

**INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD OF ELECTRICAL WORKERS
LOCAL 278
CORPUS CHRISTI, TEXAS**



**100 YEAR
COMMEMORATIVE HISTORY**

1926 - 2026



I.B.E.W. LOCAL 278 CENTENNIAL ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION DINNER-DANCE

Saturday, April 25, 2026
6:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.

Omni Corpus Christi Hotel
900 North Shoreline Boulevard, Corpus Christi

Cocktail Reception.....	6:00 – 7:00 p.m.
Seating & Welcome.....	7:00 – 7:15 p.m.
Dinner	7:15 – 8:15 p.m.
Remarks and Presentations	8:15 – 9:00 p.m.
Music, Dancing, Celebrating, Gifts.....	9:00 – 11:00 p.m.

WE MOVE FORWARD WITH TRADITIONS THAT BUILT OUR LOCAL

Brothers, Sisters and Friends:

Welcome, and thank you for joining us as we celebrate 100 years of I.B.E.W. Local 278.

For a century, this local has been built by the hands and dedication of hardworking men and women who believed in something bigger than themselves. Through every generation, our members have carried forward a tradition of skill, pride and unity that continues to define who we are today.

This milestone belongs to each and every member, past and present, who helped shape this local into what it is. Their commitment laid the foundation we stand on, and their example continues to guide us forward.

As we reflect on our history, we also look ahead with purpose. The strength of this union has always come from its membership, and it will be up to all of us to carry that strength into the future.

Today, we honor 100 years of brotherhood, sisterhood and excellence in our trade, and we recommit ourselves to the work that lies ahead.

It is an honor to serve this membership during such a historic moment.

David A. Carranco, Business Manager/Financial Secretary
I.B.E.W. Local 278, Journeyman Wireman No. 7572875



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I.B.E.W. Local 278 and Union Histories give thanks to the following for their contributions to the local's history presented in this book:

Local 278 retirees James Garcia, Eduardo Rodriguez, Norvile Johnston, Ken Erickson, Marvin Marshall, Constantine Vera, Miguel Carranco

I.B.E.W. Museum and Museum Curator Curtis Bateman

City of Corpus Christi Public Libraries, Special Collections and Archives

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The 100-Year History of I.B.E.W. Local No. 278

POWERING THE GULF

F'S COASTAL BEND SINCE 1926



A rapidly developing coastal town by 1910, the City of Corpus Christi in the “Coastal Bend” region on the Gulf of Mexico in South Texas began an aggressive program of modernization in 1913 that included construction of a new city hall and a municipal wharf to boost shipping operations. By 1914, four railroad lines were also serving the city, which contributed to its accelerating growth.

In that promising setting, the **International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers** (I.B.E.W.) established a local union of its own in Corpus Christi, chartering “mixed” inside-wiremen and outside-linemen **Local No. 505** in the city on May 20, 1913. However, Corpus Christi – like much of Texas and the United States in the early 1900s – was generally anti-union and resisted organized labor during that time, and less than three years after it was established, Local 505 was defunct by the end of 1915.

The city’s development was abruptly halted by a powerful hurricane that destroyed much

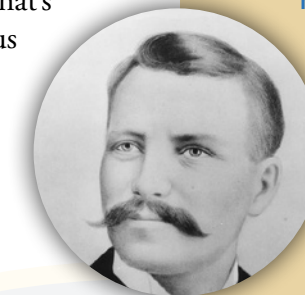
of its central business district and North Beach area on September 14, 1919. But Corpus Christi recovered over the next several years, eventually building a deepwater port from the gulf to a protected harbor in the city that opened on September 14, 1926.

“The impact on Corpus Christi was immediate,” as Texas State Historical Association literature notes. With a new-found prosperity, by 1930 the city’s population would be more than double what it had been just a decade earlier.

Recognizing the need for the burgeoning city’s electrical workers to be organized during that time, on April 17, 1926, 14 men submitted an application to the I.B.E.W. for a new local in Corpus Christi. A week later, the union granted them a charter for “mixed” electrical trades **Local No. 278** on **April 24, 1926**, to represent inside electricians and outside linemen in the jurisdiction of “Corpus Christi and Vicinity.”

ADVANCING ITS OBJECTIVES, ENDURING HIGHS AND LOWS

Less than five months after it was established, Local 278 by September 1926 had organized a membership of about 25 electricians and linemen. What's more, every electrical shop in Corpus Christi by that time was employing the local's union electrical workers across a territory in South Texas that extended from the City of Kingsville to the south of Corpus Christi to the City of Beeville to the north.



MILLER, OTHERS FOUNDED I.B.E.W. 135 YEARS AGO

A small group of inside electricians and outside linemen, headed by founder and first president **Brother Henry Miller**, officially formed the **National Brotherhood of Electrical Workers** during a convention on November 21, 1891, in St. Louis. Brother Miller reportedly went without food and other necessities and instead used his earnings to travel the country to organize local unions in various cities into the new national union.

At its 1899 convention in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the union officially changed its name to the **International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (I.B.E.W.)** after it added a local in Ottawa, Ontario. The union's primary objectives remained improving safety, wages and working conditions for its members – just as the modern-day I.B.E.W. continues to focus on organizing, collective bargaining and advocating for workers' rights.

Brother Miller passed away on July 10, 1896, while working as head lineman for the Potomac Electric Power Company after he was shocked, fell from a ladder and died the next morning from a concussion. He was only 38 years old.

To help advance and protect the local's condition and that of all organized labor in the city, on January 11, 1927, Local 278 representatives joined other construction crafts to form the **Corpus Christi Building and Construction Trades Council**, with Local 278 member **Brother G. I. Cowan** serving as its first vice-chairman. The new organization announced its "purpose" was to "bring all labor of the city into a central body in order to form better understanding and closer relationship between builder, manufacturer and businessman and the labor trades."

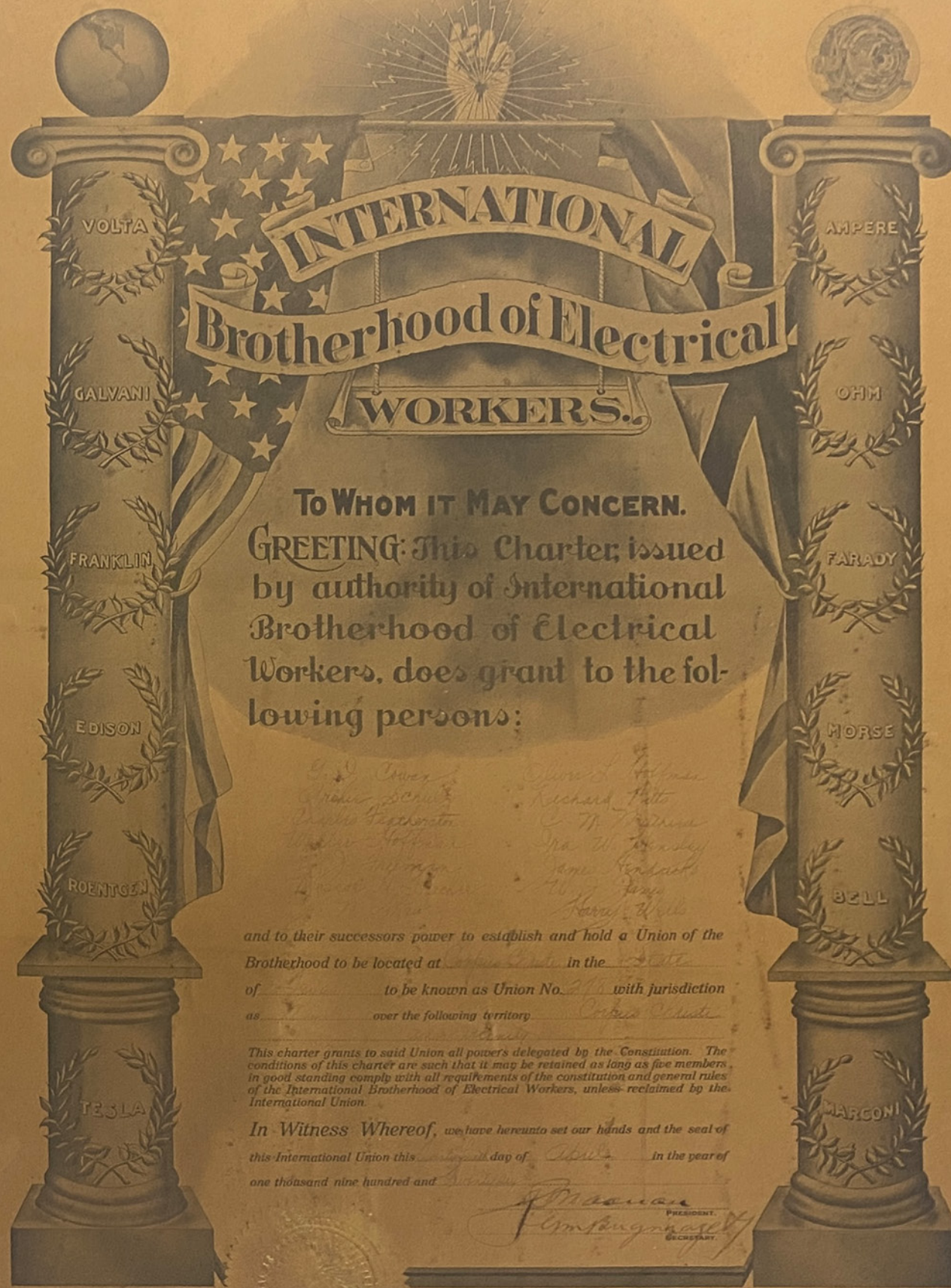
As Corpus Christi continued to develop – highlighted by construction of its first skyscraper, the Nixon Building, in 1927 – Local 278 was hosting traveling members from other I.B.E.W. locals in early 1928 to help it staff a large number of projects in its area that would keep union electricians busy throughout the year. Those jobs included wiring an addition to the new **Port of Corpus Christi** and its two large **cotton compresses** that were completed in March of that year, in time to process the largest shipment of cotton to ever leave the port at that time.

