strength, Local 558 also went on strike that April against the **Boulogny Corporation** of Charlotte, North Carolina, which was working a project in Muscle Shoals City. After 12 days, the strike was settled to the local's "entire satisfaction," as every request it had made was granted, including the elimination of the second-class lineman classification, the removal of all non-union men from the job and the placement of union men to complete the work. Additionally, for the first time in the company's history, Boulogny signed a contract recognizing Local 558 as the sole bargaining agency for its employees.

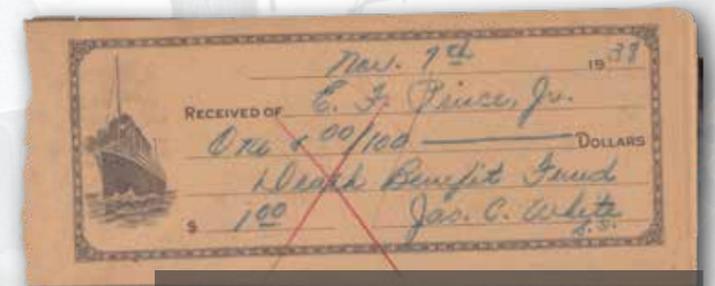
Throughout the balance of the 1930s, Local 558 electricians and linemen remained busy on countless projects throughout its jurisdiction, including work for the **Tri-Cities Electric and Plumbing Company**. Members were also employed on construction of the switchyard at the Gunterville Dam, which was completed in record time by the I.B.E.W. crew. While erection of switchyard steel had traditionally been performed by iron workers at a higher cost, Brother Graham noted in the January 1939 *Journal*, "If figures mean anything, and they certainly do with the TVA, the electrical workers will, no doubt, erect all future work pertaining to switchyard steel."

Employment did slow with the completion of the Pickwick Landing Dam on February 8, 1938, and then the Gunterville Dam on January 17, 1939. The situation was exacerbated in late 1938 when the I.B.E.W. went on strike in Chattanooga.

But the local continued to grow – and by 1939 had already become the largest I.B.E.W. local in the region. Additional significant projects on which members were employed during that time

included an expansion of the Wheeler Dam with two 86,000 K.V.A. generators (making a total of four such machines) and an extension of the Pickwick Dam with a new 40,000 K.V.A. unit (making a total of three 40,000 K.V.A. machines).

That year, Local 558 started a **Death Benefit** for its members. With the fund, each member would donate \$1 each time a member passes away and the money already in the fund would be given to the deceased's spouse or next of kin to assist with a funeral and other expenses.



Local 558 Brother E. F. Pence Jr.'s Death Benefit Fund payment receipt dated November 7, 1938.



Local 558 crew of the TVA's Guntersville Dam Electrical Department in November 1938.



Guntersville Dam, August 1939

### A New Home and Another War

Local 558 continued to make progress into the 1940s, and after several years of planning, the local in September 1940 moved into a new union hall it had purchased at 3325 Jackson Highway in Sheffield – where it would remain for the next 67 years. Relocating from the Labor Hall in Florence, the local bought the property outright “without a single penny of debt hanging over our heads to be passed on to those loyal members who stick with the union through thick and thin and those new members coming in,” Press Secretary George T. Hurt boasted in the October 1940 *Journal*.

The building, dubbed the “Electrical Workers Home,” was completely refurbished to “first-class condition” and featured ample space for seating 255 people. It also included an office for the business manager, another for

his secretary, a room for the examining board, two other rooms for committee meetings and three rooms in the basement to be used as training classrooms.

With World War II escalating into a truly global conflict, Local 558 was “doing its part in the national defense program by furnishing capable and loyal men” for war production. Before the end of 1940, many members were transferred to the Wilson Dam, where the TVA would install four additional generators, making a total of 12 units, to increase electrical output for the growing wartime-production facilities in the region.

During the fall of that year, the local also had several of its brothers working on a new substation to supply power for the construction of the TVA's Cherokee Dam in Tennessee.

Into 1941, additional defense work in which

the local's members were employed included a \$6.6 million explosives plant in Muscle Shoals and a \$22 million aluminum plant in Lister, Alabama, being built by the Reynolds Metals Company. Soon after, Local 558 electrical workers were also at work on an expansion to the Electro Metallurgical Company plant near the Wilson Dam to double the capacity of that facility – which the local's men had initially helped build.

Construction of the Huntsville Arsenal also began in 1941 with skilled labor from Local 558, which would have over 300 of its men working the project at its peak. Established as a second chemical weapons plant for the United States, the factory was renamed Redstone Arsenal in 1943 and through the war years produced more than 27 million chemical munitions and loaded 45.2 million ammunition shells (according to “Redstone Arsenal: Yesterday and Today” by Michael E. Baker).

After the United States officially entered World War II as a combatant following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, defense production on the home front continued and expanded, as did Local 558. By October 1943, wartime employment pushed the local's membership to about 700 as it was constantly adding workers from the new war industries in its jurisdiction.

Before the end of the year, the local organized the electrical workers at Decatur Iron and Steel Company and was working on an addition for the regional Goodyear factory under a closed-

shop contract. The local also had the Ingalls Iron Company shipyards at Decatur, where one of its major wartime activities was the work of 65 I.B.E.W. members employed by the Knight Electric Company to help build cargo ships for transporting war materiel.

Meanwhile, branches of Local 558 had been organized and were function in Huntsville and Decatur. “Things look good around the local's home in Sheffield,” Press Secretary Lee Crouch also reported in the April 1944 *Journal*. “All in all, some aspirin is needed occasionally, but not too much.”

### LOCAL 558 GAVE DURING SECOND WORLD WAR; ONE BROTHER MADE THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE

During World War II, Local 558 had more than \$70,000 invested in War Savings Bonds by October 1943 and just about every one of its roughly 700 members was involved in war-production work or serving in the military. At one point earlier that year, the local had 83 members in service to the country.

The local was also involved in various wartime civic activities. For instance, its business manager acted as an advisory member of the local branch of the War Manpower Board and another brother worked on the rationing board.

The local also tried to “keep the morale of our fighting men high” by sending cigarettes, messages of encouragement and other needs to them throughout the war.

Local 558 Brother Coy W. Phillips, a U.S. Navy Petty Officer-Fire Controlman First Class, was killed in action on April 6, 1945, off of Okinawa at age 23 while serving in the Pacific Theater.



Wheeler Dam, November 1938

## LOCAL 558 UNION HALL LOCATIONS

After Local 558 was chartered in February 1918, its initial offices were located on Tennessee Street in Florence above a pool room and meetings were held in the city's Carpenters Hall – where they would be held throughout the 1920s.

During the Great Depression, the local met during the first few years of the 1930s in the home of Business Manager-Financial Secretary Charles A. James. Before the end of the decade, the local's offices and meeting location were in the Labor Hall at 117-1/2 North Court Street in Florence from about 1935 through 1939 and for one year in the Labor Hall on East Tennessee Street.

In 1940, the local moved its offices and union hall to a building it purchased at 3325 Jackson Highway in Sheffield, which it dubbed the "Electrical Workers Home."

Local 558 remained at that location until January 29, 2007, when it moved to 1803 East 17th Street in Sheffield. The local resides in the 30,000-square-foot facility as it celebrates its 100th Anniversary in 2018.

By the end of 1944, Local 558's jurisdiction covered the construction and maintenance electricians and linemen of its surrounding area, and all electrical work in the area over the previous six year had been done under union agreements with the local. That jurisdiction included the cities of Sheffield, Florence, Tuscumbia, Decatur, Hartsell, Athens, Russellville and Huntsville, Alabama, and Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, and at the time, the local had a total membership of over 900.

Even as defense production halted after the



The Local 558 union hall on Jackson Highway in Sheffield, into which the local moved in 1940 and remained until 2007.



war ended in September 1945 and the many Local 558 members serving in the armed forces returned from duty, there were only brief periods of unemployment for the local during the next few years. While there was not much heavy construction in the jurisdiction, work still remained plentiful.

The local also continued to grow; so much so, in fact, that in the spring of 1946 the local hired its first-ever assistant business manager. According to Press Secretary J. Guy Daniels in the April 1946 *Journal*, Business Manager George E. Jackson had "sorely needed an assistant for several years."

Employment slowed, however, by 1949, even though by that time the local had taken over about 75 crane operators at the Reynolds Plant. But its more than 800 members were facing hard times ahead with a looming lack of construction work in the region.

Indeed, it would be another trying period for Local 558 and new Business Manager Charles S. Goidel. Before the end of the decade, the local dealt with an election at the Decatur Copper Tubing plant; contracts with Reynolds Metals and Alloys companies, in which the local accepted a 7-cent-per-hour increase; and agreements with General Electric. Out in the field, members were working on an installation of new turbines at Wheeler and Wilson dams and installation of some work at Reynolds Alloys being done by contractor Patterson Emerson-Comstock.

However, about 25 men remained idle in late 1949 as work in construction continued to lag. Nevertheless, in addition to its inside and outside construction divisions, the mixed-classifications Local 558 entered the 1950s with its maintenance men working at the TVA dams and in many service shops and private enterprises throughout its jurisdiction.

## OFFICIAL BALLOT Local Union 558

PRESIDENT	
VOTE FOR ONE	
<input type="checkbox"/>	J. O. Brown
<input type="checkbox"/>	T. R. Bosley
VICE-PRESIDENT	
VOTE FOR ONE	
<input type="checkbox"/>	O. E. Farley
<input type="checkbox"/>	G. A. (Pete) Douglass
BUSINESS MANAGER AND FINANCIAL SECRETARY	
VOTE FOR ONE	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Geo. E. Jackson
<input type="checkbox"/>	Robert H. (Bob) Broadfoot
<input type="checkbox"/>	O. C. Davis
<input type="checkbox"/>	C. E. Jessup
TREASURER	
VOTE FOR ONE	
<input type="checkbox"/>	W. R. Bloss, Sr.
RECORDING SECRETARY	
VOTE FOR ONE	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Richard F. Mason
<input type="checkbox"/>	Le Roy (Shorty) Couch
EXECUTIVE BOARD	
VOTE FOR FIVE	
<input type="checkbox"/>	W. J. (Boots) Cornelius
<input type="checkbox"/>	Harry W. Cornett
<input type="checkbox"/>	E. C. Easterwood
<input type="checkbox"/>	Joe M. Stutts
<input type="checkbox"/>	W. Glyn Davis
<input type="checkbox"/>	C. B. Simpson
<input type="checkbox"/>	James E. Lummus
<input type="checkbox"/>	F. A. Cantrell
<input type="checkbox"/>	W. O. Allen
<input type="checkbox"/>	C. E. (Shorty) Allen
EXAMINING BOARD	
Lineman	
VOTE FOR ONE	
<input type="checkbox"/>	W. T. Stevenson
<input type="checkbox"/>	A. J. Cutshall
Inside Wireman	
VOTE FOR ONE	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Walter R. Smith
<input type="checkbox"/>	G. C. Spence
<input type="checkbox"/>	P. E. Sealey
Maintenance Wireman	
VOTE FOR ONE	
<input type="checkbox"/>	C. W. Riley
<input type="checkbox"/>	Glenn K. Blackburn
DELEGATE TO T.V.A. WAGE CONFERENCE AND PANEL BOARD	
VOTE FOR ONE	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Charles S. Goidel
<input type="checkbox"/>	F. A. Cantrell
<input type="checkbox"/>	Alvis O. Gray

Local 558 ballot for election of officers in 1949.

## Up, Down and Politically Active

Local 558 and other trades locals whose members were employed by the TVA won a new agreement with increased wage rates beginning in 1950. Secured by the 14-member Tennessee Valley Trades and Labor Council, of which Local 558 had been a part since its inception several years earlier, negotiations with the TVA were conducted in accordance with plans developed jointly between labor and management over a period of years. Under those guidelines, both sides collected information on wage rates paid by employers in the area for work "comparable to work performed by TVA employees" and together determined rates that would be considered as "properly reflecting the rates prevailing in the area."

The following year, using the same negotiating tactic, Local 558 and other construction unions throughout the Tennessee Valley area were awarded an additional 25-cent-per-hour raise from the TVA.

During that time, a growing number of TVA projects, particularly maintenance and upgrade jobs, continued to employ I.B.E.W. members. As a result, by August 1951, Local 558's membership stood at 956 electrical workers and apprentices.

Into the following year, the local's members were working on good-sized projects that included the Muscle Shoals Phosphorus Development Works and the Monsanto Caustic Chlorine Plant, which together employed approximately 500 electricians. Many men from sister locals travelled into the area to work those jobs, including members of locals 11, 100, 108, 129, 130, 136, 226, 317, 369, 384, 397, 429, 433, 436, 446, 453, 460, 474, 479, 480, 495, 505, 525, 576, 611, 613, 649, 676, 697, 733, 755, 760, 779, 835, 846, 852, 917, 934, 995, 1077, 1317, 1516, 1531 and 1575.

