

U.A. PLUMBERS, PIPEFITTERS AND HVAC SERVICE TECHS
LOCAL 286

100th Anniversary



U.A. PLUMBERS, PIPEFITTERS
AND HVAC SERVICE TECHS

LOCAL 286

Chartered November 28, 1923

A CENTURY OF SERVICE TO CENTRAL TEXAS

AUSTIN, TEXAS

COMMEMORATIVE HISTORY



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LOCAL 286

★ CENTRAL TEXAS ★

"The person who works with his hands is a laborer; the person who works with his hands and his head is an artisan; the person who works with his hands, his head and his heart is a member of the UA." - Local 286



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100-Year Anniversary Celebration

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1106 Lavaca St., Ste.201
Austin, Tx 78701
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Plumbers & Pipefitters Local 286
100-Year Anniversary
Dinner-Dance and Christmas Party

Saturday, December 16, 2023
5:00 p.m. to Midnight

Kalahari Resort & Convention Center
3001 Kalahari Boulevard, Round Rock, Texas

Dinner-Dance and Christmas Party Program

Registration, Photo Ops, Blue Santa Charity Toy Collection	5:00 to 7:00 p.m.
Cocktails and Hors D'oeuvres.....	5:00 to 6:00 p.m.
Welcoming Remarks, National Anthem, Invocation.....	6:00 to 7:00 p.m.
Dinner Buffet	7:00 to 8:30 p.m.
Presentations, Dessert, Coffee, Door Prizes	8:00 to 8:30 p.m.
Dancing, Celebrating, Photo Op	8:30 p.m. to Midnight
More Door Prizes.....	10:00 to 10:30 p.m.

U.A. 286



100th Anniversary

THE PROGRESS OUR FOUNDERS FORESAW IS NOW EVIDENT IN OUR LOCAL AND CITY

Brothers and Sisters:

I am honored to be an elected representative of our local union at this time of celebration of 100 years since the chartering of U.A. Local Union No. 286. Our local union has provided the training and the opportunity to support our families for multiple generations, and I have a deep gratitude for all the opportunities the local has afforded me. Much like our hometown of Austin, Texas, our local union might be unrecognizable to our charter members that organized it in 1923.

As our city has grown, so has our local, and we have more members today than ever. What used to be a sleepy little college town with no industry other than government and education has turned into a thriving metropolis of semiconductor manufacturing, headquarters for many technology companies, and now home for a large electric-car manufacturer. Even with all the growth, Austin remains a popular destination for many, and several of those choose to make it home.

I would like to thank all those that helped to get us where we are: our past members and officers that got us started; our office staff that helps make this local run smoothly; our current officers who keep us steered in the right direction; our members that get up every day and work long hours to support their families; and, finally, our contractor partners that choose to use us as their source of labor for piping installations.

Once again, I am humbled to be in the position I am in and reflect on all that the members of Local 286 have accomplished over the last 100 years. I am positive that Local 286 will continue to grow and flourish for another 100 years because of the talent seen in the next generation coming up. Our model of apprentice training and organizing will ensure the future of our great local union.



Fraternally,

Robert "Chap" Thornton, Business Manager
U.A. Local No. 286, Austin, Texas

This book was proudly produced by

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The 100-Year History of U.A. Local No. 286

A VITAL FIXTURE FOR AUSTIN ACROSS A CENTURY



“One of the oldest, strongest and most active local labor organizations in Austin is the plumbers union, Local No. 286, with a record going back to 1895, when their charter was granted. Before this local came into existence, the plumbers had no conception of what decent hours, working conditions and wages were, as they were working almost as long as there was daylight and for pay that was too low to be even considered wages.

“By carefully training their apprentices, being sure that each member gave ‘an honest day’s work for an honest day’s pay,’ increasing their efficiency and continually working for the advancement of their craft, this local has succeeded in gradually lowering their working hours, bettering their working conditions and increasing their wages until they are now in a position to give their families at least the necessities of life, with a little pleasure added, and have some time to enjoy life with their wives and children.

“The organization, with the help of the plumbers throughout the state and the Texas Federation of Labor, has also succeeded in having protective laws passed by the legislature that are a wonderful asset to the entire state, both from the standpoint of protection to the citizen and the skilled plumber.”

— Austin American-Statesman, September 5, 1936



FOSTERING A STABLE AUSTIN PIPING LOCAL

For more than two decades *before* the United Association of Journeyman Plumbers, Gas Fitters, Steam Fitters and Steam Fitters' Helpers of the United States and Canada – predecessor of the United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipefitting Industry of the United States and Canada (U.A.) – chartered Local No. 286 on **November 28, 1923**, to represent pipe-trades craftsmen in Austin, the international union had a presence in the state capital city of Texas. In fact, the U.A. initially chartered “plumbers, gasfitters, steamfitters and steamfitters helpers” Local No. 286 on October 9, 1909.

Even before that, plumbers in the city were organized into at least one unaffiliated union as early as 1890. Then during the spring of 1900, the U.A. organized and chartered **Local No. 203** as its first local in Austin.

However, Local 203 went defunct sometime during late 1907 for apparent lack of interest among its officers and members. Likewise, the original Austin-based Local 286 (the number had been used previously for locals in Medford, Massachusetts, and Marion, Indiana) could not survive the challenging conditions maintained throughout its town by the anti-union “Open Shop Association” of plumbing contractors during the late 1910s and early 1920s, and it was summarily disbanded in the fall of 1923.

Undeterred, U.A. **General Organizer E. B. Fitzgerald** visited Austin in early October 1923 to re-organize the city’s “15 to 20” plumbers and fitters into a local branch of the union. He subsequently reported in the November 1923 U.A. *Journal* monthly member publication: “I have been informed that all of these men are very anxious to be taken into the United

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.

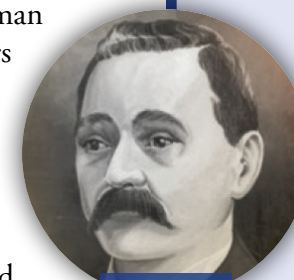
Four days later, the **United Association of Journeyman Plumbers, Gas Fitters, Steam Fitters and Steam Fitters' Helpers of the United States and Canada (U.A.)** was born on October 11, 1889. The U.A. selected Brother Quinlan as its president, Brother Henry Collins of New York City as its vice president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

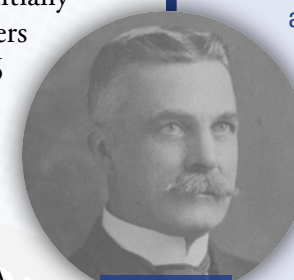
The union endured through two world wars and the Great Depression, after which on January 1, 1947, it changed its name to the **United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry of the United States and Canada**.

