

PLUMBERS AND STEAMFITTERS
LOCAL NO. 198
BATON ROUGE



100th Anniversary

COMMEMORATIVE HISTORY



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PLUMBERS & STEAMFITTERS LOCAL UNION NO. 234

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LOCAL UNION NO. 198**

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on your

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from the

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of the

**United Association
of Journeymen and Apprentices
of the Plumbing and Pipefitting Industry
of the United States and Canada**

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100th Anniversary

PAY HOMAGE TO LOCAL 198'S PAST WHILE BLAZING ITS FUTURE

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

It is a great honor that I served Local 198 as Business Manager/Financial Secretary on our 100-year anniversary on April 3, 2020, and continue in that role today. I congratulate all of the local's members on that milestone. Unfortunately, circumstances did not allow us to meet in person to celebrate our landmark occasion.



As you look through this publication, which chronicles our past 100 years, we certainly must acknowledge the members who worked to make this union what it is today. They fought tough battles, not only for higher wages but also for better working conditions and benefits. Those members laid the groundwork for the union we have today, all for a desire for a better life for our families. We truly thank them for their sacrifices. Because of them, we continue to enjoy the benefits we have today.

As we remember our past, we must also look to the future – one in which Local Union 198 continues to grow and our members prosper. Each and every member has the ability to forge our future. We must challenge ourselves in the classroom, on the jobsite and at the union hall. The strength of our union lies with its members. It is our responsibility to continue to pave the way for future generations.

Our contractor group is essential to our survival, and working closely with our contractors is extremely important. Labor and management working together is not new, and the need for each other grows every year.

We appreciate all who helped sponsor this journal, as you helped make this publication of our history possible.

Fraternally,

Jonathan Waddell

Jonathan Waddell, Business Manager
United Association Plumbers and Steamfitters Local 198
January 2024

This book was proudly produced by

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United Association Local 198 and Union Histories give special thanks to the following for their contributions to this book:

Local 198 Retirees Club
East Baton Rouge Parish Library, Main Library
United Association, International Office

Head Historian: Calvin Jefferson
Research Assistant & Proofreader: Ann Wilkins Jefferson

Art Direction: Andy Taucher
Layout & Design: Steven Demanett



U.A. LOCAL No. 198 OF BATON ROUGE — THE FIRST 100 YEARS

A CENTURY OF PIPING

SERVICE TO 'RED STICK' & ALONG THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER

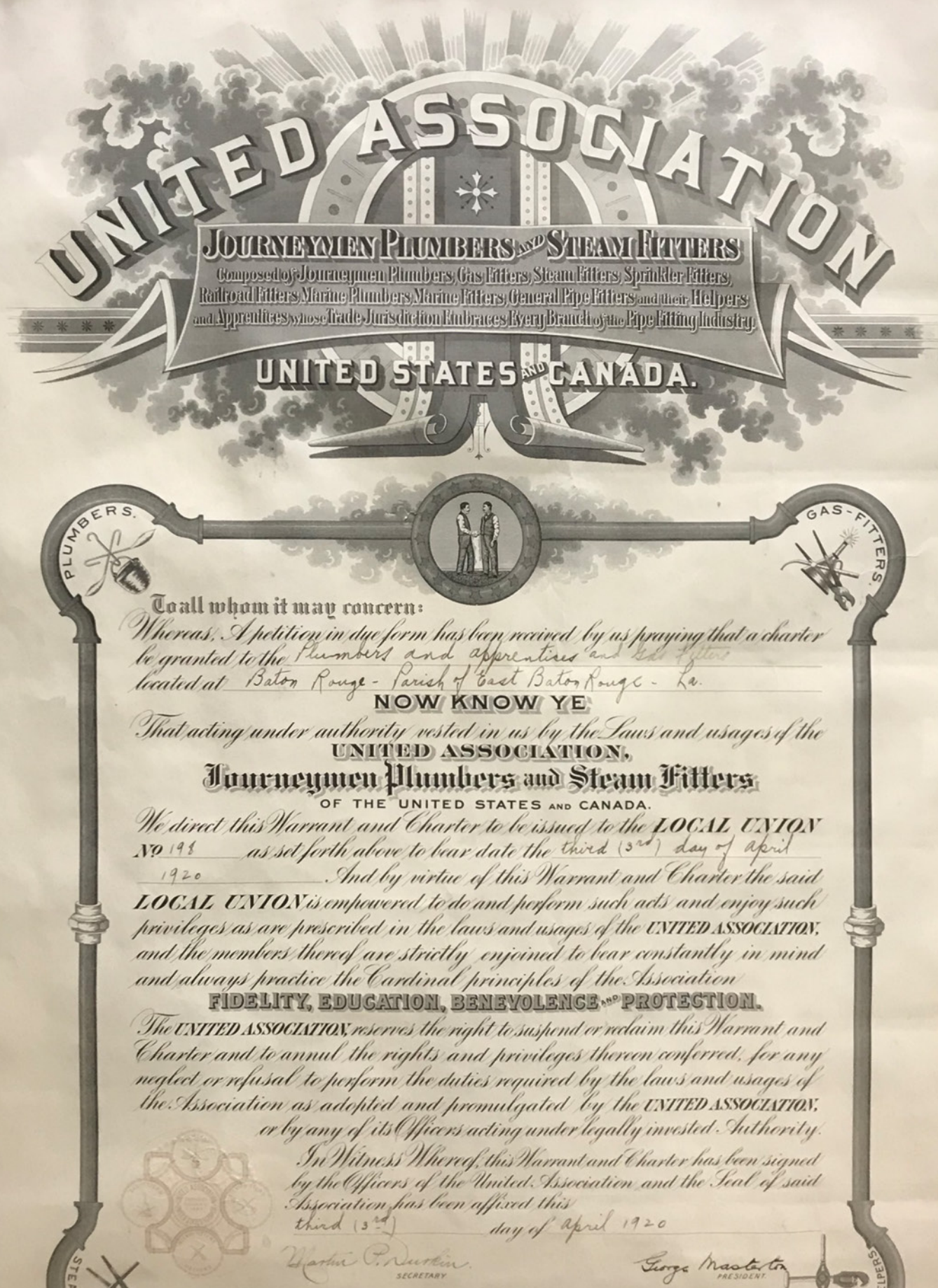
"I arrived in Baton Rouge on a Sunday morning (March 28, 1920). I had wired Vice President Manning to have some members of Local Union No. 60 (of New Orleans) that were working in Baton Rouge to see me at the Istrouma, and they were there bright and early, and we decided on a program for a meeting Monday evening. This was held, and a local union decided upon. I sent for the charter and supplies that evening by wire, and the next morning ran down to New Orleans to take a look at the business there while waiting for the charter for Baton Rouge. On the following Saturday (April 3, 1920), I left again for Baton Rouge to install the local, and this was done the same evening. Officers were elected and installed and Baton Rouge was equipped for another chance to make good, and I am positive that they will go the limit for the good of the trade this time."



Six years before General Organizer Thomas B. Clark wrote that report in the May 1920 issue of the United Association of Journeyman Plumbers, Gas Fitters, Steam Fitters and Steam Fitters' Helpers (U.A.) *Journal* describing the formation of U.A. Local No. 198 in Baton Rouge, the union had organized **Local No. 641** in May 1914 to represent the city's plumbers, gasfitters, steamfitters and pipefitters.

The fledgling local's membership set out to wield their new strength and went on strike that August 1 after their demand for a \$5-per-day wage for eight-hour days was denied by contractors, who were paying union plumbers \$4 per day at the time. But during much of the

first two decades of the century, Baton Rouge was anything but a union town, as organized labor was essentially nonexistent and the so-called "plantation mentality" of big business ruled the city. Within that setting, Local 641 was defunct by August 1915, leaving the members of **U.A. Local No. 60** of New Orleans to man the little union work in Baton Rouge – and U.A. General Organizer Jason H. Sheeche to ponder in his report in the September 1915 *Journal*, "Most of these (former Local 641) men work in the oil fields, and they recently asked for an increase in pay, which was promptly refused. They all agree now that they are sorry that they did not maintain their local."



U.A. Local No. 198 charter reissued in February 1942 to reassign the local to represent plumbers and gasfitters after the U.A. formed Local No. 807 to represent steamfitters and pipefitters within the Local 198 jurisdiction. Local 807 would be merged into Local 198 in 1950 at which time the local was reassigned to represent plumbers and pipefitters. (The reissued charter was signed by General President George Masterton, who served in that position following the passing of then-General President John Coefield in February 1940 until his sudden death on July 17, 1943, while he was also still in office.)

BUILDING A NEW LOCAL AND A NEW UNIVERSITY

The need for a union to organize and represent the plumbers and steamfitters of Baton Rouge remained and heightened over the ensuing several years, so much so that the U.A. and General Organizer Clark ultimately chartered Local 198 in the city on **April 3, 1920**. Eager to evolve and grow, the new local initially held weekly general membership meetings every Tuesday afternoon in the Fraternal Order of Eagles Hall on the city's North Boulevard.

Just more than a month after their local was established, the members of Local 198 went on strike against their employing contractors beginning May 26, 1920, to gain a six-month contract that would provide the union plumbers and steamfitters with a \$10-per-day standardized wage. The local, which at the time had no signed agreement with the contractors, also demanded that "working conditions be adjusted by a conference committee" of representatives from both parties, the *State-Times Advocate* newspaper reported on May 27.

Many of the local's members were already earning \$10 per day before the strike, but others were only receiving \$9 when several of the contractors announced a reduction to \$9 for those who were earning \$10, which prompted the local to strike. While by June 10 three contractors had agreed to raise its daily pay scale to \$10 beginning July 4, the local's remaining five employing contractors had refused to sign an agreement for \$10 per day unless the union agreed to allowing the companies to run "open" (non-union) shops – which the local wholly refused.

Moving its headquarters and meeting location into the Odd Fellows Hall on Third Street in Baton Rouge in early 1922, Local

U.A. FORMED OVER 130 YEARS AGO

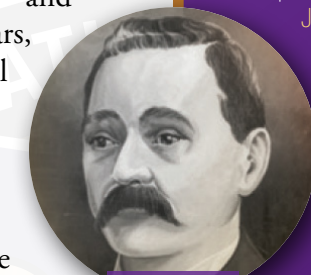
With a general lack of stable, national organizations to represent steamfitters and plumbers at the time, Patrick J. Quinlan, a plumber from Boston, sent a letter to Richard A. O'Brien, a plumber in Washington, D.C., on April 25, 1889, proposing the formation of a new, national pipe-trades union. Subsequently, on October 7, 1889, 40 delegates from 23 piping-trades locals in 10 states and the District of Columbia assembled in Washington for a convention.

Four days later, the United Association of Journeymen Plumbers, Gas Fitters, Steam Fitters and Steam Fitters' Helpers of the United States and Canada (U.A.) was inaugurated on October 11, 1889. The U.A. selected Brother Quinlan as its president, Brother Henry Collins of New York City as its vice president and Brother O'Brien as its secretary/treasurer.

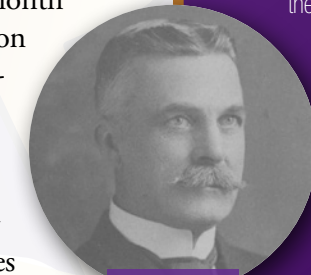
Meanwhile, most steamfitters were attempting to sustain their own national union, the National Association of Steam, Hot Water and Power Piping Fitters and Helpers, that they had formed in 1888, soon after which it became the International Association (I.A.). For two decades, however, the two piping unions clashed regularly over jurisdiction – before the American Federation of Labor (A.F.L.) ordered the I.A. to amalgamate into the U.A. in 1912.