"We are proud that these men saw fit to

Local 558 trade classifications that it represents changed in 1953 from "mixed" Inside and Outside to Inside, Outside, Radio-Television Service and Sound and Public Address. Electrical Manufacturing was added in 1956.

The local's classifications in 2018 are Inside, Outside, Radio-Television Service, Sound and Public Address, Electrical Manufacturing, Cable Television, Maintenance, Radio-Television Broadcasting and Utility, the newest disciplines having been added after 1974.

stop at our local and work with us," Local 558 Press Secretary F. A. Contrell proclaimed in the March 1952 *Journal*.

At that time and for the coming year, the local's journeymen were earning \$2.62-1/2 per hour, while fourth-year apprentices were being paid \$2.25 per hour and new apprentices were earning \$1 per hour.

A job at the Chemstrand Acrilan acrylic fiber plant in Decatur and the start of construction of the TVA's Colbert Steam Plant in Pride, Alabama, that summer, along with housing projects and "regular, routine

work," kept the local "humming" through the balance of the year.

Work in the jurisdiction came to a standstill in early 1953 when steelworkers went on strike throughout the country. However, many Local 558 members were able to travel for work, in particular with I.B.E.W. Local 816 of Paducah, Kentucky, and Local 702 of West Frankfort, Illinois.

The local received another raise that year to \$2.77 per hour, but \$1.20-per-day travel time it requested was not approved.

Employment remained stagnant as 1953 progressed and the Colbert Steam Plant moved along slowly, although before year's end, the local would have a large number of men building an air refrigeration plant in Decatur and working on a rebuild of the old Nitrate Plant No. 1, while about 200 members worked at the Redstone Arsenal. The local would also activate a Civil Service Unit covering the government employees connected with electrical work at the arsenal.

Local 558 apprenticeship graduate wiremen in 1952: (front row, left to right) Wink Hargrove, Lyn Worsham, Sam Kimbrough, Albert Rickard, Almond McGee, Pete Statom and Leona Alexander; and (back row, left to right) Raymond Woodis, (unknown), Paul Grigsby, R. W. Kirby, Owen Wallace, Clarence Cox and (unknown).



Local 558 brothers (left to right) Cecil Wylie, Hobart Butler, John Henson, Olin Wright and Marvin Beckham pose with the truck they would ride through a 1953 Labor Day parade.

Local 558 also successfully organized and negotiated new wages with the Franklin County Electrical Cooperative in Russellville, Alabama, during March 1953. The co-op's employees had been receiving approximately \$200 per month for journeymen; after joining the local, not only were they earning higher pay but they were also enjoying eight-hour workdays and 40-hour workweeks, sick leave of 12 days and vacation of 12 working days, in addition to New Year's Day, Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas day as paid holidays.

But in the interim, Press Secretary Granville O. Allen declared in the April 1953 *Journal*, "At the present time, 558 has more men on the bench than at any time in recent years."

In response to the state's passage of an anti-union "Right to Work" bill earlier that year, the local appointed a Political Action Committee during that time "to investigate the integrity of every individual seeking office in the State of Alabama." The committee, in turn, was to inform members about political candidates who favored and opposed organized labor.

By the spring of 1954, work on the Colbert Steam Plant had picked up significantly

Local 558 brothers (left to right) Dewey Robbins, Joe Peters, A. P. Des Ruisseaux, Business Manager Arnold Madison, President J. O. Brown, J. A. Allison and Harry Cornett stand atop a Local 558 float that would participate in a 1953 Labor Day parade.



Local 558 brothers (left to right) Donald Alexander, Glenn Young, E. C. Easterwood, Leon Speegle, John Ling and Bo Forsythe pose by a Local 558 float that would participate in a 1953 Labor Day parade.

and, as a result, all Local 558 members were employed. At its peak, the plant would employ 350 I.B.E.W. electrical workers, including several travelers.

Then in early 1955, the local received a boost of 11-1/2 cents per hour to its construction rate, bringing its scale with TVA and outside contractors up to \$3 per hour. But work on the Colbert plant had slowed as it was nearing completion (it would begin commercial operation on January 18), and by April 1955, the local only had a skeleton crew working there – and a large number of men again on the out-of-work "bench."



Local 558 members manning a TVA dam control room in 1954.

More new contracts for 1956, signed by local contractors and industrial employers, provided construction electricians with a 7-1/2-cent-per-hour raise to bring their hourly rate to \$3.07-1/2. A new agreement for maintenance electricians at the Reynolds Company gave them a 20-cent-per-hour raise.

Construction of the [Huntsville Times Building](#) at 2317 Memorial Parkway, which would be the newspaper's new home after it moved there from downtown Huntsville in 1956, was a solid source of employment that year.

Then into and throughout 1957, work increased almost exponentially with an influx of projects that included installation of a fabricating mill at Reynolds with contractor [Eastman-Ore Company](#), a Carbon Carbide job in Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, with the [Edenfield Electric Company](#) and various other jobs throughout the region with those contractors and [Bagby Electric](#), [Perry Electric](#) and [Rogers Electric](#). Before the end of the year, work was so "plentiful" that the local was hosting I.B.E.W. workers from 80 different locals representing 35 states – with the expectation that more would soon join them.

Another lull in work hit the local in mid-1959 and would continue through the remainder of the decade, during which time up to 80 members were often unemployed. The local was still at work on the large Redstone missile arsenal in Huntsville, where instrumentation and electronic-control work was providing many jobs, and work also continued on the multimillion-dollar aluminum rolling mill at Reynolds, which required about 75 miles of conduit and [Press Secretary Harold Gooch](#) described in the February 1960 *Journal* as "a veritable maze of electrical and electronic automatic controls."

### **MOON-SHOT HELPED AND HELD UP**

*"The work situation here is slow and is going to get slower."*

**A**s Brother Gooch indicated in the February 1960 *Journal*, the close of the 1950s and the opening of the 1960s was a particularly lean time for Local 558, which regularly had at least 100 unemployed members during that year-long period. Compounded by the impending completion of the Reynolds rolling mill

project, at the beginning of the new decade 110 members were on the local's out-of-work list – even though 100 electrical workers (down from a peak of 250) were still employed at Reynolds.

An addition to the Colbert Steam Plant did start on January 4, 1960, but only 15 wiremen and linemen were initially placed on the job. The addition of hydro-turbines at Wilson Dam was also underway but would progress slowly, while the announcement by Reynolds Metals that it would install a silicon furnace, which would be a significant source of work for construction electricians, was still just an announcement.

Subsequently, by May 1960 the local had about 130 men on the bench, although would go to work outside of the local's jurisdiction.

Worked picked up in June after several small contracts were let, which nearly cleared the unemployed roster. Meanwhile, construction also started on the 500,000 kilowatt generating-unit addition at the Colbert.

The following year brought with it "a measure of prosperity," Brother Gooch reported in the February 1961 *Journal*, as there was sufficient employment for the local's full membership. Negotiations between the local and the [National Electrical Contractors Association \(NECA\)](#) were also settled favorably by the Council on Industrial Relations, which awarded the local a 12-1/2-cent increase in wages to bring the hourly scales to \$3.86 outside of city limits and \$3.55 within the cities of Florence, Sheffield, Tuscumbia, Decatur and Huntsville. (At the time, most all work was being performed outside of those cities.)

As the year was coming to a close, everyone was still working and the local's future prospects of full-time employment were promising. Most encouraging were new jobs being started regularly in connection with the new [Marshall Space Center](#), which had officially opened at Redstone Arsenal on July 1, 1960, to develop the Saturn launch vehicles for the Apollo moon-landing program.



The officers and board of Local 558 in 1956: (seated, left to right) Assistant Financial Secretary William H. Pickens, Assistant Business Manager Donald W. Alexander, Assistant Business Manager John B. Smith, Business Manager & Financial Secretary Arnold Madison, Treasurer Wayland McKinney Jr., Recording Secretary R. F. Mason, Vice President J. C. McCulloch and President James O. Brown; and (standing, left to right) Executive Board members T. P. Montgomery, J. Grady Daniel, James E. Lummus, Felix A. Cantrell, E. C. Easterwood and John R. Broadway and Examining Board members Frank W. Potter, Austin N. Strickland, John L. Jackson and W. T. Stevenson.



Local 558 members of the maintenance crew at the Franklin Electric Cooperative in Russellville, Alabama, pose with the safety award they received in 1957 after putting in many thousands of working hours without a "lost time" accident: (front row, left to right) Frank Burcham, groundman; Nelson Duncan, lineman; and James Pounders, lineman; and (back row, left to right) Grady Paden, lineman; Weldon Stone, lineman and job steward; Ernest Dill, material clerk; and Kenneth McCaidin, lineman.

Full employment persisted into and throughout 1962. However, about 150 I.B.E.W. members working at Marshall went on strike in August 1962 to protest the employment of non-union electricians at the facility by the Baroco Electric Company of Pensacola, Florida, effectively disrupting projects involving the lunar program. The I.B.E.W. International Office directed the striking members to return to work, pending

an August 27 hearing by the President's Missile Sites Labor Commission on the "merits of the dispute." Within the next few days, most all of the union electrical workforce returned after a federal court mandate also ordered an end to the strike.

By 1963, Local 558 added a second assistant business manager, Brother Glenn Young, to help Business Manager James Haygood cover the local's massive jurisdiction. What's more, various wage negotiations had been settled by that time, most notably a new contract with NECA that, effective January 1, 1963, raised pay to \$4.15 per hour. New wage increases were also negotiated for employees of Tennessee Pulp and Paper Company; Armour Chemical; Tombigbee Electric Cooperative; City of Russellville Electric Department; Reynolds Metals and Alloys; Franklin County Electrical Cooperative; and TV Cable Corporation. Soon after, new contracts would be approved for I.B.E.W. employees of TVA; Joe Wheeler Electric Cooperative; the cities of Sheffield, Tuscumbia and Florence; and Muscle Shoals City Electric.

Work on rehabilitating and modernizing the eight original hydroelectric units at Wilson Dam, a \$9 million project, began in the fall of 1965 and would employ many Local 558 members until its completion in 1968. After



Local 558 picnic, 1959



nearly 40 years, the original units' turbine runners, bucket-type (Francis) wheels that drive the generators, were to be replaced. The project also included the building and modernizing of the generators, installing new governors and adding equipment to allow the units to be remotely controlled from the central control room.

The local's largest job moving through the second half of the 1960s was the new airport being built near Huntsville, where members were employed under Reynolds Electric and Engineering Company. (Originally known as the Huntsville Jetport when it opened in October 1967, it would later become Huntsville International Airport.) Several projects at Reynolds Metal, a large job at the 3M plant in Decatur and the start of construction of the TVA's new Browns Ferry Nuclear Plant near Athens – the agency's first atomic-generation site – added to the local's favorable employment in 1966 and 1967 while providing work for some travelers, too.

Augmenting gains being made out in the field, early in 1967 the local's Health and Welfare Committee established a new Health and Welfare Plan benefit for the local's members.

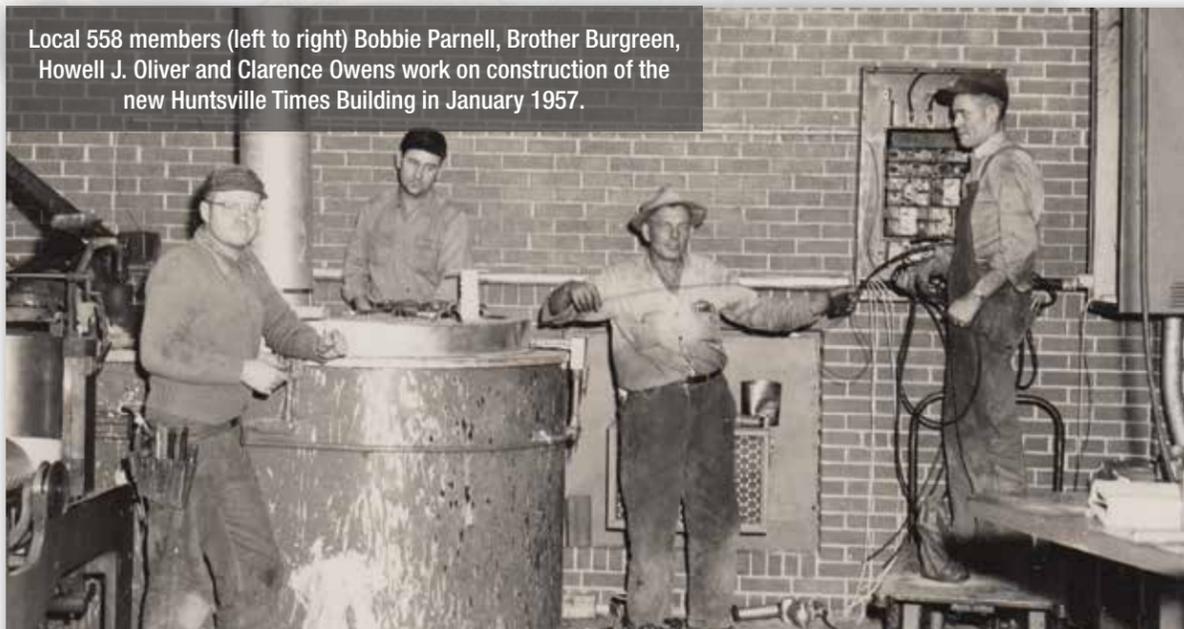
### AFTER A LULL, WORK GOES NUCLEAR

After the modernization of the original eight hydroelectric units at Wilson Dam was completed in early 1968 and Local 558 members helped finish construction of the new Southgate Mall in Muscle Shoals that year, the local experienced some slack time. "Work has been so slow here that even our traveling Brothers who live here have had to travel," Local 558 Press Secretary W. H. "Wink" Hargrove wrote in the July 1968 Journal.