Association. Evidently, we will be successful in reorganizing a very good local union in Austin.”

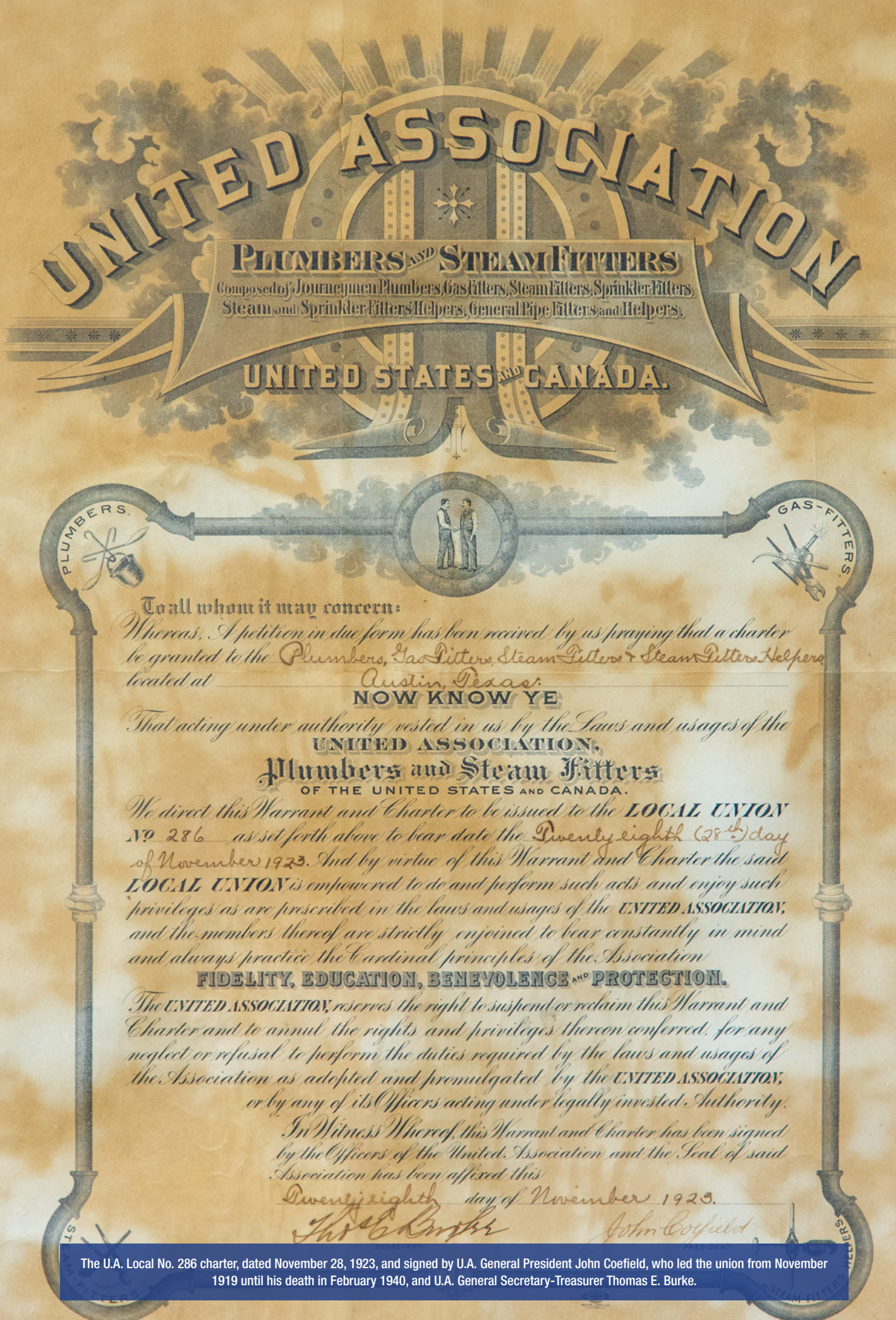
Even before the U.A. issued the charter for Local 286 on November 28, the general organizer arranged a meeting on November 23, 1923, at which he initiated 12 new members who joined the local's original 16 charter applicants. Afterwards, he reported in the January 1924 *Journal*:



Patrick J.
Quinlan



Richard A.
O'Brien



The U.A. Local No. 286 charter, dated November 28, 1923, and signed by U.A. General President John Coe, who led the union from November 1919 until his death in February 1940, and U.A. General Secretary-Treasurer Thomas E. Burke.

LOCAL 286 UNION HALLS

(All locations are in Austin.)

Austin Labor Temple

200 East 10th Street
1923 – 1955

I.B.E.W. Union Hall

210 South Congress Avenue
1955 – 1968

Local 286 Union Hall

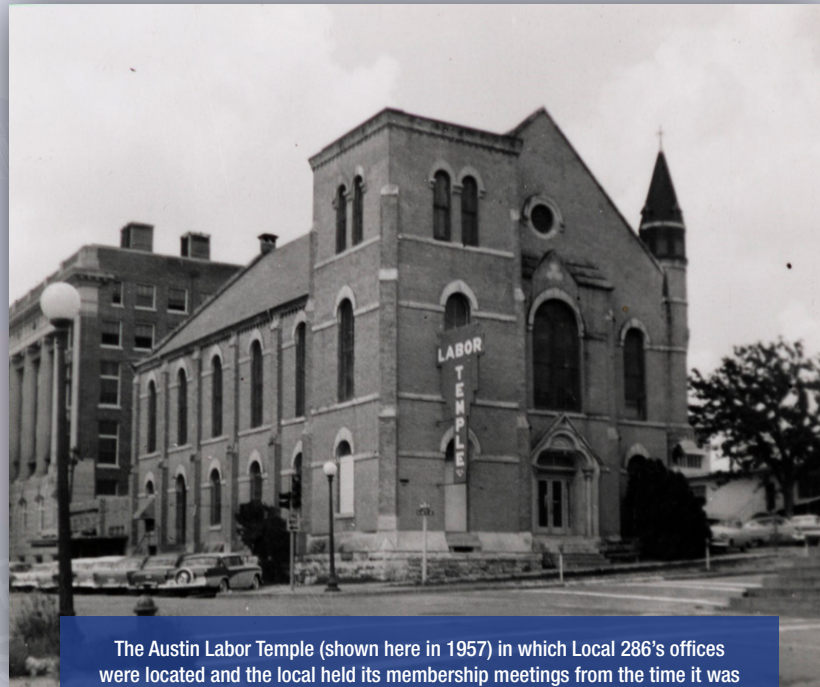
814 Airport Boulevard
1968 – 2009

Local 286 Offices (Rented)

Airport Boulevard
2009 – 2010

Local 286 Union Hall

814 Airport Boulevard
November 2010 – current



The Austin Labor Temple (shown here in 1957) in which Local 286's offices were located and the local held its membership meetings from the time it was chartered in 1923 until 1955. The former First Methodist Church built in 1883 at the corner of East 10th and Brazos streets was purchased by the Austin Labor Temple Association in May 1923 for \$21,000 to convert to the Labor Temple.
(Photo PICH-04825, Austin History Center, Austin Public Library)



Local 286 members pose while participating in Labor Day activities in Austin sometime during the late 1920s or early 1930s.