The U.A. endured through two world wars and the Great Depression, after which on January 1, 1947, it changed its name to the United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry of the United States and Canada. Throughout its more than 130 years, the U.A.'s skilled members have taken part in building many of the most-iconic structures in North America and have also protected the health of the citizens of both countries by providing proper piping installations and services, while the union has represented and trained plumbers, pipefitters, sprinklerfitters, service technicians and welders in locals across the continent.

198 began to grow if not outright flourish that year. U.A. General Organizer E. B. Fitzgerald even noted in his May 17, 1922, report that appeared in that June's *Journal*, "Things were going along fairly well in Baton Rouge at this time; our members are just about finishing up on two large jobs there."



Patrick J. Quinlan



Richard A. O'Brien

The local's newfound good fortunes were bolstered and sustained into the second half of the so-called "Roaring Twenties" (a period of rapid economic growth and social change in the United States) due in large part to construction of the new – and current – Baton Rouge campus of **Louisiana State University** (L.S.U.), which began in 1922 and would be completed in 1926, along with several downtown buildings and large industrial plants on which the local's members worked. Before the new campus was formally dedicated on April 30, 1926, the school had been located since 1886 at the federal garrison grounds, which would become the site of the state capitol the following decade.

During the school's construction, however, several Local 198 members went on strike in late October 1923 to protest the plumbing and heating contract for one of the 12 buildings

being erected being awarded to a non-union contractor. After General Organizer Fitzgerald and Local 60 Business Agent F. J. Forto met with the "unfair" subcontractor in its New Orleans offices and a four-man committee from the local met with Louisiana Governor John M. Parker, "the situation was adjusted to the satisfaction of Local Union 198," Brother Fitzgerald reported in the December 1923 *Journal*, and the **Hill Memorial Library** was subsequently completed in 1926. Among all of the structures on the L.S.U. campus, union plumbers and fitters also helped construct the **dairy barn** (the first building to be completed), **Memorial Tower** and the **Power House**.

Meanwhile, Local 198 continued to organize members and contractors and also worked with Louisiana Governor Henry L. Fuqua in early 1925 to form and appoint a statewide plumbing Board of Examiners, as provided in a recently enacted law that had been advanced by the state's locals and their international union.

LOCAL 198 UNION HALLS

Fraternal Order of Eagles Hall
 327 North Boulevard
 April 1920 into 1922

Independent Order of Odd Fellows Hall
 227 Third Street, Third Floor
 1922 into 1940

Baton Rouge Labor Temple
 359 Lafayette Street
 1940 to July 1965

Local 198 Union Hall
 5888 Airline Highway
 July 1965 to present

Local 198 Satellite Office
 5432 Broad Street, Lake Charles
 January 2015 to present

SURVIVING & ENDURING A TUMULTUOUS DECADE

As Local 198 enjoyed strong employment conditions and continued to expand throughout the second half of the 1920s, the **Great Depression**, which began when the U.S. stock market crashed on October 29, 1929 (history's "Black Tuesday"), brought harsh times to the local and U.A. members across the country as unemployment soared during the devastating

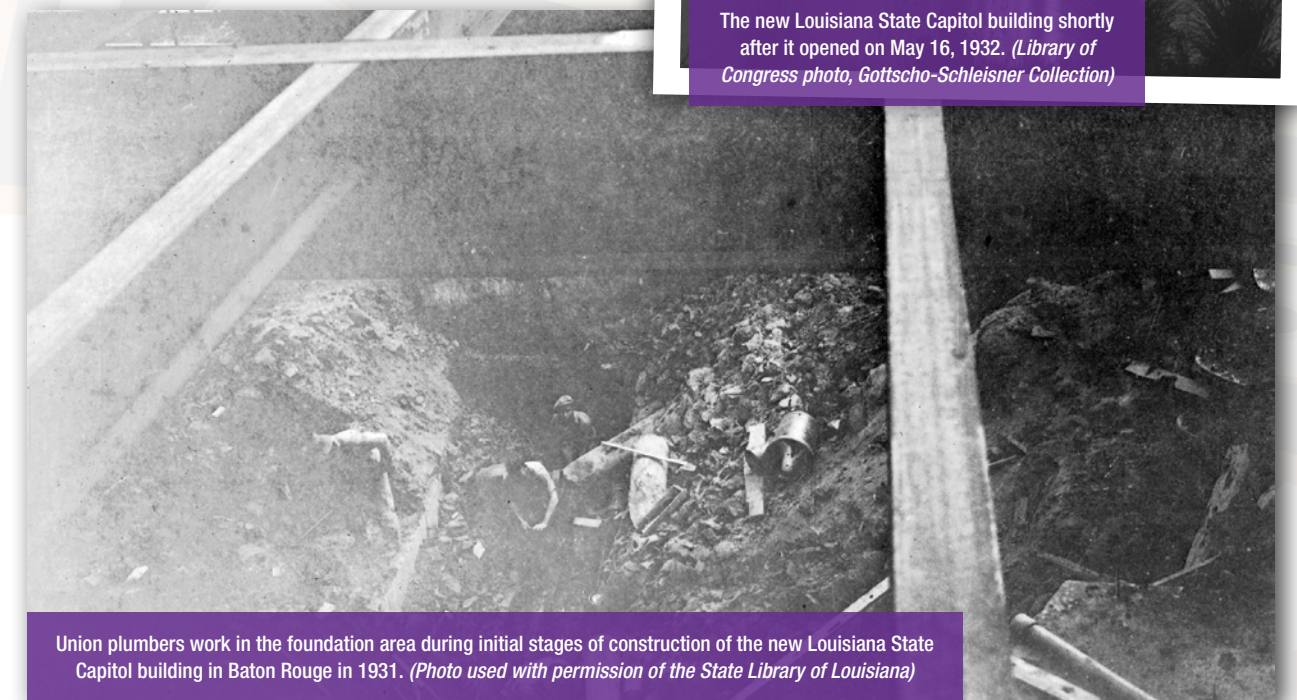
economic collapse and resultant decade-long humanitarian catastrophe. According to the U.A. International's official history, the *Journal* even ran several issues during the early 1930s that offered advice on how members could make their wages go as far as possible, such as growing their own food in their own gardens, but much of the focus was either on calling on the government to take action to help people or on trying to offer some kind of hope and encouragement to the U.A. membership.

"... Construction all but stopped, and this led to a significant decline in manufacturing," the U.A. history recounts. "The economies of both (the United States and Canada) spiraled ever downward, until unemployment reached extremely high numbers and workers began to give up altogether." But while membership declined and no U.A. International conventions were held between 1928 and 1938, "the union held it together."

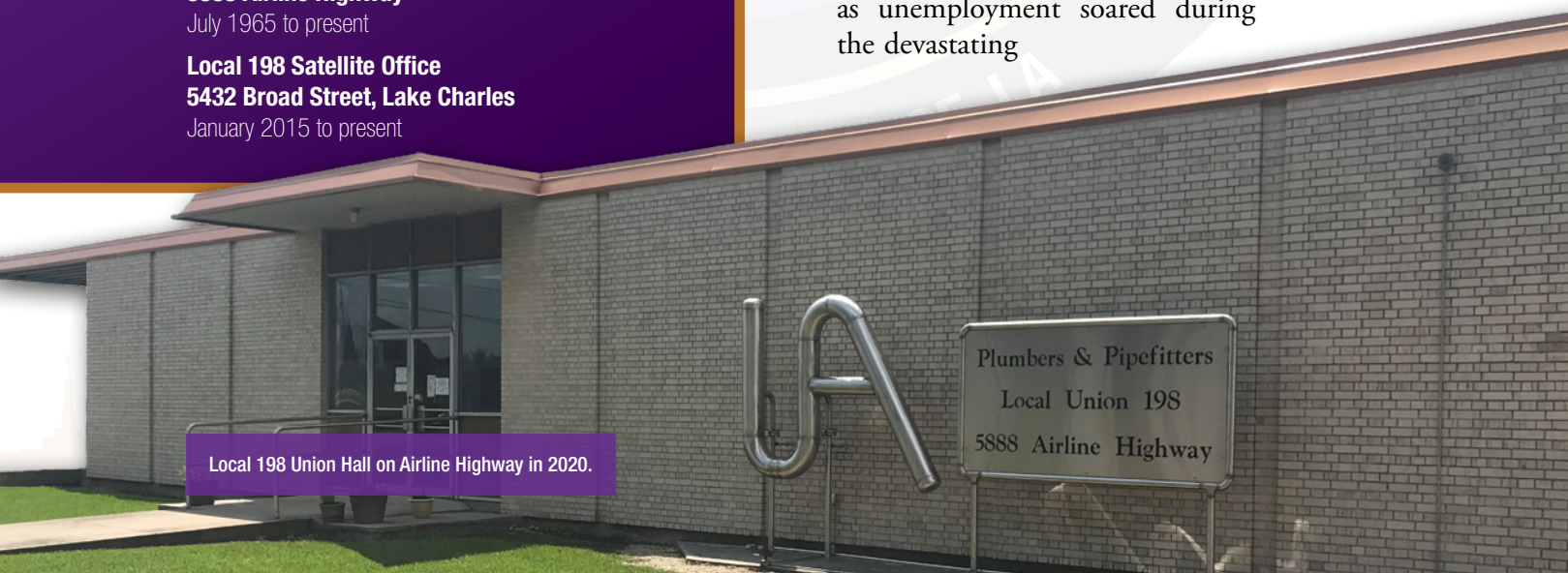
The initial impact of the Depression, which hindered building activity in and around Baton Rouge into 1931, essentially forced Local 198 to accept a wage cut from \$1.25



The new Louisiana State Capitol building shortly after it opened on May 16, 1932. (Library of Congress photo, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection)



Union plumbers work in the foundation area during initial stages of construction of the new Louisiana State Capitol building in Baton Rouge in 1931. (Photo used with permission of the State Library of Louisiana)



Local 198 Union Hall on Airline Highway in 2020.

per hour to \$1 per hour that year. But the city's standing as the state capital and its oil and natural gas industry along the Mississippi River curbed the effects of the Depression throughout the local's jurisdiction.

The start of construction in December 1930 on the new, \$5-million **Louisiana State Capitol** building in downtown Baton Rouge, which was built entirely with union labor, further helped employ many of the local's members through its completion in January 1932. (Some 88 years later in 2020, the 450-

foot, 34-story structure was still the tallest skyscraper in Baton Rouge and tallest capitol in the United States.)

What's more, in 1930 Governor Huey Pierce Long Jr. initiated a massive building program to expand the L.S.U. physical campus, which included construction of its medical school and a creamery, supplying more work for the local's plumbers and steamfitters. Despite the Great Depression, the number of buildings on the campus increased during the first half of the decade as its courses expanded

LOCAL 198 BUSINESS MANAGERS

Before the position of Business Manager was established in 1950, Local 198 business affairs were managed by a president and business agents. The local's first president after it was chartered in 1920 was **Brother John Coffee**, and one of its more-prominent business agents was **Brother Walter A. Cerdas**, a charter member of the local (and veteran of World War I, during which he served in France) who served as a business agent for three terms and 12 total years in the 1940s and 1960s during his nearly 50 years as a member of the local.