However, the lull was brief – soon after, several major projects began to employ a large number of electrical workers, especially the Browns Ferry Nuclear Plant, which began building its switchyard that year.

By mid-1968, the local's members were also working on jobs in Huntsville at Automatic Electric for T. D. Little Electric and at Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company (PPG), Barber-Colman Company and a new hospital for Bagby Electric. Still more Local 558 members were at work for Reynolds Electric on IBM's three-

Local 558 members (left to right) Bobbie Parnell, Brother Burgreen, Howell J. Oliver and Clarence Owens work on construction of the new Huntsville Times Building in January 1957.





Local 558 float participates in the City of Decatur Labor Day parade in 1960.

story office building and a new sentinel job for the Army office building being done by Wall Electric Company of Huntsville.

With employment remaining strong into 1969, Local 558 received a 25-cent raise on January 1 and another 20-cent raise effective July 1 to bring its journeyman scale up to \$5.20, plus 15 cents per hour would be contributed by the employers into the Health and Welfare Fund.

Early that year, approximately 135 I.B.E.W. men were on the job at Browns Ferry Nuclear Powerhouse, including several travelers. About 100 more members were on the Automatic Electric and the PPG jobs, half of whom were travelers, and when the Automatic project finished up in late summer, construction of a Dunlop Tire and Rubber Company plant and a paper mill in Courtland for Champion Paper were already underway and using Local 558 members. *(The paper plant would open in 1970 and was purchased in 2000 by International Paper, which closed the facility in 2014.)*

In the wake of all the construction activity within its jurisdiction, by the end of the 1960s, Local 558 had grown to about 1,600 members. The decade came to a favorable conclusion for those brothers when, after contract negotiations with NECA had bogged down, the Council on

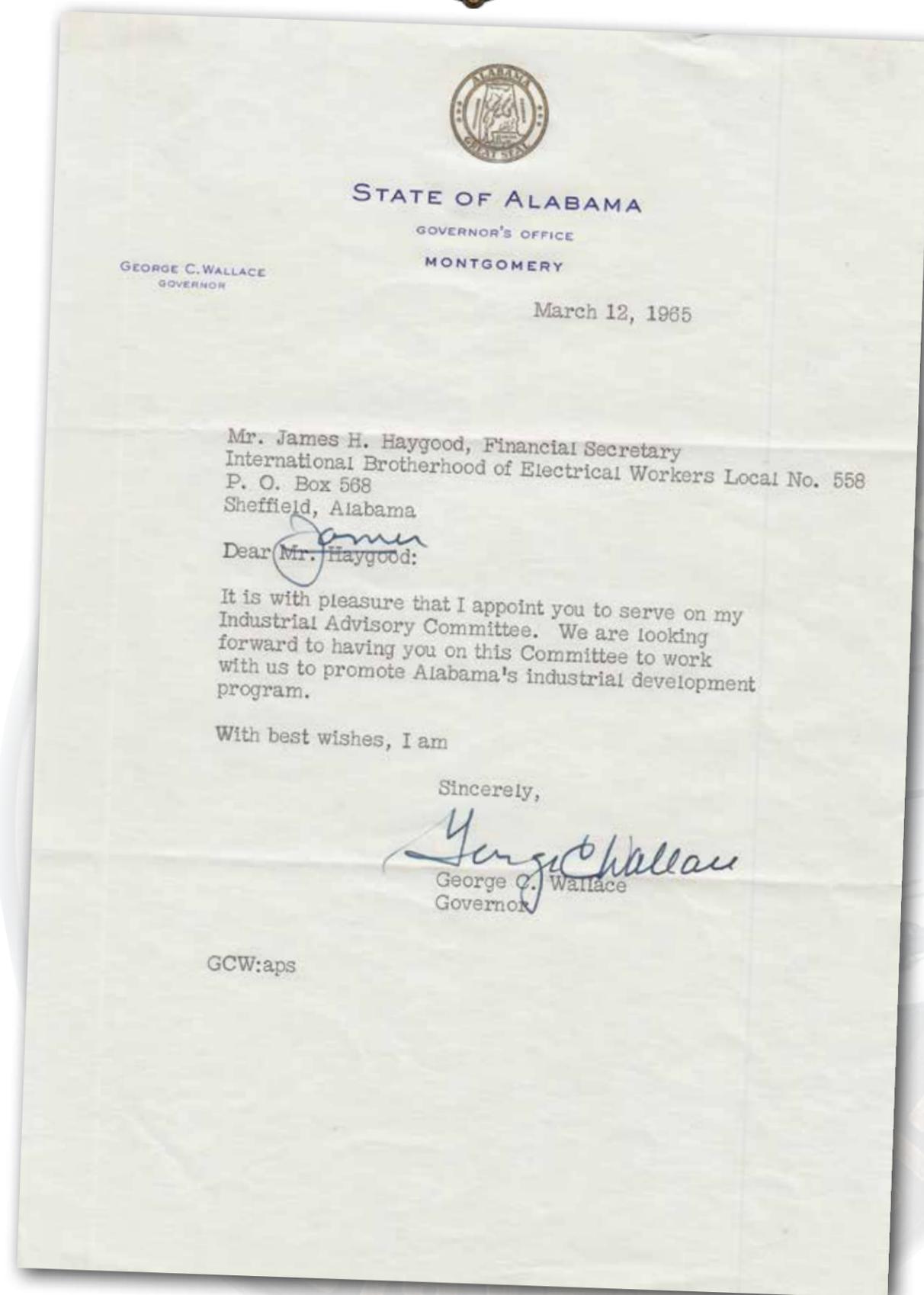
Industrial Relations awarded a new, two-year contract with wage increases of 25 cents for the first six months and again the second six months and 50 cents for the second year, taking the wage scale to \$6.20 at the end of the two-year pact.

Entering the 1970s, Browns Ferry, a job at Reynolds and the paper mill were working almost all of Local 558's construction men. Work for several smaller shops was also picking up, at times leaving the local in need of more linemen and wiremen

to man jobs. *(So many journeymen were needed on Browns Ferry, in fact, that apprentices were suffering because they were not permitted to work on TVA projects since the agency had its own training program; consequently, the local's training program decided not to put any new apprentices on during the fall of 1970 in order to provide work for those already indentured.)*



Marshall Space Flight Center test stand in which NASA's Saturn I rocket vehicle was first tested in April 1960 and the Saturn I-B was first tested in April 1965, shown in 1971.



STATE OF ALABAMA  
GOVERNOR'S OFFICE  
MONTGOMERY

GEORGE C. WALLACE  
GOVERNOR

March 12, 1965

Mr. James H. Haygood, Financial Secretary  
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local No. 558  
P. O. Box 568  
Sheffield, Alabama

Dear *James* Mr. Haygood:

It is with pleasure that I appoint you to serve on my Industrial Advisory Committee. We are looking forward to having you on this Committee to work with us to promote Alabama's industrial development program.

With best wishes, I am

Sincerely,  
*George C. Wallace*  
George C. Wallace  
Governor

GCW:aps



Browns Ferry Nuclear Plant Unit 1 under construction in 1967. (Source: Tennessee Valley Authority)

Negotiations with the TVA for 1971 garnered Local 558 construction members an increase of 70 cents per hour on a one-year contract. Throughout the rest of the first half of the decade, even when new construction work was at a standstill, most all of the local's construction workers would continue to work on Browns Ferry.

“Work in our jurisdiction seems to be holding its own. ... Most of our members who want to work are doing so,” Press Secretary Charles E. Alexander reported in the April 1974 *Journal*. “The Browns Ferry Nuclear Plant ... is progressing slowly but surely, keeping steady jobs for many of our members and also the members of our neighboring locals.”

That year, the local's wage negotiators were able to increase construction wages from \$7.15 to \$7.65 per hour. The TVA contract was also

Browns Ferry Nuclear Plant, 2007 (Source: Nuclear Regulatory Commission)



(Left to right) I.B.E.W. International Secretary J. D. Keenan, Local 558 member Harry Cornett, International President Charles Pillard, Local 558 Business Manager James H. Haygood, International Executive Council Chairman Rex Fransway and Fifth District International Vice President G. X. Barker celebrate Brother Cornett's 50-year service pin award in 1969.

renewed at an increased rate from \$7.22-1/2 to \$7.65 per hour.

However, Brother Alexander also included an ominous note in his April report that would prove to be a sign of things to come: “At present, we are involved with other local union organizations in picketing the non-union projects which threaten our area. So far, we have not progressed in this field of endeavor as we would like ...”

### NON-UNION ELEMENTS MOVE IN

*“Brothers, we are experiencing serious problems with unfair contractors in our jurisdiction. These contractors are beginning to organize themselves in a manner that would mean real trouble if they are allowed to continue.”*

**J**ust one month after his first warning, Brother Alexander issued that more succinct admonition in the June 1974 *Journal*. A particular “old sore spot” was a Champion Paper Mill expansion project, where Local 558 and the Building Trades had been unsuccessfully picketing its unfair contractor, Brown and Root Construction, for several months.

Regardless, the abundant construction in the area provided ample employment for Local 558.

Newly installed Local 558 officers, 1969





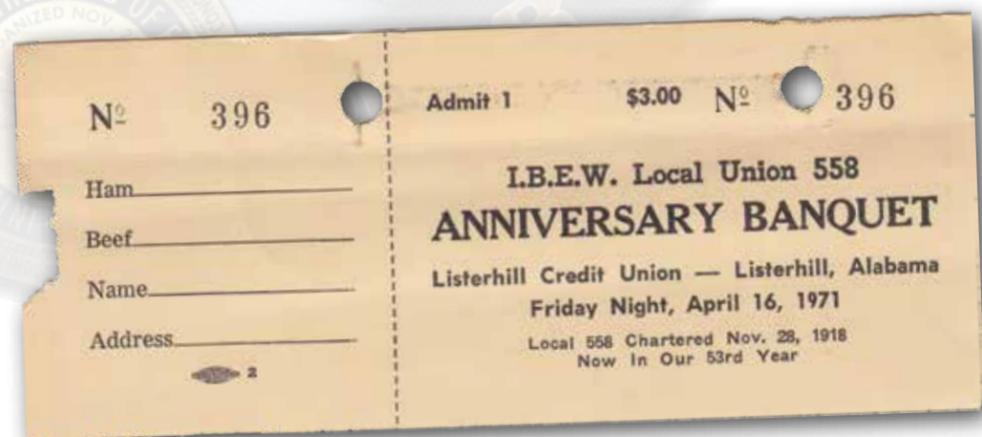
Local 558 members attend a safety meeting at the Browns Ferry Nuclear Plant in 1970.

Up to that point, the local's union contractors had been able to land several sizeable contracts; however, at the same time, they were outbid on some very important projects, including construction of a new General Motors plant near Athens. "I mentioned in my last report that the electrical job on this project had not been let; well, it has been and it's rat," Brother Alexander bitterly announced in the August 1974 *Journal*.

The local stayed on the offensive as best it could, and its efforts to regain the expansion work with the Champion Paper Company progressed favorably – and the job would eventually be turned. That fall, the local conducted meetings with other non-union contractors and a short strike resulted in a contract settlement with the Mussel Shoals T.V. Cable Company.

Work remained available to any I.B.E.W. member who wanted to work in the Local 558 jurisdiction into 1975. The local also gained another pay increase for that year of 70 cents per hour, boosting its construction wage rate from \$7.65 to \$8.35.

However, the anti-union forces within the local's jurisdiction persisted, most notably in Huntsville, where organized labor was taking a "severe beating." But the Local 558 unit there did not back down, and under the leadership of Brother Bosco Morgan formed a committee



in early 1975 to combat the non-union sector that plagued the area. That also meant taking on City Hall, as several large companies located in Huntsville had been told not to use union labor and, consequently, the local's union contractors were not even permitted to bid on some projects.