"Conditions in Austin, to say the least have been deplorable for the past several years, and it is going to be some little time before we can accomplish that which we desire, as it always takes some little time to rebuild your forces, but from the sentiment expressed at this special meeting, I am sure that Local Union 286 will be heard from within the near future."



Local 286 President Edgar Wallace in 1936.

of the splendid progress they are making in cleaning up this city after the disastrous effect of the open shop fight left here. They feel sure that in a short time they will regain their former conditions and have a 100 percent organization here."

In July the following year, Local 286 went on strike against its employers and, after a few days, was able to gain a "satisfactory agreement," as Brother Sheeche reported in the September 1926 *Journal*, for a one-year contract with a wage scale of \$9 per day. The general organizer went on to declare, "This local is to be congratulated for the splendid work accomplished, as they were forced to work under very unsatisfactory conditions for the past five years due to the activity of the Open Shop Association. They are now enjoying Union Shop conditions and a fairly good minimum wage scale."

Into 1927, among the major construction projects on which Local 286 members were

MAKING PROGRESS IN GOOD AND BAD TIMES

With its offices located in and its membership meetings being held at the **Austin Labor Temple** – where it would be located for the next 32 years – it did not take long for Local 286 not only to be "heard from" but also to make considerable noise. As such, U.A. **General Organizer Jason H. Sheeche** was able to announce in the August 1925 *Journal*, "I was pleased to learn



The first Local 286 Union Hall at 814 Airport Boulevard, where the local was located from 1968 into 2009, shown just before it was demolished that year to make room for construction of the local's new union hall and training center.

employed was the new **Alice T. Littlefield Dormitory** at the **University of Texas at Austin**, the university system's main campus. When completed in September that year, the 150-student residence hall (which is still in use in 2023) was the only all-female freshman dormitory in the United States.

But while the local's members were being employed during that time by no less than 10 plumbing and steamfitting contractors, for which the local even ran advertisements in the *Austin American-Statesman* newspaper during the year, on July 1 the local again went on strike after the two sides failed to reach an agreement on a new wage scale after the previous contract expired on June 30, 1927. At issue was the refusal by the Master Plumbers Association, which consisted of the union-signatory contractors, to grant the local's request for a \$1-per-day raise for its journeyman members to \$10 per day for eight-hour workdays and Saturdays off.

After five days, the local and the master plumbers signed a new, two-year agreement on July 5, after which the journeymen returned to work the following day. The pact kept in place a wage scale of \$9 per day until January 1, 1928, and then provided \$10-per-hour pay for eight-hour days until July 1, 1929.

The local's progress was suddenly slowed, however, with the onset of the Great Depression, the historic economic and human catastrophe that began when the U.S. stock market crashed on October 29, 1929 (history's "Black Tuesday"). In particular, the nationwide financial collapse brought hard times to U.A. members across the country as unemployment among its ranks soared.

The union's official international history even notes that the *Journal* ran several issues during the early 1930s that offered advice on how members could make their wages go as far as possible, although much of the

focus of the articles was either on calling on the government to take action to help people or on trying to offer some 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." Meanwhile, as its overall international membership declined and the U.A. held no conventions between 1928 and 1938, "the union held it together," the U.A. history declares.

Like all other American cities, Austin suffered during the Great Depression, but university expenditures and state government employment bolstered the city's economy, allowing it to evade the most damaging effects of the era. "Austin experienced the harsh effects of the Great Depression," according to the Texas State Historical Association. "Nevertheless, the town fared comparatively well, sustained by its twin foundations of government and education."

What's more, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's federal "New Deal" programs, such as the Public Works Administration, created jobs to reduce the destructive effects of the Great Depression, providing a measure of relief to the country and the U.A. membership. In particular, by 1936, the Public Works Administration had provided Austin with more funding for municipal construction projects than any other Texas city during the same period, according to the Historical Association, while the university nearly doubled its enrollment during the decade and undertook a massive construction program.

Among a host of New Deal projects within Austin that provided work was construction of the new U.S. Courthouse that opened on September 22, 1936; Becker Elementary and Robert E. Lee Elementary (since renamed



Local 286 members pose while participating in Labor Day activities in Austin sometime during the late 1930s or early 1940s.

Russell Lee Elementary) schools; Chalmers Court and Rosewood Courts public housing; Andrews Dormitory for women and Roberts Dormitory for men at the University of Texas in 1936; and the Govalle Wastewater Treatment Plant that was completed in May 1937. Additionally, the federal program funded the renovation and expansion of the Austin City Hall and the growth of the Robert Mueller Municipal Airport, which had opened for commercial air traffic in 1930.

Benefiting from those many advantages, Local 286 relatively prospered during the second half of the decade. Consequently, even as the Great Depression persisted, the *American-Statesman* noted in a September 5, 1936, article, "Throughout the years, the plumbers have been an active local but never more active than they are at this time."

WINNING A WAR AND IMPROVED CONDITIONS

Completely and finally extracted from the Great Depression at the dawn of the 1940s after the outbreak of World War II in Europe and Asia in 1939, U.A. locals nationwide – including Local 286 – stabilized and grew with the influx of work created by the materiel-production demands of the war. With the busy wartime economy, U.A. membership across North America swelled from 81,000 in 1941 to 210,000 members, many of whom built and expanded shipyards, weapons plants, aircraft factories and other facilities to support the war.

But first, Local 286 and its contractors entered into a two-year working agreement on September 1, 1940, that was in effect through August 31, 1942. The pact provided

LOCAL 286 BUSINESS MANAGERS

Local 286 elected its first business manager in 1934; previously from the time the local was chartered in 1923, its administrative and business functions were performed by part-time presidents, financial secretaries and recording secretaries.

Milton R. Otto

1934 – 1936

Carl Cassidy

1936 – 1939

James H. Pittsford

1939 – 1942

(During his term, Brother Pittsford became the local's first full-time business manager.)