Meanwhile, the local also negotiated its **first-ever work agreement** with the "Electrical Contractors of the City of Corpus Christi," which went into effect May 1, 1928

(and consisted of only two pages). Among its provisions, the contract stipulated that signatory contractors would only employ members of Local 278 and workdays would consist of eight hours.

The agreement also provided a wage scale for the local's journeymen of \$1.12-1/2 retroactive to April 15, 1928, and from July 1, 1928, through July 1, 1929, an increased scale of \$1.25 per hour. What's more, the contract set overtime pay for weekdays at time-and-one-half the wage rate and for weekends and holidays at double-time.

"Our contractors are pretty fair-minded, even if they think we are not worth all they give," Local 426 member **Brother Harry H. Hensel** wrote in the March 1928 issue of the I.B.E.W.



I.B.E.W. Local 278 charter issued April 24, 1926, and signed by I.B.E.W. General President James Patrick Noonan (who served in that position from 1919 into 1929) and I.B.E.W. General Secretary Gustave M. Bugniaget (who served in that position from 1925 into 1947).



Local 278 Charter Members

These 14 men signed the application for a charter granted to Local No. 278 by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers on April 24, 1926, and were subsequently listed on the local's charter.

G. I. Cowan	W. J. James
Charles Featherston	Charles M. Mathieu
E. J. Freeman	Richard Pitts
James Hendricks	Archie Schultz
Ira W. Hensley	Joseph N. Shaw
Oliver L. Hoffman	Roscoe H. Thacker
Walter Hoffman	Harry Wells

Journal, the union's monthly membership magazine, while reporting on negotiations for the new agreement. "They know we need it, and they most always help a good cause."

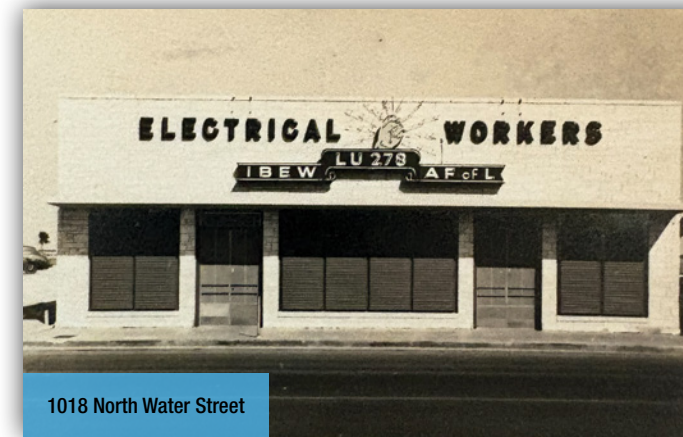
With ample construction work and, as a result, steady employment conditions for Local 278 members persisting as Corpus Christi continued to develop, jobs providing workhours for the union electricians included construction of the first **Sears, Roebuck and Co.** department store in the city. The two-story building in the 1300 block of Leopard Street opened in November 1928 after being wired by the local's craftsmen.



But as work began to slow in its jurisdiction when larger projects were being completed or had been concluded, the local was forced to counter employers who were not abiding by the work agreement it had in place with the electrical contractors. In one such instance, the local listed in an ad in the November 8, 1928, *Corpus Christi Times* newspaper the names of five firms that had *not* "violated" the agreement while announcing that one other Corpus Christi electrical contractor (who was not named) had breached it.

Then on June 1, 1929, even with only a dozen of its members employed at the time, Local 278 refused to accept a cut in its active agreement's pay scale to \$2 per day that had been proposed by most of its signatory contractors. Those employers subsequently locked the local's members out of their jobs that day, after which the union electricians were off those sites for more than a week before a compromise was reached.

Growth in and around Corpus Christi and, consequently, progress and employment for Local 278 were initially slowed during the early years of the Great Depression, the decade-long national economic catastrophe that began with the U.S. stock market crash of October 29, 1929 (history's "Black Tuesday"), after which



1018 North Water Street

upwards of 25 percent of the nation's workforce was unemployed. As the United States and Canada experienced unprecedented economic stress as a result of the depression, more than 50 percent of the I.B.E.W.'s membership was unemployed at times throughout North America and wages for members who were able to work dropped, according to the international union's *History & Structure* biography.

However, the start of drilling for recently discovered oil in the Saxet Field near Corpus Christi in 1930, creating jobs erecting wells and refineries, and the continued development of the city's port helped offset the depression's worst effects during its earlier years for Local 278 and the region. With the economic boost to the area from what was part of a broader South Texas expansion of the oil industry, between 1931 and 1941 the city's population more than doubled again.

But the dismal economy eventually caught up to the local. As such, by 1935 it began holding its meetings at various contractors' shops to save money on renting a hall after having met in the **Woodmen of the World Hall** since 1926, its membership dropped to less than 20 dues-paying members by 1937 and by then only two electrical contractors in the city were employing union workers.

The National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 – the "New Deal" – developed under

Local 278 Union Halls

(All locations are in the City of Corpus Christi.)

Woodmen of the World Hall
Lawrence Street at Water Street
1926 – 1935

Various Shops of Local 278 Employing Contractors
1935 – 1938

Central Labor Union Hall
506-1/2 Mesquite Street
1938 – 1939

Corpus Christi Labor Temple
906 North Lower Broadway
1939 – 1941

Corpus Christi Labor Temple
1824 Mesquite Street
1941 – 1943

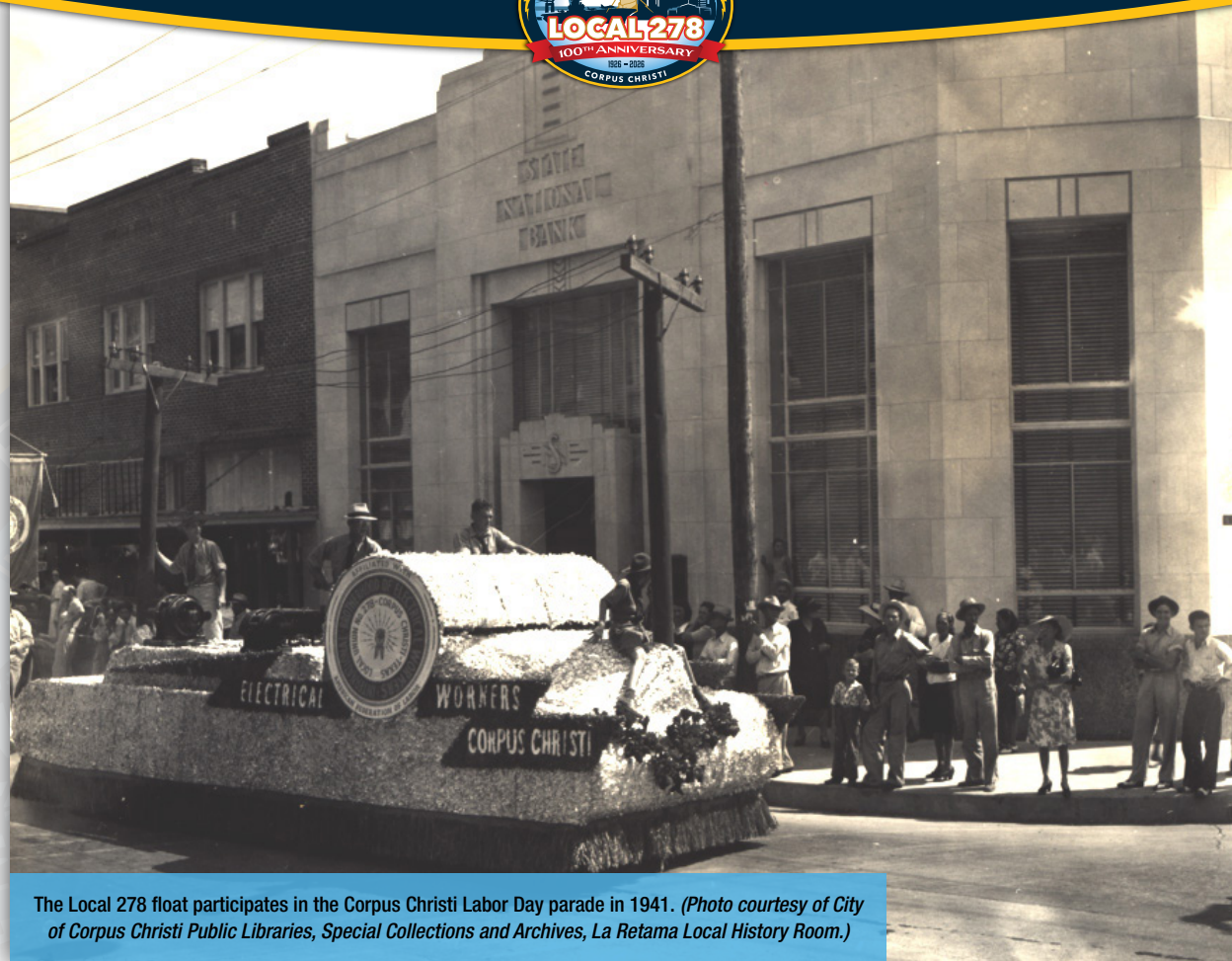
Carpenters Union Hall
2107 Morgan Avenue
1943 – 1951

Local 278 Union Hall
1018 North Water Street
1951 – 1987

Local 278 Union Hall
2301 Saratoga Boulevard
1987 – current

U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt provided some relief nationally from the effects of the Great Depression with its series of economic measures aimed at generating jobs. The few New Deal projects in the Local 278 jurisdiction that created employment opportunities included construction of Wynn Seale Junior High School for the Corpus Christi Independent School District, which after it was completed in early 1936 with a grant from the federal Public Works Administration also served as a cultural center for the entire community.

The federal government also passed legislation that assisted unions and protected workers' rights. Among those measures was the National Labor Relations Act of 1935, which guaranteed



The Local 278 float participates in the Corpus Christi Labor Day parade in 1941. (Photo courtesy of City of Corpus Christi Public Libraries, Special Collections and Archives, La Retama Local History Room.)

employees the right to form and join unions and to collectively bargain for contracts through representatives of their choosing.

As the 1930s and the depression neared their ends, Local 278 was already working its way back and at one point in 1938 it had already again signed most of the electrical contractors, including all of the “principal” firms, to its work agreement. The local’s progress even earned it a special commendation from I.B.E.W. International General President Daniel W. Tracy for the progress it made “in starting Corpus Christi on the way toward becoming a closed-shop (union) town.”

