

UNITED ASSOCIATION PIPEFITTERS LOCAL NO. 211
HOUSTON · BEAUMONT · SOUTH TEXAS



75th Anniversary **COMMEMORATIVE HISTORY**

UA
PIPE FITTERS
LOCAL UNION 211
AND
APPRENTICESHIP SCHOOL



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CONNECTING GENERATIONS

75 Yrs

Congratulations UA 211 on
75 Years of Service and Solidarity

FROM THE OFFICERS, MEMBERS AND STAFF OF **UA PLUMBERS LOCAL UNION #68** WE WOULD LIKE TO CONGRATULATE **UA PIPEFITTERS LOCAL UNION #211** ON 75 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE



PIPEFITTERS LOCAL 211
75th Anniversary Celebration

DINNER-DANCE GALA
Saturday, March 23, 2024
6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.
OMNI Houston Hotel
Post Oak Ballroom
4 Riverway • Houston, Texas

Cocktail Reception6:00 to 7:00 p.m.
Seated, Plated Dinner7:00 to 8:00 p.m.
Presentations and Entertainment8:00 to 10:00 p.m.

LOCAL 211 SUCCESSES OF YESTERDAY, TOMORROW ARE EVIDENT TODAY

As Pipefitters Local Union 211 celebrates its 75th Charter Anniversary this year, we congratulate all members and staff, past and present, for three-quarters of a century of success!

As a union, we are very blessed to be part of an organization as successful as Local 211. There is definitely a sense of pride that comes with being a member of the local – I know I feel very blessed to be a third-generation member. Really, Local 211 is all I have ever known as far as my work life (I am now a 30-year member as of January 2024), and that pride definitely runs deep in my family roots.

I have been very blessed to be a full-time officer of Local 211 for the past 20 years. In fact, for years, I was the youngest officer, and now I am one of the oldest. I have seen this local union come a long way in the past 30 years, and we are still improving in so many ways. We are constantly striving to make important adjustments, whether it be in our training methods or our healthcare.

As a union, we are successful because we have great signatory contractors, and we have an amazing group of employees. This combination is what makes Local 211 not only survive but thrive.

A huge piece of our success are our incredible instructors at all three of our training locations: Deer Park, Nederland and Harlingen. Without our instructors teaching young men and women our trade, we would be no better craftsmen than the non-union laborers. Because of our new, young and talented Training Coordinator Octavio Rojas, his staff and instructors, we are able to teach with the newest technology and stay at the top of our trade. This makes our members, most importantly, safe and much more productive than non-union workers.

A huge “thank you” to all the sponsors of our 75th Anniversary celebration, because with your help we are able to have this event and history book. I also want to thank all the VIPs who came to celebrate with us; Local 211 values your partnership AND your friendship.

Also, a big “thank you” to all the members who have come out to celebrate your local union’s Diamond Anniversary.

Without the hard work, time and effort that both Cara Coker and Andrea Delagarza put into this event, it would not have happened. This was a huge endeavor, so a big “thank you” to Cara and Andrea for another job well done.

As for the future of Pipefitters Local 211, I am very confident that we will stay at the forefront of our industry. I also believe with our growth through organizing, we will achieve our goal of a total membership of 4,000 members strong. The future of this great local union looks bigger and brighter than ever! Happy 75th Anniversary, Pipefitters Local Union 211!

Bryan K. Edwards
Business Manager



This book was proudly produced by

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The History of U.A. Pipefitters Local No. 211

ANSWERING SOUTHEAST FOR 75

THE CALL IN SOUTH YEARS

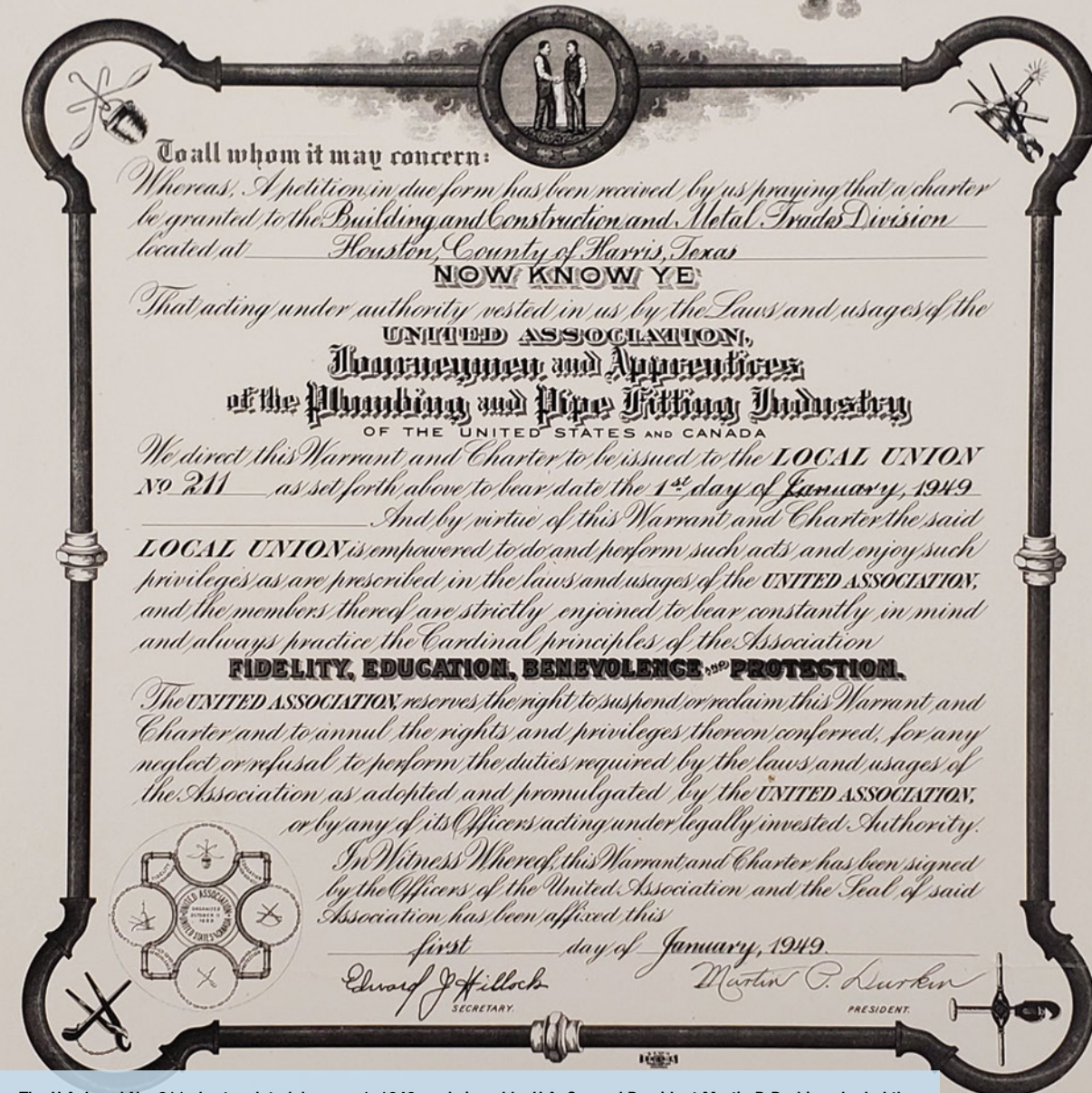


The very deepest roots of Pipefitters Local No. 211 of the United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipefitting Industry of the United States and Canada (U.A.) can be traced all the way back to May 1892, when the international union chartered **Plumbers and Steamfitters Local No. 68** in Houston. Shortly after in 1910, the U.A. then established another Local 211 predecessor when it chartered **Plumbers, Gasfitters and Steamfitters Local No. 504** in nearby Beaumont, Texas.

The union formed another local in that town in the mid-1930s, chartering **Steamfitters Local No. 195** while Local 504 continued to function. But Local 195 was soon absorbed into Local 68 in 1938, becoming the Industrial Pipefitters Branch of the Houston-based organization while Local 504 maintained jurisdiction over plumbing and piping work in Beaumont.

By 1943, internal conflict with their plumber counterparts led pipefitters to withdraw from Local 68 and form a new local, which the U.A. chartered that year as **Pipefitters Local No. 214** of Houston. Pipefitters also split from Local 504 in 1943 to form a new **Pipefitters Local No. 195** in Beaumont.

Before the year was out, however, fighting over territorial jurisdiction between the two pipefitters locals – which among other issues was causing stoppages in military production work while the country was fighting World War II – prompted the U.S. to designate Local 195 take over Local 214 “because of many complaints that the 900-member Houston local was violating association rules,” U.A. International Representative Ed Switalski told a district court judge who was hearing Local 214’s legal appeal in early January 1944. The following month, the judge ruled that the



The U.A. Local No. 211 charter, dated January 1, 1949, and signed by U.A. General President Martin P. Durkin, who led the union from 1943 to 1953, and U.A. General Secretary Edward J. Hillock, who served in that position from 1943 to 1958.

U.A. 211



75th Anniversary

union had the authority to revoke Local 214's charter and consolidate its members into Local 195, which grew from about 4,000 to nearly 5,000 members with the merger and afterwards was identified as "Pipefitters Local No. 195 of Beaumont and Houston, Texas, and Vicinity."

Meanwhile, the war's unprecedented need for oil and its byproducts (such as synthetic rubber) quickly opened and expanded the East Texas oil field as the state supplied 80 percent of the increase in production during the war, according to Texas State Library and Archives literature. What's more, "the years following World War II were the glory years for Texas oil," as both domestic and foreign demand soared with the "enormous uptick" in the number of automobiles on the road and the start of the Korean War in 1950 – after which the state would supply 35 to 45 percent of the nation's petroleum until the 1970s.

"By 1951, Texas crude exceeded the billion-barrel-a-year mark," according to the State Library and Archives. "Five years later, Texas oil would reach its high-water mark, with 21,519 wells in production."

ESTABLISHING A NEW LOCAL AND COUNTERING ADVERSITY

In that setting, on December 19, 1948, about 2,000 of the nearly 3,000 members of Pipefitters Local 195 who were forming a new U.A. local of pipefitters for the Houston area held an organization meeting at the Local 195 union hall at 202 Milam Street in Beaumont. That evening, the group elected officers from a total of 82 members who were nominated for the 20 offices of the new local, headed by **Business Manager C. L. Quinn** and **President L. J. Colbert**.