Louis Bradshaw

1942 – 1945

Charles Escott

1945 – 1954

James Walter Lingo

1954 – 1971

James E. Hamrick

1971 – 1977

Billy Bob Long

1977 – 1991

Jerry L. Evans

1991 – 1998

Roy N. Ruston

1998 – 2004

Russell "Corby" Shelton

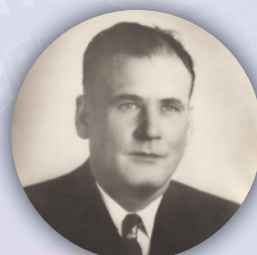
2004 – 2012

Thomas "T.J." Dodd

2012 – 2018

Robert "Chap" Thornton

2018 – current



James H. Pittsford



Louis Bradshaw



Charles Escott



James Walter Lingo



James E. Hamrick



Billy Bob Long



Jerry L. Evans



Roy N. Ruston



Russell "Corby" Shelton



Thomas "T.J." Dodd



Robert "Chap" Thornton

an increased wage scale of \$1.62-1/2 per hour for the local's journeyman plumbers and fitters during that period.

While numerous members served in the armed services both on and behind the front lines after the United States officially entered the war following the Japanese attack on the U.S. Naval Base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941, on the homefront most members did their part by helping to build those vital military facilities within the local's jurisdiction. In fact, as the local's plumbers and fitters were working well in excess of 40-hour weeks beginning in early 1942, **Business Manager Louis Bradshaw** declared in the March 26 *American-Statesman*, "We will have to make sacrifices from time to time because we are at war. Remember, you are the man behind the man behind the gun."

Among the crucial projects on which Local 286 members were employed during the war was construction of the **Camp Swift** U.S. Army training base just north of Bastrop, Texas, in 1942. Pledged to complete the base within a 108-day period, members worked nine-hour days for six days per week to build the \$25-million facility, which at one time during the war would host 90,000 U.S. soldiers and 10,000 German prisoners of war.

About 200 union plumbers and fitters, including "travelers" from other U.A. locals, also helped build a \$10-million, government-financed **magnesium plant** in Austin in 1942 while working on a 24-hour construction cycle to complete the factory, which refined Texas dolomite for use in incendiary bombs and aircraft during the war (after which it became the Balcones Research Center of the University of Texas). Still other Local 286 members helped complete the **Del Valle Army Air Base** for activation on September 19, 1942 (after which it was renamed to **Bergstrom Army Air Field** in March 1943 and then **Bergstrom Air Force Base** in December 1948 before being closed in 1993).

Local 286 Brother Alfred B. "Speedy" Croisdale (U.A. Card No. 234180) was the last surviving charter member of the local when he passed away on December 18, 1983.

The local's members were forced off many of their jobs, however, on March 27, 1944, when 13 of the local's 15 employing contractors initiated a lockout by refusing to sign a new agreement after members had been working without a contract since September 1, 1942. During that period, the local had unsuccessfully attempted to arrange meetings between its negotiating committee and contractors' negotiators, while the local proposed a new agreement it had presented to the master plumbers on March 1, 1943, that only maintained its \$1.62-1/2 wage scale and provided overtime pay of time-and-a-half on Saturdays and Sundays.

"We feel like this agreement is in keeping with the surrounding territories, such as San Antonio, Houston, Fort Worth and Dallas, which have a wage scale of \$1.62-1/2 per hour," Local 286 **President Walter Bernhard** later declared in the March 29, 1944, *Austin American* newspaper.

Despite the lockout, members continued to man all government and national-defense jobs before contractors finally agreed to a new, two-year contract on March 29. The agreement maintained the \$1.62-1/2-per-hour wage in all shops, increased pay for apprentices in a range from 30 to 50 percent of journeymen pay in stepped increases over a five-year period, and included a provision calling for contractors to provide transportation for members to and from jobs beyond a 50-mile radius of Austin.

After World War II ended with the surrender of Nazi Germany on May 7, 1945, and then Japan that September 2, Local 286 flourished in the burgeoning post-war economy and construction industry of Central Texas.



Local 286 Business Manager Walter Lingo (standing) and members (kneeling, left to right) Andy Anderson, Rudy Sternadall, O.B. Sherrill, Nick Nichols, <unknown> and George Nauert work in a dormitory at the University of Texas at Austin in July 1957.

Subsequently, the local's membership surpassed 140 plumbers and fitters in December 1947, and the local continued to prosper into and throughout the 1950s as the City of Austin's population increased exponentially from 87,930 in 1940 to 132,459 in 1950 – and then to 186,545 in 1960.

Major construction projects that employed a large number of Local 286 members during that time included an addition to Austin's **Seton Hospital** and the city's spacious new **Police and Courts Building** at East Seventh Street and East Avenue. Elsewhere, members also worked during the first half of the 1950s on the new *Austin American-Statesman* plant, a new **Jefferson Chemical Company** building, a new sorority house and law building at the University of Texas, the new **McCallum High School**, the new **Texas State Bar Building** and the new, five-story **American National Bank**

Building at West Sixth and Colorado streets in downtown Austin, which was said to be the most modern, efficient and "service-minded" bank in Texas when it opened in early 1954.

The local's wages also continued to rise, although its members went on strike beginning July 1, 1953, to enforce their demand for an increase in pay of 25 cents to \$2.87-1/2 per hour after their previous contract expired at midnight on June 30. Nearly three weeks later, during which time the local proposed to cut its wage-increase demand in half, Local 286 and its employing contractors signed an agreement on July 20 that provided a compromise rate hike from \$2.62-1/2 to \$2.75 per hour.

Exactly one year later, however, the union plumbers and pipefitters refused to work beginning July 1, 1954, after the contract between Local 286 and the Associated Mechanical Contractors expired at midnight



the previous day. Some of the local's members did continue to work on projects such as the city-owned **Brackenridge Hospital** and the Bergstrom Air Force Base emergency operating room that were being built by independent contractors who had signed a new agreement.

"We believe the \$3 per hour wage we are asking is a fair one, but the contractors have offered only a token increase which was not acceptable to our members," Local 286 **President R. L. Edrington** announced in a statement released the morning the strike began. "We therefore find it necessary to exercise our right not to work without a contract."

Again mirroring the previous year's strike, after three weeks the two sides reached an agreement on July 21 that called for an immediate wage increase of 12-1/2 cents per hour to bring the local's journeyman wage scale to \$2.87-12 per hour. The following day, its plumbers and fitters returned to work on a range of construction sites that included the new **St. David's Community Hospital** on east 32nd Street; a new general medical and surgical building at **Austin State Hospital**; a new cafeteria and new men's, law-student and women's dormitories; and a new chemistry building at **Huston-Tillotson College** in Austin.

REALIZING INTERNAL, EXTERNAL PROGRESS

The rapid growth of Austin that began in the 1950s and accelerated during the following decade was the product of the expanding educational institutions and state government the city hosts. Indeed, during the 1960s, the number of students attending the University of Texas doubled; between 1950 and 1970, the number of government employees working in Travis County tripled; and the city's population grew by 40 percent between 1960 and 1970 to more than a quarter-million residents.