With employment picking up late in the decade, among the major projects on which the local’s electricians worked was the new Richter Baking Company plant on Ayers Street in Corpus Christi. After the \$225,000 (equivalent to about \$5.2 million in 2026) **Butter Krust Bakery** opened in 1938, it could bake 1,750

loaves of bread each hour (*but it was closed nearly 60 years later in January 1997*).

HELPING WIN A WORLD WAR, DEVELOPING WITH ITS TOWN

The United States and Local 278 finally escaped the Great Depression as the country entered the 1940s and its industries were producing military materiel with World War II already underway in Asia and Europe. During that war, as the Corpus Christi economy transitioned from a regional trade center based on oil and agriculture into a vital military and industrial hub, Local 278 members helped transform the region into a host for vast military infrastructure.

Arguably the most significant source of employment for the local’s membership was provided with the construction and subsequent maintenance and expansions of **Naval Air Station Corpus Christi** (N.A.S.), which was

commissioned on March 12, 1941. The massive construction project employed thousands of workers, including many union electrical workers, to build the world’s largest naval training facility, which featured a main station and six auxiliary sites and would graduate more than 35,000 pilots during the war.

After the United States officially entered World War II following the surprise attack by Imperial Japan on the U.S. Naval Base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941, military production continued to provide abundant workhours for the Local 278 membership. In particular, the N.A.S. was a primary driver of economic growth for the region and employment for the local during the war, as the federal government ultimately invested more than \$100 million (about \$1.86 billion in 2026) in the facility.

Elsewhere, with Corpus Christi serving as a strategic center for defense manufacturing and logistics, union building-trades craftspeople including Local 278 members helped develop the region’s shipyards and the most-extensive petrochemical industry in the world to refine fuel for the U.S.-led Allied war effort, which included expansions of the **Pontiac Refining Company and Sinclair Oil refineries** to produce aviation fuel. Other sites on which the local’s electricians also worked included construction of the key **Great Southern**

Refinery in 1943 and 1944 before it was completed that year to produce critical aeronautical gasolines.

Meanwhile, Local 278 signed work agreements with the **Texas Gulf Coast Chapter, National Electrical Contractors’ Association** (NECA) during the war that were essentially unchanged from year to year, with the final contract being signed in April 1944. None of the pacts called for wage increases, maintaining the local’s journeyman pay scale of \$1.62-1/2 per hour for 40-hour workweeks and time-and-a-half pay for Saturday and overtime work – after the local had agreed in 1941 to a reduction from double-time for overtime.

After the war ended with the surrenders of Nazi Germany on May 7, 1945, and then Japan on September 2 of that year to the Allies, the local maintained strong employment conditions while Corpus Christi continued to grow rapidly. While construction work was stalled in late 1945 and early 1946 because of a shortage of building materials, throughout the remainder of that year and the balance of the decade, the local often had to call upon traveling I.B.E.W. members to help handle manpower needs of its contractors, which included expansion of a massive **Brown & Root hot mix asphalt plant** in 1947.

During that period, Local 278’s journeyman wage scale increased to \$1.87-per-hour at one



Local 278 members and guests attend a local banquet in 1943.

point in 1946. But Local 278's roughly 250 members briefly went on strike against their NECA employers beginning February 17, 1947, to gain a requested 25-cent increase to their \$1.87-per-hour wage scale in a new work agreement that the contractors had initially rejected.

More work was also made available to the local's membership when Corpus Christi experienced a massive housing boom in the late 1940s that was driven by post-war population growth, N.A.S. expansion and the region's oil industry. The surge led to rapid accelerated suburban development and an increased demand for infrastructure improvements, all of which helped the local gain workhours and, as a result, grow to about 390 members before the end of the decade.

REALIZING HISTORIC GAINS, EXPANDING ITS INFLUENCE

Perhaps the most consequential decade in the history of Local 278, the 1950s was highlighted for the local when in February 1952 it moved into the first headquarters it ever owned. The local had purchased the red-brick building at 1018 Water Street in Corpus Christi, which was formerly occupied by the Texas Employment Commission, the previous year for \$74,000 (about \$912,000 in 2026) to serve as its future home.

The local moved into the first-ever **Local 278 Union Hall** after it extensively remodeled the one-story structure with offices, a kitchen and a meeting hall with 100 theater-style seats at a total cost of about \$41,000 (approximately

\$505,000 in 2026). It held a grand opening for the new facility in May 1952, after which the local remained in the union hall for the next 35 years.

Out in the field, the local's roughly 360 members remained busy with work during the early 1950s. Jobs that provided employment during that time included construction of the new, \$80-million (about \$979 million in 2026) **Reynolds Metals Company aluminum reduction plant** in San Patricio, Texas, that was completed in 1952.

After a brief lull in employment in 1954, during which many of the local's members traveled to the jurisdictions of sister I.B.E.W. locals around the state and country for work, a surplus of large-scale industrial expansions throughout the city during the second half of the decade kept members and I.B.E.W. travelers from other locals busy. Notably, much of the work included installing modern new electric-control systems in the region's expanding refineries, including the **Southwestern Refinery** in Corpus Christi.

Elsewhere, with the availability of water becoming a problem for the area as its industrial sector and residential population simultaneously grew, the local's members helped build the new **O.N. Stevens Water Treatment Plant** in 1954 and 1955. The facility would more than double the output of water for the Corpus Christi region and continue to serve as a primary water-treatment plant for the city for decades to come.

Among numerous other industrial and commercial projects, in 1955 and 1956 union electricians also wired an expansion of **Alcoa Point Comfort aluminum smelting plant**

LOCAL 278 BUSINESS MANAGERS

Archie Schulz 1926 – 1927	Edwin J. Hayes 1956 – 1963
Joseph A. "Joe" Verret 1927 – 1929	William B. Tucker 1963 – 1970
Harry F. Harrell 1929 – 1931	Gordon Lynn Tate 1970 – 1978
Joseph A. "Joe" Verret 1931 – 1932	Rick Diegel 1978 – 1983
<i>(None listed 1933 – 1935)</i>	Ken Helbling 1983 – 1986
Charles M. Mathieu 1936 – 1938	Larry Major 1986 – 1992
R. Randolph (Linemen) William W. McClellan (Wiremen) 1938 – 1939	Robert S. Shake 1992 – 2004
Eugene "Gene" Hendricks 1939 – 1940	Miguel F. Carranco 2004 – 2016
Milton T. Lyman 1940 – 1941	San Juan Garcia 2016 – 2019
Joseph E. Mathieu 1941 – 1943	Jesse C. Gatewood 2019 – 2022
Eugene "Gene" Hendricks 1943 – 1956	David A. Carranco 2022 – current



Local 278 apprentice Brother Jeff Shelburne (center) receives his apprenticeship Certificate of Completion and the "Local 278 Apprentice of the Year" award from I.B.E.W. Seventh District International Representative Albert Lindstrom during apprenticeship graduation ceremonies in 1955.

near the City of Point Comfort, Texas, and a 66,000-kilowatt expansion to the **Lon C. Hill Power Station** near Corpus Christi for the **Central Power and Light Company**. The electric utility had been substantially adding to its electric-generating capacity in the Gulf Coast Area during the previous five years, greatly expanding its transmission and distribution facilities as well, providing Local 278 members with more workhours.

By that time, the local's electricians were also performing approximately 90 percent of the residential wiring work in Corpus Christi. With the city's population more than doubling in size during the decade to nearly 168,000 residents by 1960, home construction was a source of steady when not strong employment for the local's wiremen.



Local 278 Member Training

EDUCATING INDUSTRY-BEST ELECTRICAL WORKERS

While since it was chartered in 1926 Local 278 was training potential electrical workers through the time-tested system of **apprenticeship**, through which apprentices learn the electrical trade while working alongside experienced journeyman electrical workers on jobsites, it was not until 1945 that the local implemented a formal, structured training program for apprentices. That year, Local 278 and its employers of the Southeast Texas Chapter of the National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA) formed the **Texas Gulf Coast Electrical Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee** (E.J.A.T.C.) of equal representation from both groups to establish, fund and oversee an organized and state-certified training program.

Charter member **Brother Joseph "Joe" Shaw** was Local 278's very first apprentice in 1926.

With the Local 278 revamped four-year apprenticeship in 2025, the local also agreed to a new, **four-year wage structure** (based on percentages of the journeyman-level wage scale) that reinstated 5-percent pay increases to apprentices advancing to the next step in their respective curriculum and a 10-percent increase from the third to fourth period.

Apprentice Wages based on percentages of Journeyman Wage Scale:

- Apprenticeship First Period: 55 percent
- Apprenticeship Second Period: 60 percent
- Apprenticeship Third Period: 65 percent
- Apprenticeship Fourth Period: 75 percent
- Apprenticeship Fifth Period: 80 percent
- Apprenticeship Sixth Period: 85 percent
- Apprenticeship Seventh Period: 90 percent

The E.J.A.T.C., in cooperation with the U.S. Veterans' Administration and the vocational department of the Corpus Christi Independent Public Schools District, first hosted inside-electrician classroom courses that supplemented paid, on-the-job training at the city's Wynn Seale Junior High School on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. *(The classes had actually begun just before World War II started in 1941 but were disbanded as most of the apprentices enlisted in the military.)* Initially, 20 men, 16 of whom were U.S. Armed Services veterans, were enrolled in the apprentice courses, for which Local 278 member electrician **Brother Andrew G. Hendricks** was the instructor and included instruction in such subjects as basic practical electricity, lighting, fixture work, wiring for power, appliance repair and signal wiring.

In 1947, Local 278 and the E.J.A.T.C. began providing classes for its new, four-year-long inside-wireman apprenticeship program through the **Corpus Christi Junior College** vocational department. Apprentices were then being registered under the jurisdiction of the college (which had been established in 1935 by the Corpus Christi School District and was later renamed **Del Mar College** in 1948).

By 1950, the E.J.A.T.C. Apprenticeship Training Program was sponsored by the Texas State Department of Vocational

Education and Del Mar College, and it was approved by the U.S. Department of Labor. That year, the program was training 38 apprentices in its four-year curriculum, which included four years of paid, on-the-job training under the supervision of trained electrical workers plus four hours per week of classroom study on theories and techniques of the electrical trade totaling 176 hours each year.