The U.A. subsequently chartered the group as Local No. 211 on **January 1, 1949**, with

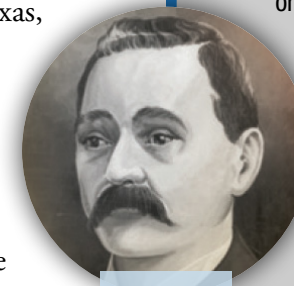
U.A. ORGANIZED OVER 130 YEARS AGO

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 **R. 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.

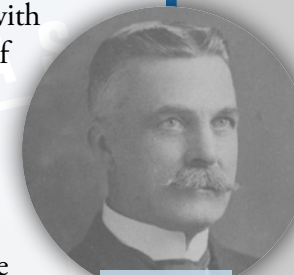
Four days later, the **United Association of Journeymen Plumbers, Gas Fitters, Steam Fitters and Steam Fitters' Helpers of the United States and Canada** (U.A.) was born on October 11, 1889. The U.A. selected Brother Quinlan as its president, Brother Henry Collins of New York City as its vice president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



Patrick J. Quinlan



Richard A. O'Brien



Local 211 Union Hall at 2535 Old Galveston Road in Houston.

LOCAL 211 LOCATIONS THROUGHOUT THE YEARS

Local 211 Union Hall
3014 McKinney Avenue
Houston
1949 – 1953

Local 211 Union Hall
5802-04 Canal Street
Houston
1953 – 1959

Local 211 Union Hall
2535 Old Galveston Road
Houston
1959 – 2016

Local 211 Union Hall
1301 West 13th Street
Deer Park
2016 – current

Branch Offices (Current)
Zone 195 Union Hall, Nederland, Texas
Zone 823 Union Hall, Harlingen, Texas

jurisdiction over all pipefitting work in and around Houston, extending from the Trinity River in the east to below Freeport in the southwest – which included much of the region's burgeoning petrochemical facilities – while Local 195 continued to oversee the Beaumont area. With an initial membership of 2,714 pipefitters and apprentices, the local set up its union hall and offices at **3014 McKinney Avenue** in Houston.

The fledgling local almost immediately flexed its considerable strength, gaining a new

contract with its employers of the **Gulf Coast Piping Contractors Association** on October 18, 1949, that renewed their current collective-bargaining agreement to June 30, 1951, with an increased wage scale of \$2.37-1/2 per hour for journeyman-level pipefitters. The pact set overtime work during the week at time-and-a-half, and it established double-time pay for overtime on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays.

But a year later, with construction activity in the Houston area virtually at a standstill, Local 211 staged a four-day strike beginning November 7, 1950, at four separate locations of the **Dow Chemical Company** over ongoing work-jurisdiction disputes with union ironworkers. The pipefitters and about 4,000 other union construction workers returned to their jobs at the plants after Local 211 was recognized as a craft on some of the work being performed on Dow's \$50-million expansion projects.

Even after employment picked up as the decade progressed, including expansions at the **Shell Oil** facilities at the Port of Houston, Local 211 was often forced to protect its work. In June 1952, for instance, the union pipefitters walked off their jobs and placed pickets at the construction site of the new, multi-million dollar **Aluminum Corporation of America** (Alcoa) aluminum works in Rockdale, Texas, for several days in protest of ironworkers participating in building a large, circulating water line serving a power plant being built for Alcoa. (*Demand for the metal by the U.S. government, which was involved in the Korean War, and an abundance of the lignite fuel that was used to produce the*

electricity need to make aluminum “gave rise late in 1951 to the establishment of the aluminum industry in Milam County” and “triggered boom-like industrialization when Alcoa’s Rockdale Works raced into production only 13 months after groundbreaking.”)

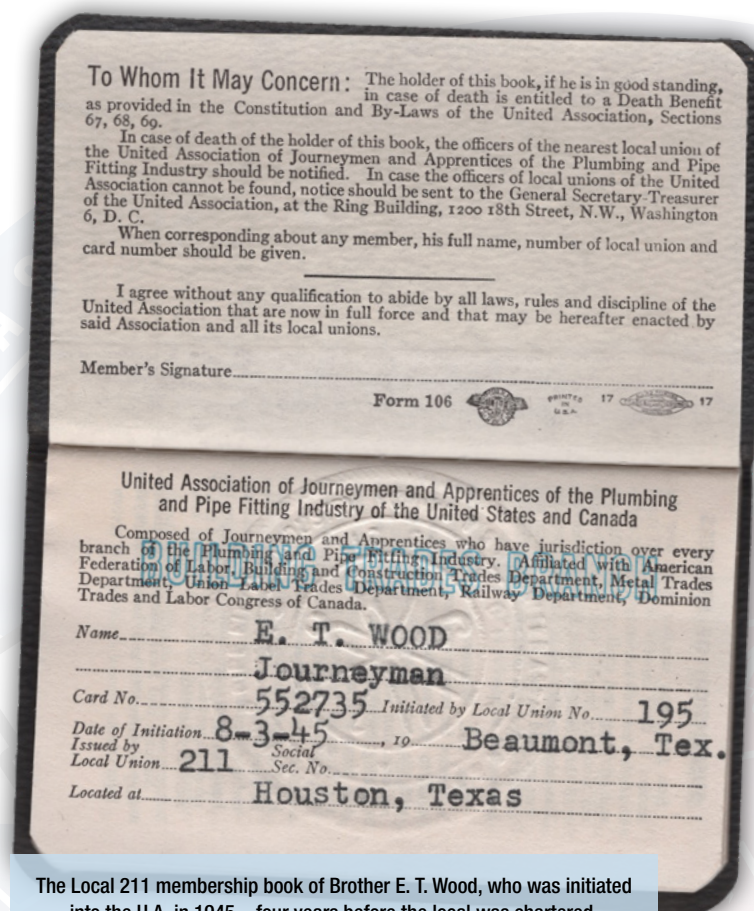
The local also got caught up in the often-violent labor unrest that permeated the union construction industry during that time. In one particularly grim incident, Local 211 member Osborne Kennedy was sentenced to two years in jail after he stabbed and killed fellow member Grady W. Toler during a fight following what

was described as a “turbulent” local meeting on May 15, 1954.

Then in August 1955, according to a report in the August 14 issue of *The Galveston Daily News*, some officials of Local 211 moved out of their homes “for fear of more bombings” after a bomb exploded at the local’s union hall at 5802 Canal Street on August 11 and six sticks of dynamite that were placed at the home of Local 211 **Business Manager W. A. Mask** the following morning failed to detonate. While no one was injured in either incident, local leaders pointed to “unemployment woes among



Shortly after Local 211 was chartered by the U.A. on January 1, 1949, local officers (standing, left to right) R. L. Daily, Bruce Myers, Business Manager C. L. “Doc” Quinn, J. W. Peckinpugh and J. W. “Jimmy” Rogers sign the local’s first shop contract with contractor E. Monroe Wise (seated) of the Southwest Fabricating & Welding Company.



The Local 211 membership book of Brother E. T. Wood, who was initiated into the U.A. in 1945 – four years before the local was chartered.

members,” 400 of whom were not working at the time and dissension over the local’s finances and recent elections as possible reasons for the attacks, for which no one was ever charged.

Regardless, the young local continued to make strides forward, including gaining a new contract with the Gulf Coast Piping Contractors Association on August 24, 1955. The agreement provided the local’s journeyman pipefitters with a 10-cent-per-hour raise that increased their wage rate to \$3.20 per hour through June 30, 1956.

That year, the local also reached settlement on May 9 on a new pay scale for members working for the **Monsanto Chemical Company** in Texas City, as the union negotiated separate pacts for members working within many of the petrochemical facilities in its jurisdiction. The one-year agreement called for a 6-percent wage

increase with a minimum of 15 cents per hour added to paychecks over the following year.

The local then gained its first-ever two-year contract on July 22, 1958, with the Piping Contractors Association, which the local also negotiated with the **Mechanical Contractors Association of Houston**, the **Construction Employers Association of Texas** and the **Associated Plumbing Contractors Association of Harris County**. The pact, which would expire on June 30, 1960, provided the local’s 3,200 members with 12-1/2-cent hourly pay increases for the first year beginning immediately and the second year beginning in July 1959.

During that time, Local 211 constructed a branch union office on State Highway 332 near Clute, Texas, and just outside of Freeport to service the local’s roughly 500 members in that area. Opened on July 30, 1958, **Business Agent J. L. Fowler** initially worked out of the \$21,000 building.

To close out its successful but challenging first full decade, in 1959 the more-than 3,600-member Local 211 moved its union hall into a building at **2535 Old Galveston Road** in Houston. The local would maintain its headquarters at that location for the next 57 years.

TRAVERSING ‘NEW FRONTIERS’ FOR ITS MEMBER PIPEFITTERS

Throughout the 1960s, Local 211 performed most all of the piping work at the petrochemical plants within its jurisdiction in and around Houston as the bargaining agent for the construction pipefitters