The contractor for the electrical work at the General Motors plant remained unfair as the calendar turned to 1976 and the non-union factions were beginning to have an effect. "We need help from our International Office and from our northern union Brothers," Press Secretary Tommy Alexander pleaded in the January 1976 *Journal*. "Work is slow!"

The local did gain a new, two-year construction contract with NECA that month, which would raise wages a total of \$2.05 to \$10.40 per hour for 1977. Included was a provision to pay time-and-one-half the regular rate for up to two hours of daily overtime on all commercial work.

What's more, Local 558 established its own Pension Fund for retirees with the contract, into which an additional 30 cents per working hour would be contributed. (Previously, the local had been participating in the I.B.E.W. pension program.) During a special meeting with NECA on February 5, 1976, the Local 558 membership voted to pay the 30 cents into the Tennessee Valley NECA— I.B.E.W. Retirement Plan, which covered members who worked under the NECA Agreement effective December 1, 1975.

For the balance of the 1970s, work for Local 558 remained extremely slow and widespread employment was persistent. By the end of 1976, the local had over 200 members on its out-or-work bench.

All construction at the Browns Ferry Nuclear Plant ended as of April 1, 1978, although the local would continuously supply the plant with men for refueling, maintenance and upgrade shutdowns.



Local 558 apprenticeship graduating linemen in 1973 were (front row, left to right) James Tanner, Mike Broadfoot, Terry McMinn and Ricky Sybert; and (back row, left to right) James Newman, Danny Hargett, (Instructor Max Kennedy), Phillip Jeffreys and Elvin Dutton. Graduate Troy Layton is not pictured.



Local 558 apprenticeship graduating wiremen in 1980 were (front row, left to right) Keith Brown, Larry Lewis, Mike Lawson, Randy Miller and Ralph Mays; (middle row, left to right) James Haygood Jr., Curtis Watkins, Rod Nesbitt, Tommy Hines, Wayne Willis and Steve Grissom; and (back row, left to right) Wayne McDow, Billy Holloway, Roosevelt Hayes, Ronald Fields, David Nesbitt and John Hart.

“We only had full employment maybe one month during that time,” Brother Bud Blackstock, who served as a Local 558 apprenticeship director, recalled in a 2017 interview. “There just was no work.”

A brief respite came in the summer of 1978 with the escalating construction of the Regency Square Mall in Florence (which would be renamed Florence Mall in 2013) and other commercial work with NECA contractors in the Tri-Cities area, which the local continued to hold. About 250 I.B.E.W. members were also employed at Browns Ferry, which was the largest nuclear plant in the world at the time, during its normal operations.

Through it all, Local 558 still continued to grow and expand. By the end of the 1970s, in fact, there were 32 I.B.E.W. locals in Alabama with approximately 10,000 members – nearly 2,400 of whom were members of Local 558.

### VIGILANT IN TOUGHEST TIMES

The first half of the 1980s and into 1986 was an historically meager era for Local 558, as work within its jurisdiction was relatively scarce for the greater part of that period. A poor economy that resulted in an infamous recession and pervading non-union construction that was advanced by anti-union sentiment within government contributed to the employment downturn.

Early on, intermittent relief came with construction of the new, \$16.8 million Shoals Hospital in Sheffield and an addition to Eliza Coffee Memorial Hospital in Florence, the new Holiday Inn of Muscle Shoals, the new Magnolia Gardens II high-rise apartments and a new multi-story First National Bank. Commercial work also helped the local, in particular two new Kroger Super Stores and a large, new TG&Y “five-and-dime” store in Florence.

Meanwhile, the local would not give in to the intrusive non-union interests. Case in point,

on January 23, 1981, the local held a special meeting at its Huntsville unit to “present and discuss possible solutions for combating the continued spread of unfair labor in the Huntsville-Decatur area.” The meeting was attended by Business Manager Doug Watkins, assistant business managers Fred Allen, Lee Broadfoot and Gene Yell and more than 60 Local 558 members.

As would often be the case in the coming years, the work situation improved somewhat in mid-1981 in large part as the result of an outage at the Browns Ferry Nuclear Plant. Similar work at Colbert Steam Plant would also occasionally provide reprieves from lethargic employment.

Elsewhere, the local was heavily involved in the NASA Space Shuttle Program at Marshall Space Flight Center during the early 1980s. In particular, Local 558 members worked on the main engine-bearing test facility’s dynamic test stand, where the Saturn 5 moon rocket and the space shuttle were tested to see if they could tolerate the immense vibrations of a lift-off. Members were also called upon to reconstruct a building (with 14-inch-thick concrete walls) that had been completely destroyed as the result of a leak in a hydrogen line.

Local 558 members were employed at Marshall not only during construction of space projects but also with Pioneer Electric, the maintenance contractor for the facility.

The fight with Champion Paper persisted during that time, and in September 1981 the local joined the North Alabama Building and Construction Trades in a peaceful demonstration to prevent the company from again hiring Brown and Root for another expansion project. While the non-union contractor was given the contract, Local 558 was well represented with members from every phase of the electrical trade among the 1,500-plus union demonstrators, and the local would participate in pickets during construction of the addition.

Before the end of the year, however, the local experienced layoffs at Reynolds Metals and Reynolds, further decreasing to its already low construction employment. Adding to that, by 1982 the Ford Motor Company had closed down its Sheffield Casting Plant after employees there refused to accept a 50-percent cut in wages and benefits.

All the while, the local’s anti-union foes seemed to be getting “braver,” even prompting the local to place pickets at several small service stations in the area that were being built non-union. “They seem to be taking our work away and daring us to do anything about it,” Press Secretary Glynn Murray pondered in the December 1981 *Journal*.

The local did come out with a “pretty good” NECA agreement for the next year. The one-year contract consisted of an initial 80-cent wage bump, 20 cents to the pension, 15 cents to a dental plan and, effective June 1, 1982, another 50-cent raise for a total package increase of \$1.65 per hour.

Work at the Colbert Steam Plant to renovate its Unit 5 under CSB and Babcock and Wilcox boosted employment in early 1982. Some members in the TVA Power Service Shops in



Local 558 office staff (left to right) Patricia Byrd, Dimple Jones and Sallie Sims at the local’s former union hall on Jackson Highway, circa 1992.

*Continued after next page.*



# I.B.E.W. LOCAL No. 558 BUSINESS MANAGERS

**Charles A. James**  
1930 through 1933

**W. A. Jones**  
1933 through 1934

**Jack Hans**  
January 1935 through April 1935

**J. E. Lummus**  
April 1935 through June 1935

**L. O. Petree**  
June 1935 through June 1937

**J. C. White**  
June 1937 through June 1939

**George E. Jackson**  
June 1939 through June 1949

**Charles S. Goidel**  
June 1949 through June 1951

**Robert H. Broadfoot**  
June 1951 through June 1953

**Arnold Madison**  
June 1953 through November 1956

**John B. Smith**  
November 1956 through February 1960

**James H. Haygood**  
February 1960 through June 1967  
June 1969 through June 1974

**James H. Hill**  
June 1967 through June 1969

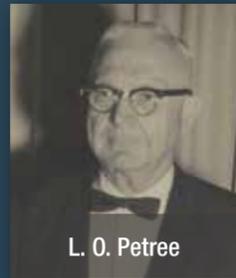
**William Lance Blackstock**  
June 1974 through July 1980  
July 1986 through July 2004

**Doug Watkins**  
July 1980 through July 1986

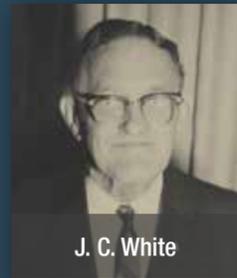
**Larry Farmer**  
July 2004 through September 2009

**Steve Crunk**  
September 2009 through July 2012

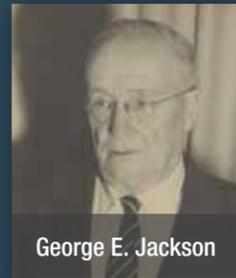
**Ralph Mayes**  
July 2012 to (current)



L. O. Petree



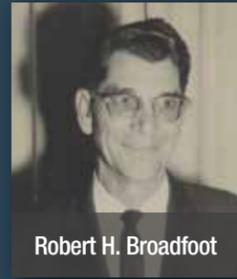
J. C. White



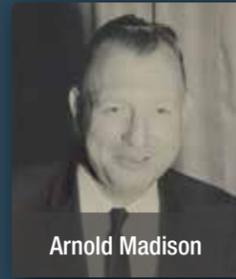
George E. Jackson



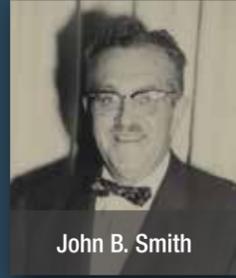
Charles S. Goidel



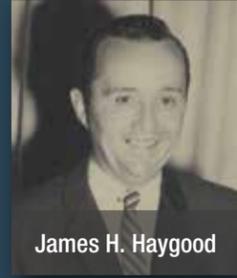
Robert H. Broadfoot



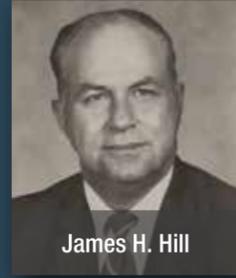
Arnold Madison



John B. Smith



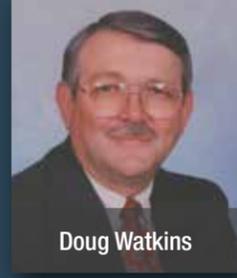
James H. Haygood



James H. Hill



William Lance Blackstock



Doug Watkins



Larry Farmer



Steve Crunk



Ralph Mayes



Muscle Shoals were also kept busy repairing transformers for the agency.

But 1983 overall started off poorly for the local, as it had approximately 200 men on its bench. By July, the situation had not changed much and unemployment continued to run high, despite a few men being placed at the Browns Ferry plant, while many other members were travelling for work.

Undaunted, Local 558 continued seeking new ways in which it could improve its condition. That year, the local and its employers formed a **Labor-Management Committee**, which was co-chaired by Assistant Business Manager Allen. According to Brother Allen, the committee would be “dedicated to improving relationships between organized labor and management, which we hope will ultimately improve the image of organized labor.”

The local’s out-of-work list remained relatively long into 1984 despite 200 employees, including some Local 558 bothers, being reinstated when Reynolds Metals Company reopened its pot line for producing

Local 558 retirees originally formed a Retirees Club on January 21, 1982, with Brother Charles D. Chesser serving as its first president. However, a club was not officially chartered by the I.B.E.W. until June 22, 1984, at which time Brother Pete Jones was serving as president.

The Retirees Club was re-organized in the spring of 1986, with Brother John Broadway serving as president, and has continued to provide camaraderie for retirees and also valuable service projects to the community and the local.

metals at its Listerhill plant. Short-time calls for local contractors also helped later that year, reducing the bench to below 150 members before year’s end – the lowest it had been “in quite some time,” Brother Murray reported in the December *Journal*.

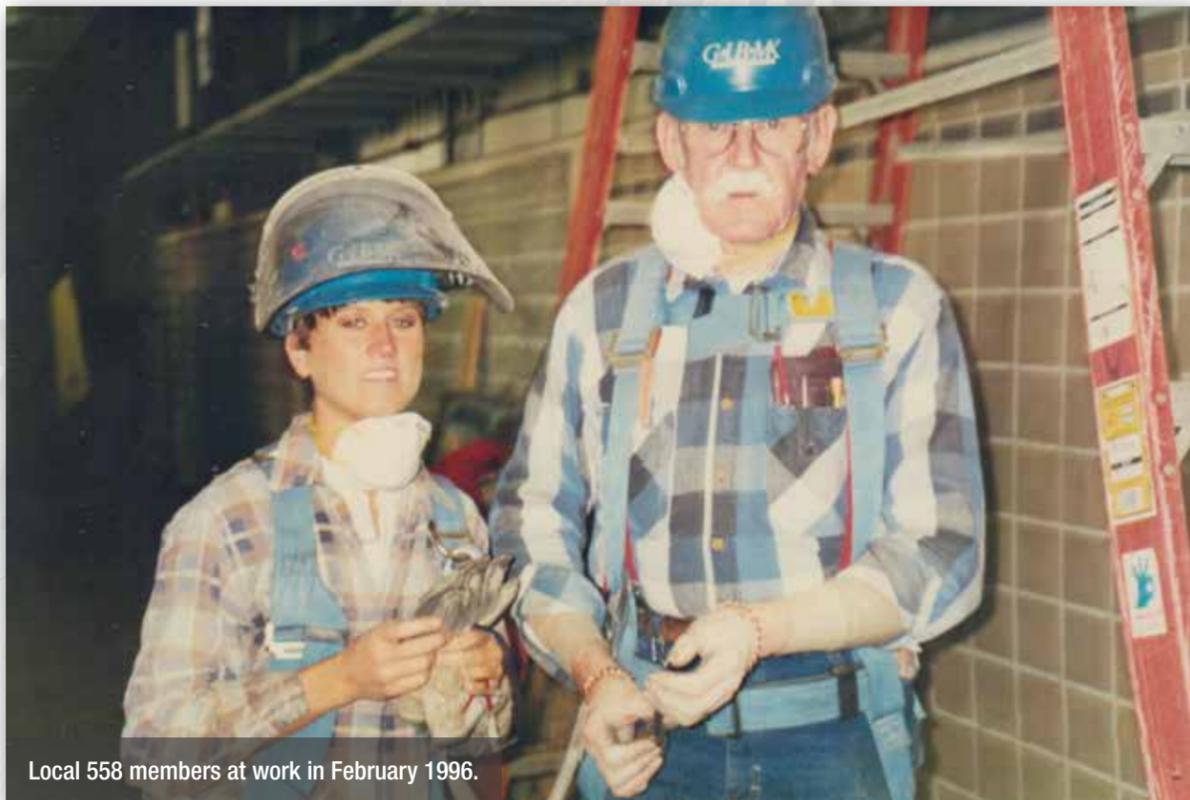
Unemployment was high again in 1985 when Reynolds closed down its last pot line, with the company blaming high utility rates in the area for the move – which was a blow to the area’s economy as well as Local 558.