Countless construction projects were launched to sustain that development and progress, many if not most of which employed Local 286 members, including the new **Holly Street Power Plant** that was initially built in 1958 to serve the growing Austin Community when it first produced electricity in 1960. The natural-gas- and petroleum-fired electric station would continue to employ the local's members until it was completed in 1974 and beyond before it was decommissioned in 2007.

With an abundance of manhours available for its membership, Local 286 was flourishing by the end of the 1950s and it also continued to grow. U.A. General Organizer Earl Griffin even proclaimed as much in his report in the January 1960 *Journal*:

"Business Manager Walter Lingo and Local 286 are showing other locals what can be done when proper attitude and desire are coupled to organize the unorganized."

To help advance the union piping industry and, concurrently, the welfare of the local, on July 1, 1966, the local and its contractors established through their working contract the **Austin Plumbing & Pipefitting Industry Fund**, into which contractors would make set contributions based on hours worked by the local's members. The fund would be utilized for "the promotion, education, advertising, direct contact work, and by any and all available legal means to create a better acceptance and image of" the union piping industry.

Throughout the 1960s, the local was also a part of the evolving technology sector that was beginning to establish itself in and around Austin. For instance, in 1967 union plumbers and fitters helped construct the first **IBM Corporation** campus in the city on Burnet Road, which hosted the 500-employee, 200,000-square-foot manufacturing plant for the company's groundbreaking Selectric typewriter.

(Continues after following spread.)

LOCAL 286 TRAINING AND EDUCATION

PROVIDING CENTRAL TEXAS WITH A SKILLED PIPING WORKFORCE

While Local 286 did not have a structured, formal training program in place to educate its apprentices (or “helpers”) until it first registered the [Austin Plumbers and Pipefitters Area Joint Apprenticeship Committee](#) with the U.S. Department of Labor’s National Apprenticeship Program on September 17, 1945, since its inception in 1923 the local has always made training its workforce a priority. In fact, during a September 2, 1941, general membership meeting, the local’s members voted to “compel helpers of Local 286 to attend plumbing class” at [Austin High School](#) by assessing them “50 cents for each class they miss.” The membership further resolved that the local would pay any fees for the class on behalf of its apprentices.



A Local 286 apprentice class at Austin High School during the 1940s, during which time the local held its apprentice-training classes at the school, includes (left to right, front row) Carl Green, Buster Ferrell, <unknown>, Ruben Barr, <unknown>, <unknown>; (middle row) O.D. Dill, <unknown>, <unknown>, Bill Coy, <unknown>, Jerry Basey, Robert Beaver, <unknown>, <unknown>; and (back row) Robert Frey Sr., <unknown>, <unknown>, James Hughes, <unknown>, JH Waker, John Melching, Billy Nauert, Gene Harlow, <unknown>, Joe Summers, and <unknown>.

With the inclusion of the new [Apprenticeship Educational Fund](#) fringe benefit in its collectively bargained working agreement with its employing contractors, which created the [Austin Plumbers & Pipefitters Training Trust](#) on July 1, 1969, Local 286 was able to enhance its [Plumbers and Pipefitters Apprenticeship Program](#). The five-year curriculum that included paid, on-the-job training – as the local’s apprenticeships have always been supplied – and structured, in-class instruction

was conducted in classroom and laboratory space at the Local 286 Training Center, which the local built on the grounds of its new union hall at 814 Airport Boulevard into which the local had moved in 1968.

During the 1980s, by which time a “high-tech revolution” was transforming the Austin economy and the city’s semiconductor industry was becoming one of the major sources of employment for Local 286 members and apprentices, the local’s training likewise expanded to offer more subjects. Into the 1990s, the Plumbers and Pipefitters Apprenticeship Program, jointly sponsored by the [Mechanical Contractors Association of Austin](#) and Local 286, had gone well beyond teaching just cutting, fitting, welding and plumbing to educating its students on fiber optics, medical-gas certification and backflow certification. Because the tech-manufacturing industry required “clean rooms” with a high level of purity in everything from production materials to circulated air, the local by then was also offering extensive training in fabrication for clean-room installations.

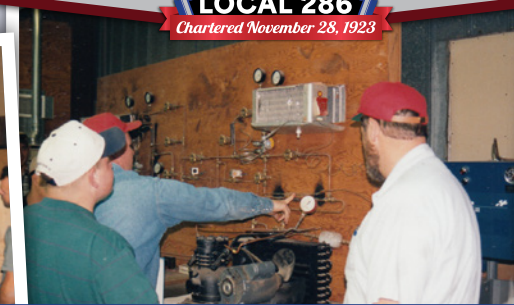
As Local 286 celebrates its 100th anniversary in 2023, its training program is administered by the [Plumbers and](#)



A Local 286 apprentice class during the early 1960s consisting of (left to right, kneeling front row) Tommy Barrett, <unknown>, <unknown>, Business Manager Walter Lingo, Greg Frey, <unknown> and Jay Harkins; and (standing back row) <unknown instructor>, Don Carlson, Gene Thornton, Jim Hamrick, <unknown>, David McKee, Buddie Howell, David Whiteaker and <unknown instructor> pose outside Albert Sidney Johnston High School in Austin, in which the local held its apprentice-training classes at the time.



Local 286 apprentices participate in training sessions at the local's former Training Center at 814 Airport Boulevard in 1997.



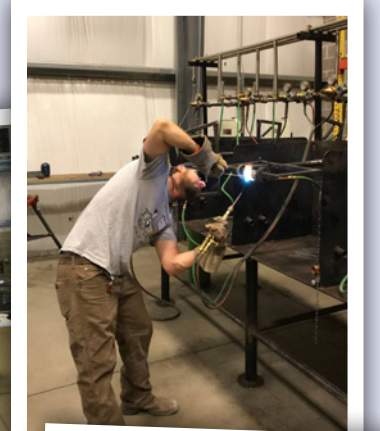
[Pipefitters Local Union 286 Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee](#), which is composed of three members each from the local and the contractors association. Recognized by the Texas Education Agency, the Veterans Administration, the Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training, and the U.S. Department of Labor, the program continues to utilize the age-old system of apprenticeship for trainees new to the industry. Those apprentices are required to complete the five-year program with 10,000 hours of on-the-job training and 1,225 hours of classroom instruction in subjects related to the trade, which are taught in the [Plumbers and Pipefitters Training Center](#) on the campus of the local’s new – and current – union hall at 814 Airport Boulevard (on the site of its former hall and training center) that it built in 2010.