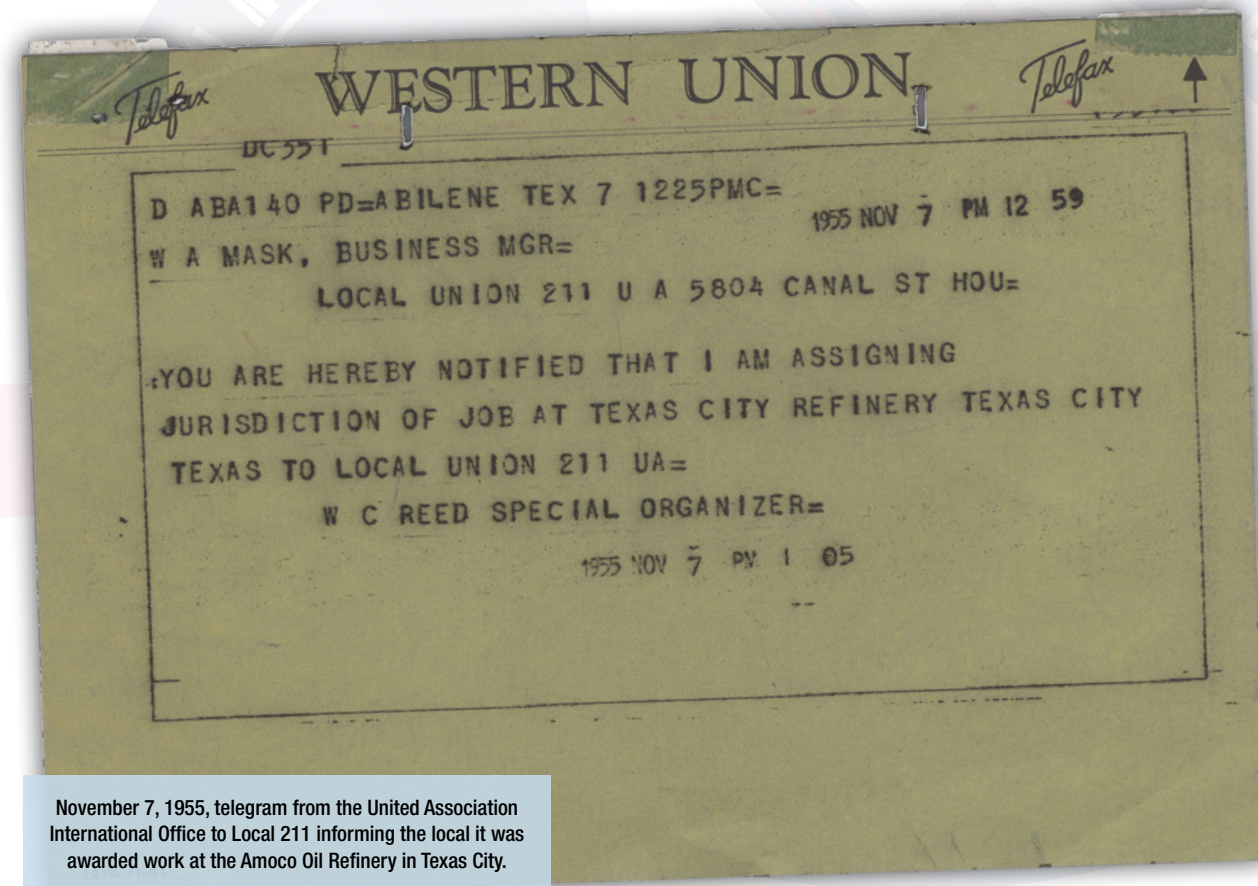
of several large plants, including Monsanto and Dow (whose maintenance pipefitters were under **U.A. Local No. 390** of Freeport at the time). But going into the decade, the local continued to struggle against non-union industry forces within its jurisdiction, as U.A. General Organizer Earl Griffin highlighted in his report in the March 1960 U.A. *Journal* monthly member publication, writing, “I am sure no other area has been more severely attacked by the enemies of labor than they.”

Undeterred, Local 211 continued to make strides forward, such as joining Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union Local No. 4-227 and International Brotherhood of Carpenters Local No. 213 in signing a 15-month contract with the **Petro-Tex Chemical Corporation** plant in Pasadena, Texas, on March 23, 1960, that gave 465 employees a 12-cent-per-hour pay hike. Retroactive to March 6 and expiring July 15, 1961, the settlement raised the wage

standard at the plant to \$3.28-1/2 per hour, which according to an article in the next day’s *Houston Post* newspaper was “one of the highest in the Gulf Coast area.”

Elsewhere at that time, Local 211 members were working at multiple sites in Houston, Baytown, Texas City and Freeport and along the Houston Ship Channel, including chemical plants such as **DuPont**. The local’s union mechanical pipefitters were also helping to erect numerous office buildings and commercial structures such as the 32-story **First City National Bank Building** (now One City Centre), which when completed in 1960 was the first modern high-rise office building in downtown Houston.

The local also conducted a successful, 27-day strike against the contractors’ associations beginning August 26, 1960, after their separate contracts for construction work and



November 7, 1955, telegram from the United Association International Office to Local 211 informing the local it was awarded work at the Amoco Oil Refinery in Texas City.

LOCAL 211 LEADERSHIP THROUGHOUT THE YEARS

Business Managers

C. L. "Doc" Quinn

Jan. 1949 – Dec. 1949

N. E. Coward

Jan. 1950 – Dec. 1950

C. L. "Doc" Quinn

Jan. 1951 – May 1960

S. T. Williams

June 1960 – May 1962

Mack C. Roberts

June 1962 – Dec. 1970

Sherman Fricks

Jan. 1971 – July 1973

R. L. Dailey

June 1973 – May 1977

Johnny Nelms

June 1977 – Dec. 1978

Sherman Fricks

Jan. 1979 – Dec. 1981

John W. "Hoot" Gibson Sr.

Jan. 1982 – Dec. 1984

M. J. "Beano" Baker

Jan. 1985 – Dec. 1987

C. D. Hooper

Jan. 1988 – March 1990

Lynn Williams

April 1990 – Dec. 1999

Thomas "Tommy" L. Self

Jan. 2000 – June 2003

Kenneth H. Edwards

July 2003 – Dec. 2016

Bryan Edwards

Jan. 2017 – current

Presidents

L. J. Colbert

Jan. 1949 – Dec. 1949

W. D. Elliott

Jan. 1950 – May 1956

Julian Sanders

June 1956 – May 1960

Sherman Fricks

June 1960 – May 1962

J. D. Keene

June 1962 – May 1964

Julian H. Sanders

June 1964 – Dec. 1984

C. D. "Chuck" Hooper

Jan. 1985 – Dec. 1987

James H. Rice

Jan. 1988 – March 1990

James H. Rice

April 1990 – Dec. 1999

C. D. "Chuck" Hooper

Jan. 2000 – June 2003

John "Ace" Coody

July 2003 – July 2018

Mark Baker

Aug. 2018 – June 2021

Randy Beal

July 2021 – current

Financial Secretaries

N. E. Coward

Jan. 1949 – Dec. 1949

J. W. "Jimmy" Rogers

Jan. 1950 – May 1960

Financial Secretary-Treasurers

W. A. Mask

June 1960 – May 1974

John W. "Hoot" Gibson Sr.

June 1974 – Dec. 1981

Francis N. O'Bryan

Jan. 1982 – Dec. 1984

Kenneth Graham

Jan. 1985 – Dec. 1996

Kenneth Edwards

Jan. 1997 – June 2003

James H. Rice

July 2003 – June 2006

Jimmy Hall

July 2006 – June 2009



Brother Kenneth H. Edwards was Local 211's longest-serving business manager when he retired from the position at the end of December 2016, having served as business manager since July 2003. Brother Edwards has been a Local 211 member since being initiated into the union on October 7, 1966, after which he also served in many positions for Local 211 since 1974, was elected a delegate to the U.A. convention 10 times, and served as U.A. District 3 vice president from 2011 to 2016.

refrigeration and air-conditioning service work expired on June 30 and negotiations came to an impasse while the local's members still continued to work. About 200 members were affected by the service contract, and roughly 1,500 of the local's 3,600 members were affected by the construction contract.

Having previously accepted smaller annual wage increases than the national average to avoid strikes, Local 211 was seeking a 17-1/2-cent-per-hour raise for each year of a three-year contract to add to its current \$3.80-per-hour journeyman scale, while the contractors were offering 10-cents per hour for

each year. That figure was 21 cents less than the national average of \$4.01 per hour for union pipefitters, Local 211 **Business Manager S. T. Williams** explained in an August 30 *Houston Post* article.

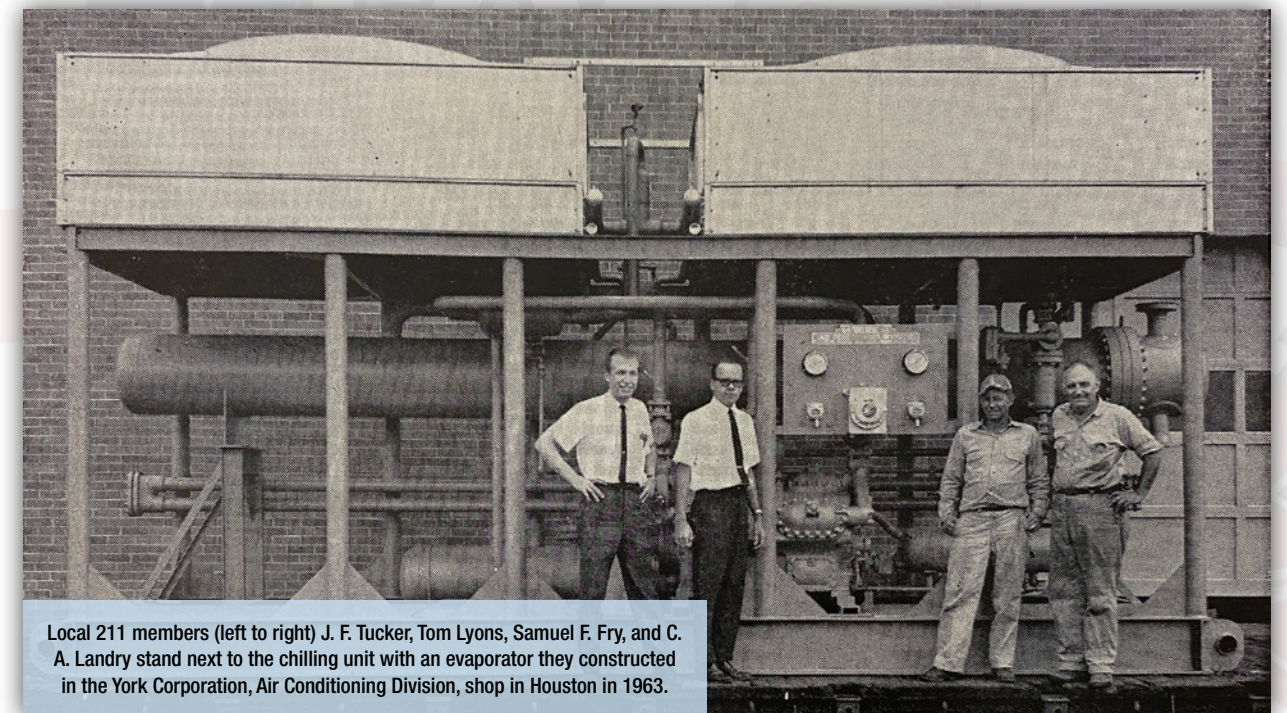
After shutting down more than \$52 million in construction projects, on which upwards of 4,000 union trades workers refused to cross the pipefitters' picket lines, the local ended the strike on September 22 when the two sides reached an agreement with the assistance of a Federal mediator on a new, three-year contract. The settlement provided the journeyman pipefitters with a 15-cent hourly wage increase the first year, an additional 12-1/2 cents the second year and another 12-1/2 cents the third year, but no other language changes to the general terms of the previous agreements.