Pearson "Whitey" Holden 1950 into 1954	Albert L. Durbin 1960 – 1962	Henry B. Holden 1977 – 1980	Louis J. LeBlanc 1992 – 2004
A. S. "Shep" Wright 1954 – 1956	Pearson "Whitey" Holden 1962 – 1964	J.C. Hicks 1980 – 1983	Sammy P. Graphia 2004 – 2010
James Kirby 1956 – 1957	Albert L. Durbin 1964 – 1974	Henry B. Holden 1983 – 1986	Neal Miller 2010 – 2019
E. Clyde Goff 1957 – 1959	Pearson "Whitey" Holden 1974 – 1977	Raymond S. Zumo 1986 – 1992	Jonathan Waddell 2019 – present



and improved, and as a result "the university entered what may be called a golden age," according to L.S.U. literature.

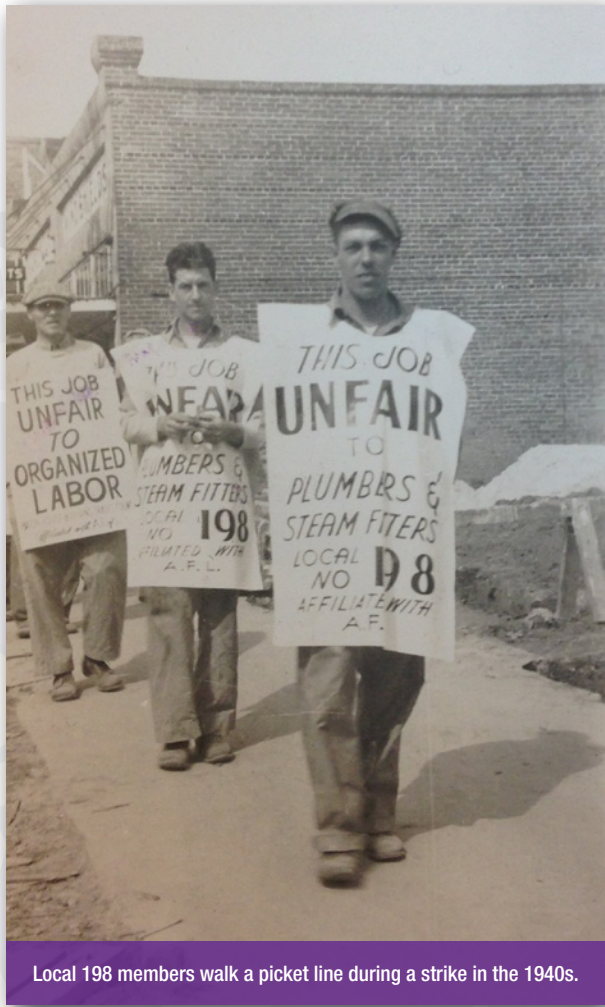
Public-works projects implemented through President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's federally funded "**New Deal**" job-creation programs beginning in 1933 provided another measure of relief to the local's membership. New Deal federal Works Progress Administration or Public Works Administration projects on which union labor was used included much of the growth at L.S.U., such as construction of **Atkinson Hall** engineering building and **Parker Coliseum** arena (also known as the Agricultural Center) in 1937, and the \$1.1-million **State Capitol Annex** building near the Capitol in 1938.

Also during that time, residents of East Baton Rouge overwhelmingly voted on June 12, 1934, to grant a five-year tax exemption to the **Solvay Process Company** in an effort to persuade it to build a caustic soda and soda ash plant in the area – a measure that had been publicly championed by Local 198 and other members of the **Baton Rouge Central Labor Council**, individually and as a single body. Construction of the factory, which began in August 1935, was yet another source of manhours for the local's membership.

With employment relatively steady as the Depression wore on into the latter part of the decade, Local 198 likewise remained comparatively stable during the waning years of the ongoing national turmoil. Subsequently, on June 1, 1937, the wage rate for the local's journeyman plumbers and steamfitters was raised back to \$1.25 per hour.

HELPING WIN A WAR & GAINING WORK, WAGES

Having withstood the Great Depression and with another world war underway in Europe and Asia, Local 198 continued to make progress into the 1940s.



Local 198 members walk a picket line during a strike in the 1940s.

Consequently, the local's journeyman wage scale was increased on January 1, 1941, to \$1.37-1/2 per hour.

Projects on which its members were employed at the time included an expansion of the **Ethyl Gasoline Corporation** plant in Baton Rouge to produce ethyl fluid, which was used in fuel for modern airplanes. During the job, however, the local's 150 members working on the job established a picket line on June 3, 1941, to protest the use of some non-union labor by the project's contractor.

Following the official entry of the United States into **World War II** after the Japanese attack on the U.S. Naval Base at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the demanding wartime economy of the 1940s pulled the nation and

BROTHERS GAVE LIVES IN SECOND WORLD WAR

Among the multiple Local 198 members who have answered the call to serve the country during times of war, Brother Leslie L. Alexander and Brother Rodney Sanches Forbes made the ultimate sacrifice in World War II.

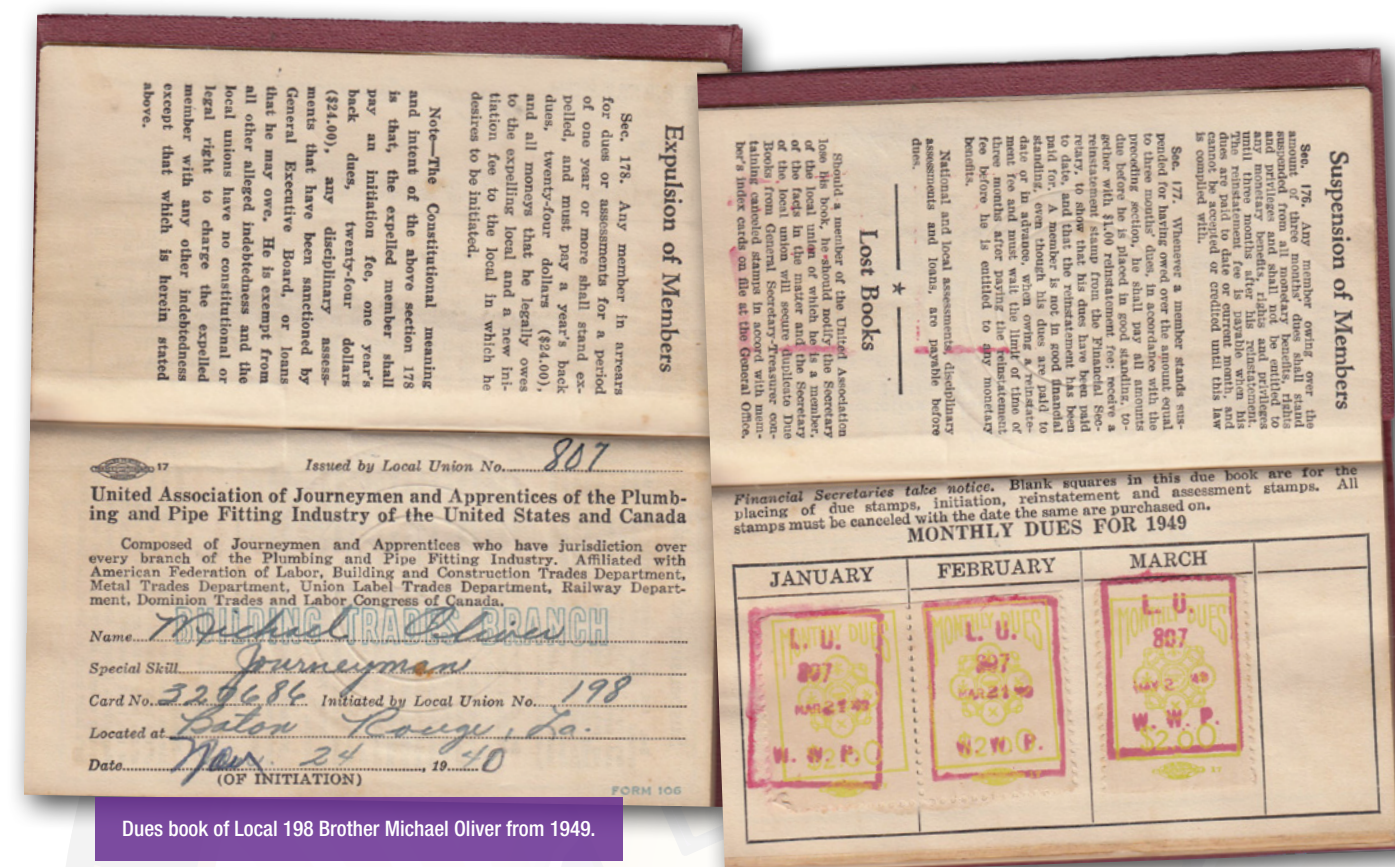
A technician fifth grade in the U.S. Army with the 42nd Bomb Disposal Squad, Brother Alexander was killed in action in France on August 20, 1944.

A technician fifth grade in the U.S. Army Air Corps with the 1896th Engineer Battalion, Brother Forbes was reported missing and ultimately declared dead on January 12, 1945, after the cargo ship on which he was being transported to the Philippines was attacked by a Japanese kamikaze plane in the Philippine Sea.

unions completely out of the Depression. Across North America, U.A. membership swelled from 81,000 in 1941 to 210,000 members, many of whom were working in shipyards, weapons plants, aircraft factories and other facilities to support the war effort.

The expanded military-materiel needs of the war quickly grew industrial construction within Local 198's jurisdiction of the City of Baton Rouge and the Parish of East Baton Rouge region. As a result, many of the local's members were employed at plants such as those operated by **Standard Oil**, **DuPont** and the **Aluminum Company of America** (Alcoa).

As the nation's involvement in the war quickly escalated and the local's employment likewise substantially increased, the U.A. separated the local's superior number of fitters from its



Dues book of Local 198 Brother Michael Oliver from 1949.

plumber members and subsequently chartered **Steamfitters and Pipefitters Local No. 807** on February 28, 1942, into which the parent union transferred Local 198's fitter members. The new local maintained jurisdiction over Baton Rouge and the Parish of East Baton Rouge and vicinity.

Throughout the war, members of both locals remained busy with work stimulated by wartime production. For example, Local 807 was given jurisdiction over the **Chicago Bridge and Iron Company Shipyard** in Morgan City, Louisiana, on the Atchafalaya River, which built floating drydocks for the U.S. Navy and provided ample work for union fitters and plumbers.

Following the war, which ended on September 2, 1945, with Japan's surrender after Nazi Germany had capitulated on May 7, work slowed within Local 198's jurisdiction, and its members experienced periods of unemployment during the first years of the

second half of the decade. However, increased expansions to many of the numerous industrial facilities within the Local 198 jurisdiction totaling an estimated \$50 million (*about \$530 million in 2020*) significantly improved work for its roughly 200 members, as well as Local 807's nearly 700 members into the final years of the 1940s. Those jobs included a new, \$6-million dormitory at L.S.U. that would be completed in 1949 as the **Germaine Laville Halls**; numerous new secondary-level schools in and around Baton Rouge; three projects to expand the Ethyl Gasoline plant that involved medical and personnel buildings; a development laboratory and a drumming plant to store mixed fuel that together were worth \$1.7 million (*about \$21 million in 2020*); and new construction at the Standard Oil facility that involved increasing its facilities for the production of gasoline components, a new laboratory building and facilities for the increased production of wax.



Local 198 officials and some of their wives gather for an event in 1943.

But before the decade was through as those projects and others continued, Local 198 and Local 807 went on strike beginning July 5, 1949, to secure their demand for a raise to their \$2.25-per-hour journeyman wages for plumbers, steamfitters and pipefitters in a new contract after their existing agreement with the **Master Plumbers Association** had expired June 30. While the association initially offered no increase to the pay scale, the locals also originally requested their employing contractors pay union members double-time for overtime work, triple-time for holiday work and a week's salary for vacation.