Apprentice wage rates are based on standard set percentages of the journeyman rate starting at 55 percent of the journeyman rate for the first year and are increased twice each year for the remaining four-year period, as long as the apprentice maintains satisfactory progress.

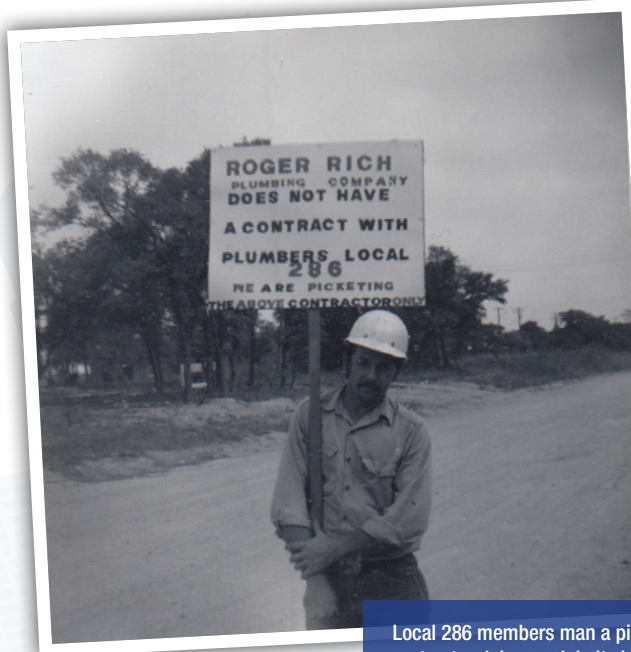
The Local 286 program also provides advanced training courses for the local’s journeyman plumbers and pipefitters so they remain up-to-date and current on new applications and technologies of the piping industry.



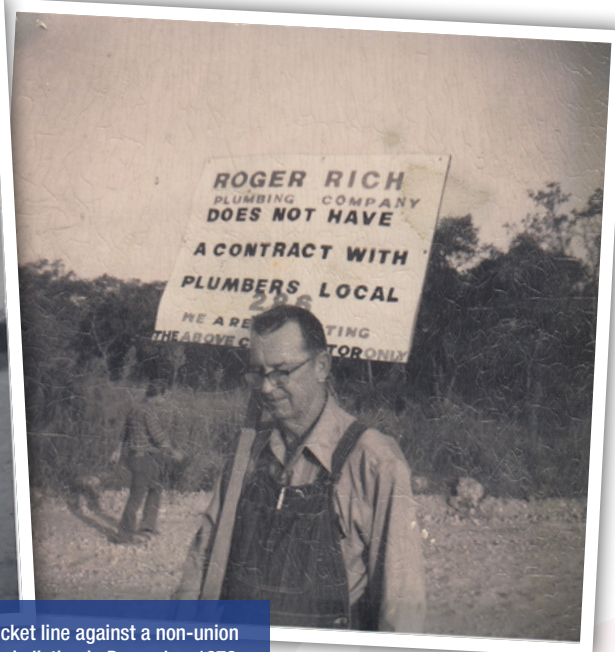
Local 286 apprentices participate in training sessions at the local's new and current Training Center at 814 Airport Boulevard in 2018.



Local 286 apprentices participate in a fourth-year Industrial Rigging class at the local's Training Center in September 2020.



Local 286 members man a picket line against a non-union contractor doing work in its jurisdiction in December 1972.



Since then, the local has played a major role in IBM's continued and expanded 56-year presence in the city, where at one point in 2011 the company's site was its second-largest single location in the United States, according to a June 15, 2011, *American-Statesman* article.

Local 286 also continued to flex its by-then-considerable muscle in order to gain improved working conditions and compensation for its membership. In 1969, for instance, the local struck the Associated Mechanical Contractors

and their jobs for 11 days beginning July 1 before gaining a first-ever three-year contract containing a total wage increase of \$2.25 per hour that pushed the local's wage scale to \$7 per hour beginning July 1, 1971, for the final year of the pact.

That contract also contained a provision to establish the **Local 286 Health and Welfare Fund** beginning May 1, 1973, to provide a health-insurance fringe benefit to the local's members. Going forward, contractors would contribute into the fund a set per-hour stipend based on hours worked by their Local 286 member employees, who would be afforded healthcare insurance for themselves and their families through the fund.

As the first half of the 1970s progressed, the roughly 360 members of Local 286 were fully employed on jobs that included the Austin School District's new **Lyndon B. Johnson High School** that opened in the fall of 1974, the new \$9-million **Austin High School** that would open in 1976, and renovations to Allison and Govalle elementary schools. Manhours were also provided elsewhere on projects such as two



Local 286 members helped build the Special Events Center multi-purpose arena on the campus of the University of Texas at Austin (shown in 2012) beginning in 1974 until it was opened in November 1977, after which it was renamed the Frank C. Erwin Jr. Center. (Demolition of the Erwin Center began in November 2023 to clear the site for the new University of Texas Medical Center.)



Sometime during the mid-1970s, Local 286 President JH Walker (second from left) and Business Manager James Hamrick (far right) hand former owner JH Cummings the local's final payment for its union hall and property at 814 Airport Boulevard it had purchased in 1968.

new dormitories at the University of Texas and numerous new office buildings in the Austin area.

But about 250 of the local's members walked off their 88 jobsites in Austin, San Marcos and Temple on August 21, 1974, in protest of some contractors' claim that, because of the Federal wage-price controls, they did not have to pay a 20-cent wage increase to the local's \$8.30 hourly scale that went into effect May 1 as part of a working agreement that had been in place since July 1, 1973. Conversely, as the *American-Statesman* reported on August 21, the union contended that the controls ended "when the federal apparatus for implementing them was dissolved April 30."

After a Federal judge issued a 10-day temporary restraining order against the local on August 23 at the request of the Mechanical Contractors Association, forcing the union's members to return to work, that was extended on September 3, the issue was sent to arbitration for a final resolution.

Ultimately, the contract was enforced, with the local's journeymen eventually earning \$9.50 per hour for its final year that expired April 30, 1976.

Meanwhile, among other ongoing work that was employing Local 286 members was construction of the \$34-million (equivalent to \$164-million in 2023) **Special Events Center**



Local 286 members (left to right) Don Carlson, Pat Baker and Richard "Rocket" Crosby work on installing a chiller during construction of an addition to Eanes Elementary School in West Lake Hills, Texas, in 1981.

LOCAL 286 HELPS THOSE IN NEED A CONSCIENTIOUS MEMBER OF ITS COMMUNITY

Throughout its century-long history, Local 286 has provided for the needs of those who are less fortunate or are in a time of crisis. Across 100 years, the local's membership has volunteered its labor for a wide array of functions and causes, and members have donated their resources to multiple charitable organizations.