During the life of that contract, as employment continued to escalate for the Local 211 membership at petrochemical plants and on commercial buildings in downtown Houston, construction of the **Manned Spacecraft Center** (later renamed the **Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center** in 1973) in the

Clear Lake area of Houston for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) beginning in April 1962 provided another source of man hours for members. Expansion, modernization and maintenance of the complex, which contains NASA's Mission Control Center that has been the primary flight-control center for all U.S. crewed space missions after becoming fully operational in June 1965 for the spaceflight of Gemini IV, has since employed countless Local 211 pipefitters.

Members working maintenance jobs within the **Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company** synthetic rubber plant on La Porte Road in Houston received an 8-cent hourly wage increase that pushed their pay up to \$3.56 per hour as part of a contract jointly negotiated with other unions and the company on August 13, 1963. Other craftsmen who also gained the boost in wages were members of Operating Engineers Local No. 347, Association of Machinists Local No. 12, Brotherhood Electrical Workers Local No. 716 and the Houston Metal Trades Council.

Local 211 gained a landmark new construction contract on September 17, 1963,



Local 211 members (left to right) J. F. Tucker, Tom Lyons, Samuel F. Fry, and C. A. Landry stand next to the chilling unit with an evaporator they constructed in the York Corporation, Air Conditioning Division, shop in Houston in 1963.

PROVIDING MEMBERS WITH LIFE-SUSTAINING BENEFITS

Local 211 members gained their first-ever employer-funded **Pension Fund** retirement benefit and **Health and Welfare Fund** healthcare-insurance benefit in the local's collective-bargaining agreement with the Construction Employers Association of Texas, the Mechanical Contractors Association of Houston and the Gulf Coast Contractors Association when the membership ratified the contract on September 17, 1963. The agreement initially called for contractors to pay 10 cents per hour worked by Local 211 members into the Pension Fund, and 10 cents per hour into the Healthcare Fund beginning September 1964.

Some 60 years later as Local 211 celebrates its 75th charter anniversary in January 2024, contributions for its members' pension and healthcare benefits from employers, bargained in new contracts that went into effect October 1, 2023, are \$5.29 per hour and \$5.97 per hour, respectively.

with the Construction Employers Association of Texas, the Mechanical Contractors Association of Houston and the Gulf Coast Contractors Association that established a first-ever **Pension Plan** and a first-ever **Health and Welfare Plan** that would be funded by employing contractors for the local's 3,500 members. While no wage increases to the pipefitters' average hourly salary of \$4.20 were given in the two-year agreement that went into effect on September 22, the pact granted 10 cents per hour to be paid into a pension fund for each employee and another 7-1/2 cents to be added the following March, while another 10 cents per hour would be paid into a healthcare fund beginning September 1964 and a 7-1/2-cent increase that would be given during March 1965.

Local 211 **Business Agent Homer Cross** subsequently deemed the groundbreaking contract and its pension and healthcare benefits, which totaled 35 cents per hour over the two-year period, "a new frontier for pipefitters."

GROWING AND TAKING CARE OF ITS BUSY PIPING WORKFORCE

A new two-year construction contract that went into effect on September 23, 1965, for Local 211's 4,000 journeymen and apprentices halted an impending strike that the local's members had approved to begin at midnight on September 27. Instead, the local and its employing contractors reached an agreement that provided pipefitters with a total 45-cents-per-hour total wage-and-benefits package increase.

The contract immediately raised journeyman wages to \$4.40 per hour, increased employer contributions into the health and welfare fund to 20 cents per hour worked and the pension fund to 17-1/2 cents per hour, and created a 2-1/2-cent-per-hour contribution into a new **Joint Educational Trust Fund** for apprentice and member training. Effective September 22, 1966, journeyman wages were increased to \$4.52-1/2 per hour, and six months later on March 22, 1967, they received another 7-1/2 cents in wages and 2-1/2 cents into the pension fund, making the total earnings for journeyman pipefitters \$5.02-1/2 cents per hour.

After the agreement was signed, Local 211 **Business Manager Mack Roberts** told *The Brazosport Facts* newspaper that day, "This contract is an indication of the union's strong aim to provide good insurance for the benefit of the families of its members, a good pension program for retirements and a vacation plan as a progressive way to take care of our people."

Two years later when that contract expired at midnight on September 21, 1967, the 4,500-member Local 211 agreed to have its pipefitters and apprentices report to work the next day while negotiations for a new pact with the three contractors' associations continued. The two sides reached a settlement early in the morning of September 23 that called for a total

increase of \$1.50 hourly in wages and benefits over three years in annual 50-cent increments that would boost the local's total journeyman pay package to \$6.52-1/2 per hour for the final year ending in September 1970.

Additionally, the week before, the local had negotiated a new contract covering commercial shop fabricators and their union pipefitters. The contract with the **Pipe Fabrication Association of Houston** applied to approximately 600 members of Local 211 who were working in fabricating shops.

Meanwhile, the fast-growing number of projects on which Local 211 members were working included construction of a new, billion-pound yearly ethylene plant at **Shell Chemical** in Houston that began in October 1967. Working for contractor M. W. Kellogg Construction Company, the union pipefitters and other trades on the job were targeting a Fall 1968 completion of the project.

The local continued to make advances within the factories its members serviced late into the decade, as well. About 475 striking

workers at Petro-Tex Chemical, including Local 211 pipefitters, returned to work after the local ratified an agreement with the company on February 11, 1969; and later that year, members at the Goodyear plant on La Porte Road, along with other tradesmen, received a 31-cent wage increase on July 24 that was negotiated for the last year of three-year union contracts with the company.

However, beginning in mid-June 1969 and throughout the balance of the year and decade, contractors, industrial-plant owners and Local 211 faced a major shortage of union pipefitters for Houston-area construction jobs. According to an article in the September 7 *Houston Post*, the cause of the shortage was "traced back to the 79-day ironworkers strike that ended June 20," during which "many of the men working out of Local 211 left the area when jobs became scarce during the strike and have been slow in returning."



Local 211 dues payment books from 1959 and 1965.

KEEPING MEMBERS ACTIVE, ENTERTAINED AND TOGETHER

Throughout its history, Local 211 has hosted a range of social and charitable activities for its members and their families that promote camaraderie and brother- and sisterhood. Many of those events have continued into the local's 75th anniversary year and have involved and still include:

[Independence Day/Fourth of July Fireworks Celebration](#) at the local's Union Hall with hot dogs, drinks and desserts.

[Spring Freshwater Fishing Tournament](#) at Lake Rayburn.

[Summer Saltwater Fishing Tournament](#) on Galveston Bay.

[Labor Day BBQ Cookout](#) at the Pasadena Fairgrounds.

[Annual Children's Christmas Party](#) at the local's Union Hall with presents and food.

[Annual Scholarship Golf Tournament](#) to benefit college scholarships provided to the local's children.

[Service Awards Banquet](#) to recognize members who have attained benchmark years of U.A. membership.



With the local rejecting contractors' suggestions to hire non-union workers and contractors declining the union's recommendation to put jobs on overtime to attract pipefitters back to the area, the most dramatic shortage of pipefitters, according to the newspaper, was at Shell Chemical. After M. W. Kellogg Construction ordered 600 pipefitters and 200 welders from Local 211 for the ethylene plant there but was provided only an average of 200 overall, as the newspaper reported, the company sent out letters to more than 100 U.A. pipefitter locals across the country – with Local 211's permission – to try to attract their members to Houston.

But at its core, the shortage underscored a problem of Local 211: Its close to 5,000 regular members were not enough to handle the manpower demands for construction jobs in its jurisdiction. The union even had an



additional 1,000 pipefitters it referred to jobs on a "permit basis" (that is, they paid union dues to work on a temporary basis but were not provided with union benefits), according to the *Houston Post*, which pointed out that "this still does not meet the demands, which are expected to increase this fall with the start of many new construction jobs in this area."

What's more, as the newspaper further reported, of the pipefitters Local 211 lost during the ironworkers strike, it estimated that 1,500 had already been working in Houston on "travel cards" as "travelers" from other U.A. locals.

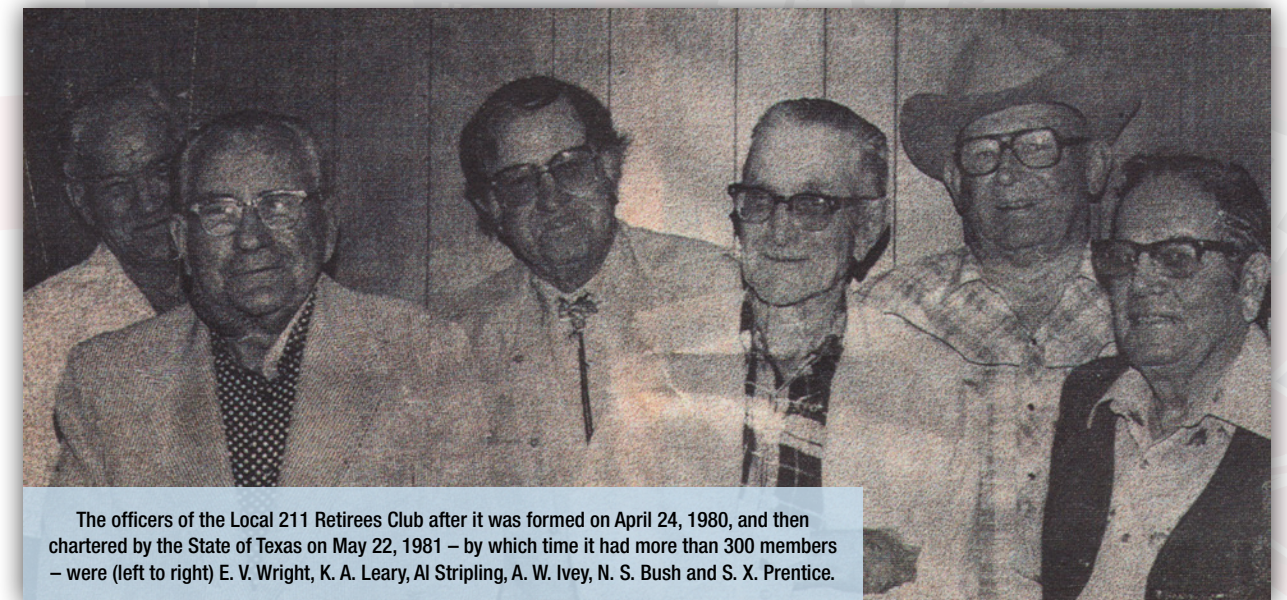
PROPELLING ITSELF THROUGH HIGHS & LOWS OF THE '70s

In response to those concerns, Local 211 would build up its workforce throughout the 1970s to 6,500 pipefitters and apprentices in 1975 and then more than 7,600 in 1979. Likewise, pay and benefit contributions for the local's members also escalated throughout the decade.