Despite its setbacks, the local was able to purchase the Carpenters’ union building in Huntsville in the spring of 1986. The brick structure contained a sizable meeting room and office spaces for the local’s Huntsville unit and several other crafts that maintained offices in the building.



Local 558 members at work in February 1994.





Local 558 members at work in February 1996.

### High And Low Towards Y2K

In a significant victory for organized labor in general and Local 558 in particular, in early 1987 the Building Trades and the local were able to turn around the new Chrysler Corporation Electronics Plant, dubbed "Electronics City," being built in Huntsville. While initial work on the 750,000-square-foot plant had been done non-union, negotiations with the company yielded an agreement for the job to be completed entirely with union labor. *(Built by Huntsville's Turner-Universal for Chrysler subsidiary Acustar, the facility was the first new parts plant opened by the automaker in more than 20 years when it opened in 1988 and was also Chrysler's largest robotic installation outside of its assembly plants, according to the company.)*

In the wake of that triumph, the local's employment situation was vastly improved for the entire year. Then during 1988, more

brother journeymen were worked in their home jurisdiction than had been in a long time, encouraging Brother Murray to dub it a "tolerable year" in his column in the April 1989 *Journal*.

The positive work situation continued through the end of the decade, buoyed by an upsurge in commercial building (although several projects went non-union). Construction of a new casting-house at Reynolds Alloys was also under way and would be a major project for the local's area.

For 1990, Local 558 completed new negotiations with the cities of Muscle Shoals, Tuscumbia and Russellville; Sammons Communications; Comcast; Tombigbee Electric Cooperative; Joe Wheeler Electric Cooperative; the Reynolds plants; Redstone Arsenal; NECA; and TVA.

Despite a large reduction at Browns Ferry Nuclear Plant later that year, including up to

200 hourly I.B.E.W. members, in 1991 Local 558 enjoyed full employment most of the time. It was even able to help other locals work travelling journeyman brothers and sisters – one of the few local unions that could boast that.

With work holding steady, Local 558 won a new wage for its NECA contract in late 1992 when the Council on Industrial Relations ruled for increases of 20 cents per hour effective December 1, 1992, and 65 cents per hour to the Health and Welfare Fund effective January 1, 1993, for a total increase of 85 cents. The Council also instructed both parties to negotiate a drug testing program under supervision of the I.B.E.W. Fifth District office and the regional director of NECA. The program went into effect on January 1, 1993, and testing began February 15.

TVA annual negotiations were also concluded for that year, with the journeyman rate for annual employees being increased to \$37,100.

Negotiations were finalized in June 1993 on a new Government Services Contract as a result of Local 558's organizing efforts. The contract covered the utility control service technicians employed by BAMSI Incorporated at the Marshall Space Flight Center, bringing into the local 11 employees who performed the programming, installation, maintenance and instrumentation of the equipment that monitored the heating and cooling of the center's buildings.

Further included in successful organizing efforts at the time were the 40 employees of the Florence Electricity Department, comprising dispatchers, collectors, tree crews, right-of-way crews, skilled crews and warehousemen. With those workers coming into the union, the City of Florence was fully unionized with Local 558. Additional new agreements that brought more new members into the local were also signed with UCS Group, Marshall Space Flight



Shoals Area Central Labor Union Labor Day celebration, 2000



Local 558 Retirees Club officers and board, October 2005

Center and BAMSI at the Redstone Arsenal.

That summer of 1993, a major repair job at the Colbert Steam Plant, required after a fire on the facility's incline coal conveyor, was completed in just two weeks by I.B.E.W. and Building Trades craftspeople. The following year, work on the plant's Unit 1 under Babcock and Wilcox moved some Local 558 members off the out-of-work books for a while.

The local remained focused on organizing, too. To that end, 66 members attended a Construction Organizing Membership Education Training (COMET) class that was held at the local's union hall on March 5, 1994. "Those who attended were enthusiastic

about the course and commented on how well it was taught," Press Secretary Belinda Phillips reported in the June *Journal*.

The local did expand later that year when I.B.E.W. Local No. 1100 of Hartselle was amalgamated into Local 558 on July 1, 1994. Local 1100 had been chartered just 10 years earlier on June 1, 1984, to represent "electrical manufacturing" members and was in negotiations with Cerro Wire and Cable at the time of the merger.

Local 558 members and some travelers were at work through much of 1995 on modifying and updating Browns Ferry's Unit 3, which would be restarted in early 1996. A Unit 2 outage at the plant early that year also provided many long hours for many of the local's hourly and annual members – helping to keep a trend of low unemployment intact.

But by mid-1996, work in the Local 558 area again soured and many brothers and sisters,

both journeymen and apprentices, were out of work or working in other jurisdictions. Outage work at the power plants helped put some members back to work, but employment remained slow for the remainder of the year and throughout much of 1997.

On a positive note, during that spring the local completed the shortest nuclear refueling outage in TVA history by 12 days and the second shortest among U.S. nuclear plants, finishing a Unit 3 Cycle 7 (U3C7) outage at Browns Ferry in just 19 days and 39 minutes.

It was more of the same throughout 1998, during which many Local 558 members remained unemployed or out of town all too often – as the local awaited news on the electrical contracts for the large, \$425 million Boeing Delta Rocket Plant being built in Decatur. Work that was available in the area included a Buccaneer Electric project at the new Muscle Shoals High School; a major addition to the Helen Keller Hospital; projects at Wilson and Wheeler dams; and smaller jobs under contractors such as Shoals Electric, Garnet Electric and Johnson Electric.

But with a U3C8 outage complete at Browns Ferry Nuclear, extra outage personnel at the plant plunged back to a bare minimum, adding to the local's out-of-work roster.

When Local 558 members were finally put on jobs at Boeing's 1.5-million-square-foot Delta Rocket Plant in the late 1990s after several of the local's contractors were awarded work, they were part of a program to manufacture a new family of launch vehicles, from the Delta II to the Delta IV and Delta IV Heavy. The first common booster core rolled out of the plant in 2000, three-and-a-half years after ground was broken for construction of the facility.

Elsewhere in 1999, Local 558 members were still working hard for Buccaneer on the new Muscle Shoals High School and for G-UB-MK Constructors on projects at Colbert Steam Plant and the Wilson and Wheeler dams. A U2C10 outage at Browns Ferry did come to a close that year, resulting in many members being laid off, but the local did have additional work at Tenneco Packaging paper mill in Counce, Tennessee, and at Champion Paper.

Meanwhile, the final sale of Reynolds Metals to Wise Alloys was completed on April 1, 1999. Most all of the local's maintenance members employed at the Reynolds aluminum plant in Muscle Shoals were able to retain their jobs following the change of ownership.

The local also attained another first in the TVA Hydro systems that year when members working in the TVA Service Shop and some G-UB-MK employees installed new controls to the spillway gates

*Continued after next spread.*



Officials cut the ribbon for the official grand opening and open-house ceremony of Local 558's new union hall on East 17th Street in Sheffield on April 14, 2007.



I.B.E.W. Local No. 1100, an electrical manufacturing local in Hartselle, Alabama, that was chartered June 1, 1984, was amalgamated into Local 558 on July 1, 1994.



## Training and Education

# PREPARING A WORLD-CLASS WORKFORCE REMAINS LOCAL 558'S PRIORITY



On-the-job training of its apprentices (or "helpers") during Local 558's early years was the standard – and only – method of teaching its prospective journeyman electrical workers. The Tennessee Valley Authority, the local's primary employer after it was formed in 1933, provided educational programs for its building-trades trainees from the outset, but very few workers took advantage of them.

It was not until 1935 that the local and other Building Trades locals began earnest discussions about forming a labor school, the sponsor of which would be the Tri-Cities Central Labor Union.

By 1940, Local 558 had formed its own school for augmenting training of its apprentices with classroom instruction, provided in the basement of its new union hall in Sheffield. By 1941, the program had four instructors teaching 60 students enrolled in a four-year apprenticeship that featured two-hour classes held two nights each week. Apprentices were required at the time to complete 144 hours of related study during each period of 2,000 hours of overall training.

"It is definitely understood that the apprentice will have to carry

out his end of the agreement or be dismissed from the job," Local 558 Press Secretary Greg T. Hurt wrote in the May 1941 I.B.E.W. Journal. "We have too many applicants to have to put up with any who are not sincere in doing their best to make this the most successful training program we have ever undertaken."

Journeyman members also began to realize the need for additional training for themselves. Subsequently, in 1944 the local was already providing a class for journeymen to learn the most up-to-date information and techniques of the electrical construction industry.

By the early 1960s, the Local 558 Muscle Shoals Area Apprenticeship School had been expanded to a five-year program that included a one-year course in basic electronics. The training center had been moved in the late 1950s into a facility on Plant Street and was owned and operated by the North Alabama Joint Apprentice and Training Committee, a joint effort of the union and its management partners of the National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA).

The school had also established an electronics course for

journeymen and, from time to time, offered various classes to improve their other skills, including cable-splicing and solder connections.

By 1968, the school had phased its curriculum back to a four-year program – and graduated two classes of apprentices during the previous year, numbering a total of 39 journeyman wiremen and three journeyman linemen.

In 2007, the North Alabama Electrical J.A.T.C. Apprenticeship Program moved into the new Local 558 union hall on East 17th Street, consolidating the local's offices and training center under one roof. The new building's school featured six large classrooms and a large computer lab.

By 2013, the facility had expanded to 25,000 square feet of classroom space and 9,000 square feet of hands-on laboratory area, and it was adding an additional 10,000 square feet to encompass different levels of training such as rigging, lifting and welding and a conduit fabrication area.

The North Alabama Electrical J.A.T.C. Apprenticeship Program in 2018 consists of five years of classroom instruction and 8,000 hours of on-the-job training to prepare apprentices to become journeyman inside wiremen while also focusing on safety. Apprentices are paid by the contractor for whom they work and earn raises as they progress through the training.

The J.A.T.C. also remains committed to providing journeyman-level workers with on-going, high-quality training and certification in the most advanced and innovative technologies in the electrical industry.

Local 558 outside lineman apprentices are trained through the Southeastern Line Constructors Apprenticeship & Training (SELCAT), which, like the North Alabama Electrical J.A.T.C., is affiliated with the National Joint Apprenticeship & Training Committee.

SELCAT provides standardized and fully certified training for I.B.E.W. lineman apprentices in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee with its 24,000-square-foot training facility in Newnan, Georgia. The state-of-the-art center, opened in 2006, features on-site classrooms, indoor and outdoor pole-climbing labs, and substation and underground training. SELCAT also focuses a great deal of its training on safety.

With these programs at its disposal, Local 558 has produced an average of 25 state-licensed electricians into the workforce each of the few years prior to its 100th anniversary in 2018.





Local 558 officers and staff during the union hall grand-opening celebration on April 14, 2007.

in the control room at Wilson Dam. Previously, operators had to go to the spillway gate to open it at a local push button, but the new controls and the use of fiber-optic cables allowed an operator to control the gates from the local station or the gates could be automatically opened from the control room by remote – features unique at the time to any TVA dam.

As the decade, the century and the millennium came to a close, so too did many projects, and work in the Local 558 area subsequently was once again very sluggish. The Boeing project was quickly slowing down, and projects on which Buccaneer had been working were mostly completed, as was a 3M job on which Shoals Electric had been working.