After six weeks, during which the work stoppage "stalemated all public building, much industrial construction and some private improvements," as the *Advocate* newspaper reported on August 16, 1949, the plumbers and fitters returned to work after the union and the Master Plumbers signed an agreement on August 15 following three days of hearings before a panel of the state mediation board. The new pact provided a 5-cent hourly wage increase to \$2.30 per hour for both locals' journeyman mechanics; time-and-a-half pay for overtime of up to two hours beyond the eight-hour workday; and double-time for work in excess of 10 hours in a day and on Sundays and holidays.

GROWING ALONG WITH ITS REGION'S INDUSTRY

The completion of larger projects in the greater Baton Rouge region reduced employment for the Local 198 membership into 1950, and the lack of work persisted through much of 1951. In that setting, the U.A. merged Local 807 and its steamfitters back into Local 198 on June 1, 1950, after which the local again represented all union plumbers and fitters within its jurisdiction.

Conditions vastly improved for the local in the wake of a surge in industrial projects along

U.A. Steamfitters and Pipefitters Local No. 807, which was formed from the member fitters of Local 198 on February 28, 1942, was merged back into Local 198 on June 1, 1950. Three members served as Local 807 business managers during its existence: former Local 198 member **Brother Robert O. Middleton** from 1941 into 1946; **Brother Henry J. Hudson** from 1946 into 1948; and **Brother William W. Pecue** from 1948 until June 1, 1950.

the Mississippi River over the following two years, including construction of two large units in the refinery operated by Standard Oil (or "Esso," as the company was also known by the phonetic pronunciation of its initials, "S" and "O"); sizable expansions at **Dow Chemical** and **Solvay Company** factories; and jobs at the **Kaiser Aluminum** and **Consolidated Chemical** plants. As those and other significant projects created an excess of employment for Local 198, **Business Manager Pearson "Whitey" Holden** was compelled to announce during the local's June 2, 1952, regular general meeting that he needed more men to handle all of the work in the local's jurisdiction.

With manhours being worked by its members escalating, later that year during its November 2 general meeting in an effort to build its treasury, the local passed a resolution that levied a \$2 assessment on any members who worked 48 or more hours in a week.

Seemingly the only things that curbed the local's favorable situation during the remainder of the first half of the 1950s was its need to picket or strike to fend off incursions by other trades into its work or to make gains in new agreements with its contractors. For instance, in August 1953 Local 198 and other building-trades members stopped construction of the Tangipahoa Parish Welfare Building and nine other construction projects including schools in the Amite area to protest the sub-contractor who was running the piping work on each job

and refused to talk to union representatives regarding the wages the company was paying.

Then on January 1, 1954, the local's plumbers and steamfitters went on strike against their employing contractors until January 19 before receiving a 15-cent-per-hour raise that increased their journeyman base wages to \$2.90 per hour. The following year, the local's nearly 100 plumbers stayed off their jobs for two-and-a-half weeks before gaining a new, two-year agreement with the Master Plumbers Association that included an immediate 15-cent raise to \$3.05 per hour and another 5-cent increase on January 1, 1956, and increased insurance benefits totaling \$10,000 instead of \$1,000 – terms that were similar to those in a contract the local's steamfitters had signed in December 1955. After the agreement was signed, Local 198 **President Earl J. Simoneaux** told the January 19, 1955, *State-Times Advocate* that it was "a contract with which we're all generally satisfied."

Strong employment of Local 198 members continued throughout 1956 and 1957, during which several more significant projects, such as construction of the \$20-million **W.R. Grace Company chemical plant** in Baton Rouge to produce newly developed high-density polyethylene, provided them with abundant manhours. During that prosperous time, the local's journeyman wage rate was also raised to \$3.25 per hour on January 1, 1957.

Ample work remained in the Local 198 jurisdiction during the balance of the decade, strengthened by a large number of commercial and industrial jobs. The more significant of those projects included work on an **Ormet Aluminum plant** in the city – although employment was slowed in February 1958 by a lengthy strike by union millwrights that shut down most projects in and around Baton Rouge.

Even after work on many of the manufacturing plants located on both sides



Local 198 retirees (front row, left to right) Joe Gould, Max Stevens, H. V. Carpenter, E. W. Barrent, Lee Heard, Roy Evans and Leslie Merrill; and (back row, left to right) Herbert Ruiz, Beo Landry, Eddie Nichols and Owen Rodriguez pose with U.A. General Secretary-Treasurer William C. O'Neill, Business Manager Shep Wright, (unknown) and U.A. Training Fund Coordinator Jack Poag during a function circa 1957.

of the Mississippi River was completed or was winding down by early 1959, including work on a Dow Chemical facility, enough jobs were still available to keep the local's members busy into the 1960s. Among those projects, Local 198 members installed special equipment on pipelines to the Esso bulk-fuel terminal, a job they picketed briefly in early September 1959 until the contractor removed non-union workers who were being used for portions of the work. Meanwhile, construction of the 35-store, open-air **Bon Marche Mall** on the burgeoning retail strip of Florida Boulevard – the city's first mega shopping center – likewise provided employment to numerous union plumbers and fitters until it opened in 1960.

FURTHERING ECONOMIC & LOCAL UNION EXPANSION

Although a lull in construction work and a sluggish economy hindered employment for Local 198 early in the new decade, the 1960s would ultimately prove to be a boon for the local and provide it with some of the most historic events in its history. To begin the period, in 1960 a new Health and Welfare Fund made its first payments to a pair of the local's members after it had been

established as a fringe benefit as part of the collectively bargained agreement between the union and its employing contractors.

The following year, however, the local's 400 union plumbers went on strike beginning January 10, 1961, after negotiations with the **Baton Rouge Industrial Contractors Association** for a wage increase in a new contract broke down. After nearly seven weeks, the local ended the strike and its plumbers returned to work on February 27 after reaching agreement on a new pact with contractors that increased the journeyman plumber's wage scale by 15 cents per hour.

A surge in employment for Local 198 began in earnest in 1963 with a marked rise in work on the chemical and petroleum plants along the Mississippi in the local's jurisdiction. Among many new industrial construction projects that provided substantial manhours to union plumbers and fitters through 1966 was a \$75-million **Texaco refinery** in St. James Parish that employed about 1,100 pipefitters and welders. Other major jobs included "turn-arounds" that shut down Keiser Aluminum and Chemical Corporation facilities for upgrades and maintenance; construction projects at the **Shell Oil** and **Esso/Exxon**



Local 198 officers and members stand by a sign erected by the local promoting Fire Prevention Week in the City of Baton Rouge in October 1962. (Photo courtesy of the East Baton Rouge Parish Library and used with permission of the Baton Rouge Fire Department)

refineries and the Allied Chemical, Dow Chemical and Borden Chemical plants; and an addition to the plant of the **Naugatuck Chemical Division** of U.S. Rubber.

During that time, Local 198 realized perhaps its most momentous and impactful long-term accomplishment when it built and opened its own **union hall** on Airline Highway in Baton Rouge, which it dedicated on July 31, 1965, with a ceremony and open house. The local had broken ground on the \$250,000 masonry and steel building on May 19, 1964, after hiring **Buquet and LeBlanc** as the contractor to build its new offices, meeting hall and education facility – in which Local 198 still resided in 2020.

With construction of its new headquarters underway and members working on additional large jobs such as the new \$6-million **Earl K. Long Memorial Charity Hospital**, the new \$40-million **Crown-Zellerbach paper mill** and 13 sorority houses and a women's dormitory on the L.S.U. campus, the local's roughly 900 steamfitters went on strike for nine weeks beginning April 1, 1965, which had "sweeping effect on major construction projects in the Baton Rouge area," the *State-Times Advocate* reported that day. While the local's plumbers had reached accord on a new contract on November 6, its fitters remained off their jobs until June 7 after they accepted a new, two-year contract with the Industrial Contractors Association providing for an immediate 30-cent hourly wage increase and an additional 20 cents per hour the following year.

Before those contracts were set to expire, the 2,000-member-strong local and its two contractor associations, seeking to avoid the labor trouble from two years earlier, signed new, two-year agreements before each previous pact ended on March 31, 1967. A joint statement from Local 198, the Industrial Contractors Association and the **Associated Mechanical Contractors of Baton Rouge** that appeared

HEALTHCARE INSURANCE FIRST UTILIZED IN 1960

After Local 198 negotiated with its employing industrial piping and associated mechanical contractors for a Health and Welfare Fund insurance benefit in their contracts during the late 1950s, the first payments from the fund to members of the local for hospital and medical bills were made in late February 1960 to **Brother Creason Alford** and **Brother Allen Watson**. At the time, the local's health-and-welfare trust was one of just a few such funds in the entire southern United States.

The group of contractors that participated in the collective-bargaining agreement that established the insurance benefit, into which each would pay a contribution based on hours worked by Local 198 members, included 18 independent shops, four national companies, 12 out-of-town contractors, six industrial-pipe contractors and 27 mechanical contractors in the Baton Rouge area. As an article in the February 28, 1960, *State-Times Advocate* explained, "The objective of the cooperative group is to provide adequate insurance and medical coverage for qualified members of (Local 198)."

in the April 1 *State-Times Advocate* declared, "These agreements assure the Greater Baton Rouge economy of continued industrial and commercial expansion without a work stoppage."

With the local's jurisdictional area in the process of its greatest growth period, during which more than \$1-billion was invested in new manufacturing facilities, large projects continued to provide union plumbers and fitters with abundant employment throughout the second half of the decade. Among those jobs, Local 198 members helped build a **Humble Oil & Refining Company** high-octane gas unit and an alcohol unit for **Enjay Chemical Company**, although a jurisdictional dispute with the union electricians briefly paused work on both in early October 1968.

A five-year, \$600-million construction program at **Willow Glen Power Station** in St. Gabriel, Louisiana, beginning in 1968



During dedication ceremonies for the new (and current) Local 198 Union Hall on Airline Highway in Baton Rouge on July 31, 1965, (left to right) Local 198 Business Manager Al Durbin, Local 198 Business Agent James Cornelius, Local 198 Financial Secretary Earl Herring, Baton Rouge Mayor John Allphin, United Association General Secretary-Treasurer William O'Neill and Local 198 President Eddie Bates cut the ceremonial grand-opening ribbon.



The new Local 198 Union Hall shown just before its grand opening on July 31, 1965.



Office employee Maxine DeWeese works in the administration offices of the new Local 198 Union Hall on July 31, 1965.

added another consistent source of employment for Local 198 through its completion in 1973, although work briefly stopped in December 1968 and October 1969 as the result of work-assignment disputes between the local's 180 pipefitters on the job and union carpenters and electrical workers, respectively. The project included the addition of a 580,000-kilowatt, \$45-million generator beginning in January 1969 which utilized scores of Local 198 members and, once online in late 1971, increased output of the Gulf States Utilities' plant to 1.54-million kilowatts.

Again in 1969, Local 198 and its employers reached deals on new working contracts before their previous pacts expired on March 31. The local's 1,500 pipefitters and its 500 plumbers accepted two-year agreements on February 26 and 27, respectively, that provided total 90-cent hourly raises in wages and healthcare and pension benefits. The following day, the local, the Industrial Contractors Association and the Associated Mechanical Contractors announced in a joint statement in the *State-Times Advocate*:

"This settlement favorably reflects that responsible leadership by the union and its contractors can accomplish stabilization within the local economy."