Fueled by an oil embargo against the United States beginning in 1973 imposed by Middle Eastern oil countries because of U.S.

support of Israel in the Arab-Israeli war, a surge in oil production in the Houston region to meet the nation's demand dramatically increased employment opportunities for union pipefitters. Multiple expansions and escalated updating and maintenance of petroleum plants such as those operated by Shell, Philips, Exxon, Mobile, Monsanto and [Gulf Oil](#) (now Chevron), as well as the erection of new tank farms, swelled the number of union pipefitters working in the Local 211 jurisdiction to 10,000 during the mid-1970s, including upwards of 3,000 travelers from sister U.A. locals.

Initially, a new, two-year collective-bargaining agreement with the contractors' associations for the local's over 5,300 members that began September 22, 1970, provided journeymen with a total \$1.60-per-hour raise that would eventually increase their wage-and-benefits package to \$8.12-1/2 per hour by the end of the contract. Specifically, the agreement called for an immediate wage increase of 42-1/2 cents hourly and a 2-1/2-cent hourly increase in health and welfare benefits that hiked the local's base wage rate for the first year from \$5.92-1/2 to \$6.35 per hour and fringe benefit contributions from 61 cents to 63-1/2 cents per hour.



The officers of the Local 211 Retirees Club after it was formed on April 24, 1980, and then chartered by the State of Texas on May 22, 1981 – by which time it had more than 300 members – were (left to right) E. V. Wright, K. A. Leary, Al Stripling, A. W. Ivey, N. S. Bush and S. X. Prentice.

LOCAL 211 MERGERS OF SISTER U.A. LOCALS

The current Local 211 jurisdiction was formed over the years after the U.A. put the following mergers of Texas-based sister locals into effect:

Local No. 567 of Bryan was merged into Local 211 on August 1, 1975.

Local No. 200 of Galveston was merged into Local 211 on July 1, 1979.

Local No. 790 of Victoria was merged into Local 211 and three other U.A. locals on July 1, 1995.

Local No. 390 of Freeport was merged into Local 211 on May 1, 2012.

Local No. 823 of Harlingen was merged into Local 211 in October 2012.

Local No. 195 in Beaumont was merged into Local 211 on May 1, 2014.

Members working at the Goodyear chemical plant in Houston, which by that time was the world's largest synthetic-rubber production factory, joined their counterpart operating engineers, electricians, carpenters, painters and sheet metal workers in a strike of the facility beginning July 26, 1971, over negotiations of a new wage scale as part of an ongoing contract from the previous year, which had set pay at upwards of \$4.86 per hour. However, the first walkout at the plant since 1952 ended in mid-August 1971 shortly after U.S. President Richard Nixon announced a Federally imposed 90-day freeze on all wages in an effort to counter nationwide inflation.

Another new construction contract began retroactively on September 22, 1972, after nearly 4,500 Local 211 pipefitters approved unanimously on September 26 to accept an agreement with their Houston-area employing contractors that boosted their pay by 5.5 percent, the maximum increase allowed under Federal guidelines. With the vote, which

Local 211 **Secretary Dave E. Runnels** said in the September 27 *Houston Chronicle* may have been "the first time local pipefitters have accepted a wage settlement without dissent," the local's journeyman base pay scale was raised 45 cents the first year of the contract and 46 cents the second year to lift it from \$8.10 to \$ 9.01 per hour.

Goodyear plant building-trades workers, including Local 211 members, also accepted new, three-year contracts without incident in July of 1973 and again in August of 1976. The agreement settled on August 2, 1976, represented an 8-1/2 percent wage increase retroactive to July 24 for about 520 employees before it expired in July 1979.

During that time, however, Local 211 members working at the **Ethyl Corporation** petrochemical-products plant in the Houston suburb of Deer Park were among the 800 union-trades employees, including steelworkers, electricians and sheet metal workers, who staged a four-month-long shutdown of the factory before returning to work on June 2, 1975. The union members voted to accept propositions offered by the company with a new wage package that included immediate 75-cent-per-hour pay raises for all employees; additional incremental raises that would total 38 cents per hour over the life of the agreement; cost-of-living allowances; and increases to healthcare insurance benefits.

But as the decade progressed, despite the advances gained by Local 211, its market share of the major work in its jurisdiction deteriorated as non-union labor moved in on many of those jobs. Subsequently, by 1978 the local's pipefitters were only handling about 14 percent of the major industrial work in its area – whereas just five years earlier in 1973, the local was performing 50 percent of that work, its membership was fully employed and about 10,000 union pipefitters with the U.A. were working in the Houston region.

To help combat that trend and strengthen the union's presence in southeast Texas, the U.A. merged **Pipefitters Local No. 567** of Bryan, Texas into Local 211 on August 1, 1975. The union's international office then merged **Pipefitters Local No. 200** of Galveston, Texas, into the Houston local on July 1, 1979.

In between, the U.A. placed Local 211 under its administrative control in July 1977 in order to help stabilize its finances and employment. The trusteeship was lifted 16 months later in November 1978, right after which the local held elections for new officers.

By that time, however, building-craft unions in the Houston area were in all-out conflict with contractors who were trying to destroy them by "conspiring to fix prices and monopolize the area construction industry in an attempt to squeeze out firms using union labor," as the **Houston Gulf Coast Building and Construction Trades Council** charged in a class-action antitrust lawsuit filed in January 1978 against a number of building associations and contractors. What's more, those unions, including Local 211, had been accepting new contracts that contained major concessions on the part of labor in an attempt to regain some of the 80 percent of construction work being done by non-union workers.

That year, the agreement for the pipefitters and all other trades included a change in overtime

pay from double-time – which had been in effect for 20 years after being implemented to discourage employers from requesting overtime work – to time-and-a-half. Local 211 settled a three-year contract with the Associated General Contractors of America on March 31, 1978, that also provided a 60-cent-per-hour immediate raise, increasing the average member's wage from \$11.35 to \$11.95 per hour, and called for the two parties to renegotiate wages annually during its last two years.

Following the termination of the U.A. trusteeship over Local 211, on December 30, 1978, the local elected **Brother Sherman Fricks**, who resigned from his position as secretary-treasurer of the Texas AFL-CIO to run in the election, to replace then-current **Business Manager Johnny Nelms**. Brother Fricks had been business manager of the local when he was elected secretary-treasurer of the statewide labor organization in July 1973.

As the decade drew to a close, the local's 7,500 members were enjoying strong employment conditions – even though non-union workers were "holding commercial construction jobs here that used to be filled almost exclusively by union workers," as the *Houston Chronicle* reported on September 3, 1979. Employment is "real good," Local 211 **Business Agent Jimmy Keene** told the newspaper, because the union was getting about 95 percent of the



The South Texas Project Electric Generating Station nuclear-fueled powerhouse near Bay City, Texas, that thousands of Local 211 pipefitters helped build from 1981 through June 1989 – and has since employed many more Local 211 members for maintenance, upgrades and retrofits.

Local 211 Apprentice and Member Training ANSWERING THE CALL FOR A QUALIFIED WORKFORCE



Local 211 staff and members celebrate the grand opening of the local's new HVAC Training Center in Deer Park in 2022, with former Training Coordinator Kevin Bickerstaff cutting the ribbon.

Since it was first established in January 1949, U.A. Local 211 has implemented and supported the system of apprenticeship to train and grow its workforce of pipefitters, welders and, more recently, HVAC technicians. Through apprenticeship, potential new members are educated by working side-by-side with experienced journeyman members on jobsites and through intensive classroom and laboratory work – all while they are paid wages and provided with pension and healthcare benefits.

Local 211 was the first union in the Houston area to have a trust fund established for apprentice training when it set up the benefit with its employing contractors in 1956. The local and its contractors continue to contribute to a training fund to finance apprenticeships and journeyman-level “upgrade” training for members.

To significantly augment those vocational education programs, in February 1960 the local opened its new, \$110,000 [Local 211 Training Center](#) at 2507 Old Galveston Road near its Union Hall. The new facility was built with a grant from the [United Association \(U.A.\)](#) international office and the [Mechanical Contractors Association of America](#), whose members employed Local 211 pipefitters and apprentices.

The apprenticeship program itself was administered and funded – as it still is in 2024 – by the [Joint Apprenticeship](#)

and Training Committee of Pipefitters Local 211 (J.A.T.C.), a partnership of the local and its contractors, under the guidance of [Training Director R. B. Crawford](#), a Local 211 member. The training was also provided under the supervision of the [Houston Vocational and Technical School](#).

At that time, 267 apprentices and 49 journeyman members being provided with upgrade training were enrolled in the J.A.T.C. training program.

By 2015, Local 211 and the J.A.T.C. had training sites in Houston, Beaumont, Corpus Christi and Harlingen. That year, the organizations moved their expanding apprentice and journeyman programs into a larger training facility, the [Local 211 Apprenticeship School](#) at 1301 West 13th Street in Deer Park – into which Local 211 would move its Union Hall and administrative offices the following year.

Then in late 2017, the local opened the state-of-the-art [Kenneth H. Edwards Apprentice Annex](#) welding facility, which was dedicated to the local's former longtime business manager, next to its Union Hall and Apprenticeship School. The local also now provides training in outlying areas at its [Nederland Apprentice School](#) and its [Harlingen Training Center](#), and in 2022 the local opened its [HVAC Training Center](#) in Deer Park.

Over 75 years, Local 211 has fulfilled the need to provide structured training to apprentices and members so that it

can provide its employing contracts with highly skilled and competent pipe-trades craftspeople. Through tuition-free, U.S. Department of Labor-registered programs, the local's pipefitting, welding and HVAC-service apprentices are paid while they train on the job and while attending night classes two nights per week or on the weekend for five years, after which they graduate as journeymen.



Local 211 apprentice Brother Timothy James Davis (left) is shown with Local 211 President Randy Beal after winning the Texas State U.A. HVAC Apprentice Competition in 2016, after which he advanced to the U.A. District 3 contest in New Orleans that June.