Then in May 1956, Local 278 and the E.J.A.T.C. inaugurated a first **Journeyman Educational Program** as a "refresher" or "upgrade" training for their electrical workers. The initial journeyman class covered wire insulations, with an emphasis on "synthetics in replacing rubber insulation," after which a second class covered "fuses, panels and switches."

The E.J.A.T.C. extended its inside-wireman apprenticeship to five years in 1960. During their schooling, in addition to jobsite training as they worked and earned wages, apprentices were then required to complete 144 hours of classroom instruction each year.

Since those early years, the E.J.A.T.C. program has progressed into the **Texas Gulf Coast Electrical Training Alliance** (under the auspices of the I.B.E.W.-NECA National Electrical Training Alliance). Along with Local 278, the **Texas Gulf Coast Electrical Apprenticeship Program** has developed into one of the premier training programs in the region, having transitioned back to a four-year-long curriculum in September 2025, with wireman training

In early 2025, six Local 278 journeyman electricians – John Eguia, Joaquin Martinez, Manuel Gonzales, Joshua Kirkland, Jerry Castillo and Rico Gomez – completed the **Craft Certification Performance Evaluator (C.C.P.E.) Course**, an intensive 8-hour training that prepares participants to carry out validated Craft Certification evaluations, including both the Incremental C.C.P.E. Performance Evaluations and the 4-hour C.C.P.E. Journeyman Evaluations. The hands-on assessments focus on real-world electrical layout and installation skills, following a standardized evaluation process to ensure accuracy and consistency.

The new, two-year Local 278 working agreement collectively bargained with the Texas Gulf Coast Division of NECA that went into effect on August 31, 2025, established a **J.A.T.C. Building Fund** into which employers would contribute 25 cents per hour worked by the local's members. The funds were earmarked for future training facilities or building needs of the local, the Texas Gulf Coast E.J.A.T.C. and their Electrical Training Alliance.

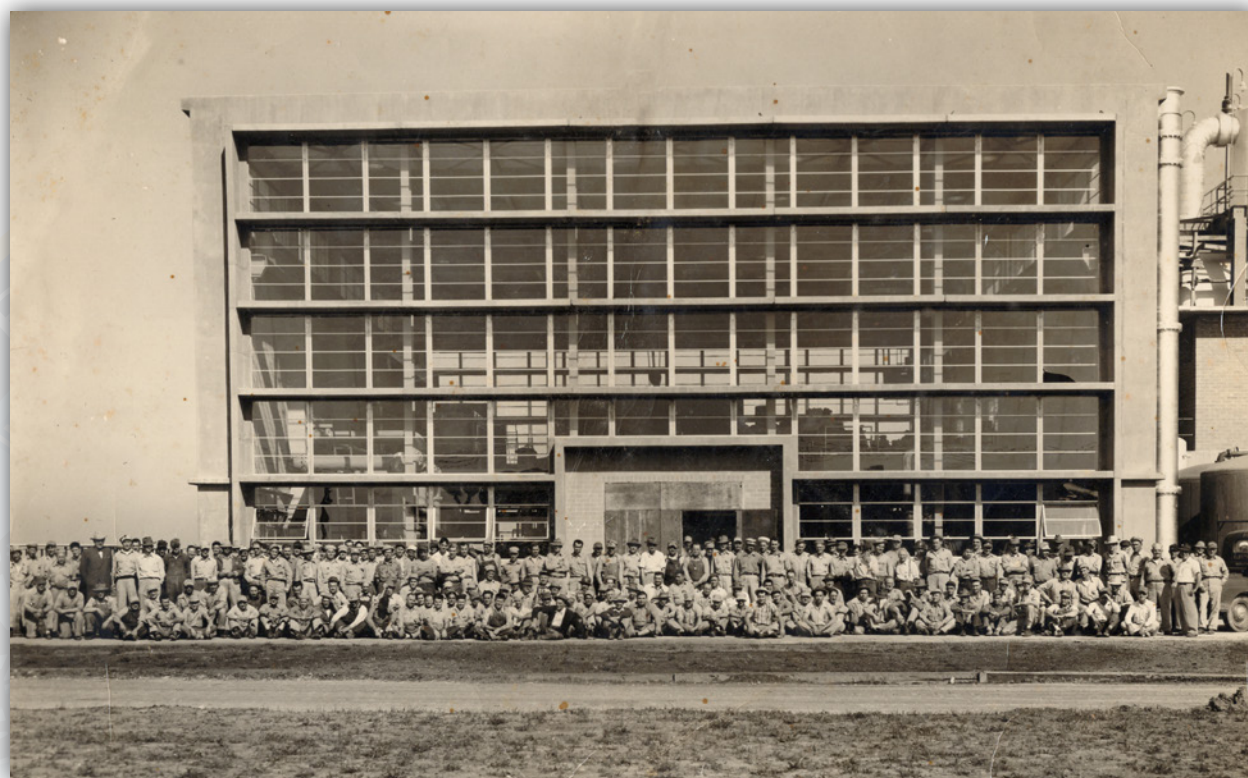
conducted in the local's modern **Training Center** at its Union Hall in Corpus Christi.

That year, the E.J.A.T.C. reviewed, negotiated and approved its new and improved apprenticeship program standards in a four-year inside-wireman apprenticeship that focuses on hands-on-training – **Craft Certification** – in commercial and industrial electrical construction. With the certification, apprentices must demonstrate the knowledge and skills they have learned during their on-the-job-training-assignments in order to advance to their next period of apprenticeship.

As Local 278 marks its 100th charter anniversary in 2026, the Electrical Training Alliance apprenticeship program requires its inside-wireman students to complete 199 hours of classroom learning per year and four years of paid, on-the-job training – while continuing to provide apprentices with a full benefits package including healthcare and retirement pensions, in addition to pay that is increased as apprentices advance in the curriculum. The Alliance also continues to provide advanced upgrade training courses to Local 278 journey-level electricians so they can keep up-to-date with the latest advances and techniques in the electrical industry.

Additionally, the local's outside linemen apprentices are trained through the American Line **Builders Apprenticeship Training** (ALBAT) program – also while being paid for their on-the-job experience in the field. After graduating, the apprentices become journeyman linemen who work on distribution and transmission power lines or at power plants as part of the outside electrical construction industry.





The local also gained new inside-wiring and outside-line work agreements with its NECA employers in late 1955. Among their provisions, the contracts called for a 10-cent wage increase for the local's journeymen, raising their pay to \$3 per hour.

New two-year agreements with NECA the following year that went into effect August 3, 1956, provided Local 278 with a 25-cent cost-of-living pay raise that was authorized by the federal wage stabilization law – *and marked more than 30 consecutive years that the local and the contractors' association had carried out collective bargaining without a significant strike or lockout.* In addition to its new \$3.25-per-hour wage scale, the local also gained double-time pay for all new construction work and holidays.

Following another brief slowdown in employment in its jurisdiction in late 1956 after most major industrial jobs were completed, several new expansions for plants beginning in 1957 put Local 278 members and travelers back to work in the jurisdiction. These projects

included large additions to the Reynolds and Alcoa factories that together were worth about \$100 million (roughly \$1.2 billion in 2026); the **Sinclair, Delhi-Taylor and Flint Hills Resources oil and gas refineries**; and the Central Power and Light power system.

The various military airfields in the region, and particularly the N.A.S. Corpus Christi, also supplied work as they were expanded and overhauled as the undeclared “Cold War” between the United States and the communist Soviet Union was escalating. Other facilities included **Naval Auxiliary Landing Field** (now the Naval Auxiliary Air Station, Rodd Field); **Naval Auxiliary Air Station, Kingsville**; **Chase Field, Beeville**; and **Naval Auxiliary Air Station, Waldron Field** – each of which was used to train pilots.

Another new work agreement between Local 278 and the Texas Gulf Coast Chapter of NECA boosted the local's journeyman wage scale by 10 cents on October 4, 1957, and again on January 1, 1958, to \$3.45 per

hour through September 25 of that year. Then another negotiated contract added another 10 cents per hour to the local's pay beginning the next day.

That agreement also included stipulations for structuring and funding an “expanded educational program” for the local's members that included journeyman electrician training and an improved, five-year-long apprenticeship program beginning in 1960. Speaking on the new contract in an article in the September 30 issue of the *Corpus Christi Caller-Times* newspaper, Local 278 **Business Manager Edwin “E. J.” Hayes** explained, “Both the union and the contractors felt that with the rapid expansion of the electrical industry, a greater technical knowledge was needed for everyone in the electrical trade.”

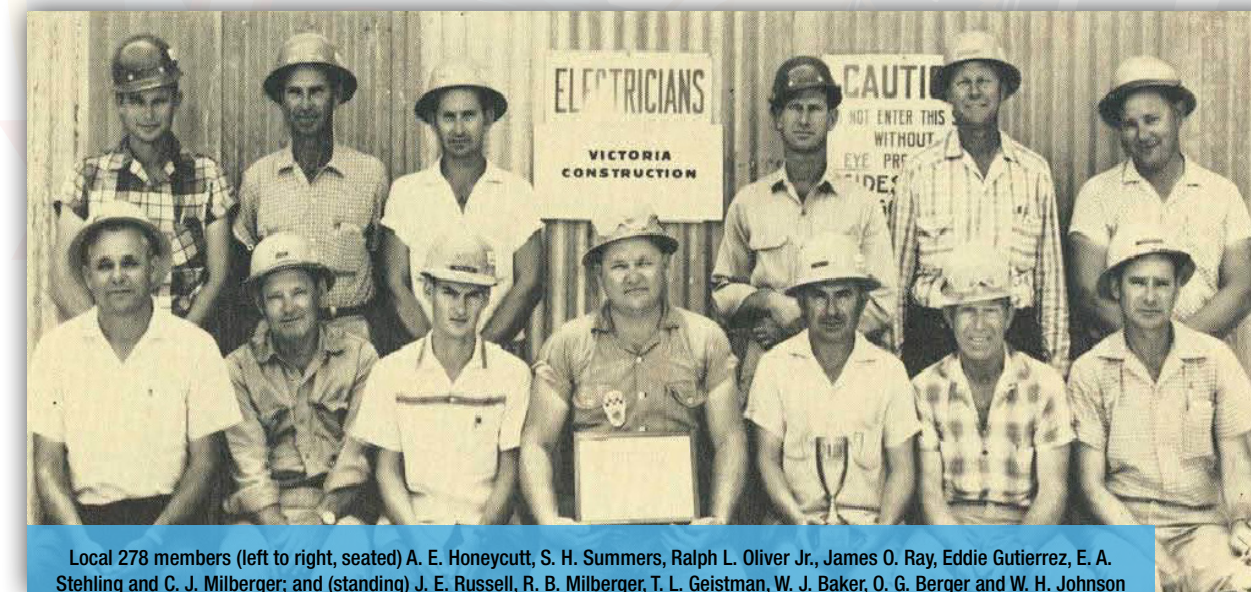
But work slowed in 1958 as the local's members were completing a new facility for **Del Mar College Technical Institute**, a public community college in Corpus Christi, and the new **Caller-Times newspaper printing plant**, which required wiring intricate new electronically controlled presses. With the closing of the **Overhaul and Repair Department** at the N.A.S. in early 1959,

which left as many as 3,000 employees without jobs, work conditions for the local remained poor and forced many of its electrical workers to find work as travelers with other I.B.E.W. locals during that time.