The range of beneficiaries from the generosity of Local 286 was on display in 1959 alone. That year, the local participated in benevolent efforts that went from members volunteering their time to install piping and plumbing for the new [West Austin Little League](#) fields to building a mock bomb shelter for the city (in the middle of the Cold War between the United States and Soviet Union) so that residents could learn how they are constructed.

Before then, Local 286 began its long affiliation with the [Salvation Army](#) as early as 1938, when the local donated the plumbing labor by eight members to enable the Salvation Army to complete its new relief service station in time for use that fall when the number of transient and relief cases began to increase. By April 1942, as the United States was engulfed in World War II, the local and its individual members also purchased nearly \$40,000 in war stamps and bonds to help finance defense initiatives and military efforts, and they had also voted to give \$100 to "Navy relief," \$100 to the U.S.O. and \$50 to "China relief."

Among its continuous more-recent charitable work, in 1991 Local 286 and its membership provided no-cost air-conditioning repairs to the families of soldiers and sailors deployed during the Gulf War between Iraq and a 42-country coalition led by the United States. Countless other efforts have included the local's long relationship with [Habitat for Humanity](#), for which it donated plumbing services and held fundraising "fish-fry" dinners; its contributions to [Operation Blue Santa](#), which provides thousands of gifts to families in need in the City of Austin during the holiday season; and its commitment to aiding members and their families when in need – as it did after [Brother Brandon Church](#) was killed in an automobile accident in 2014 by hosting fundraisers for the his wife and young children.



New Local 286 journeymen Thomas "T.J." Dodd (left), who would go on to become the local's business manager, and Dale Wilhelm display their Outstanding Graduate awards after graduating from the local's Apprentice Training Program in 1995.

on the campus of the University of Texas at Austin beginning in August 1974. Known as "The Superdrum" because of its round, drum-like appearance and later renamed the Frank C. Erwin Jr. Center, the multi-purpose arena would open in November 1977 as the home of the school's men's and women's basketball teams.

Yet another strike by Local 286 was necessitated during that time beginning April 30, 1976, when about 250 members refused to work after the contractors association refused their request for a \$1.15-per-hour pay hike in a new, one-year contract. During the ensuing 36-day strike, more than half of the striking union



Local 286 Business Manager Chap Thornton presents a donation from the local to representatives of Operation Blue Santa in December 2022.



Construction of the new Local 286 Union Hall and Training Center at 814 Airport Boulevard on the site of its former union hall in 2009 and 2010 after the old facility was demolished and its sign was taken down (top left photo). During construction of the new facilities, the local rented a small office space on Airport and borrowed training space from the I.B.E.W. and Sheet Metal Workers unions on Saturdays for its apprentice training program.



BUSINESS MANAGERS MOVED UP TO INTERNATIONAL OFFICES

Local 286 former business managers **Brother Billy Bob Long** and **Brother Corby Shelton** were both promoted to work with the U.A. International Office while still active in their leadership positions with the local. Brother Corby, who was business manager beginning in 2004, served as a U.A. special representative from late 2012 until his election to international representative for the State of Texas at the 2016 U.A. Convention, a position he holds as the local celebrates its 100th anniversary in 2023.

Brother Long, who was business manager beginning in 1977, went to work for the U.A. in 1991 as a special representative before he was elected an international representative, a position he held until his retirement in June 2005. He passed away in February 2018 as a 53-year member of Local 286.

members traveled to other locations to work with sister U.A. locals before the Mechanical Contractors Association agreed on June 6 to a \$1.65-per-hour wage increase distributed over a two-year contract period. Under its terms, the local's journeymen received a 65-cent raise to \$10.25 per hour retroactive to May 1, another 20-cent on November 1 and 40-cent increases in May and November 1977 that boosted the scale to \$11.25 per hour until April 1978.

TECHNOLOGY SURGE DRIVES LOCAL TO 100

The arrival of IBM in Austin in 1967 with construction of its typewriter plant and then **Texas Instruments** in 1969 – both of which had been attracted to the city by the University of Texas at Austin, a leading research institution, and the city's low cost of living – “paved the way for the development of the city's technology ecosystem,” according to

the Austin Technology Council. Subsequently, as the Council further stated, during the 1970s and 1980s, “Austin witnessed a surge in high-tech companies, which earned the city the nickname ‘Silicon Hills.’”

Following a slow employment period for the Local 286 membership during the early 1980s, when an economic recession considered to be the worst downturn since the Great Depression (until the so-called “Great Recession” of 2007 through 2009) gripped the United States, the local became fully immersed in the tech boom that enveloped and advanced its jurisdiction. As such, the local would also progress and grow considerably over the following decades, into the new 2000 millennium and through to its 100th charter anniversary in 2023, by which time its membership had grown from about 350 in the pre-tech-era mid-1970s to more than 1,600 members.

Employment opportunities for the local multiplied after more technology businesses that focused on semiconductor manufacturing, software development and computer-systems design came to the city beginning in 1983, creating a large glut of related work for the



Local 286 member John Henry Melching Jr. (left) receives his 65-year U.A. membership award from Business Manager T.J. Dodd in 2013. Brother Melching would pass away on July 24, 2020, at the age of 96 as a 70-year member of Local 286.



(Left to right) Local 286 Plumbers and Pipefitters Apprenticeship Program 2014 Outstanding HVAC Graduate Jason Zapata, Outstanding Plumbing Graduate David Kreinbrink, Outstanding Pipefitter Graduate Bobby Smith and Outstanding Welding Graduate Homero Fernandez display their awards following graduation ceremonies in June 2014.

Local 286 membership as well as travelers from sister U.A. locals. Additionally, according to the Austin Technology Council, a collaboration of semiconductor manufacturers founded in Austin in 1988 induced major semiconductor companies such as **Motorola** (now NXP Semiconductors), **Advanced Micro Devices** (AMD) and **Samsung Electronics** to open labs and research facilities in the region – many of which were built, expanded and maintained by union piping professionals working through Local 286, which during the 1980s and 1990s hosted as many as 400 U.A. travelers at times.

More specifically, the tech projects on which Local 286 members and travelers have worked have ranged from construction of a 220,000-square-foot 3M electronics manufacturing plant in Austin in 1982 to a \$4-billion renovation of Samsung's Austin semiconductor plant in 2012 and 2013 to accommodate full system large-scale integrated (LSI) circuit production (a job for which Local

286 members were taught site-specific welding). But the evolution of the IBM facility in Austin has perhaps been the primary catalyst of the local's own development over those decades.

Further contributing to Local 286's progress has been a steady stream of piping work in other industries, perhaps most significantly applications for medical gasses in all of the hospitals in Austin. The continued expansion of the University of Texas likewise has provided near-consistent manhours for the local's members over the past 20 years.