The Kenneth H. Edwards Apprentice Annex welding facility opened by Local 211 and its J.A.T.C. next to the local's Union Hall in Deer Park in 2017.

heavy commercial projects in the area, besides a lot of “smaller” jobs such as warehouses and shopping centers, and it had “more than enough work.”

Offsetting Non-Union With Conversion Of Nuke Plant

Non-union competition took its toll on Local 211 during the 20-year balance of the century and millennium. As a result, the local's membership dropped dramatically across the 1980s from a high of more than 7,500 in 1980 to just fewer than 5,000 pipefitters and apprentices in 1989.

The trend continued throughout the following decade, as well. During that time, the local's membership dropped from just more than 3,700 in 1995 to below 3,500 in 1999 as the non-union workforce infiltrated every industry in which the union pipefitters were employed.

But construction of the **South Texas Project Electric Generating Station**, a nuclear-fueled powerhouse located just southwest of Bay City, Texas, proved to be a saving grace for the local after a non-union contractor was

removed from the job in 1981 and union-friendly employers, Bechtel Corporation and Ebasco Constructors, were awarded the task of completing the station. Over the next eight years, about 3,000 U.A. members installed the piping for its two pressurized water reactors, which went into service August 25, 1988, and June 19, 1989, respectively, and their 7,000-acre cooling reservoir.

South Texas Project owners Houston Lighting & Power, San Antonio City Public Service, Central Power & Light of Corpus Christi and the City of Austin fired the original design engineer, Brown and Root, in 1981, after which the company resigned as construction contractor, according to a May 31, 1985, Associated Press report. The owners charged that construction of the plant was mishandled by Brown & Root, the Associated Press reported, leading to cost overruns that by 1985 had increased the estimated cost of the project to \$5.5 billion, about 500 percent more than the original estimate.

Local 211 experienced another significant internal crisis of its own beginning in 1980 when Business Manager Fricks and Local 211 Training Director Harold Grubbs were charged with conspiracy, racketeering and bribery by the Federal “Brilab” F.B.I. undercover operation to catch union officials and government figures who were willing to accept bribes for using their influence to deliver insurance contracts. The pair was indicted in May 1981 on one count of conspiracy and one count of bribery after they had accepted cash payments in July 1979 from an informant who claimed he “might be able to provide a better group insurance package for the pipe fitters than already had been offered to the union,” according to a report in the September 20, 1980, *Dallas Morning News*.

Found guilty of “conspiring to make money by influencing a labor union insurance plan,” the Associated Press later reported in November 1985, a Federal judge on May 22,

1984, sentenced Fricks to one year probation and fined him \$10,000 and sentenced Grubbs to six months in prison and fined him \$20,000. A Federal appeals court upheld the conviction in November 1985.

Brother John W. “Hoot” Gibson Sr., the local's secretary-treasurer, was selected in 1981 to serve as Local 211 business manager. He would remain in the position through 1984.

Meanwhile (while Fricks was still serving as business manager), Local 211's 5,000 construction pipefitters went on strike beginning April 4, 1981, “in a dispute with contractors over ‘economics’” after their previous agreement expired on April 1, the next day's *Houston Chronicle* reported. It was the first strike by the local in about 20 years over its construction and erection contract, which was the largest of several agreements the local held at the time with contractors and other employers.

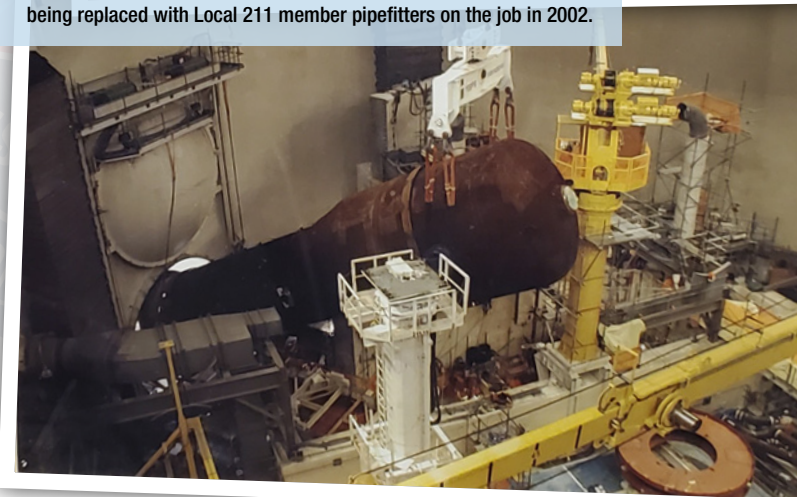
After one week on strike, the pipefitters ratified a new, three-year contract on April 11 that would eventually raise the local's journeyman base pay to \$18.25 per hour and benefits contributions by employers to \$2.53 per hour – although at least 1,500 of the local's members did not participate in the vote because they were working as travelers through other locals around the country at the time. However, the local's contract with pipe-fabricating shops in which about 1,000 pipefitters were working remained unsettled and those members remained on strike until they reached an agreement sometime later.



Among Local 211's many generational U.A. members, shown here in 2013 are (left to right) son Michael Flynn III, an apprentice with Plumbers Local 68 of Houston at the time; son Greg Flynn, an apprentice with Local 211; grandfather Mike Flynn Sr., a 25-year member of Local 211; and father Mike Flynn Jr., a 15 year member of Local 211.



The steam generator of Unit 2 at the South Texas Project Electric Generating Station nuclear powerhouse southwest of Bay City, Texas, being replaced with Local 211 member pipefitters on the job in 2002.



Lynn Cockrell served as a Local 211 office professional for 37 years before she retired in 2010. She passed away at age 64 on August 21, 2015 (at which time her husband, Brother Charles Cockrell, was president of the Local 211 Retirees Club).



Local 211 apprentice graduates of the local's training program in May 2015.

The local's pipefitters struck construction contractors again after that agreement expired on April 1, 1984, and the employers called for a 15-percent wage reduction in a new contract to help them compete with non-union contractors. After the local rejected multiple offers from the contractors while as many as 2,000 members remained off their jobs and most of the other 4,500 members continued to work on large industrial jobs such as the South Texas Project, the U.A. international office installed a trustee to manage the local during the ongoing negotiations.

U.A. Trustee Joe Woodson signed a new contract on June 6, 1984, that reduced the wages of Local 211 members by 15 percent, a cutback that had already been accepted by most of the other building-trades unions in the Houston area. With the settlement, the pipefitters' wage scale was lowered to \$15.51 per hour, but management's total benefits contribution remained at \$2.53 per hour.

ACQUIRING ADDED STRENGTH WITH U.A. CONSOLIDATIONS

By the mid-1980s, Local 211 was losing a sizable portion of its maintenance work in the petrochemical and other plants within its jurisdiction to non-union labor. However, booming commercial work in and around Houston helped sustain the local during the second half of the decade.

But with the South Texas Project nuclear station nearing completion, Local 211 members employed on the site joined other union tradespeople in a strike beginning March 1, 1988, to protest wage discrepancies and the layoffs on pipefitters and electrical workers after some had refused to perform duties they were not required to perform. A Federal court on March 3 ordered the striking workers to stop picketing and return to work after Ebasco Constructors filed a request for the order that stated it was "suffering damages of \$1 million per day" while the employees were refusing to work.

Although Local 211 continued to lose membership, its pipefitters remained busy throughout much of the 1990s, in particular with upgrade and maintenance work at the South Texas Project. Elsewhere, members also enjoyed stable employment created with industrial-cleanup projects and emissions-reduction retrofit work at many of the petrochemical facilities, highlighted by numerous sulfur-recovery projects for oil plants.

Nevertheless, organized labor and union pipefitters continued working to counter their languishing market share in southeast Texas. In one particular action, on July 1, 1995, the U.A. consolidated the membership of **Plumbers and Pipefitters Local No. 790** of Victoria, Texas, into Local 211 and Local 68, Local No. 142 of San Antonio and **Local No. 823** of Harlingen.

But in a move to make it more competitive and to prepare it for an anticipated recession, Dow Chemical in 1997 cut the workforce at its Freeport petrochemical complex, which employed hundreds of Local 211 members, by 550 jobs, or 11 percent. After having reduced its Texas operations by about 350 workers per year for the previous four years through voluntary early retirements, the facility's latest and largest manpower reduction in recent history, according to an article in the May 29, 1997, *Houston Chronicle*, would further cut into the pipefitters local's man hours.

Among significant projects that did continue to put Local 211 members to work during the final years of the 1990s was construction of **Enron Field** (now Minute Maid Park) baseball stadium for Major League Baseball's Houston Astros beginning in November 1997. About 50 union pipefitters handled all of the piping and air-handling installations for the \$250 million, 41,168-seat, retractable-roof venue in downtown Houston before it was completed and opened on March 30, 2000.

REGAINING ITS STANDING WITH 'FLOURISHING' WORK

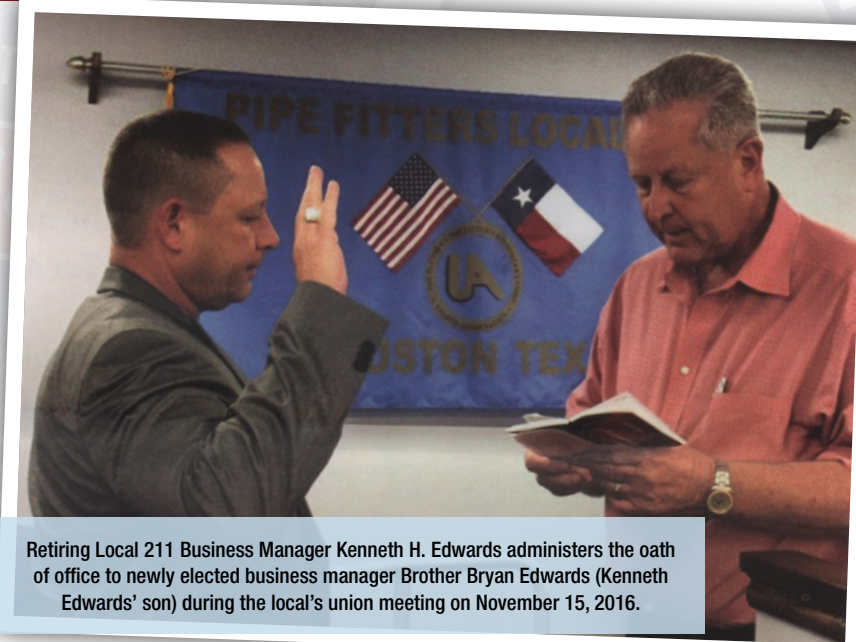
The new "Y2K" (Year 2000) millennium brought with it significant change for Local 211. Perhaps foremost, in 2002 the local elected **Brother Kenneth Edwards**, who was serving as its financial secretary, to the position of business manager, which he would hold until his retirement in 2016.