Before the new Y2K millennium was ushered in, the local's membership passed a very controversial amendment to the Local 558 Bylaws that raised the working assessments of construction members from 1-1/2 percent to 3 percent. The assessment would help bolster the local's finances over the coming years.

### **AN OLD FRIEND AND A NEW LEASE**

**W**hile work in the Local 558 jurisdiction continued to be slow over much of the first two years of the new millennium, with primarily only smaller jobs such as a school addition in Hartselle, a new Winn Dixie store in Muscle Shoals and outage work at Browns Ferry, organizing efforts within the local were in full swing. With the commitment of both management and the local's membership and the backing of the financially sound local, which frequently hosted COMET classes, the organizing would soon pay dividends.

Employment picked up in earnest beginning in mid-2002, enhanced by the start of construction on a new **Toyota Motor Manufacturing Plant**, a car and truck engine factory in the Huntsville area. I.B.E.W.-signatory contractor **Cleveland Electric** of Atlanta had the electrical contract for the plant's first stage, which would be completed in 2003.



The Local 558 union hall, offices and training center on East 17th Street in Sheffield, into which the local moved in 2007, was a former Tennessee Valley Authority environmental research building that the union completely renovated over a six-month period.

Another boost came later that year with the TVA project to renovate and restart the Unit 1 reactor at Browns Ferry, which would employ many Local 558 craftspeople over the coming five years – in addition to those needed to work the yearly Units 2 and 3 outages at the plant. The TVA board voted in May 2002 to restart the reactor at an estimated cost of \$1.8 billion; when completed, it would generate enough electricity to power about 650,000 homes.

The Browns Ferry restart was governed by a project maintenance and modification agreement that was signed by the presidents of building trades unions including the I.B.E.W.

The I.B.E.W.'s performance at Browns Ferry was enhanced by the union's **Code of Excellence** program, a written commitment "demonstrating to customers that I.B.E.W. members perform the highest quality of work, utilize their skills and

abilities to the maximum and exercise safe and productive work practices." Following the program's introduction in March 2005, International Vice President Bobby Klein and Local 558 Business Manager Larry Farmer designated Browns Ferry Unit 1 a "Code of Excellence job," with which "Excellence Steward Training" was given to all of its stewards and supervisors.

Ongoing work at Browns Ferry and Toyota and outages at Colbert Steam Plant, among other projects, helped keep many Local 558 brothers and sisters working at home into the

following years.

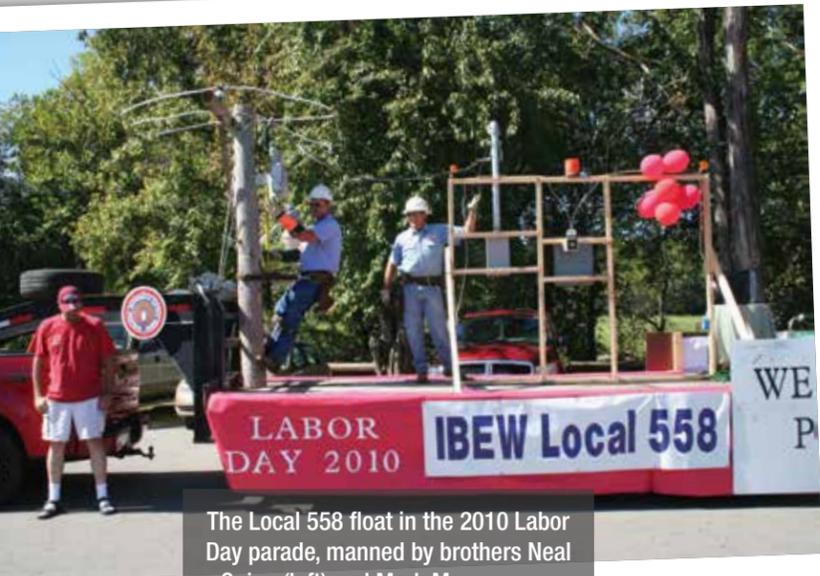
Then after 67 years, the local in January 2007 moved its offices and union hall from Jackson Highway to a new location at 1803 East 17th Street in Sheffield. The new headquarters was the former TVA environmental research facility, which the local renovated over a period of six months to transform the building into its new home.

The move also consolidated the union hall and the local's apprentice training center under one roof. The former training center, owned by the **North Alabama Joint Apprentice and Training Committee**, was located on Plant Street.

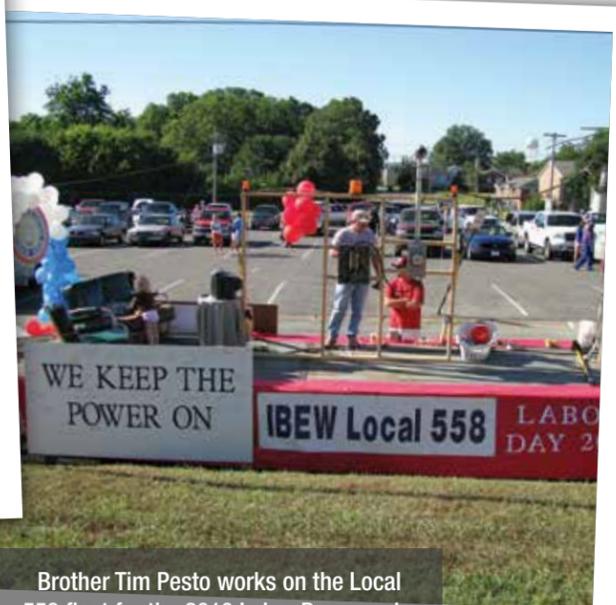
What's more, the **I.B.E.W. Local 558 Federal Credit Union** also moved into an adjacent building. It had been in a doublewide trailer across the street from the old union offices.

Local 558 I.B.E.W. service pin and certificate recipients in December 2008.





The Local 558 float in the 2010 Labor Day parade, manned by brothers Neal Quinn (left) and Mark Massey, won first place for best float.



Brother Tim Pesto works on the Local 558 float for the 2010 Labor Day parade.

Later that year, escalating tensions with Wise Alloys over wages and outsourcing of maintenance jobs resulted in union workers including Local 558 members picketing at the gates of the company's aluminum plant on Second Street in Muscle Shoals beginning November 1 – the first labor strike at the former Reynolds Metals plant in nearly 15 years. Members of the Security, Police and Fire Professionals of America were the first to begin the picketing when their contract expired, and workers represented by the North Alabama Building Trades unions joined them one hour later.

“We’d much rather be in there making metal than standing out here holding signs, but they forced us into this situation,” Local 558 Assistant Business Manager Charles Lamon told the *Florence Times Daily* newspaper. “People have to understand that we’re just fighting for our jobs.” Many of the 200 maintenance workers at the plant were represented by the I.B.E.W.

Wise hired ABB to do the maintenance work in the plant, and the I.B.E.W. ultimately lost its maintenance contract with Wise after the strike.

Local 558 members working for URS Corporation participate in the Toys for Tots “Bikes or Bust” campaign in 2010.



### IN SOLIDARITY TOWARDS THE FUTURE

Employment for Local 558 in the years leading up to its 100th Anniversary in 2018 was good, for the most part. During the summer of 2008, for instance, the local was able to work several traveling brothers and sisters while the regular outage at Browns Ferry Nuclear Plant was expected to begin in mid-October.

Throughout the next few years, work held steady and hosting travelers from time to time in order to fill manpower needs became the norm. “We are thankful that work in our jurisdiction is looking good and we have several Book 2 members working an outage at Browns Ferry Nuclear Plant,” Membership Development Coordinator Mac Sloan reported in the June 2012 I.B.E.W. *Electrical Worker*.

Even when work occasionally dropped off as it did in mid-2012, the local could look forward to the fall outage at Browns Ferry to boost opportunities for members as well as some travelers. That year, the local was also awaiting calls for jobs on an expansion to the Toyota facility in Huntsville, which had just broken ground. Before the end of the year, work was strong once again as the local

was making preparations to begin manning the Toyota engine plant project (the third plant built at the company's Huntsville facility).

Organizing remained a highest priority for Local 558, as well. To that end, the local hosted an Organizing Blitz in August 2012 with organizers from Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama assisting, as well as state organizing coordinators from the I.B.E.W. Fifth District (of which Local 558 is a member).

Employment in the construction sector remained steady and stable throughout 2013, sustained most notably by the spring outage at Browns Ferry, consistent work at the Toyota plant through to its completion in the fall and a newly constructed Jack Daniels facility in Decatur.

Solid work persisted in 2014 with spring and fall outages at the nuclear plant, the ongoing Jack Daniels project and the final stages of the Toyota plant, in addition to many other smaller projects, supplying abundant man-hours. By October, two new Local 558 signatory contractors completed two of those jobs with



Local 558 brothers Thomas “Peanut” Howard and Neal Quinn man the local's float in the Sheffield Christmas Parade in 2010. The float was awarded second place in the Tusculumbia Civitan Christmas Parade on November 30 and won first place in the Muscle Shoals Christmas Parade on December 9.



Local 558 father and son team Rodney (right) and Matthew Russell march in the 2010 Christmas parade in Sheffield.

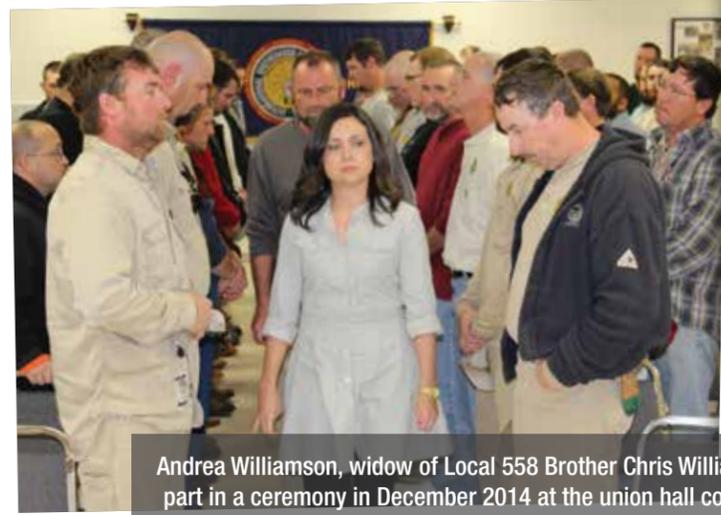
Local 558 has long been a regular participant in Labor Day festivities, and in 2013 the local was again recognized at the Shoals Labor Day Rally, the longest-running such event in the United States, as the top donor – having also earned the acknowledgment in previous years.

no interruptions in work: Silman Construction at the Jack Daniels facility (while gaining a “significant portion” of work from the local’s competition, as well) and Elk River Electric on the first outage at Toyota.

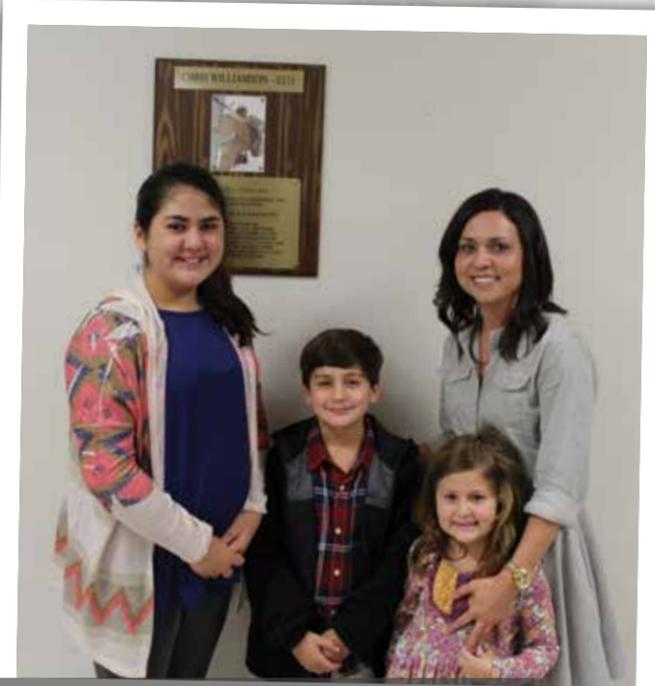
In another sign that the local’s organizing efforts were effective, later that year American Electric also became a signatory contractor to Local 558. Then, the local’s strong partnership with Wolf Creek Federal Services on its Installation Support Services contract at Redstone Arsenal helped the local in early 2015 to bridge a multi-year contract and organize all of the fire-alarm mechanics who had been added to an installation project there.

Work in the local’s jurisdiction slackened considerably into the second half of 2015 and would remain slow throughout 2016 and into the following year. During that time, many members traveled to other I.B.E.W. locales for employment.

