

# The IBEW SPARQ

A quarterly newsletter highlighting IBEW values

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## Building a Culture of Safety on the Job

Good wages, benefits and working conditions are hallmarks of the IBEW's strong contracts. But there's one condition more fundamental than anything else: ensuring that members return home healthy and unharmed every day.

as our industry has changed so dramatically," said Kim Greene, president and CEO of Atlanta-based Southern Company Gas. "Maintaining our safe operations is absolutely paramount. Having trained, skilled, confident workers is the key to that."

finally asked workers for their opinions, responses poured in.

"People care about safety. They had something to say, and boy did they say it," Greene said. "They let us know that we were paying way too much attention to the small stuff and were being distracted from the big stuff...that we were operating in many ways by being lucky, not necessarily by being smart."

Management realized that "we'd created a culture where people weren't reporting, a culture of being hard on people who tripped and fell, being hard on people who smashed their finger, being hard on people who got an insect bite and might have blown a period of time of no injuries for a work group," she said.

Partnering with the IBEW and safety experts, Southern Company Gas began concentrating on critical risks, the tasks most likely to cause serious injuries or fatalities. The result, along with the company's response, might surprise you.

"This year, the recordable incident rate is as high as it's been in 10 years," Greene said. "But I feel like our company is safer than ever. I don't think we're having more injuries, I think that people are telling us about it now."

Working with the IBEW, she said, "We're creating a learning environment where it is clear that we really care about keeping people safe."



Beyond the bargaining table, the IBEW is partnering with employers to build a true culture of safety.

"Our members do an excellent job looking out for each other and minimizing risks. But that's not enough," International President Lonnie R. Stephenson said. "Employers have to be every bit as committed to job safety as we are."

With the IBEW's input and encouragement, they increasingly are.

"We've had the privilege to work side by side with our IBEW partners

Greene told the audience at the IBEW Membership Development Conference in Chicago in August how her company changed its approach to safety after consulting with workers.

For years, management focused on an OSHA metric known as the "recordable incident rate" that measures work-related deaths, injuries and illnesses. Deciding the rate was too high, they cracked down on employees, demanding they "work smarter." The rate dropped, but something wasn't right. When the company



What does SPARQ mean to you? Have an idea for the newsletter? Email [theSPARQ@ibew.org](mailto:theSPARQ@ibew.org)



## Being Safe Lets You Do Your Best Work

IBEW broadcast members can be on the field bringing viewers the sights and sounds of the big game—or in the field delivering important breaking news.

But putting oneself at risk is not a requirement to achieve great results. Safety is the No. 1 pillar of the Code of Excellence's core values because nothing else matters if you don't go home at the end of the day. That is why, when IBEW members see something wrong, the Code requires them to inform a steward or business manager.

That's just what members of Nashville, Tenn., Local 429 did, and it may have prevented a serious accident. Members who regularly work NFL games at Nissan Stadium for Fox Sports or CBS noticed that a support used to lift equipment to a high end-zone camera position wasn't high enough to get cases over the fencing, requiring members to reach down for their gear.

Treasurer Kim Sansom, who was doing a routine site visit, and Business Manager Randy Clark notified the IBEW Broadcasting and Telecommunications Department, which contacted CBS. The company sent a crew to install permanent rigging and redesigned the fence to make it safer for members to access equipment.

Fox Sports and CBS also investigated after a handful of

locals noticed that music being played in NFL stadiums on setup days was overly loud. Thanks to the vigilance of members, both networks sent safety directors who found that the noise was above safe levels. Although the NFL countered that public address system decisions are made by the individual stadiums, the networks immediately made noise-canceling headsets available to members working there.

It's that kind of heads-up thinking about safety that can prevent accidents and injuries. That's what the Code of Excellence is all about.



## SPARQ GOES LOCAL



### IBEW 2019 RENEW/NextGen Conference

More than 500 young leaders attended last year's IBEW RENEW/NextGen Conference and learned about the difference they can make every day in their workplaces and in their union when they commit to the IBEW Code of Excellence. RENEW and NextGen members are serious about their roles in building a strong IBEW—and demonstrating the core values of SPARQ is part of making that future a reality.