When Business Manager Edwards stepped down, the local appointed **Brother Bryan Edwards**, his son, to be its business manager. He continues to serve in that position some eight years later as the local celebrates its 75th anniversary in January 2024.

Projects that employed the local's members during the early 2000s included construction of **Reliant Stadium** (now NRG Stadium), a multi-purpose facility in Houston that is home to the Houston Texans of the National Football League (N.F.L.), beginning in March 2000. When completed in August 2002, the \$352-million, 72,220-seat facility was the first in the N.F.L. to have a retractable roof.

But Local 211's struggles were exacerbated by election irregularities, financial inconsistencies and internal conflicts, while its membership fell from about 3,500 in 2000 to 3,010 in 2007, prompting the U.A. international office to place it under its trusteeship on May 22, 2007. The union terminated all of the local's officers but immediately rehired Brother Kenneth Edwards as acting business manager and **Brother Jimmy Hall** as acting business agent.

Under trustee U.A. International Representative Phillip Lord, who took control of the local's operations and business activities, and Brother Edwards, the local implemented a new budget and dues structure. Over the following year, the moves would build up the local's finances, helping remove it from under U.A. supervision.



Retiring Local 211 Business Manager Kenneth H. Edwards administers the oath of office to newly elected business manager Brother Bryan Edwards (Kenneth Edwards' son) during the local's union meeting on November 15, 2016.



Local 211 member Brother Frank Maldonado and Business Agent Kenneth Waybright at Memorial Hermann The Woodlands Medical Center in June 2011 during an expansion project for the hospital.

Just two years after being placed into trusteeship, Local 211 fully renovated its long-serving union hall on Galveston Road and held a “grand opening” of the new complex in 2009 while also celebrating the local’s 60th charter anniversary. “Our old building served us for 50 years,” the Local 211 60th Anniversary Committee wrote in the event’s program book, “and hopefully this new one will serve us just as long.”

Out in the field, work for Local 211 members in the Houston area skyrocketed into 2010 and remained abundant throughout the first half of the new decade as industrial, chemical and mechanical work created upwards of 100,000 new jobs and billions of dollars’ worth of work along the Gulf Coast. The U.A. and the Local 211 training programs had prepared the local’s membership for those jobs, particularly welders and pipefitters, allowing the local to take advantage of the influx of work, which included the Keystone Pipeline System’s **Gulf Coast Pipeline**, a 485-mile, 36-inch pipeline

that connected oil storage facilities in Cushing, Oklahoma, with Gulf Coast refineries in Texas after it was completed in late 2013.

Further aiding Local 211’s ability to gain much of that work for its members, by that time the union and its employing companies were enjoying improved labor-management relationships. Additionally, the local had undergone substantial changes in its business practices by eliminating cumbersome work rules, instituting a no-strike clause in its contracts and abandoning seniority traditions, allowing contractors to request specific workers with specific skills for projects.

In the Houston area, members worked at practically every type of plant that was built during that time, including refineries, LNG plants and chemical plants, such as an \$4-billion expansion for Dow Chemical’s in Freeport complex beginning in 2013 and a \$8-million expansion of Exxon’s petroleum facility. What’s more, many of the local’s

members were also employed in a large number of fabrication shops, including Wisconsin-based Team Industries, which set up its shop in Houston in 2008.

“I’m a 48-year member, 35 years as an officer, and the energy sector right now in this country is booming,” Business Manager Edwards declared in the January 2015 *U.A. Journal*. “It’s just a great time to be here. In Houston, U.A. contractors that have followed the work to the Gulf Coast are flourishing.”

Aside from petrochemical work, among many jobs employing Local 211 members was the new, \$95-million **Shell Energy Stadium**, home to Major League Soccer’s Houston Dynamo and the National Women’s Soccer League’s Houston Dash, from February 2011 to May 2012. In 2012 and 2013, union pipefitters also helped remodel the **University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center** in Houston, the largest cancer facility in the United States.

During that time, the U.A. merged three more southeast Texas locals into Local 211: Local 390 on May 1, 2012; Local 823 in October 2012; and Local 195 – from which Local 211 originated 65 years earlier – on May 1, 2014 (just one year after the Beaumont local was released from an 18-month U.A. trusteeship).

The international union knew those mergers would benefit the new Local 211 members because they would be part of a local that was financially sound, had numerous signatory contractors and a good amount of work, as well as the highest pay scale in the southern part of the country.

The mergers expanded the Local 211 jurisdiction to cover nearly 600 miles from the Louisiana border to the Mexico border in Brownsville, Texas. The local also then had offices in Houston, Beaumont, Harlingen and Corpus Christi.

In addition to the amalgamation of Local 195, 2014 was a particularly noteworthy year for Local 211 because it closed out the first half of the decade with virtually full employment and a substantial increase in its members’ total working man hours of several hundred thousand over the previous year. The local also completed first-ever contract negotiations for its new “Zone 195” and “Zone 823” (the areas of former Local 195 and Local 823, respectively) and received a satisfactory agreement in both zones, with all its signatory contractors signing both the Zone 195 construction and service agreements.



(Left to right) Local 211 Organizer Jeff Broussard, Business Manager Bryan Edwards, Organizer Steve Parker, former Business Agent Todd Longron and his family display items collected by the local for hurricane relief efforts in Louisiana in 2021.

LOCAL 211 MEMBERS 50-YEAR U.A. SERVICE AWARDS

2016



2017



2018



2019



2023



ENJOYING PROSPERITY AGAIN — AND A NEW HEADQUARTERS

As Local 211 moved into early 2015, the total man hours worked by its members were higher than they had been during the past several years due to an abundance of steady commercial work and new industrial projects as well. By April of that year, the local had more than 200 pipefitters on a South Texas Project maintenance and upgrade outage and more than 100 members each at the Dow Chemical plant and installing the post-combustion Petra Nova Carbon Capture Project at the 3.65-gigawatt **W.A. Parish Generating Station** near Thompsons, Texas, which would be the largest such emissions-reducing installation on an existing power plant in the world when it was completed in January 2017.

With the abundance of work, which included jobs in the Bryan-College Station area such as renovations to the **Kyle Field** football stadium and construction of a large lab at **Texas A&M University**, Local 211 had close to 200 travelers working in its jurisdiction at one point in 2015. The union pipefitters could also be found that year at numerous other plants that included the **Bryan Texas Powerhouse**, the **Fayette Power Plant** near La Grange, Texas, and **Lyondell-Citgo oil refinery**, as well as a fall outage at the South Texas Project on which Local 211 members and travelers worked in excess of 44,000 man hours without a recordable injury or human performance error.

The strong employment conditions subsequently helped increase the local's membership numbers. Between January 2014 and December 2015, 737 pipefitters and apprentices joined the local, which grew back to 3,800 members during that period.

Local 211 had also made several changes in its agreement to help its employing contractors

be more competitive. One of the several results of the effectiveness of those contract modifications was the local's ability to retain lowest-cost healthcare for members while the insurance was increased with eye, dental and life insurance for spouses, coverage the local never previously had.

The local also managed to maintain a \$25 million dollar reserve by the end of 2015 – when only seven years earlier it had only \$3 million dollars in reserve. And in negotiations that year, the local was able to gain a \$2-per-hour above-scale increase for industrial welders, which helped attract many new welders into the local.

Local 211 then renovated the former Houston Area Safety Council building at **1301 West 13th Street** in Deer Park, which it had purchased in late 2015, and moved its Union Hall and training offices and school into the building in October 2016. The new complex continues to serve as the local's headquarters in January 2024 as it marks its 75th anniversary.

By the time Brother Edwards retired at the end of 2016, before which his son was elected to succeed him as business manager in a membership vote in October and November of that year, Local 211 members had worked 4 million manhours for the second year in a row. Bolstering that employment was a large amount of work in the Corpus Christi and Harlingen areas.

The remainder of the decade was both positive and productive for the local under the leadership of Business Manager Bryan Edwards, as work in all facets of the pipefitting industry remained strong in its jurisdiction while the local signed nine new contractors in 2017 alone. That year, commercial work in downtown Houston, school and **HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning)** jobs throughout the area, work in fabrication shops and industrial projects at sites such as Baytown Exxon, **Chevron Phillips** and the

U.A., LOCAL PROVIDE AGAIN IN WAKE OF HISTORIC STORM

As the entire U.A. and Local 211 and their memberships always have in the aftermath of natural disasters, they quickly and fully responded to assist fellow U.A. members and neighbors throughout the Texas Gulf Coast region after [Hurricane Harvey](#), a devastating Category 4 hurricane, hit Texas and Louisiana in August 2017. The costliest tropical cyclone on record, inflicting more than 100 deaths and \$125 billion in property damage, the hurricane caused catastrophic flooding in the Houston metropolitan area and Southeast Texas – destroying or damaging the homes of many Local 211 members.

In response, U.A. locals from across North America sent much-needed financial assistance and supplies, such as water, canned food, tools and more, to the affected area, which is also home to U.A. [Plumbers Local No. 68](#). The locals set up distribution centers at their Union Halls and in Beaumont to make those supplies available to the hundreds of Local 211 and Local 68 members and retirees – many of whom did not have flood insurance – affected by the hurricane.

The leadership of the Houston locals also created a process to reach out to every single member to find out if they needed assistance of any kind.

“I can truly say one thing; I am a third-generation member of Local 211 and also a third-generation officer of Pipefitters Local 211, and I have never seen the outpouring of generosity that I have seen after Hurricane Harvey,” Local 211 [Business Manager Bryan Edwards](#) wrote in an open letter in the November 2017 U.A. *Journal*. “We have been overwhelmed at the love, support and assistance that we at Local 211 have received following Harvey from all the locals in the United States and Canada.

“We will never forget the devastation and destruction that Hurricane Harvey left behind, but what we will also never forget is the generosity that our U.A. brothers and sisters gave us during this difficult time.”



South Texas Nuclear Plant sustained the local’s good fortunes as its members together worked 3.8 million manhours.

However, Local 211 was slowed in 2017 when Hurricane Harvey, an extremely destructive Category 5 Hurricane, hit the Texas Gulf Coast starting on August 25 and continued to pound the region through August 28. The worst natural disaster in the history of the Houston and Beaumont areas, the storm devastated the lives of many Local 211 members and their families and neighbors.