But outages at Browns Ferry and Nucor Steel in Decatur and new projects such as an



Andrea Williamson, widow of Local 558 Brother Chris Williamson, and their children, Avery, Brody and Lilly, take part in a ceremony in December 2014 at the union hall commemorating Brother Williamson’s death in the line of duty on June 5 that year while performing repairs after a severe storm passed through northern Alabama.



Local 558 members participate in a Habitat for Humanity project to build a home for a family in need in 2011.



## In The Community LOCAL 558 GIVES BACK

Since its inception, Local 558 has been an active and caring member of the communities it serves, constantly providing its financial resources and skilled manpower when called upon for those in need. March of Dimes, Habitat for Humanity, the Cerebral Palsy Center and many others have benefited from the generosity and concern of the local’s membership.

assisted living facility in Madison, Alabama; an expansion of the Huntsville International Airport; a new Target Distribution Center in Limestone County; and work at the Bunge North America packaging plant in Decatur turned things around in 2017. What’s more, one of the local’s contractors recaptured a contract that had been manned by a major non-union contractor at United Launch Alliance in Decatur.

Additionally, TVA had multiple projects that would need manpower throughout the Tennessee River Valley, further improving 2017 and the coming year for the local. Other recent jobs on which its members worked include a paper plant in Cherokee, Alabama; the automotive plants in Huntsville; continual maintenance at a Decatur steel mill; maintaining the facilities at Redstone Army Base and Marshall Space Flight Center; and contracts with 13 different utilities and electric cooperatives.

Meanwhile, the local was extremely fortunate to sign several contractors to an I.B.E.W. agreement over the past decade (an uphill battle in the south). The local has also successfully

Among its more recent community involvement activities, Local 558 in the 1990s formed a Feed and Help the Community Group. The effort received strong support for its “Feed the Needy Drive” during the Christmas season in 1995 and again for its campaign to raise money the following year to provide Easter baskets for children at the Safe Place Homes for abused children and adults.

In May 1998, Local 558 held its first annual golf tournament to benefit March of Dimes, while members also donated money to the Cerebral Palsy Telethon that spring. Members recently have also volunteered their time at the Cerebral Palsy Center of Northwest Alabama to provide general maintenance for the center.

Among the local’s more personal charitable activities is the annual Chris Williamson Wild Game Fest, which began in 2014 to help less fortunate children in north Alabama and is named for fallen Local 558 Brother Williamson. In 2017, the event raised over \$29,000, which could bring assistance to over 500 local families.



Local 558 participants in the 2015 Christmas Parade.



enforced Davis Bacon prevailing wage laws, an effort that has leveled the playing field for its partner contractors in the construction market.

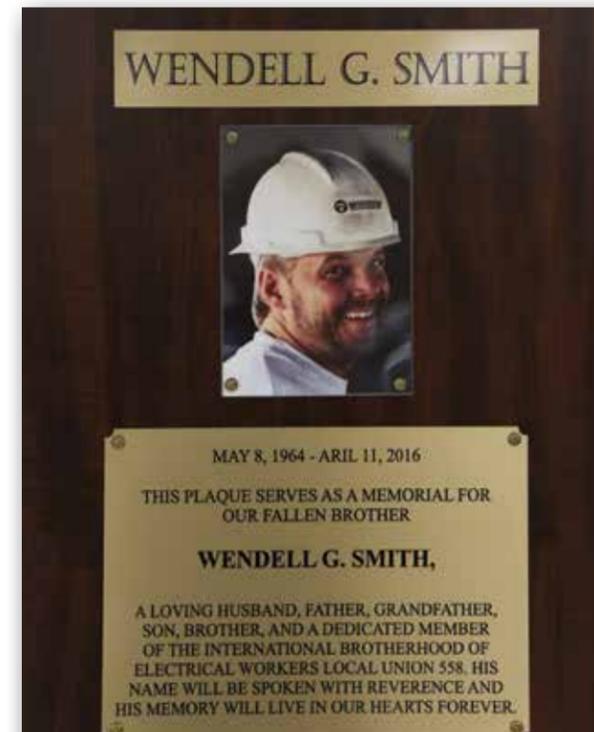
At 100 years old in February 2018, Local 558 is still the largest skilled-trades union in the State of Alabama. With an active membership of around 1,690, roughly 650 retired members and about 150 apprentices, the local is still going strong after 100 years.

Local 558 has often set efficiency standards at several of the facilities in which its members work. In 2017 and 2018, members played a vital role in setting records at Browns Ferry Nuclear Plant, where all three generating units have been running for over 300 days – and still counting as the local celebrates its 100th anniversary. Browns Ferry Unit 3 has been running almost 700-straight days, while all three units produced 28 billion kilowatt hours of power in 2017.

During that century, Local 558 has built the “Electrical Center of the Nation.” Concurrently, its membership has reaped the benefits of union affiliation while also enjoying the camaraderie of the brotherhood – since its inception, the membership has picnicked, danced, mourned and celebrated its members’ accomplishments and its apprentices’ graduations together. From annually participating in the Shoals Central Labor Councils’ 95-year-old Labor Day celebration to hosting its own spring picnic since 2010, Local 558 has maintained its calling to be like a second family for its members and their families.



Local 558 members in Florence don pink hardhats to promote Breast Cancer Awareness in 2016.



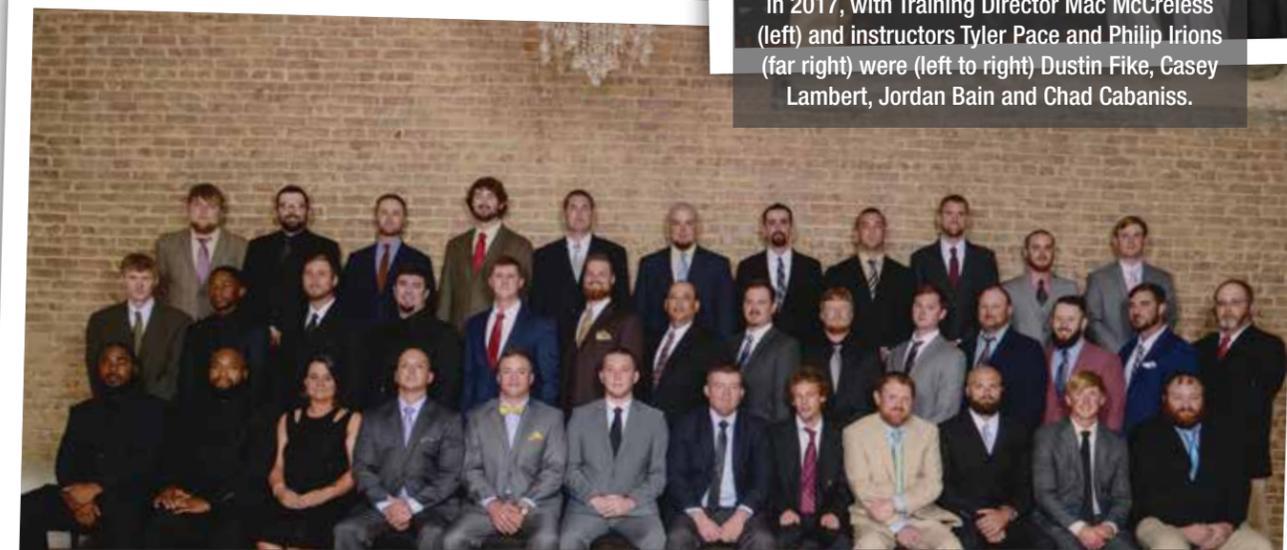
The plaque dedicated to Local 558 Brother Wendell G. Smith, who tragically passed away on April 11, 2016, that was first displayed in the local’s union hall during a November 2016 meeting, attended by Brother Smith’s family and his wife, Lisa, who hung the memorial.

Recently, the local has also supported several of its own members in their respective campaigns for election to local and state political and civil offices – because the local has become keenly aware that legislation and law play a vital role in its survival.

And most pointedly, Local 558 welcomes its next 100 years, as its officers and membership stand at the ready, together, to embrace their collective future.



Local 558 apprenticeship graduating linemen in 2017, with Training Director Mac McCreless (left) and instructors Tyler Pace and Philip Irions (far right) were (left to right) Dustin Fike, Casey Lambert, Jordan Bain and Chad Cabaniss.



Local 558 apprenticeship graduating wiremen in 2017 were (front row, left to right) Ryan Cole, Coleman Jones, Heather Cook, Cody Burden, Zachary McKelvey, Thomas Hamm, Toby Keeton, Cody Neal, Tyler Skidmore, Jared Lawler, Chad Sykes and Patrick Jones; and (middle row, left to right) Justin Lovelace, Rico Scott, Joshua Trzaskoma, Jacob Kimbrough, Casey Jones, Cody Logan, Brian Erwin, Garry Watson, Joey Stout, Cullen Grissom, Joshua Baker, Kyle Clemons, Matthew Price (and Training Director Mac McCreless); and (third row, left to right) Tanner Moody, Ellis McCarley, Joe Carroll, Drew Burden, Chad Quinn, Alexander Herston, Ben Morgan, Dakota Blackstock, Michael Shedd, Marshall Gower and Dillon Erwin. Graduate Dylan Green is not pictured.