FACING A NEW RIVAL PRODUCED FROM WITHIN

By the final year of the 1960s, the union pipefitters of Baton Rouge and New Orleans were facing opposition from a group of nearly 400 fellow union members who were "disgruntled over the operation of existing pipefitters local unions in this area,"

according to the March 28, 1969, *State-Times Advocate*, and petitioned the U.A. international office for a charter of their own. The group, one of whose key complaints is that the existing locals had forced them to purchase out-of-state union cards to be able to work in the trade, the newspaper reported, sought to establish a local between the two cities in Prairieville and elected temporary officers on April 1 in anticipation of its new charter.

However, the U.A. rejected the charter application, prompting the seceding pipefitters to apply for membership with the Allied Federation of Unions (A.F.U.), which chartered a group of craftsmen in mid-October 1969 as Local No. 102 after attempting for nearly two years to form a union within the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (A.F.L.-C.I.O.), with which the U.A. is associated. The new local included all building trades and covered the entire State of Louisiana, and it declared it would have "one of the cleanest and most upright of unions," the October 21, 1969, *Advocate* reported.

Over the ensuing years, Local 198 would clash often with A.F.U. Local 102, which was "a thorn in the side of the construction trades unions since it was chartered," an article in the August 2, 1971, *State-Times Advocate* proclaimed. Earlier that year, for instance, the local persuaded the Stauffer Chemical Company to switch from a contractor using A.F.L.-C.I.O. craft unions – including Local 198 – for maintenance at its plant in St. Gabriel to employing a firm that used members of Local 102.

Lingering animosity between the two locals at times even manifested into violence. In one instance on July 28, 1971, while Local 198 members had been picketing a Capline Tank Farm project near Welcome, Louisiana, since July 26 to protest the use of Local 102 members on a project to construct a pipeline for Marathon Oil Company in the facility,

a "scuffle" broke out between members of the locals, the August 2 *State-Times Advocate* reported. While one non-Local 198 participant was admitted to a hospital, no arrests were made in connection with the incident, according to the newspaper.

Local 198 Assistant Business Manager Haskell Douglas even acknowledged in the September 16, 1974, *State-Times Advocate* that "a concerted effort (was) underway to disband Local 102" through pickets and recruiting its members into A.F.L.-C.I.O. unions, particularly welders into Local 198. At the time, the building-trades' efforts resulted in plant and factory owners canceling a half-dozen contracts with Local 102 employing contractors over the previous three months, according to the newspaper.

RIDING OUT A DECADE AND ITS UPS & DOWNS

The 1970s were highlighted by favorable employment for Local 198 and underscored with advances on working agreements with the local's contractors; however, they were also dotted with occasional strikes and setbacks.

In one such instance, in February 1970 a National Labor Relations Board (N.L.R.B.) examiner ruled that Local 198 had "engaged in unfair labor practices by exerting pressure to monopolize work and overtime for travelers (from other U.A. locals who were working through Local 198), members of other locals and permit men," the February 28, 1970, *Advocate* reported. The ruling was made in connection with charges filed by two workers who claimed they were terminated from the Willow Glen Power Station project and a job at Dow Chemical in Plaquemine "because of their non-membership in Local 198," according to the newspaper. The examiner also concluded in his ruling that the local violated



The yet-to-be-used auditorium in the new Local 198 Union Hall shown on July 31, 1965.



Local 198 delegates to the U.A. Convention held August 2-5, 1971, in Denver.

law by informing members it “would ensure employment for its members by getting non-members fired or by forcing members to quit,” and he subsequently recommended to the N.L.R.B. that the local be ordered to “halt the practice and reimburse one man for pay he lost as a result of the discrimination against him,” the newspaper reported.

But later that year, Local 198 gained a new, two-year contract from the Industrial Contractors Association and the Associated Mechanical Contractors on November 17 – more than five months before their current contract was to expire on March 31, 1971. In a joint statement lauding the expedient agreement, which would eventually raise the Local 198 journeyman total wage-and-benefits pay scale to \$8.075 per hour, the three organizations declared that it would “help to stabilize the construction industry in this area”

and should “aid in attracting new construction which the Baton Rouge Area economy sorely needs at this time.”

As work at Willow Glen continued, additional projects also provided manhours to the local’s members as the early 1970s progressed. In particular, a large amount of construction and maintenance work at Kaiser Aluminum and Dow Chemical plants in the region, which would persist throughout the balance of the 1970s, employed many union plumbers and fitters.

Then on March 30, 1973, the local signed another two-year agreement with its contractors that included wage-and-benefit increases totaling 45 cents per hour effective April 1 and another 45 cents per hour effective April 1, 1974. The raises would take the local’s total journeyman hourly compensation to \$8.975 for the final year of the 24-month pact.

The N.L.R.B. disciplined Local 198 again in June 1974, however, to “stop discriminatory job-referral practices” and provide back pay to a worker who lost his job “as a result of the practices,” the June 4 *State-Times Advocate* reported. An administrative judge had found that the local had discriminated against a pipe-welder who was a member of U.A. Local No. 798 by not referring him to a job at National Maintenance Corporation the previous September 25 – even though the local contended that employers had complained that Local 798 welders “lacked qualifications.”

Construction of the \$70-million **Cortana Mall Shopping Center** in Baton Rouge beginning in late 1974 and the new, 460-bed **Our Lady of the Lake Hospital** the following year, as well as numerous industrial plant jobs in the area, increased work opportunities for the local’s members. At the time of its opening in 1976, the 1.5-million-square-foot Cortana Mall was the largest enclosed mall in the South and the largest single-story mall in the nation. *(It would be demolished in 2021.)*

But Local 198 entered the second half of the 1970s with one of the lowest journeyman basic-wage rates in the State of Louisiana at \$7.90 per hour as of March 1975. Elsewhere, U.A. members in New Orleans were earning \$8.90 per hour on their paychecks and those in Lake Charles were making \$8.88 per hour at the time.

Subsequently, Local 198 plumbers and pipefitters went on strike beginning April 1 over a new contract with higher pay rates. While the local’s 500 maintenance workers did not strike and its 400 plumbers returned to work the following day after agreeing to a new pact with the Associated Mechanical Contractors, the local’s 1,000 pipefitters remained off their jobs until April 29 after they won a contract that was retroactive until April 1. The agreement with the Industrial Contractors Association provided a total \$1.50-per-hour increase in

wages and benefits over the following 25 months, including an immediate 80-cent hourly increase.

Meanwhile, a \$120-million expansion of the **Georgia-Pacific Corporation pulp mill** at Port Hudson and construction of an \$11.5-million **Air Products alkylamines plant** in Iberville Parish beginning in 1975 that would be used to manufacture herbicides added to the manhours the local’s members were able to work. However, the union plumbers and fitters were engaged in jurisdictional disputes over job assignments on both projects with Teamsters Local No. 5, whose members walked off the pulp-mill job in early February 1976 and the alkylamines plant job later that month.

Construction of the **River Bend Nuclear Generating Station** near St. Francisville, Louisiana, under a labor-friendly Project Labor Agreement between Gulf State Utilities and the building trades beginning in March 1977 provided yet another boost in employment for Local 198, which would continue into the 1980s until the plant went online in June 1986. Work on the single 967-megawatt-unit nuclear power station employed many 198 members and travelers from other locals, helping that local’s membership grow to about 4,500 craftsmen by the end of the decade.

A strike by Local 198’s plumbers and pipefitters beginning May 7, 1979, shut down nearly 60 percent of the industrial development along a 100-mile stretch of the Mississippi River, according to a report in that day’s *State-Times Advocate*. The local’s 500 plumbers settled a contract with the Association of Mechanical Contractors on May 25, but the local’s 4,000 pipefitters did not come to terms with the Industrial Contractors Association until June 23.

With economics on their side since many pipefitters were able to work other jobs during the strike while the contractors were operating businesses with “high overheads,”

according to the June 23 *Advocate*, both two-year agreements provided favorable terms for the local that included wage-and-benefit raises of \$1.10 per hour the first year retroactive to May 1 and \$1 the second year beginning May 1, 1980, which raised the journeyman hourly pay package to \$14.675. The local also won a concession from contractors that prevented them from transferring journeyman members between jobs.

In a first for the local, during the strike it deployed former TV sportscaster **Dennis McCain** as its public-relations spokesperson. "It wasn't the ideal situation," the *State-Times Advocate* later pronounced in its August 19, 1980, issue, "but it was substantially superior to the total silence from some sectors of organized labor during previous strikes. ... McCain's availability as a conduit of information probably was of benefit to both the union and the public."

ENDURING THE HARDEST PERIOD OF ITS EXISTENCE

Driven by the state's passage in 1976 of a so-called "right-to-work" law, under which workers being represented by a union in a workplace are not required to pay union dues for that representation, and the influx of a large number of non-union craftsmen into Louisiana during construction

The Local 198 Retirees Club was formed in 1979 by Brother Billy Miller and Brother Bill Bostick. While the primary purpose of the club is to provide camaraderie among the local's retired membership, the club has served the local and community in a variety of ways over the years, including helping to assemble and distribute food baskets for member families who need assistance during the holidays; cooking dinners for Labor Day festivities; providing meals during relief efforts in the aftermaths of catastrophes such as Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and the Baton Rouge floods of 2016; and catering the Baton Rouge Building Trades Christmas party.

booms of the 1950s and 1960s, the non-union construction industry overtook and surpassed the union sector in Baton Rouge and Louisiana beginning in the early 1980s. As a result, many of the industrial plants along the Mississippi River that the union craft trades had built and serviced in the 1960s and 1970s, such as Exxon, turned to non-union workers during the decade.

Local 198 also had to contend with the federal conviction in May 1980 of **Business Manager Henry Holden** for obstruction of justice in 1979, for which he served time in prison. The verdict was made in connection with Brother Holden's attempt to influence a grand jury during a probe that led to the conviction of former State Senator Gaston Gerald in a scheme to have a contractor on city-parish buildings avoid paying an assessment for completing work late. After a U.S. Court of Appeals upheld the verdict in April, Brother Holden resigned from his position with the local and its membership voted on June 2, 1980, for **Brother J.C. Hicks** to replace him as business manager.

As the non-union threat escalated, in early 1981 the local began allowing its members to seek employment with contractors that did not have collective-bargaining agreements with Local 198. The arrangement was made in an attempt to organize non-union jobs in the Baton Rouge area.

But then during Local 198's August 3, 1981, general meeting, Business Manager Hicks announced, "Manhours are falling off at a great rate." He went on to inform the membership that "work was going to unfair (non-union) contractors" and the "building trades are falling by the wayside."

Subsequently, by one point in 1982, the jobless rate among union construction-craft tradesmen – including the membership of Local 198 – was as high as 50 percent. By July of that year, non-union contractors were



Local 198 delegates to the U.A. Convention held August 16-20, 1976, in Las Vegas.

performing "at least" 60 percent of Baton Rouge area construction work, including up to 90 percent of new construction, according to the July 12, 1982, *State-Times Advocate*.

This prompted a spokesperson for the Industrial Contractors Association, the longtime Local 198 employer representative, to even admit in the newspaper that Baton Rouge's identity as a "union town ... was changing."

During the early 1980s, Local 198 members as well as their brother craftsmen with other unions continued to man construction of the River Bend Nuclear Generating Station, where the local had a workforce of some 500 members; the three-unit **Big Cajun II Power Plant** in New Roads, Louisiana, whose third generator was completed in 1983; and a **Bechtel Incorporated chemical plant**, which employed about 400 union pipefitters. But while those projects provided strong employment for the organized trades and used nearly their entire workforce, non-union pipe-tradesmen were performing

most of the work elsewhere throughout the local's jurisdiction. As a result, into and through the early 1980s, the non-union industry took over nearly all of the other industrial plant jobs, and primarily maintenance work, in the region as industrial plants in the area pushed for non-union workers.