After recovering from the storm with assistance from the U.A. and its sister locals, an abundance of industrial work offset slow commercial employment to facilitate Local 211 members working nearly 4 million manhours for 2018 – which, once again, led all U.A. locals in the southern portion of the United States. That pattern repeated the following year, during which industrial manhours continued to grow along with industrial/natural gas/petrochemical construction along the Gulf Coast, while the local also focused on growing its HVAC opportunities by increasing its membership training offerings in that field to round out the decade.

Local 211 pipefitters were also working on a host of other staple projects, including hospitals such as Houston Methodist, Baylor Medical Center and Memorial Hermann, where medical-gas piping installations had become an important source of employment. Members could be found working at the [Budweiser Brewery](#) in Houston, too, as they often had since it opened in 1966, from which time the brewery expanded its capacity from 1-million to 14.2-million barrels of beer.

MAKING ITS GREATEST STRIDES WHILE ADVANCING TO ITS 75TH

The onset of the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic that struck the United States beginning in January 2020 and continued into 2023, by which time it had claimed the lives of more than 1 million Americans, also hampered Local 211. But the local maintained its offices while implementing social distancing and other safety measures to curb the spread of the virus and support its working members, who continued on job sites as “essential workers” despite the uncertain conditions.

But as Local 211 progressed into the 2020s, its membership steadily increased from 3,400 to almost 4,000 pipefitters, HVAC technicians and apprentices. Several factors contributed to the growth, including the Federal “infrastructure bill” that inundated the Gulf Coast with work and compelled the local to recruit more members to fulfill workforce needs.

The local also created a new Marketing Fund that allowed it to put up informational billboards about the union and its apprenticeship program around Houston and run similar commercials on local TV networks in three different cities, which attracted more candidates for membership.

Nevertheless, HVAC jobs experienced a constant manpower shortage as the local’s HVAC department grew to the same size as its pipefitting department while working on myriad projects that included sites for Elon Musk’s [Space-X](#) private space-travel program and a new medical center. In response, the local opened a new, state-of-the art HVAC training facility near its Union Hall and a newly registered apprentice school in Harlingen.



Front of the Local 211 Union Hall in Deer Park, into which the local moved in 2016.

Local 211 during that time also worked out a deal with Next Level Healthcare to offer no-cost doctor visits for their members and their dependents, which has saved the local's healthcare fund an immense amount of money.

In 2023, the local secured its current **Construction and Erection Agreement** and **Mechanical Equipment Service and Maintenance Agreement** with the Mechanical Contractors Association of Houston, both of which went into effect on October 1, 2023, and will run until September 30, 2026. Notably, the three-year collectively bargained construction contract contained the largest pay raise ever negotiated by Local 211, part of which increased its journeyman pipefitters' base gross wage during the first year of the pact above \$40 per hour for the first time in the local's history.

The Construction and Erection Agreement provides an initial journeyman base wage of \$38.31 per hour and a total gross wage (with working assessment, marketing, tool and COPE Fund contributions added to the base) of

\$40.09 per hour for the first year. With benefit contributions that include \$5.97 per hour to the Local 211 Health & Welfare Fund and \$5.29 per hour to the U.A. National Pension Fund, the local's journeyman pipefitters are receiving a total economic package of **\$52.80 per hour** through September 30, 2024.

The Service and Maintenance Agreement provides an initial journeyman base wage of \$38.31 per hour and a total gross wage of \$39.84 per hour for the first year. With benefit contributions that are the same as in the construction contract, the local's service and maintenance journeymen are receiving a total economic package of **\$52.55 per hour** through September 30, 2024.

Both agreements call for a \$1.15-per-hour increase in the journeyman total package effective October 1, 2024, and another raise of \$1.20 per hour to the package effective October 1, 2025. With those increases, the total economic packages during the final year of each contract are scheduled to be \$55.15 per hour for journeyman pipefitters and \$54.90 per hour for journeyman technicians.

The agreements each also set overtime pay for work performed by Local 211 members beyond consecutive five 8-hour or four 10-hour workdays at time-and-one-half of the regular base wage and working assessment and double-time for work on Sundays and Holidays.

The contracts further set permitted ratios of apprentices-to-journeymen on any job at one-to-one, excluding fourth- and fifth-year apprentices. As always, apprentices are paid an increasing percentage of the journeyman basic wage based on time spent within the local's training programs, and they are provided with all the same benefits as full members; those percentages in the new contracts were set at:

- First-Year Apprentices receive 55 percent of the journeyman wage;
- Second-Year Apprentices receive 60 percent;
- Third-Year Apprentices receive 70 percent;
- Fourth-Year Apprentices receive 75 percent; and
- Fifth-Year Apprentices receive 80 percent.

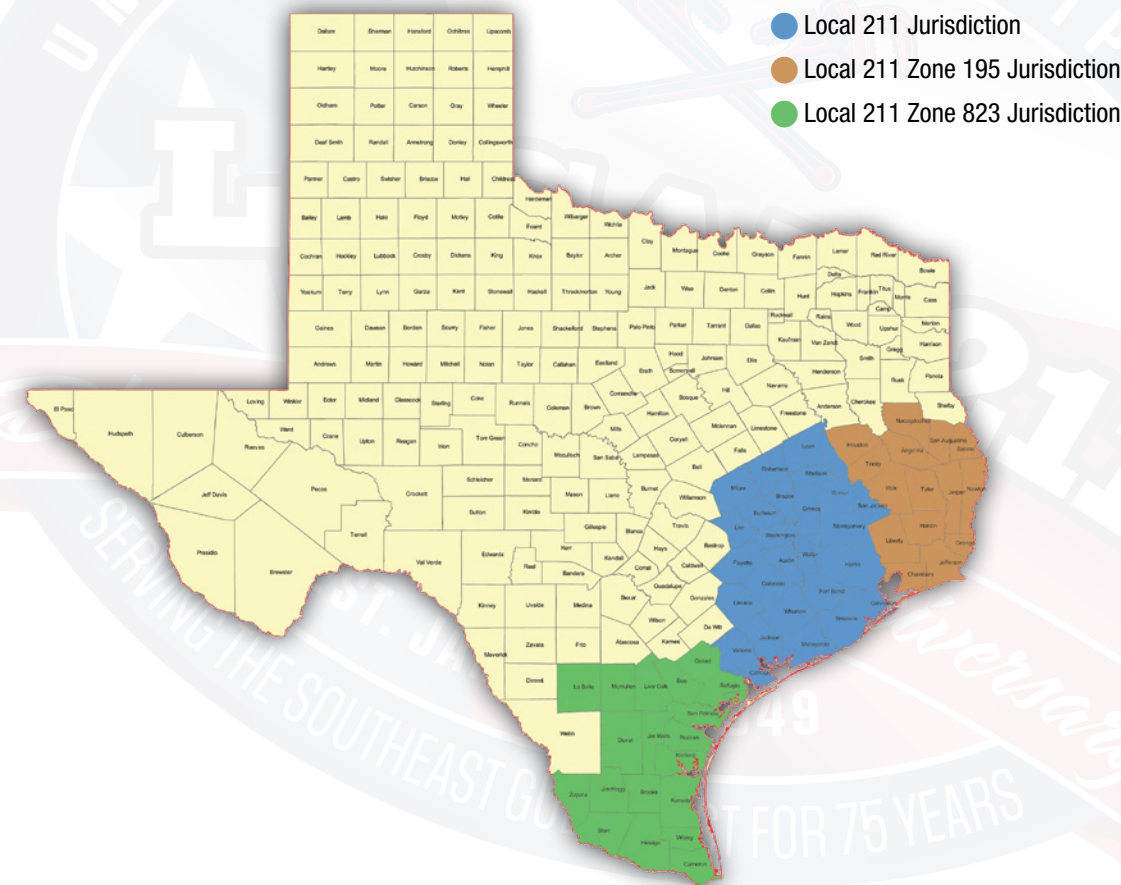
Importantly, the contracts were negotiated under amicable conditions between Local 211 and its employers that had been cultivated over the previous several years.

"Our relationship with our contractors is a true partnership," Business Manager Edwards stated while reflecting on the local's 75-year

history and its current status. "Our contractors are very active in our local events, and our business agents spend quite a bit of time with our contractors both locally and on job sites."

Now in its "Diamond Anniversary" year, Local 211 for over three-quarters of a century has helped erect many major industrial and manufacturing complexes; office towers and commercial buildings; entertainment facilities; schools, colleges and universities; hospitals, hotels and prisons in its greater Southeast Texas jurisdiction. Training qualified craftsmen across the entire Southeast Gulf Coast region and maintaining a commitment to quality, the local after 75 years continues "answering the call" as it has been since 1949. ●

LOCAL 211 JURISDICTION, 2024



New Local 211 apprentices are sworn in during the local's union meeting in November 2023.

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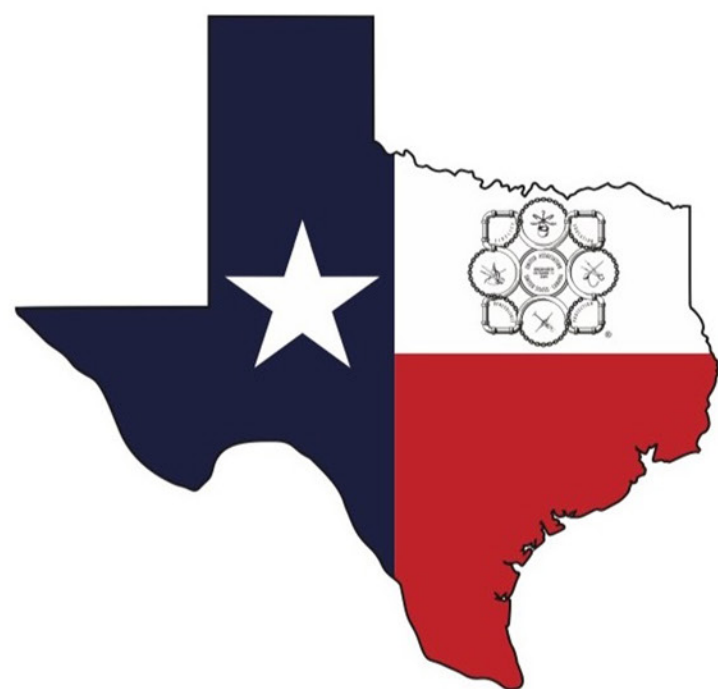
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