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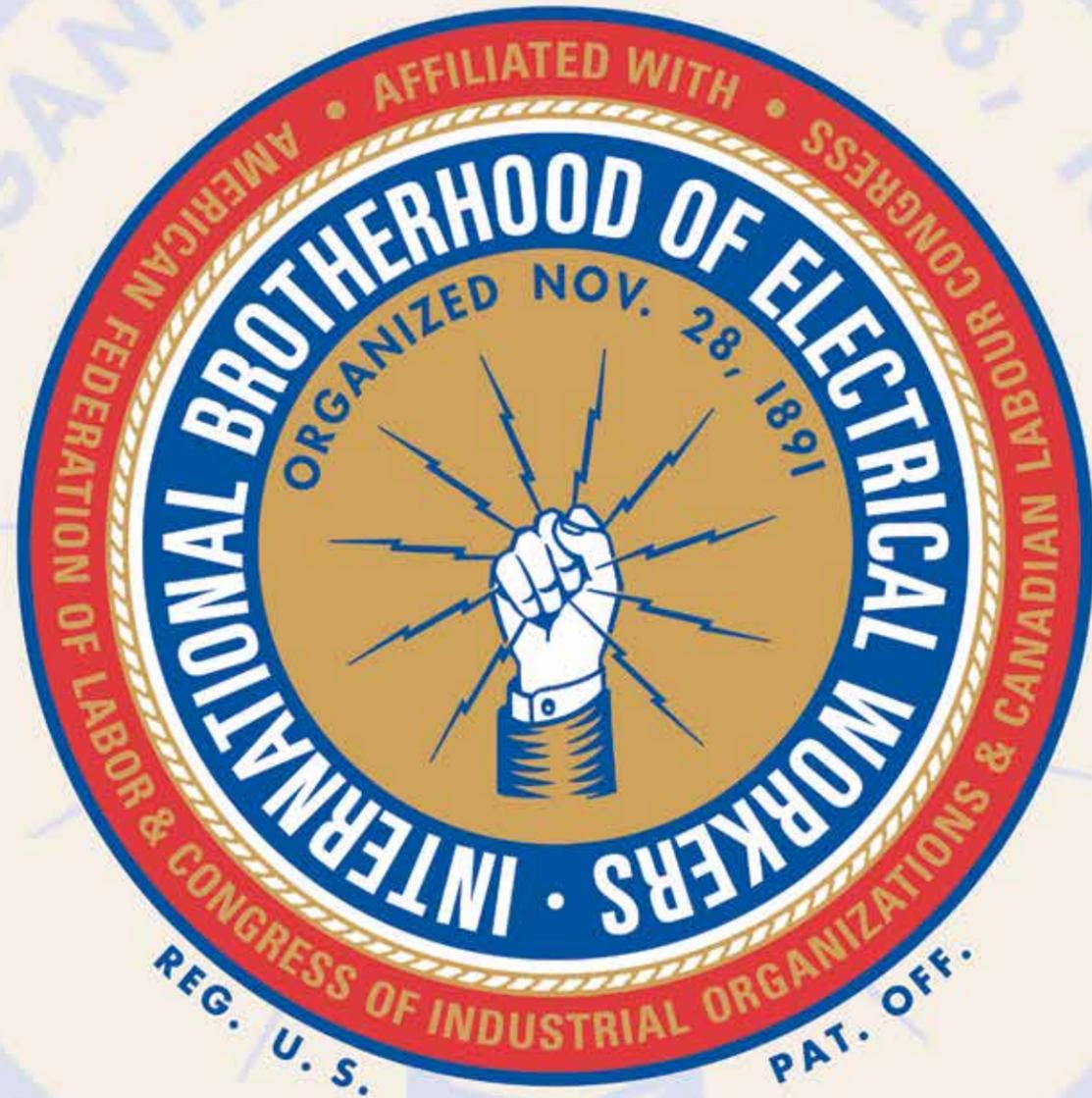
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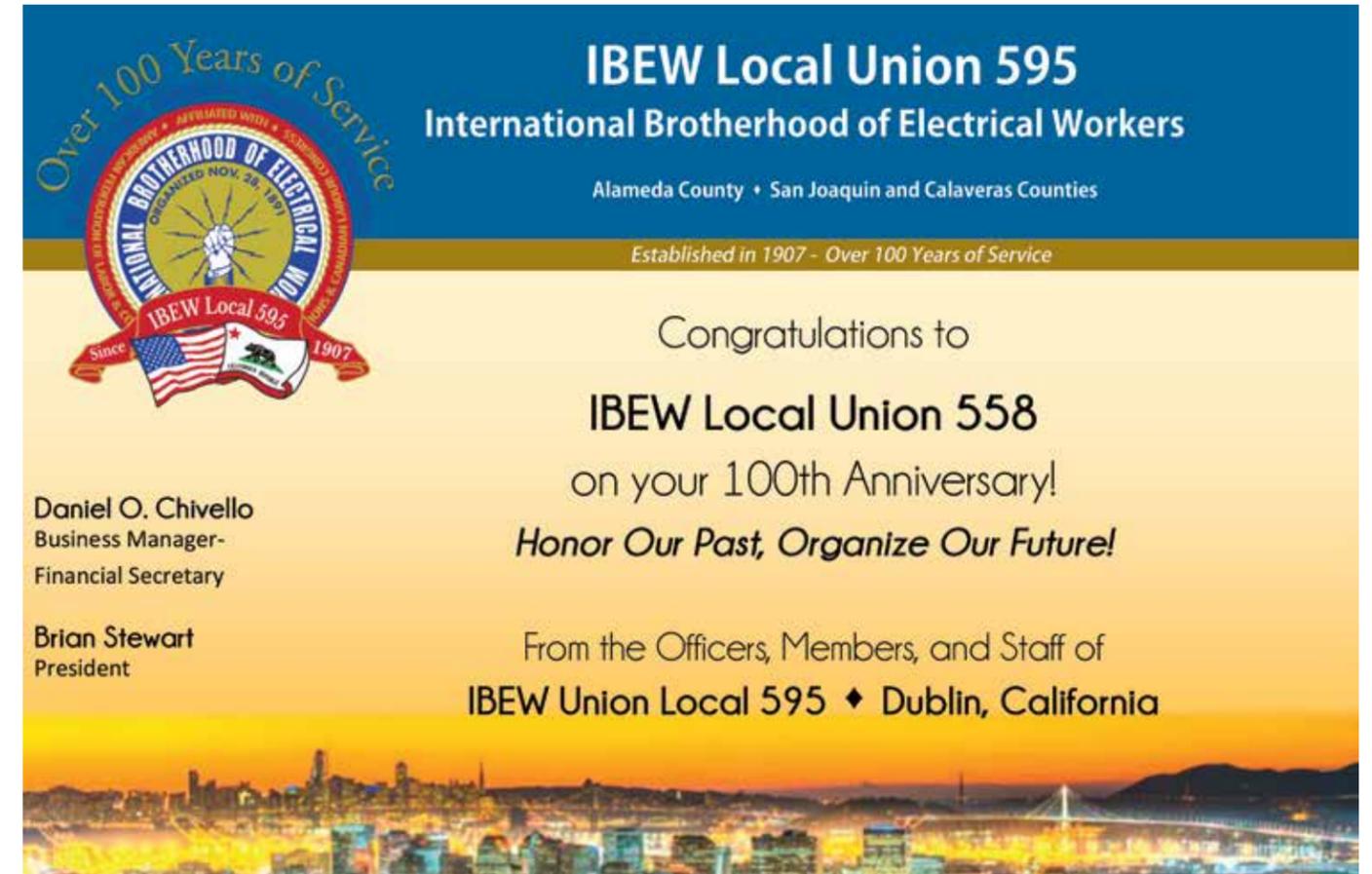


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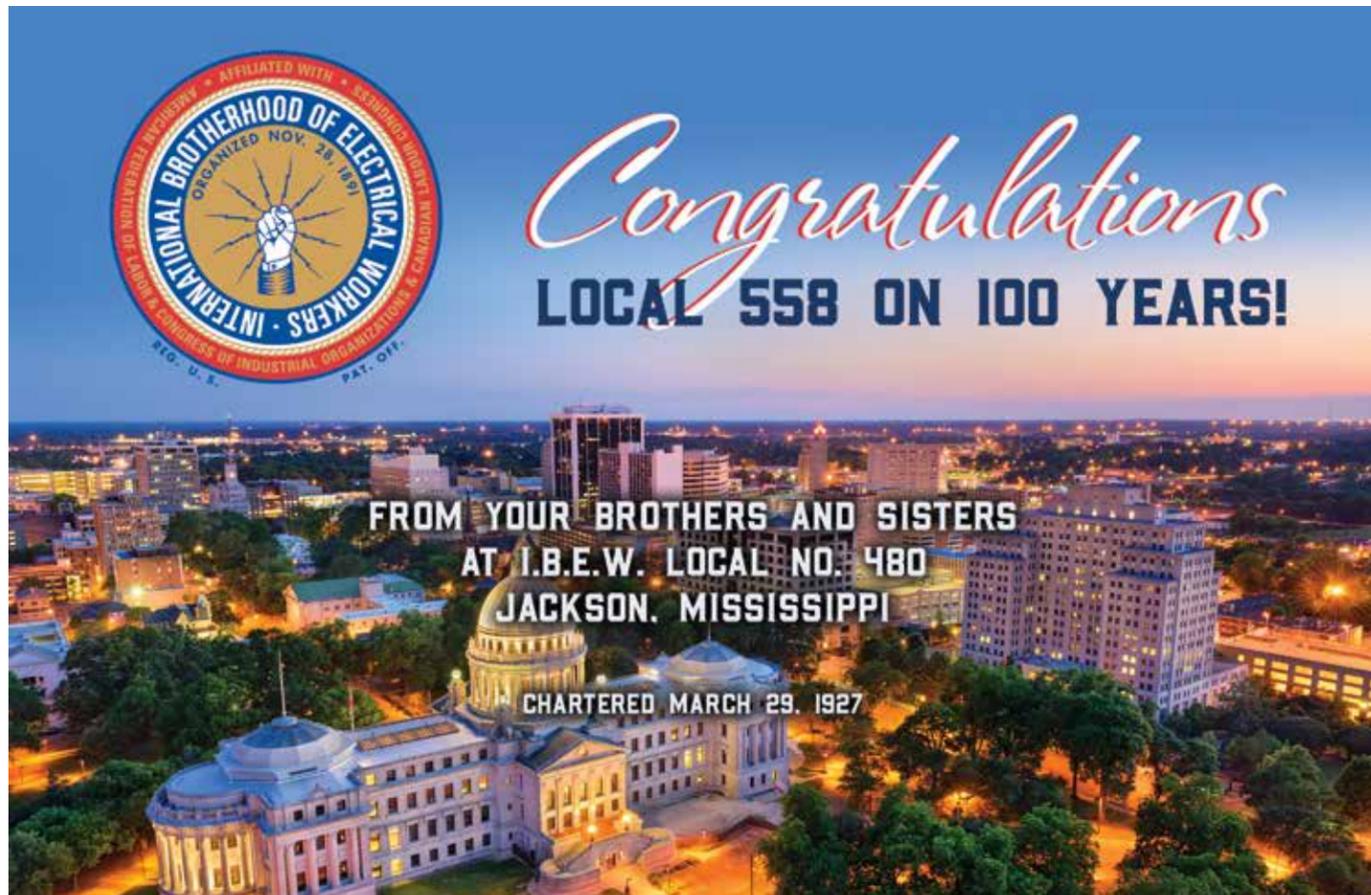
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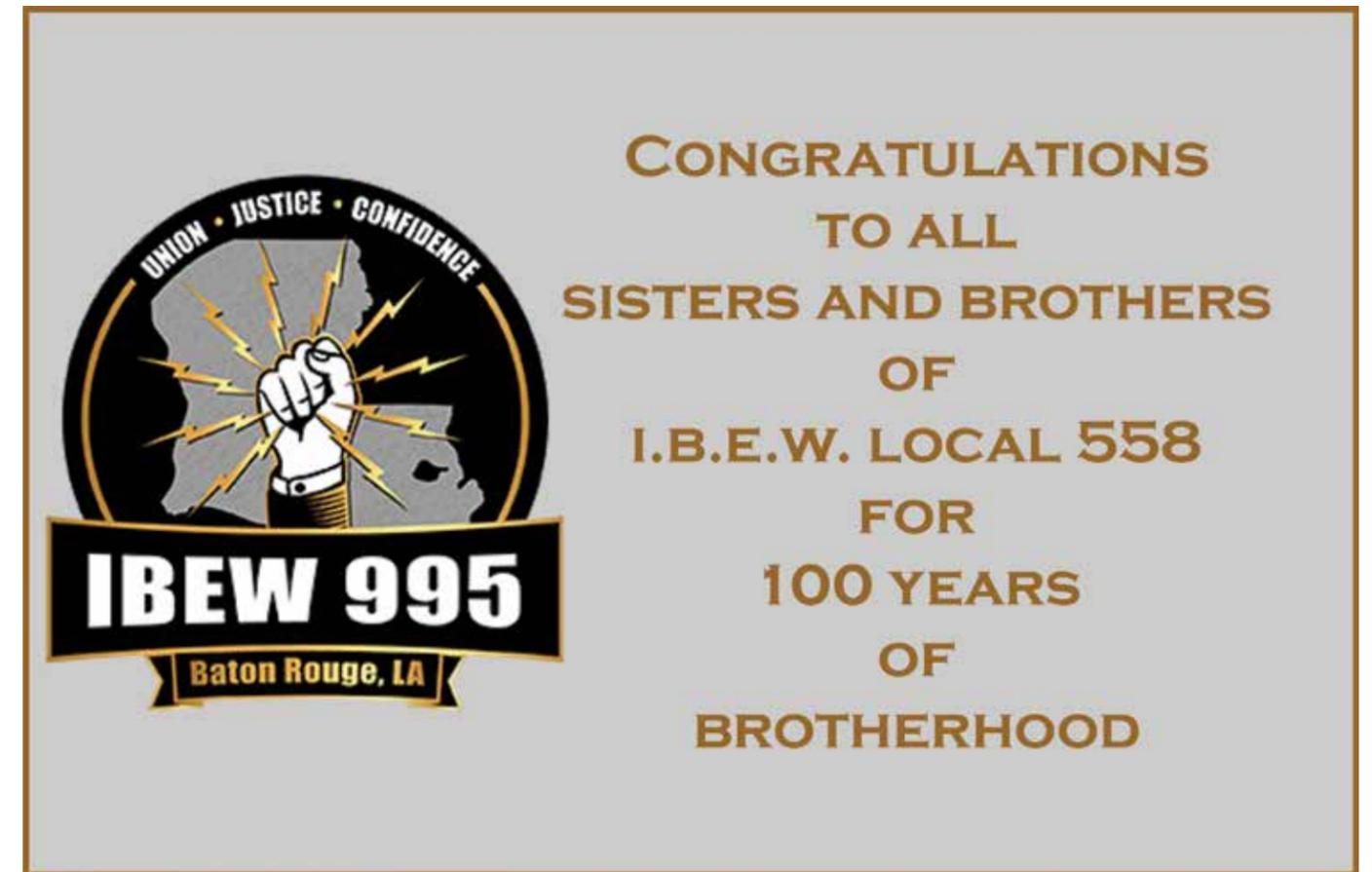
From the Officers, Members, and Staff of  
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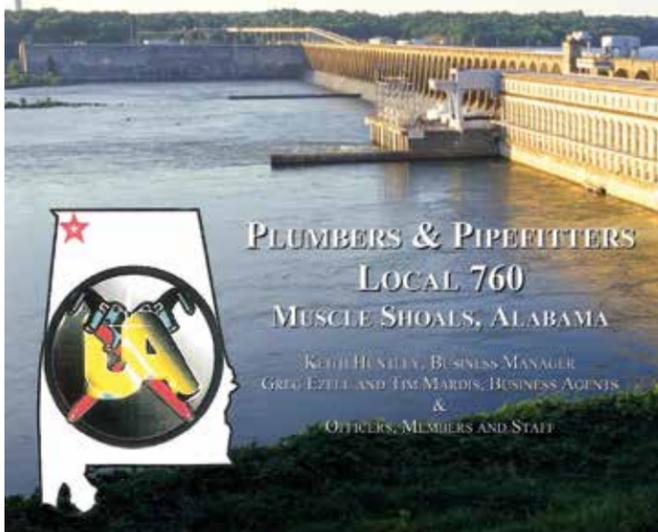


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