What's more, the I.B.E.W. eventually disbanded **Local No. 1990**, which had been chartered on June 1, 1957, to represent workers at the Overhaul & Repair Department. The union transferred many Local 1990 members into Local 278, effective August 1, 1959.

Also that year, Local 278 and NECA went through what at the time was their longest negotiations over a wage dispute for a new work agreement, beginning June 29 and continuing into November without a resolution. The Council on Industrial Relations for the electrical contracting industry ultimately settled the issue that month, awarding the local's members a 10-cent pay raise to \$3.65 per hour – thereby extending the two sides' history of avoiding strikes by deferring to the council for settling disagreements.

The contract additionally stipulated that contractors could begin employing three eight-hour work shifts in a day without having to



Local 278 members (left to right, seated) A. E. Honeycutt, S. H. Summers, Ralph L. Oliver Jr., James O. Ray, Eddie Gutierrez, E. A. Stehling and C. J. Milberger; and (standing) J. E. Russell, R. B. Milberger, T. L. Geistman, W. J. Baker, O. G. Berger and W. H. Johnson display their “outstanding safety record” award after completing a seven-year project at the DuPont Plant near Victoria in 1964.

pay overtime, as they were previously required to pay. The local conceded that condition as it believed it would help its contractors acquire large industrial maintenance contracts and, subsequently, some much-needed work.

OBTAINING NEW BENEFITS, COUNTERING THE NON-UNION

Local 278 and its membership continued to be affected by poor employment conditions into the 1960s and through the first half of 1963. During that period, the local consistently had members traveling for work and on its unemployed “bench.”

Occasional relief came with sporadic larger jobs such as the Alcoa aluminum plant and other industrial projects in the coastal town of Port Lavaca, Texas, but for the most part, construction work remained slow until the second half of 1963. That summer and fall, while there were no large jobs in the Local 278 jurisdiction, enough work existed to bring

many – but not all – members back to their home local’s territory to work.

Despite the difficult employment climate, the local was still able to make gains in its work agreements during that time, beginning in 1960 with a 10-cent hourly wage increase in a new one-year contract with NECA that was settled through the Council on Industrial Relations. It also included a clause that reduced the local’s ratio to one apprentice for each journeyman on residential work to reduce costs on home building to gain more of the market.

The following year, another negotiated contract provided the local with a 15-cent-per-hour raise to its journeyman pay scale. Subsequent agreements pushed the local’s wages to \$4.10 per hour in a pact that was in effect from September 1, 1963, through August 31, 1964.

By that time, the local was countering its declining employment with a stepped-up

picketing campaign of non-union jobsites and employers throughout its jurisdiction. For instance, in 1963 its members were picketing two projects, a new bank in Corpus Christi and a new school in Taft, that were being built by a non-union contractor – whose complaint against the local’s actions were dismissed by the National Labor Relations Board (N.L.R.B.) in May 1964.

Elsewhere, among scores of other picketing actions, the local demonstrated against non-union construction of the Charles Jackson and Angelus Funeral Home in Corpus Christi in early 1965 and an Enco Service Station in Portland, Texas, later that year. The local then briefly closed down two Central Power and Light Company projects in Corpus Christi being done by non-union employees, an apartment development and the Parkdale AutoTown car dealership plaza, in 1966, and as its picketing campaigns continued throughout the decade, in 1969 the local protested non-union workers at the West Oso High School building site.

After the local had recently signed collective-bargaining agreements with seven former non-union shops as a direct result of its continuous organizing drive, Local 278 **Press Secretary Norman N. Perdue** declared in the February 1966 *Journal*, “Perhaps the most effective method of organizing used by Local 278 has been the picket. We have had splendid results with ... roving pickets, the picket carriers ... being able to spot and report violations of the City Electrical Ordinance to the City Electrical Inspection Department, as well as maintaining the protest line.”

The local also went after employers who were violating employment laws as another way to protect its jurisdiction. For example, after the local obtained affidavits from laborers who were doing electrical work on a job at the N.A.S., in 1965 the N.L.R.B. ruled that the non-union electrical contractor employing the

Local 278 gained its **first-ever employer-funded fringe benefit** in a work agreement when the local and the Southeast Texas Chapter of the National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA) signed a new, two-year contract that went into effect on September 1, 1966, and included a **Health and Welfare Plan** funded by contributions from employing contractors based on hours worked by the local’s members. (*Local 278 would later convert its Health and Welfare Plan to the I.B.E.W. Seventh District Health Care Plan.*)

laborers was violating provisions of the Davis-Bacon Act on the project.

Meanwhile, on January 18, 1964, the N.L.R.B. conducted an election to certify Local 278 as the collective-bargaining agent for the employees of 15 Coastal Bend area electrical contractors. All 103 members who voted, out of 155 who were eligible to vote among the local’s 435 total members, cast ballots in favor of remaining with the union.

Out in the field, employment conditions improved into the second half of the decade with a surge of major projects on which Local 278 electrical workers were employed, including construction of a generator addition to Central Power and Light’s **Nueces Bay Power Plant** that was commissioned in 1968. The local’s members also worked on construction of the new **Richard King High School** for the Corpus Christi Independent School District that opened in 1965; another multi-million-dollar expansion of the **DuPont Victoria Plant** petrochemical facility in Victoria, Texas, to produce adipic acid that was completed in 1967; and ongoing expansion and upgrade work at the N.A.S. and the Reynolds Metals plant throughout that period.

As work increased and the effects of Local 278’s organizing push, which was bolstered with its picketing activity, by mid-1966 the local and its NECA employing contractors controlled approximately 93 percent of the



LOCAL 278 TRADE CLASSIFICATIONS

Local 278 was designated a “mixed” **Inside Wiremen** and **Outside Linemen** local when it was chartered by the I.B.E.W. on April 24, 1926.

On September 4, 1956, the I.B.E.W. transferred Local 278’s Outside Linemen into Houston-based **Outside Local No. 66**.

On May 10, 1959, the I.B.E.W. added **Radio-Television Broadcasting** and **Sound and Public Address** to Local 278’s trade classifications.

On August 1, 1959, the I.B.E.W. added **Government Employees** to Local 278’s trade classifications when it merged “Government Employees” **Local No. 1990** of Harlingen, Texas, into Local 278.

On January 6, 1967, the I.B.E.W. returned **Outside Linemen** to Local 278’s trade classifications.

In 1967, the I.B.E.W. added **Electrical Manufacturing** and **Cable Television** to Local 278’s trade classifications.

In 1976, the I.B.E.W. removed Radio-Television Broadcasting, Sound and Public Address and Cable Television from Local 278’s trade classifications.

In 1982, the I.B.E.W. added **Utility Workers** to Local 278’s trade classifications.

On December 14, 1990, the I.B.E.W. removed Utility Workers from Local 278’s trade classifications.

As of April 24, 2026, the 100th anniversary date of its charter, Local 278 has represented the following trade classifications within its jurisdiction since 1990:

- **Inside Wiremen**
- **Outside Linemen**
- **Electrical Manufacturing**
- **Government Employees**

electrical work performed in the principal cities of the local’s territory. What’s more, before the end of that year, the local had more than 600 skilled union electrical workers employed under its jurisdiction, of which about 315 were actual members, another roughly 100 were working on permits while their union memberships were being considered and the rest were travelers from other I.B.E.W. locals.

In that favorable environment, as the local was enjoying full employment, Press Secretary Perdue announced in the March 1967 *Journal*, “We are holding our own in regard to work. No one is on the bench at the present time.”

Local 278 was also successful with contract negotiations during the second half of the

1960s, gaining a one-year work agreement with the Texas Gulf Coast Chapter of NECA with a 25-cent wage increase to \$4.35 per hour for journeymen. From there, the 400-plus-member local signed a two-year agreement that went into effect on September 1, 1966, with a total 60-cent pay increase that would boost wages to \$4.95 per hour.

That contract also included the local’s first-ever fringe benefit, the **Local 278 Health and Welfare Plan**. The healthcare-insurance benefit for members and their families would be funded by per-hour contributions from employing contractors based on hours worked by the local’s members, which would soon after also be followed by an employer-funded **Local 278 Pension Plan** for retirement benefits. *(The local would later convert to the I.B.E.W. Seventh District Health Care Plan and the I.B.E.W. Local No. 716 Retirement Plan.)*

With the local continuing to make progress and employment conditions remaining strong if not stable, in February 1969 the local had 38 contractors in the Corpus Christi metropolitan area signed onto its collective-bargaining agreement and employing 415 union electrical workers – twice the number as in 1964. Additionally, by 1969 the local was performing 90 percent of the residential wiring work and 95 percent of all other electrical work in the area.

“Since Texas has a right-to-work law which handicaps organizing efforts,” Local 278 **Press Secretary Richard H. Steinbomer** announced while reporting on the local’s advancements in the August 1969 *Journal*, “we feel proud to have made these achievements.”

