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Laborers Union Local 324 Helps Build Careers

By **Kia Croom**



Willie Lee Hicks, Jr. Photo by Joe L. Fisher.

For more than 100 years, the Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA) (commonly referred to as Laborers Local 324) has been helping community members establish viable careers in the construction industry and even within large firms. Laborers Local 324 is one of the largest unions in the Northern California District Council of Laborers with over 2,500 members from various industries.

According to Laborers Local 324 President Willie Lee Hicks, Jr. the union is full of resources that can help its members harness viable careers.

"It's about more than just a job, members utilize our training center to better their skills and find great jobs to support their families", Hicks said. "It's more than just a dig-a-ditch kind of job our members can become engineers, superintendents etc. Many people in these occupations started out as laborers."

The Laborers Local 324 has a targeted outreach strategy to reach both members and non-members in the broader community to avail the union's resources to them. Laborers Local 324 has partnered with the Central Labor Councils and Construction Trades—two American Federation of Labor and Congress Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) associations. Through these partnerships, Laborers Local 324 has leveraged resources to bring valuable programming to community members such as job fairs, awareness and advocacy for fair treatment of workers.

"We created the Helmet to Hardhat program so that people coming out of the military can go to work at the various trade unions as laborers, pipefitters, iron workers, electricians and even operating engineers. We offer courses in basic math skills and certifications at our training site in San Ramon," Hicks said.

The Laborers Local 324 stands by its mission of enhancing, conserving and advancing the interests of its parent, the international union, its affiliates and members. At the heart of its mission is the union's commitment to organizing its members to promote good will through its civic involvement within the community.

In 1992, Hicks joined the Local 324 Union in Richmond and was appointed Business Representative for the union 1995. In his new capacity he would soon have the opportunity to work with a number of firms including Chevron, RichmondBuild, Bechtel, Ghilotti Brothers and a host of others which have played an integral part in employing many union members in the construction industry.

Under the leadership of President Hicks, in the 2010/11 year Laborers Local 324 successfully organized several local employers in the area and encouraged them to execute the union's master agreement, guaranteeing members healthcare for their families, prevailing wage pay and a host of other fringe benefits.

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