Further compounding the building-trades unions' deteriorating collective position at that time was its employing contractors' growing use of "double-breasting," by which they were simultaneously operating both union and non-union companies. A July 14, 1982, article in the *State-Times Advocate* noted that several union leaders, including Local 198 Business Manager Hicks, said "virtually all the contractors they negotiate with operate non-union sides."

The contractor on the River Bend Nuclear Generating Station, Stone and Webster, fired 220 Local 198 pipefitters on March 26, 1981, after they refused to go to work following the dismissal of four union members who had left



Local 198 retirees gather during an event in 1980.

work early the previous day, the *State-Times Advocate* reported on March 27. The workers' refusal to work was considered a violation of the Nuclear Construction Stabilization agreement that forbade strikes and walkouts, according to the newspaper. However, the contractor rehired most of the fired members on April 9 after negotiations between the union, owner and employer.

The following month, in stark contrast to negotiations just two years earlier that resulted in a nearly two-month-long strike, Local 198 and its contractors associations approved a new, three-year working contract on May 5, which was retroactive to May 1. The agreement – the first signed among the union building trades that year – provided increases in hourly wages and benefits of \$1.75 on May 1; 25 cents on November 1; \$1.75 on May 1, 1982; and another \$1.75 on May 1, 1983, which would increase the local's journeyman pay package to \$20.175 per hour for the final year. However, in the negotiations the local conceded double-time pay for half-time pay for work on Saturdays; language permitting contractors and workers to agree on a project-by-project basis to a work week with four 10-hour days; and provisions that would allow contractors to shift workers from one job to another without going through the union hall.

But as a severe construction slump in the local's area continued into 1983 and large numbers of Local 198 members were consequently out of work, the local agreed to forgo the final, \$1.75 raise it was to receive on May 1, 1983, for the third and final year of the contract. With the wage "freeze," as Local 198 **Business Agent Bob McGlothlin** described it in the May 15 *State-Times Advocate*, the plumbers and pipefitters journeyman scale remained at \$15.865 per hour in wages and \$2.585 per hour for benefits.

Then on June 6 of that year, Brother Henry Holden, who had earlier been released from federal prison, was voted back into the office of business manager, defeating incumbent Business Manager Hicks in an election among four candidates.

COMING TOGETHER TO COUNTER TOUGH TIMES

A sizable portion of the Local 198 membership became and remained unemployed during the mid-1980s in the wake of an expanding construction slump, the loss of heavy industries to overseas competitors, a poor economy and the escalating encroachment of non-union competition in its jurisdiction. "Because of the unemployment

rate, we're embattled like every other union here," Business Manager Holden told the April 12, 1985, *State-Times Advocate*, while he also estimated that about 45 percent of the local's 3,750 members were without jobs at that time.

Looking back three decades years later, U.A. International Representative Lance Albin acknowledged in the January 2015 *Journal*, "A lot of things were our fault. Sometimes it was the contractor's fault and sometimes the owner's fault, but the bottom line is the owners got together and said, 'Enough is enough. We are not putting up with it anymore.' As a result, the floodgates opened up for the non-union to do all of the piping work in this area."

Completion of the River Bend Nuclear Generating Station in 1985 brought another significant drop in employment for Local 198 – after which it became a "suitcase local" with a large number of members traveling to other U.A. locals throughout the country for work.

During that year, the local also raised its dues to help keep it financially solvent. Additionally, on April 1, 1985, the local's Finance Committee released a list of recommendations for curbing costs, which included requiring long-distance office calls be made through a special number for lower rates, only calling special meetings for elections and contract negotiations to lower the cost of mailouts to members and taking all items out of storage and putting them in the union hall to save the cost of storage.

In another sign of the troubling times, Local 198 members were among the more than 500 union tradesmen working in the River Bend nuclear power plant who were laid off on May 23, 1985, and then were asked to return to maintenance positions at a lower wage rate. Union representatives noted in the May 25 *State-Times Advocate* that the workers would return to the plant to perform "the same work for less pay."

Local 198 did attempt to counter the slide in employment and membership in various efforts, such as placing an announcement in newspapers throughout early 1988 that read:

"PLEASE contact our State Senator, State Representative, your Congressman, your City Councilman – Urge them to protect LOCAL JOBS."

With about 600 of its members working out of state in the jurisdictions of other U.A. locals at one point in October 1988, **Business Manager Raymond Zumo** also took to the newspapers to address the "strong-arm" union tactics of the past. "We don't do that anymore," he declared in the October 21 *State-Times Advocate*. "All we want is a fair shake."

But the following year, a considerable influx of work in the area left both union and non-union contractors seeking qualified journeyman plumbers, pipefitters and welders to man their projects. As such, on July 3, 1989, Business Manager Zumo, **President George M. Boatner** and the local's other top officials ordered members to quit working non-union jobs or risk losing their membership in the union. (In early 1981, members were given permission to seek employment with non-union contractors.)

In response to a newspaper inquiry regarding the local's demand, Business Manager Zumo simply told the August 4, 1989, *Advocate*, "We're tired of people coming in here from out of state, taking our jobs, tearing up our roads, leaving on Fridays and leaving us to pay taxes to repair them."

In the July 3 letter announcing the ultimatum, the local's leadership also emphasized to its members, **"Now is the time to come together."**

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Local 198 Member Training and Education

A 100-YEAR DEDICATION TO PREPARING ITS PIPING WORKFORCE

Throughout its first century after being chartered by the United Association in 1920, Local 198 has trained its workforce through a system of hands-on apprenticeship, in which potential piping-industry professionals work alongside experienced journeyman plumbers, steamfitters and pipefitters to learn the trade while also earning a wage. However, the Local 198 apprentice-training program was not formalized and supplemented with regularly organized classroom and laboratory instruction until 1947, when the local hired an instructor to provide theoretical education to students.

The following year, the local joined efforts to establish a trade school at the **Baton Rouge Vocational-Technical School** located at 3400 Winbourne Avenue. Over the next decade and a half, the local's apprentices attended classes and conducted hands-on lab work at the school as part of the local's five-year apprenticeship program, which by the time was being administered and funded by a **Joint Apprenticeship Committee (J.A.C.)** of representatives of the local and its employing contractors. (The program would be shortened to four years during the mid-1970s before it was reverted back to five years in 1981.)

The year 1962 was a watershed time for the Local 198 apprenticeship training program, as the local and J.A.C. broke ground in February on the new **Plumbers and Steamfitters Trade School** at the corner of Greenwell Street and Airline Highway in Baton Rouge — which would be the first such apprenticeship training school in the area when it opened later that year. The \$85,000 facility included an administration office, a refrigeration and air-conditioning workshop, an instrument room, a board-meeting room and three classrooms. It was built under the **Apprenticeship and Training Trust Fund** of Local 198, the Industrial Piping Contractors, Mechanical Contractors and Air Conditioning and Refrigeration Contractors, which had been set up December 31, 1958, with five representatives each from the union and the employers to study and plan the school.



Also in 1962, Local 198 hired **Brother Ernest E. Goff Sr.** as its first-ever training coordinator for its Apprenticeship Training Program. (Brother Goff would be a 60-year member of the union when he passed away in 2010 at age 82.)

In 2020 as Local 198 reached its 100th anniversary since being established, the local continued to train most of its apprentices in its updated, modern and state-of-the-art training center on Greenwell Street adjacent to its Union Hall on Airline Highway. Its five-year apprenticeship program, which received full accreditation 20 years earlier in 2000, provides training for the plumbing; pipefitting; heating, ventilation, air conditioning and refrigeration (HVACR); and welding trades. In addition to their on-the-job training, students attend class two nights per week from September through May.

Local 198 apprentices earn income as they are paid wages while they are learning, and they receive raises every six months of their apprenticeships. They are also eligible for the local's employer-funded Health Care Plan and Pension Plan.

After graduating to journeyman-level status, Local 198 members continue their education in the trades through the local's continuing education and training programs, which provides courses for certifications in a variety of specialized areas in the

piping industry. U.A. certification programs include valve repair, medical gas installation; welding; refrigerant handling; industrial rigging; foreman training; geo-thermal; green awareness; instrumentation; and HVACR S.T.A.R certification.

SECOND TRAINING FACILITY OPENED IN 2014

Local 198 held a grand-opening ceremony for its new training center in Lake Charles on November 19, 2014, which represented a significant investment by the U.A. and its contractor partners that would benefit both the industry and the community as labor demand was increasing dramatically along the Gulf Coast — and particularly in the Lake Charles area. The state-of-the-art facility included 52 welding booths, ample classroom space and an authorized testing facility that allows for testing and immediate dispatch of welders.

The facility was part of the U.A. expansion of its presence along the Gulf Coast to help the union meet growing manpower demands in the region — which was on the verge of an industrial boom with Lake Charles at the epicenter. In particular, the school was initially established to train welders and plumbers with an emphasis on welders, for which there was a tremendous demand.



Helping to cut the grand-opening ribbon for the Local 198 Lake Charles Training Center during a ceremony on November 19, 2014, are (left to right) Paula Ramsey, vice president of Chamber Operations and Services, Chamber Southwest Louisiana; George Swift, Lake Charles Chamber of Commerce; Kelly Craft, Local 198 business agent; Louis Wren, president of the Louisiana AFL-CIO; Randy Roach, mayor of Lake Charles; Dr. Joe Fleishman, vice chancellor for Economic and Workforce Development, Sowela; Bill Hite, United Association general president; Neal Miller, Local 198 business manager; Lance Albin, United Association international representative; Christopher Haslinger, United Association director of training; and Mike Pleasant, United Association assistant general president.

WAGING AN ORGANIZED FIGHT FOR A COMEBACK

Local 198 continued to push back against non-union proliferation within its jurisdiction and poor employment conditions throughout the first half of the 1990s. Regardless, a portion of its membership was still compelled to travel to sister U.A. locals for work throughout much of the decade.

Among the activities undertaken by Local 198 to counter its struggles, members picketed a construction project at the Exxon Refinery in Baton Rouge in June 1994 to protest contractor Fluor Daniel's use of out-of-state workers. "They are squeezing us plum out of the picture," Local 198 **Organizer Jeff Armstrong** told the June 14 *Advocate*. "We're going to live here and work here, we want the job."

Then in July of that year, the local picketed the construction site of the Catfish Town casino and entertainment center, where the subcontractor handling heating and air conditioning was not hiring union labor, according to the July 26, 1994, *Advocate*. "I have a beef with them bringing people in here and not even giving us a fair shot at the work," Local 198 **Business Manager Louis LeBlanc** told the newspaper.

Internally during that time, the local also had to contend with a bookkeeper who embezzled about \$370,000 from the local's pension, health and welfare, and education funds. She eventually pleaded guilty to the theft and was sentenced on June 20, 1992, to 2-1/2 years in prison, while the loss of funds to the benefit plans was covered by insurance policies.

Into and during the mid-1990s, Local 198 pushed its unsurpassed **apprentice training program** as a means to counter the non-union piping industry. Responding to a call by several shipyards in Louisiana to employ the local's members and a previous article addressing the need to train welders through

state-operated programs, Business Manager LeBlanc even exclaimed in a letter in the December 3, 1997, *Advocate*:

"Plumbers and Steamfitters Local Union No. 198 has been training welders for more than 75 years with an extensive, five-year training program while working apprentice welders with journeyman welders on the job. All of this is done at no expense to the state."

Among many measures undertaken by the local to enhance its training at the time, in March 1995 the local received a grant it had requested from the U.A. to purchase new welding machines and renovate the welding shop in its training center. Those upgrades were in turn used to install a **welder certification program** as part of its training.