STRUGGLING AND PROSPERING WITH THE PETROLEUM SECTOR

In the aftermath of the devastating Hurricane Celia, which hit the Corpus Christi area on August 3, 1970, and was the costliest tropical cyclone in Texas history up to that time, Local 278 electrical workers were called upon to help the region recuperate. With upwards of 90 percent of the buildings and about one-third of the homes in and around the city having been damaged or destroyed by the Category 4 hurricane, the local’s members and a large number of traveling I.B.E.W. members almost immediately afterwards went to work to rewire and reconnect its jurisdiction.

“We’re making electrical repairs on hurricane damage as fast as we possibly can, but as everyone

knows there is so much to be done,” the local announced in a public service statement in the August 26 *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*. “We are working overtime and on the weekends, and 432 additional skilled electricians from all over the country have been sent out on jobs in the Corpus area by our union.”

As workhours for the local surged along with the employment created by the recovery efforts, the local in mid-August filed suit against the Texas Gulf Coast Chapter of NECA to ensure its signatory contractors were abiding by the terms of their agreement with the union and only utilizing its hiring hall to place union electrical workers on storm work. Meanwhile, the local also worked to successfully counter the influx of non-union contractors who had come to the region following the storm, and by mid-1971 practically all of those firms had



Local 278 apprentice Brother Bob Loudon (third from left) receives the “Outstanding Apprentice of the State of Texas” award in February 1970 after competing against 10 other contestants from sister I.B.E.W. locals in the statewide I.B.E.W. apprentice competition held in Houston.



either signed with the union or had left the area.

Subsequently, after reporting in the September 1971 *Journal*, "Work in our jurisdiction is holding up well," Local 278 **Press Secretary Bill Darby Jr.** was also able to declare in that year's December issue of the magazine, "Our continued success in competing with non-union contractors lies simply in doing a better job for the money and in continuing our efforts to police our jurisdiction."

Also during that time, the local made notable advances in actively recruiting members of minority groups as the result of a program it had instituted in early 1970. As such, in September 1972 the Human Relations Commission of the City of Corpus Christi even publicly commended the local and its officers "for their progress made in a recently held interview where 13 people were accepted into their apprenticeship program, seven of whom are members of minority groups – three blacks and four Mexican Americans."

As part of the minority recruiting program, the local and NECA agreed to waive for one year a requirement for prior employment to join the union. That provision in the collective-bargaining agreement between the two groups had required that any worker the local referred to a job must have worked under the contract for at least one year.

Local 278 announcement that it ran in local newspapers after the devastating Hurricane Celia struck Corpus Christi on August 3, 1970. (Image courtesy of newspapers.com.)

Please Be Patient

We're making electrical repairs on hurricane damage as fast as we possibly can, but as everyone knows there is so much to be done.

You may have heard rumors that Electricians are refusing to work overtime . . . or that we have discouraged Electricians from out of town from coming into Corpus Christi. These rumors are simply not true.

We are working overtime and on the weekends and 432 additional skilled Electricians from all over the country have been sent out on jobs in the Corpus area by our union.

For the truth about our union and the aftermath of Celia, please watch our TV program tonight.

Tonight

Channel 3 10:30

Channel 6 6:55

Channel 10 10:30

The Members of

I.B.E.W.

LOCAL 278

The Union that Cares About Corpus Christi

The local during that time also gained a new, one-year agreement with NECA in July 1972, which included a **Vacation Plan** fringe benefit, and then a new, two-year contract that went into effect September 1, 1973. The latter pact provided two annual pay increases of 35 cents that ultimately raised the local's total journeyman wage-and-benefits package to \$8.28 per hour beginning September 1, 1974, until the agreement expired on August 31, 1975.

By the time that second agreement was being negotiated, however, work and employment in the Local 278 jurisdiction had severely slackened beginning in early 1973. Although the local was still performing 95 percent of the electrical construction work within the city limits, acquired through organizing efforts and hard work by the local's officers, the end of major storm-recovery work, economic instability throughout the country and material shortages were adversely affecting employment conditions.

During that slack period, the I.B.E.W. merged **Local No. 542** of Harlingen, Texas, into Local 278 on February 1, 1974, to consolidate its forces in the region. With the amalgamation of the inside-electricians local, the Local 278 jurisdiction then covered an additional five counties in the Rio Grande Valley area south of Corpus Christi.

Although employment conditions remained lackluster, several of the local's members were able to

work on construction of the new, \$14-million (about \$81 million in 2026) **Nueces County Courthouse** in downtown Corpus Christi. After the modern facility was completed in 1977, county administration and services moved from the former, historic 1914 courthouse into their new home on the city's Leopard Street.

The local remained active in its organizing and other efforts to counter non-union incursions in its jurisdiction during that time as well. Perhaps most notably (and certainly most publicly) was its campaign in 1977 to dissuade the Texas A.F.L.-C.I.O. (American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, the largest federation of unions in the United States) from holding its 2,500-attendee 1978 Committee on Political Action (COPE) convention in Corpus Christi because, as the August 20, 1977, *Caller-Times* paraphrased the local, the city had been "insensitive to the needs of workers and taxpayers."

In particular, the local was bickering with and filed suit against the City Council after it failed to reappoint the two union members of the city's Electrical Advisory Board earlier that year and instead reappointed two non-union contractors and added four new non-union members. Then in May, the local

The **Local 278 Retirees Club** was initially chartered on March 11, 1974, with **Brother Pat Finigan** serving as its first president.

fought a city ordinance to increase the number of inexperienced apprentices who could work under the supervision of journeyman electricians, as, according to the newspaper, "the council felt the existing regulations kept electrical costs high and inflated rates for electrical workers" while the local argued the change would jeopardize safety.

"We expect to be treated with respect, and the city has failed to do this," Local 278 **Business Manager Lynn Tate** further stated in the newspaper. "I think the community and its leadership ought to show some concern for its workers, whether they be union or non-union. Until they do, our community will continue to be in a period of upheaval like it has been for some time."

With the Corpus Christi Building and Construction Trades Council supporting the electrical workers local because of what it called the city's "anti-union stance," the Texas A.F.L.-C.I.O. instead held the convention in





Houston in March 1978. What's more, the statewide labor organization also vowed to use its resources to help defeat the then-current members of the Corpus Christi City Council in the next election.

But it was the **Texas oil boom** of the late 1970s, which was initially set in motion by the Middle East OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) oil embargo beginning in late 1973 against the United States and other countries that had supported Israel during the recently ended Arab-Israeli War. Subsequently, as gasoline prices skyrocketed because of the shortage of oil, the economies of Texas and the Gulf of Mexico's Coastal Bend region experienced rapid growth in their oil industries that, by the late 1970s, created an enormous amount of work for the Local 278 membership as well as many I.B.E.W. travelers in oil fields and production and delivery facilities, particularly the Port of Corpus Christi.

"Money sloshed around the state as independent oil producers took out millions in loans to buy the equipment needed to drill from Kilgore to Wichita Falls to Midland," as a May 18, 2020, *Texas Tribune* article later recalled. The drastic need for manpower, and especially electrical workers, to install, operate and maintain that machinery as well as erect the infrastructure and power systems for the quickly expanding South Texas population, would sustain the local throughout the remainder of the decade and into the 1980s.

MERGERS HELPED SHAPE LOCAL 278

August 1, 1959: The I.B.E.W. merged "Government Employees" Local No. 1990 of Harlingen, Texas, into Local 278 on August 1, 1959. The union had chartered Local 1990 on June 1, 1957.

February 11, 1974: The I.B.E.W. merged "Inside Wiremen" Local No. 542 of Harlingen into Local 278 on February 11, 1974. The union had chartered Local 542 on September 25, 1941.

In the midst of the flourishing conditions, Local 278 **Press Secretary Charles Eaton** was able to announce in the December 1979 *Journal*, "Work in all fields of the trade has been plentiful. Refinery expansions, new refineries, commercial buildings, maintenance and residential work have all been good enough to give us full employment."

FROM 'BOOM' TO 'BUST' WITH OIL & NON-UNION INDUSTRIES

As strong employment continued in the early 1980s for Local 278, its members were still handling at least 80 percent and as much as 90 percent of the electrical work in the Corpus Christi area. With oil-industry work still thriving, the local was also still making great strides with organizing non-union workers into the I.B.E.W. as well as jobs throughout its jurisdiction, keeping its membership steadily employed despite a national recession in 1981 and 1982 and an anti-union federal administration under President Ronald Reagan.

Among building projects that employed many of the local's members during that period was construction of the new, \$23-million (about \$92 million in 2026) **Bayfront Plaza Convention Center** on North Shoreline Boulevard in downtown Corpus Christi that was opened in March 1981. With its 76,500 square feet of exhibit space and a 27,000-square-foot banquet hall each wired by union electricians, the Bayfront Plaza (which in 2026 is now part of The Hilliard Center entertainment complex) was erected to make the city competitive in the national convention market.

The local also kept up its ongoing fight for organized labor during that time, highlighted in August 1981 when its members honored the picket lines of striking air traffic controllers at **Corpus Christi International**



Local 278 electrician Brother Lynn Hutchins fabricates a D.C. generator while working on board the Gulf Commander oil-drilling platform the the Gulf of Mexico in 1982.

Airport, where the union electricians were working on the initial stages of more than \$1-million worth of various construction projects. The members were ordered back to work by a district judge on August 19 after the city filed a suit that claimed the local was participating in a "sympathy strike," which violated state and federal statutes. (*President Reagan would famously fire more than 11,000 union air traffic controllers nationwide on August 5, 1981, citing a federal law prohibiting strikes by government employees, while the controllers had been seeking improved pay, shorter workweeks and better working conditions.*)

But Local 278 membership rose to an all-time high at one point in 1982 as employment in its jurisdiction remained robust. By that year, much of the work on which members were working involved commercial and condominium projects.

Before the end of the year, however, the effects of the recession finally caught up to the South Texas construction industry and, subsequently,

Local 278 as unemployment quickly spread throughout its ranks. "The tide has turned for the worse, and the recession or depression, depending on whose standards you rely on, has finally hit," Press Secretary Beto Mendez declared in the June 1983 *Journal*. "It seems like the walls of immunity against unemployment are rapidly crashing down upon us."