As work opportunities both at home and even on the road remained scarce as Local 198 began the second half of the decade, it turned to an all-out **organizing campaign** to improve its situation by recruiting new members and contractors. Underway in 1995, the campaign was the first coordinated, all-out organizing effort in the Gulf Coast area during that time and for the next several years.

However, while the local successfully placed members on out-of-town jobs in places such as Philadelphia and Chicago during 1996, many were working non-union jobs on projects that included a job at the Exxon plant. And while the locals plumbers and fitters were employed by union contractors on jobs that included projects at the **Oschner Clinic** and **Southern University** in Baton Rouge as well as several smaller commercial developments, during the local's December 2, 1996, general membership meeting, Business Manager LeBlanc reported that there was "no work on the road or at home" at the time.

Regardless, the local kept up its organizing efforts. For instance, in mid-1997 it attempted

to organize workers at the construction site of an American Iron Reduction plant in St. James parish, during which it filed unfair labor and safety complaints with the N.L.R.B. and the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) against the construction contractor, Houston-based Becon Construction Company, according to the September 5, 1997, *Advocate*. As a result, OSHA proposed fining the contractor up to \$7,275 "for a series of safety violations" on the construction site, the newspaper reported on November 1.

In response to the ruling, Local 198 **Organizer Jeff Armstrong** told the newspaper, "I want everyone to have better wages and safer jobs."

Employment opportunities with sister locals remained slack in 1998, during which projects on which Local 198 members worked in their jurisdiction included a job at the **Rubicon polyurethane plant** along the Mississippi River in Geismar, Louisiana. That June, that local also signed a contract with Combustion Engineers

for a \$22-per-hour wage-and-benefits package for work at Big Cajun II Power Plant.

The following year, although plumbing work was extremely sparse within the local's area, many of its steamfitters were employed on several sizable jobs including a project at one of the **BASF Corporation** chemical facilities in the region. Additionally, union fitters worked several maintenance and upgrade "turnarounds," during which portions of plants were shut down or taken offline for service, at River Bend, Rubicon and a steel mill, among others.

That July 1999, Local 198 won its first job using its new **Market Recovery Program**, through which a fund subsidized by the local's wages was used to help its employing contractors submit lower project bids. **Louis Mechanical** was the benefactor of the union's job-creation effort.

But the local was still reliant on employment with other U.A. locals as the decade was coming to a close, and many of its members



Local 198 delegates to the U.A. Convention held August 6-10, 2001, in Miami.



Local 198 Brother Charles E. Pearce, 81 years old, takes a welding test at the local's training center on January 30, 2007.

– and particularly its plumbers and welders – were employed at that time in locations including New Jersey; Massachusetts; Toledo, Ohio; Phoenix, Baltimore; Kansas City; Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Detroit; Albuquerque; and Omaha. Undeniably, the ability of its members to travel around the country for work was the direct result of the local's first-class training program, as members were well-prepared and highly skilled and, therefore, were welcomed by sister locals.

IMPROVING CONDITIONS AMID NATURAL TRAGEDY

The new “Y2K” millennium came with familiar challenges for Local 198 as non-union labor sustained its ongoing creep into the local's jurisdiction. Consequently, the local lost its maintenance contracts at plants operated by the likes of Dow and Shell, as well as work at the Borden Milk Production and Distribution Center in Baton Rouge.

But the local did gain work for its medical gas welders early in the new decade, and turnarounds at facilities such as the Shell refinery, Big Cajun II Power Plant and the **CF Industries** fertilizer complex in Ascension Parish (the largest in North America) provided manhours for members. Out-of-town jobs in locations including St. Paul, Minnesota, with Local No. 455; Harrisburg, Pennsylvania with Local No. 520; Cranston, Rhode Island, with Local No. 51; and Pueblo, Colorado, with Local No. 20 likewise kept numbers of Local 198 plumbers, fitters and welders busy.

With half of the year 2000 complete, commercial work for plumbers was “very good,” as Business Manager LeBlanc declared during the local's June 5 general meeting. However, he also informed the membership that work both in-town and on the road was “very slow” and also announced, “We have a lot of people on the road.”

That month, the local settled on a new, two-year working contract that provided an immediate \$1-per-hour raise retroactive to June 1 and hourly increases to wages of 50 cents on December 1; 75 cents on June 1, 2001; and another 75 cents on December 1, 2001. All other language in the local's previous agreement with its contractors remained the same.

While work on the road for Local 198 members continued to fluctuate into 2002, an organizing campaign by the U.A. along the Gulf Coast that year brought more jobs for union plumbers and fitters in the region. Locally, shutdowns for maintenance and upgrades at plants such as BASF, CF Industries, **Honeywell** and **Vulcan Company Chemical Division** remained a steady – if only temporary – source of employment.

Having learned valuable lessons after losing its market share along the Gulf Coast during the 1980s and 1990s, to further enhance the ability of all its locals in the region to gain work, the U.A. also created and chartered

the **Gulf Coast District Council** in 2002, of which Local 198 became a part. Among other purposes, the council was responsible for business outreach, establishing important relationships and contacts by reaching out to owners and contractors.

Substantial work in the local's jurisdiction and also on the road with other locals remained cyclical throughout the first half of the decade, with turnarounds providing the majority of peaks in employment for the local's membership. During that time, for instance, when a large number of major projects being worked by Local 198 members in locations such as Boston, Albuquerque, Phoenix, Portland, Colorado Springs, St. Paul and St. Louis were all completed in 2002, sources at home including CF Industries, Rubicon, River Bend power plant and Honeywell picked up the slack with new projects and maintenance outages. Elsewhere that particular year, however, few other employers were able to provide steady, significant work and mechanical work in the area also dropped considerably.

Meanwhile, the U.A. international office pushed the local to increase organizing efforts in its area to gain more work opportunities. To that end, in 2002 and 2003 the local deployed **Business Agent Sammy Graphia** (who would be elected business manager in June 2004 to succeed the retiring Brother LeBlanc) at times to work alongside the local's two organizers in that capacity.

The local's struggles persisted, however, to the point that in 2003 it considered selling its union hall and properties along Airline Highway and Greenwell Street – where it still resides at its 100th anniversary. Ultimately, the local voted during a special order of business at its September 8, 2003, general meeting to not sell.

Periods of improved work within its area relieved the local during the mid-2000s and throughout the second half of the decade.

For instance, the local announced during its May 2007 general meeting that all of the “major” plumbing shops in its area had hired during the month and were still looking for licensed plumbers as well as apprentices. However, jobs with other locals throughout the country slackened often during the middle of the decade, resulting in periods of higher unemployment for Local 198, which was still considered a suitcase local.

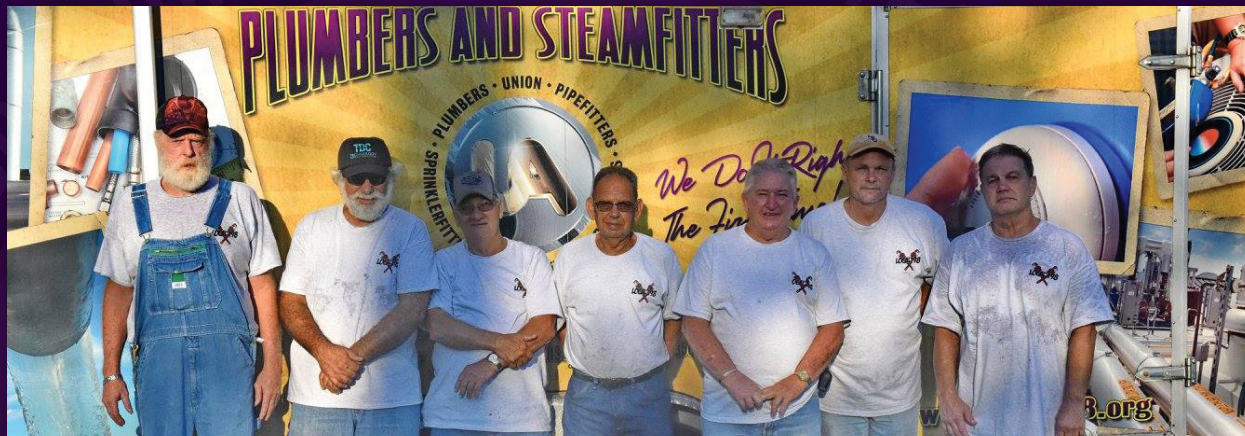
Another defining moment in its history, as well as those of the U.A., the state and the nation, was thrust upon Local 198 when the “Category-5” **Hurricane Katrina** slammed into the Gulf Coast, causing more than 1,800 fatalities and \$125 billion in damage in late August 2005, especially in the City of New Orleans and the surrounding areas. Local 198 responded in kind, leading efforts to help storm victims, collect needed donations of money and supplies, and even hosting the Local 60 staff, which used its sister Baton Rouge U.A. local's offices to conduct business after the storm left its New Orleans union hall inoperative.

Continued after following spread



Local 198 members cook for a benefit dinner for Brother David DeVeer in September 2012.

Answering the Call

LOCAL 198 REGULARLY RESPONDS IN TIMES OF NEED

Following the Category 4 Hurricane Harvey that hit southern Louisiana and Texas in August 2017 and caused devastating flooding in the Houston metropolitan area, Local 198 members provided relief by cleaning out houses and distributing supplies while the Local 198 Retirees Club cooked more than 300 meals for local residents. Local 198 brothers who participated in the relief efforts included (left to right) Wayne Hanna, Terry Quatrevingt, Joe Babin, Ronnie Rome, Sidney "Snookie" Ballard, Business Manager Neal Miller and Kenny Guidry.



"Over the years, I have witnessed so many acts of generosity, sacrifice and kindness on the part of United Association members, not just to one another, but also to complete strangers who happen to be in need. It is a part of our culture to offer help whenever and wherever it is needed, and many times the U.A. is among the first organizations on the scene in times of national tragedy."

That is exactly what is happening in Houston, just as it happened in New Orleans and on so many other occasions when disaster has struck. In fact, the effort in Houston is being led by brothers and sisters from Louisiana, in particular Local 60 in New Orleans and Local 198 in Baton Rouge. ...

Much of what was accomplished was due to the advice and work of Neal Miller, business manager of Local 198, whose prior experience with relief efforts proved invaluable. Due to this teamwork, we were able to get emergency assistance to our members almost immediately."

— U.A. General Secretary-Treasurer Patrick H. Kellett,
September 2017 *Journal*

After Category-5 Hurricane Camille, at the time the second-most intense tropical cyclone on record to strike the United States, devastated the coasts of Mississippi and eastern Louisiana in August 1969, the Local 198 membership voted during its September 8 union meeting to donate \$1,000 to the Hurricane Camille Relief Fund. For the local, the donation was another act in what has been a long history of providing aid and comfort in the wake of natural disasters within its jurisdiction and throughout the Gulf Region.



NOLA helps with cleanup after flooding in southern Louisiana in 2016: (left to right) Curtis Mezzic, Ronnie Rosser, Johnny Sabathe, Lance Albin and Louie Robien.

Local 198, in particular, and other U.A. locals across North America rallied to help families along the Gulf Coast following Hurricane Katrina in August 2005 and Hurricane Rita in September 2005. For example, the Local 198 welding shop in its training center served as a warehouse for the tens of thousands of donated goods in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, which at the time was the costliest tropical cyclone on record after it caused widespread destruction especially in the City of New Orleans and the surrounding areas. Additionally, U.A. Local 60 of New Orleans, which had many members lose everything, temporarily relocated to the Local 198 Union Hall to resume operations and attempt to help its membership.