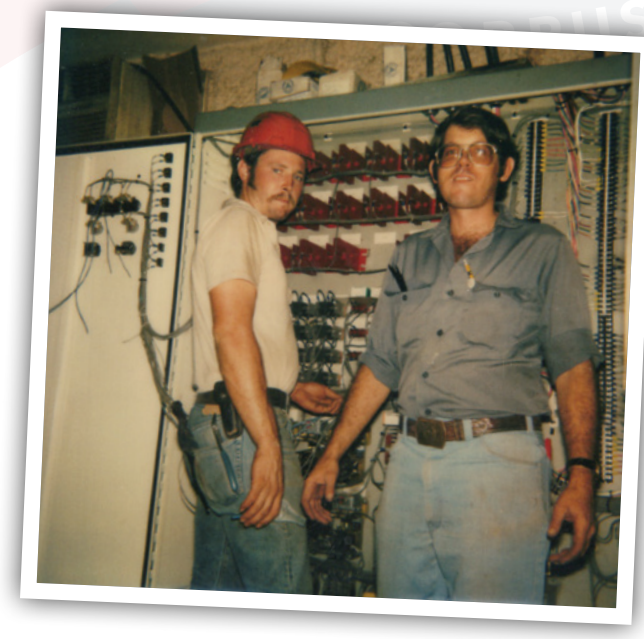
As conditions continued to deteriorate while non-union contractors who were undercutting the local's signatory contractors on job bids also continued to infiltrate the local's territory, by July of 1983 it had more unemployed members than at any time in its history. The situation became so dire that the local set up a **Relief Committee** to provide food for out-of-work members and their families that was purchased through the local's **Brotherhood Fund**, into which members could voluntarily donate.

The tightening job market and non-union competition then forced Local 278 to accept a pay cut of \$2.67 per hour, or 16 percent, to the wage scale in its active work agreement with



NECA effective September 7, 1983, which **Business Manager Kenneth Helbling** called an “unprecedented” action. With one-third of the local’s 800 members out of work at one point that August – including some electricians who had been unemployed from nine to 12 months – he went on to explain in an article in the August 23 *Corpus Christi Times* that the local decided to “roll back” wages “so that electrical construction will be more economical, which will enhance the employment opportunities of the membership.”

Although the South Texas union electrical industry began to slowly recover as the second half of the 1980s progressed, thanks in large part to the skills of Local 278’s highly trained workforce and the financial concessions the local made to its employers, the local and the region were dealt another severe blow as by 1986 the recently burgeoning Coastal Bend oil industry had severely cratered. With Americans purchasing more gas-efficient automobiles and oil supplies around the world far outproducing demands during the mid-1980s, the resulting surplus tanked oil prices, causing soaring unemployment while leaving little work in the oil fields and refineries that had helped sustain Local 278.



The “boom to bust” oil industry consumed the local’s jurisdiction throughout the rest of the decade and into the 1990s. What the May 18, 2020, *Texas Tribune* article later labeled “an economic crisis for the ages” left the local with diminished employment opportunities at home, compelling many members to regularly travel for work throughout that destitute period.

A ray of light did shine through during those dark times, however, when the local built and then moved into its new **Local 278 Union Hall** on Saratoga Boulevard in Corpus Christi in 1987. In addition to the new offices and meeting hall, the facility also featured training space for the **Texas Gulf Coast Electrical Apprenticeship Program** of Local 278 and NECA, which trains their apprentices.

HIGHER STANDARDS THROUGH ORGANIZING BRINGS STABILITY

Adverse employment conditions for the Local 278 membership, worsened by the increasing impact of non-union elements on the South Texas building industry, persisted into the 1990s. The emergence into the area of double-breasted contractors, which operated both union and non-union construction companies, further aggravated the precarious situation that at one point in July 1990 put 110 of the local’s members on its out-of-work “book.”

The South Texas economy slowly improved as the decade initially advanced, and with its unmatched apprentice and member training and continued focus on organizing, Local 278 **Business Manager Larry Major** was able to declare in an article in the September 2, 1990, *Caller-Times*, “We are on the move.” Indeed, with multiple industrial projects planned for its jurisdiction, the local had reason for optimism, and to help ensure its future prosperity, it created a full-time organizer position that year, to which it appointed member **Brother Tony Dornak**.



But construction work and union employment remained poor in the local’s area into and throughout mid-1991. By that year, in fact, union craftspeople were performing only a small percentage of the electrical work in the region.

Before the end of the year, however, for the first time in a long time the local was able to not only place all its members on jobs but also host traveling I.B.E.W. members as refinery work and projects for a new, extensive Texas Department of Criminal Justice prison construction program began to emerge. Those jobs – which even provided some overtime work for union electricians – included maintenance and improvement shutdowns at the **Valero Refining Corpus Christi East and West refineries** and construction of the high-tech, automated **William G. McConnell Unit** maximum security prison in Beeville, Texas, that would open in 1994.

With the local hosting 85 travelers at one point during the spring of 1992 as employment surged, Local 278 Press Secretary Leo C. Mercado was able to announce in that year’s June issue of the *Journal*, “In a welcome change from previous years, our work situation is very good.”

Prison projects helped the local maintain a sizable number of workhours in 1993

and 1994 as well. Additionally, the local’s organizing campaigns, enhanced by “salting” tactics by which union members work on jobs for non-union electrical contractors so they can organize their workers, made accelerated progress during that time and steadily grew the local’s membership.

Work for the local’s members diminished again in the second half of the decade, but by that time the City of Corpus Christi had realized the need to improve its facilities as its economy was transitioning away from traditional mainstays of oil, petrochemicals and the military. Instead, the city was experiencing slow, steady growth driven by its port, tourism and public services, while its military bases remained part of its economic foundation.

That shift created another flood of construction employment for the Local 278 membership beginning in the late 1990s and continuing in the new “Y2K” (Year 2000) millennium. Among numerous major government, commercial and industrial projects the local’s members wired during the period was construction of the new, 165,000-square-foot, high-tech **United States Courthouse** in downtown Corpus Christi that was completed in 2001.

With a stable, sufficient amount of work in its jurisdiction, Local 278 continued its robust



organizing program as well. As part of that campaign, in 1999 and 2000 the local regularly placed advertisements in newspapers that recruited electricians with enticements that often included the local's journeyman pay, which in early 1999 was upwards of \$19.88 per hour in wages and benefits, including healthcare and the retirement pension.

The local's ads eventually even directly addressed "ALL NON-union ELECTRICIANS." They also regularly announced a Local 278 mantra of sorts: **"Organizing for a higher standard of living."**

Full employment for the local's membership was once again shattered by an economic recession when the national economy faltered in 2001. But soon afterward, by late 2002 work had again returned to the local, led by the two-year construction of the 10,000-capacity **American Bank Center Arena** multi-purpose facility that was completed in October 2004 as a major expansion of the city's convention and entertainment facilities (now together as The Hilliard Center).

Elsewhere, as work in the region's oil fields again surged, union electrical workers were employed on a host of projects in the petroleum industry during the balance of the decade. Those included wiring an advanced new, \$115-million

(about \$195 million in 2026) **gasoline desulfurization unit** at Valero Refining's West Plant that was completed in 2005.

Sadly, however, Local 278 **Business Manager Robert S. Shake** passed away on July 9, 2004, from the effects of mesothelioma, a cancer caused by asbestos exposure, while he was still in office but nearing retirement. At 66 years old, Brother Shake had served as the local's leader for the previous eight years.

New **Business Manager Miguel "Mike" Carranco** picked up where his predecessor had left off, pushing organizing to improve the local's conditions – which was a key policy for Brother Shake even before it was mandated by the I.B.E.W International Office in the early 2000s. Subsequently, over the next dozen years with Brother Carranco guiding the local, its organizing efforts helped it regain market share and rebuild its treasury.

Mostly steady when not abundant work during the second half of the decade included jobs at the Corpus Christi area's three major refineries, for which the local often hosted travelers to complete. Construction of the large William B. and Maureen Miller Wing addition that nearly doubled the size of the 1970-built **Art Museum of South Texas** and was completed in October 2006 was also



among the numerous projects wired by Local 278 union electricians during that time.

The increased volume of work, accelerated by ongoing recovery along the Gulf Coast from the unprecedented destruction caused by the catastrophic Hurricane Katrina that hit the region in August 2005 and Hurricane Rita that struck the following month, created a severe labor shortage in the South Texas electrical construction industry – as well as the building trades as a whole – by 2007. Preempted back in the 1980s when declining wages deterred workers from entering the construction crafts, the situation was further exacerbated by the ability of the local's members to travel to other I.B.E.W. jurisdictions for higher-paying jobs; for example, in April 2007 about half of the local's roughly 500 members were working in other locations outside of South Texas.

But the thriving energy sector and stable housing market within its jurisdiction essentially allowed Local 278 to avoid the worst effects of the nationwide "Great Recession of 2007," the most severe economic collapse in the United States since the Great Depression. While the downturn lingered well into 2009, steady oil and gas industry- and military-related jobs, boosted with work created by the federal government's 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act stimulus package that was designed to jumpstart the economy, helped keep union electricians relatively busy.

RECOVERING, FLOURISHING THROUGH TO ITS CENTENNIAL

Emerging from the aftereffects of the recession in the early 2010s, the Corpus Christi-area economy was by then converting back into an energy-exporting force on the strength of the newly discovered resources in the **Eagle Ford Shale**, a highly productive natural-gas and oil formation. As such, Local 278 electrical workers enjoyed favorable employment conditions throughout

the decade, which featured major industrial expansion, including new oil and gas extraction and refining infrastructure and petrochemical plants, in its jurisdiction and significant growth in the Port of Corpus Christi.

Ongoing organizing efforts helped ensure union electrical workers had access to strong employment opportunities during that time as well. For instance, in 2016 the local salted the construction site of an addition to Spohn Hospital Corpus Christi – Shoreline that was being done by the largest non-union electrical contractor in the local's area, after which the contractor signed on to the union's collective bargaining agreement.

But the roughly 550-member local, along with the rest of the nation, was waylaid by the onset of the worldwide coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic that struck the United States in early 2020, after which it would claim the lives of more than 1 million Americans over the next three years. While the epidemic initially curtailed employment and forced the local to cancel meetings and delay some services out of its union hall, construction in South Texas and its Coastal Bend region was quickly regenerated through the continual needs of the energy industry and industrial and military sectors, putting Local 278 members back to work.

Those jobs included continued construction of the \$1.7-billion **Steel Dynamics Southwest-Sinton Steel Mill** (also known as the SDI Sinton Division) beginning in early 2020. When the facility went into operation in the autumn of 2021, it could produce 2.7 million metric tons of high-quality, low-carbon flat roll steel per year, allowing the City of Sinton to become a gateway for Steel Dynamics to markets in the Southwestern United States and Mexico.

When current **Business Manager David A. Carranco** was then elected by its approximately 600-strong membership in 2022 to lead Local 278, the new leadership administration ushered in long-overdue advancements to the way the

Continued after following spread.

In The Community

LOCAL 278 SERVES ITS NEIGHBORS



Local 278 members volunteer to wire the Bayfest family festival in Corpus Christi over the years.



From 1976 through 2010, Local 278 powered the **Bayfest** three-day music festival in Corpus Christi, which was operated by non-profit organizations to celebrate the unique cultural and ethnic diversity of the city through music, art and entertainment. Run by community volunteers such as Local 278 members, who wired the festival at no charge each year, Bayfest also generated funds for the area's non-profit organizations until it was halted after 2010.

The festival was one of countless community and charitable efforts and causes Local 278 and its membership

have supported across the past century of the local's existence. Along the way, those benevolent endeavors have included, for example, Local 278 electricians wiring a new home that was built in two days in February 1946 for double-amputee **Private T. M. Jarvis Jr.**, a U.S. Army veteran who lost his legs in World War II.

Among the lengthy list of charitable causes in which the local has also participated and continues to participate in 2026, back in 1952 its members voluntarily repaired and installed light fixtures for a new **American Cancer Society Information Center** in Corpus Christi. Then in 1969, in just another one of many instances, several of the local's electricians donated their time to wire the city's new **Southside Youth Football Stadium**.

Fast-forward to 1980, as the local continued its philanthropy in January of that year, 40 of its electricians and apprentices installed wiring worth more than \$8,000 for time, labor and materials as part of the Corpus Christi Camp Fire Girls' effort to restore the historic **Simon Gugenheim House**. Built in 1900, the building was brought up to modern-day building-code standards by the union electrical workers.

Between then and through Local 278's centennial anniversary in 2026, its members have continued to support their communities and those in need, regularly donating time, talent and resources to a range of worthy causes and non-profit organizations, which are spearheaded by many Local 278 committees for giving back to the community. Those

The **Local 278 Brotherhood Reimbursement Program**, introduced by then-President and current Business Manager David A. Carranco and adopted by the local in 2019, offers opportunities for the local's apprentices to give back to the community and earn tuition at the same time.

efforts further include working with **Electrical Workers Without Borders North America**, which fields volunteers on social-impact projects in disadvantaged communities and helps communities adopt renewable energy systems and obtain the training needed to maintain them.

The local also responds to natural and man-made disasters and assists emerging power industries to create modern workforce development and safety programs. In doing so, in 2025 and 2026 the local has offered, for instance, to cover lost time and wages for up to two weeks for members who were to join a **Navajo Tribal Utility Authority** effort to bring electricity to the one-third of Navajo Reservation homes without power.

Local 278 also looks after its own members and their families. In particular, the local hosts family-centered events such as its annual **Easter Egg-Stravaganza** at its Union Hall, featuring an Easter egg hunt for children, an annual **Christmas Party** and a **"Trunk or Treat"** candy giveaway for children at the Union Hall on Halloween.



A youth football team in Corpus Christi sponsored by Local 278 sometime in the 1970s.



local conducted its business. For instance, the local remodeled and modernized its union hall and business offices; it launched its own mobile phone app with which members can now pay their dues online as well as sign the local's employment books virtually instead of in person after being laid off from a job.

The following year, the local gained a new, landmark two-year work agreement with the Texas Gulf Coast Chapter of NECA that was in effect through August 31, 2025. Among its provisions, the contract called for a total 11-percent wage increase constituting a \$2.10-per-hour raise in the first year and an additional \$1.30 per hour in the second year; the addition of four paid holidays on Memorial Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day and the Friday after Thanksgiving; and increased contractor funding for training of the local's apprentices and journeymen through the **Texas Gulf Coast Electrical Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee** (J.A.T.C.).

Back out in the field, an abundance of work that often created manpower shortages for the local included **transmission line rebuilds** across South Texas and surrounding areas, including the Rio Grande Valley, that fully employed the local's outside-line workers. Its electricians likewise remained busy wiring a range of projects, including the massive **Cheniere Corpus Christi Liquefaction facility**, a major liquified natural gas (L.N.G.) export terminal on the north shore of Corpus Christi Bay.

The local settled its current **Outside Collective Bargaining Agreement** with NECA for its journey-level line workers and other sub-classification members in 2024. The two-year contract only provided a total 8-percent wage increase, with no additional contributions to benefits, through 4-percent pay raises for each year.

The local became signatory to a new **Texas Statewide Tele-Data Agreement** negotiated between the I.B.E.W. and NECA in 2025, which

covers work across the state related to low-voltage systems, including the installation, maintenance and removal of communication facilities such as phone lines, data networks, video systems and fiber optics. A groundbreaking feature of the agreement is that it introduced paid time off (P.T.O.), a long-overdue and significant benefit for members working under the contract.

As the local's construction-side electricians remained busy that year as well, the completion of the **New Harbor Bridge** to replace the former bridge taking U.S. Route 181 and Texas State Highway 35 between downtown Corpus Christi and Rincon Point (or North Beach) over the Corpus Christi Ship Channel significantly impacted the region's economy. By enabling larger ships, including Panamax cargo vessels designed to transit the original locks of the Panama Canal, to now have access to the Port of Corpus Christi, the opening of the new bridge provided another boost to the region's economy and its status as a global energy hub, enhancing the prospects for more jobs that would employ Local 278 members.

Construction projects that did provide work hours to the local's electricians in 2025 and early 2026 as the local approached the 100th anniversary since it was chartered back in 1926 included the new **City of Victoria Public Safety Headquarters**. Opened on February 25, 2026, the 70,000-square-foot facility replaced an older building to house the town's police department, municipal court and fire administration.

Local 278 also negotiated its current two-year, inside work agreement with NECA that went into effect on August 31, 2025, and will remain in place through August 28, 2027. The contract provides a total 13-percent overall wage increase for the local's journey-level electricians, constituting a pair of \$2-per-hour annual raises, and an additional fifth paid holiday, Christmas Day.

In addition to calling for employers to contribute 25 cents per hour worked by



members into a special **J.A.T.C. Building Fund** for "future training facilities and building needs," the agreement also sets a new wage structure for apprentices that would reflect a \$3 hourly increase for apprentices moving from the third to fourth periods of their apprenticeships. It further stipulates that apprentices can earn another \$3 increase while moving from their fifth to their sixth periods if they obtain 7,000 work hours and pass the journeyman exam.

The local's work situation continued to be steady with more job opportunities for all classifications as it moved into 2026. A \$100-million safety upgrade for the O.N. Stevens Water Treatment Plant to replace its aging chlorine systems and increase capacity are among the jobs currently providing stable employment for the local's membership.

The local also recently won major Unfair Labor Practice cases with the N.L.R.B. that awarded some of its members back pay in the amounts of \$45,000 and \$25,000. Additionally, the local filed prevailing-wage lawsuits against the Corpus Christi school district, helping reclaim prevailing-wage work it was performing.

Then on March 17, 2026, the local's membership ratified a new outside work

agreement with the **Southwestern Line Constructors Chapter** of NECA that runs until October 31, 2029. The contract provided journeyman linemen with an immediate 5-percent (\$1.90 per hour) wage increase, after which it calls for three additional pay raises over its three-and-a-half-year term totaling \$5.40 per hour.

At its **Centennial Anniversary** in April 2026, Local 278 has grown to approximately 1,200 members, in part as the result of steady work in inside-wiring construction and maintenance and an influx of employment in the outside-transmission sector that the local's administration has been organizing and will continue to organize. In doing so, across its now-15-county South Texas jurisdiction, the local has embraced modern techniques – including dedicated online social media recruitment efforts and its very own podcast – while improving upon tried-and-true tactics to embrace and maintain its role as the largest labor local union in the Coastal Bend and the only building trades union local still operating and actively organizing in Corpus Christi, positioning itself and its membership for continuing success in the future. ♦



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LOCAL 278 100 years 1926-2026

Congratulations on 100 years!



Your IBEW family joins in celebrating a century of brotherhood

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Kenneth W. Cooper, International President Paul A. Noble, International Secretary-Treasurer Christian J. Wagner, International Vice President, Seventh District



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Best Wishes on Your 100th Anniversary Celebration I.B.E.W. Local Union No. 278

From

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the Officers, and the Entire Membership...***



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from the members and staff of IBEW LOCAL 551

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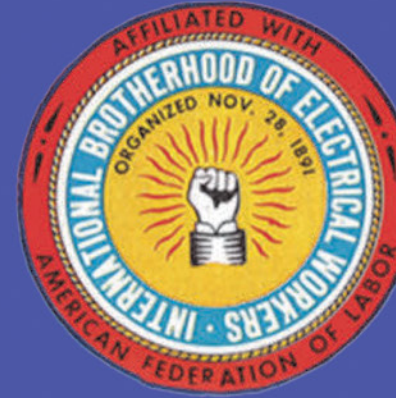
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*Celebrating 100 Years of Service to
the Sisters & Brothers of the IBEW*

John J. Doherty

Business Manager - Financial Secretary

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ON YOUR

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FROM

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Chartered August 9, 1959

President: James May
V.P.: Glenn Miles
Secretary Treas.: Shane Denn

HAPPY 100TH BIRTHDAY, IBEW LOCAL UNION 278!

From the Officers, Delegates and All Affiliated Labor Unions
in the Coastal Bend Labor Council,
We Wish Continued Success for the Next 100 Years
for all Sisters and Brothers of Local 278.



President: David Carranco
Vice President: Xavier Miles
Secretary/Treasurer: Dr. Nancy Vera

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Local 87
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From All the Officers, Delegates and Affiliated
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