Likewise, after historic floods devastated parts of south Louisiana in August 2016 with more than 20 inches of rain in a three-day span and destroyed the homes of as many as 300 Local 198 members, the local stepped up and stepped in to help. First and foremost, Local 198 collected and distributed funds from its Local 198 Emergency Relief Fund, as well as contributions from the U.A. Charitable Fund Trust, to victims of the flooding.

Then when Category-4 Hurricane Harvey struck in August 2017, hammering Louisiana and Texas, Local 198 Business Manager Neal Miller and the local's membership flew into action and helped start a movement that would expand into a major relief effort as other unions got involved. As a result, regular deliveries of supplies and equipment to Houston and Beaumont, Texas, which were hit particularly hard, took place during the weeks after the storm.

While assisting in Houston, Local 198 also helped local members and residents in the Lake Charles area, which was severely flooded. Members manned a distribution center filled with supplies that came from U.A. locals and the building trades from across the United States, and Local 198 retirees cooked a hot meal for more than 300 people in one day. Many U.A. members



Some of the many recipients of Local 198 relief funds following the catastrophic flooding that hit Baton Rouge and surrounding areas in August 2016.

worked in the effort and together they cleaned out almost 200 houses of Local 198 members and the community at large — in a single day, in fact, a team of Local 198 apprentices cleared out seven houses of mostly elderly and disadvantaged people in the city's Vinton area.

"These members have lost sleep and time with their own families to bring this desperately needed help and support to the Gulf Coast region, and their efforts will not stop until every member gets the help he or she needs." U.A. General Secretary-Treasurer Patrick H. Kellett wrote afterwards in the September 2017 U.A. *Journal*. "They are all to be commended — they are unsung heroes, every single one."

Reflecting on his local's heritage of reaching out to communities in need following natural disasters and its willingness to continue the tradition, after the Hurricane Harvey efforts Business Manager Miller declared:

"We help our members, and we also reach out to the community and help them. So there's not a question of 'if we weren't doing it' — because we're all doing it, and we'll continue to do it if it happens again."

Local 198 endured and persisted through the balance of the decade on the strength of the ability of its members to travel and be welcomed by sister U.A. locals to work on projects in their jurisdictions. It also subsisted on regular turnarounds at plants in its jurisdiction and occasional jobs at sites such as the River Bend Nuclear Generating Station, the L.S.U. campus and the Willow Glen Power Station.

During that time, Local 198 and the U.A. also had 600-plus pipefitters, welders and maintenance workers on Big Cajun II upgrade outages. Their skills and dedication on those projects were touted by the people for whom they were working; for instance, Dunwoodie McDuffie, manager for contractor Fluor, said in an article in the January 2015 *Journal*, “The U.A. provides a skilled mechanic. We don’t have any labor issues. They are non-existent.” Big Cajun II General Manager Abe Burrell, who worked for owner NRG Energy, also stated, “I have seen nothing but cooperation and integrity from the U.A. Track record, safety, we’ve had zero recordable incidents, and experience. It all speaks for itself.”

TURNING ANOTHER CORNER ON ITS WAY TO 100 YEARS

The U.A. invested large amounts of money, manpower and time during the early 2010s in its new **Gulf Coast Initiative**, which was intended to meet enormous skilled-manpower needs that the union was expecting for the region, as it was being viewed as the setting for the next big energy boom. What’s more, U.A.-signatory mechanical contractors were setting up their shops along the coast, which at the time already



Local 198 Brother Eddie Freiburger at work welding on a job in 2013.

accounted for roughly 28 percent of the nation’s oil and gas employment, as well.

As part of its strategy for gaining that work and more, the U.A. had also turned up its efforts to turn around negative union perceptions that had plagued it for decades. As International Representative Albin described in the January 2015 *Journal*, “There is a stigma that we have to overcome – wildcat strikes, tearing up plants, being uncooperative. It hasn’t been easy, and we’re still working on it. Our message to owners is this, “That’s not us. We are the U.A. We are a professional organization. We train folks, and we provide a skilled, safety-conscious workforce.”

Local 198 did its part, as well, to attract and prepare the skilled-labor piping workforce that analysts were predicting would be needed to complete new projects. “We are running a lot of advertisements,” **Business Manager Neal Miller** explained at the time. “We are being particular, but if we think we can train someone, it’s worth a shot.”

In further preparation for the anticipated big push in work, which was expected to bring a large number of jobs to the Lake Charles/Baton Rouge area, in particular, the U.A. consolidated Local No. 106 of Lake Charles into Local 198 in

2014. Shortly after, former Local 106 business manager **Brother Kelly Craft**, who became a business agent for Local 198, summarized the advantages of the amalgamation, “This consolidation has given us strength in numbers and resources. We now have a significant role in what’s going on. I’ve been able to reach out to contractors coming into the area, and I have been actively working with the state’s Workforce Development Committee, exposing them to the U.A. We have already seen success stories.”

One of the more-immediate results of the initiative came in late 2014 when **Boise Paper Mill** in DeRidder, Louisiana, took on two U.A.-signatory contractors for work in the plant after no union contractor had been utilized by Boise in more than 25 years. After seeing the quality of work and the productivity of a few union craftspeople it had employed, the mill hired the contractors and by the end of the year employed 65 U.A. members.

A vital component of the Gulf Coast Initiative involved the ability of the U.A. to train and certify a large workforce. To help accomplish that, Local 198 and the international union opened the new **Lake Charles Training Center** in November 2014. With the 25,000-square-foot facility, the local would be able to test 50 welders each day.

Meanwhile during the first half of the decade, Local 198 continued to face non-union competition. But it also found growing employment on the road with sister U.A. locals and locally with turnarounds and construction work on new projects such as the new **L’Auberge Casino Hotel** in Baton Rouge and with standard employers including Willow Glen, Rubicon, CF Industries and Big Cajun.

U.A. Plumbers and Pipefitters Local No. 106 of Lake Charles, Louisiana, which was chartered by the union on June 21, 1913, was merged into Local 198 in 2014.

Into January 2014, some of those plants were even taking travelers as conditions within the local’s jurisdiction improved.

Into the second half of the decade, nearly every chemical plant along the Gulf Coast was experiencing some form of planned expansion as a result of cheap natural gas that they used as a fuel source. Subsequently, Local 198 members enjoyed steady work with their home local while work on the road was strong as sister locals sought fitters and welders for projects that included the Turkey Point Nuclear Generating Station near Homestead, Florida.

Employment was still picking up both at home and on the road and the local’s organizing efforts were going strong into and throughout 2019. On July 1 of that year, its membership elected **Brother Jonathan Waddell** as its new **business manager**, and Local 198 was poised to gain more momentum as it approached its 100th anniversary in April 2020.

However, early that year, the local, the United States and the world were abruptly shaken and essentially halted by the outbreak of the **coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic**. The local’s leadership acted immediately to counter the effects of the deadly virus (which would claim the lives of more than 1 million Americans as it continued into late 2020 and beyond), canceling meetings and rescheduling events, including its 100th anniversary celebration that had been scheduled for April 25 at the L’Auberge Casino Hotel. The local also established safety procedures to protect members and administrative staff while allowing work to continue, and it adhered to the Governor’s Proclamation and its “Stay Home” order, having most of its office staff work remotely beginning March 23, 2020, to ensure minimal disruption to members.

Like the many other challenges it faced over the previous century, Local 198 again met the latest one with its focus squarely on the welfare of its members and the future of their union. ♦



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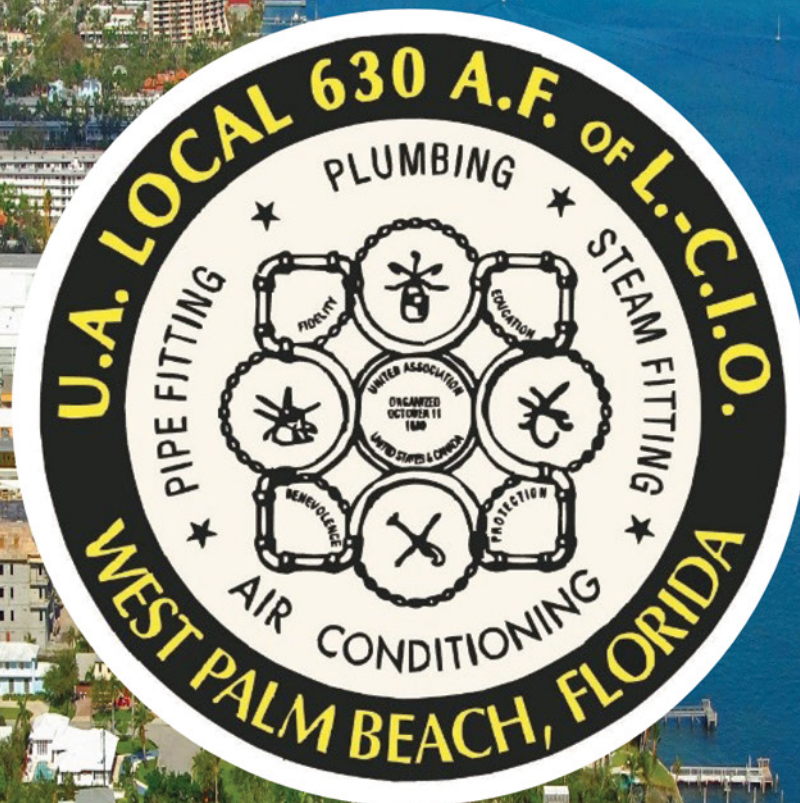
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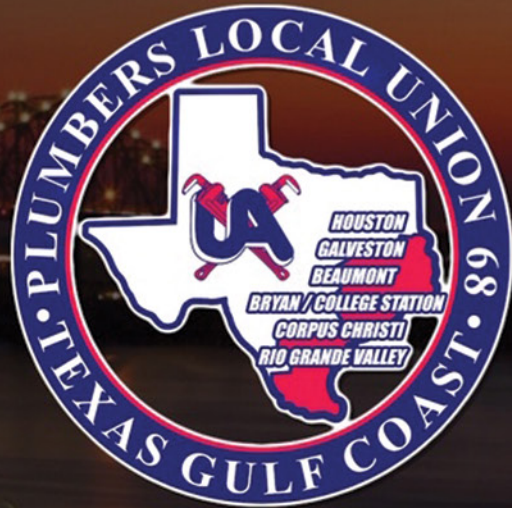
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Happy 100th Anniversary



*From the Officers and Members
of Local 119*

**Congratulations to the
Officers & Members
Of Local 198 on your 100th Anniversary!**

From all of us at
Plumbers & Fitters Local 125 Cedar Rapids, IA.



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The Officers and Members
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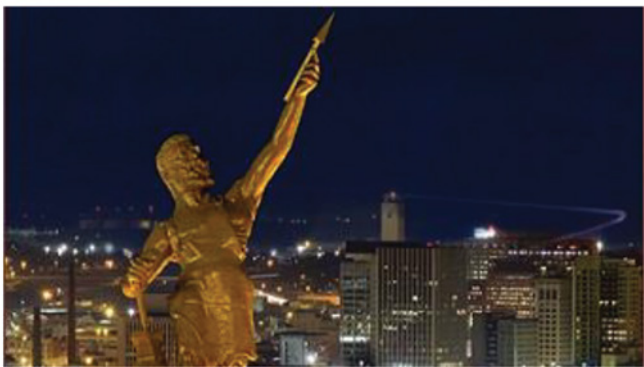
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Happy 100th Anniversary to Local Union 198



From the Officers Members and Staff
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