During that time, as the Local 286 membership also continued to grow, the local built its current, spacious and state-of-the-art **Union Hall** and **Training Center** at the site of its former facility at 814 Airport Boulevard in Austin. The local moved its offices, meeting spaces and training program into the new, 30,000-total-square-foot buildings in November 2010.



The Local 286 Plumbers and Pipefitters Apprenticeship Program graduating class of 2019.

As favorable conditions persisted throughout much of the balance of the decade, **Business Manager T.J. Dodd** noted in the March 2017 issue of the local's newsletter, "It has been a busy winter and we are blessed with more work than we have had in Austin in a long time. ... The work here is crazy right now!" Adding to the available manhours for the local's members throughout its jurisdiction were projects at Samsung and a large amount of work in the Austin downtown area, where more than 100 U.A. craftspeople were employed on construction of the 37-story **Fairmont Hotel** that would open in March 2018 as the city's tallest hotel. What's more, at least 100 more members were working on various sites at the University of Texas during that time, and numerous projects for the **Austin**

Independent School District and **Austin Community College** would further enhance the local's employment.

Local 286 was only initially interrupted with 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. While the local maintained its offices to support its working members, who continued on multiple jobsites as "essential workers" despite the uncertain conditions, and only instituted distance learning for apprentices from March 2020 until summer break beginning May 2020, its members were able to work as many hours in 2020 (2.3 million) as they had in 2019 (2.4 million).

In fact, the local never slowed down as a workforce and set a record by working 3.4-million manhours in 2021. What's more, it actually grew and took in a record 150 first-year apprentices in September of that year.

Local 286 was also able to secure its current working contract with the Mechanical Contractors Association and Sheet Metal and Air Conditioning Contractors' National Association (SMACNA) of Austin, which went into effect on June 1, 2021, and continues until June 2, 2024. The agreement provided an immediate new journeyman base wage of \$32.05 per hour for the first year of the pact, which was supplemented by fringe benefits for which contractors initially made hourly contributions per hour worked by a member of \$2.85 into the **U.A. National Pension Fund**; \$4.15 into the Local 286 **Money Purchase Pension Plan** retirement fund; \$7.07 into the Health and Welfare Fund; 75 cents into the

Austin Plumbers & Pipefitters Training Trust Fund; 10 cents into the **U.A. International Training Fund**; 16 cents into the **Southwest Pipe Trades Association** fund and 10 cents into the Industry Fund.

Over the second year of the contract beginning June 6, 2022, and ending June 4, 2023, an additional \$1.55 would be added to its total wage-and-benefits package of \$47.23 per hour. The third – and current – year of the contract, which began June 5, 2023, provided an additional \$1.55 per hour, which boosted the total, current journeyman pay package to \$50.33 per hour.

Meanwhile, as the technology sector in its jurisdiction remained a key source of employment of Local 286 members into the 2020s, it also helped produce substantial ancillary work for the local – some of which were and continue to be major suppliers of work for union plumbers and fitters. Perhaps most notable, Local 286 members helped build the high-tech **Gigafactory Texas** automotive manufacturing facility in Austin for **Tesla**, which designs and builds electric vehicles, beginning in July 2020. The 10-million-square-foot factory became the U.S. manufacturing hub for the company's Model Y car and the home of the futuristic Cybertruck after it opened in 2021, and it also serves as the site of Tesla's corporate headquarters.

Additionally, as recently as 2022 while Austin was in the midst of another tech-manufacturing and housing boom that has been adding to the city's

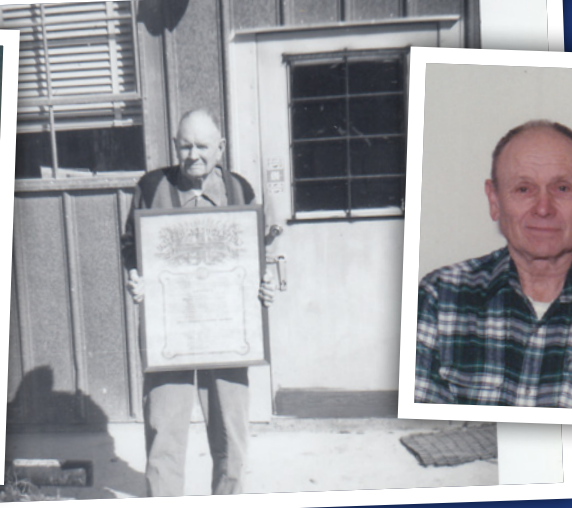
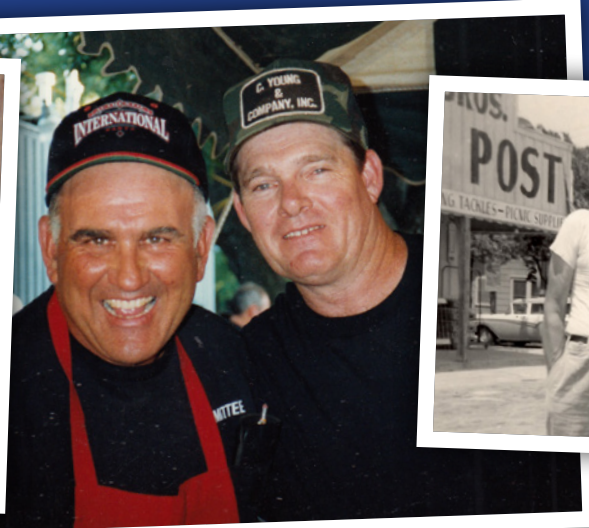
skyline, Local 286 plumbers and fitters began work on the new, 74-story **Waterline** supertall skyscraper being built in downtown Austin. The tower, which is situated along Waller Creek, will be the tallest structure in the State of Texas once completed in 2026.

Until then – and beyond – Local 286 will maintain its primary mission of servicing the piping industry throughout its jurisdiction, which covers much of Central Texas and encompasses Travis, Williamson, Hays, Bastrop, Caldwell, Blanco, Burnet, Llano, San Saba, Lampasas, Bell, Lee and Mason counties. To that end, the local will continue to represent and prepare its membership to properly fabricate, install and service piping systems on jobsites involving garden and high-rise apartment buildings, large and small office buildings, supermarkets, food warehousing and processing facilities, power plants, chemical installations, factories, public buildings and healthcare facilities – while ensuring all projects are completed right the first time, on budget and on time. ♦



Richard Townsend (left) and son Tate Townsend receive their 55- and 25-year U.A. membership awards, respectively, in December 2020, Richard having been initiated into the local on September 20, 1965, and Tate having been initiated almost 30 years later on March 1, 1995.







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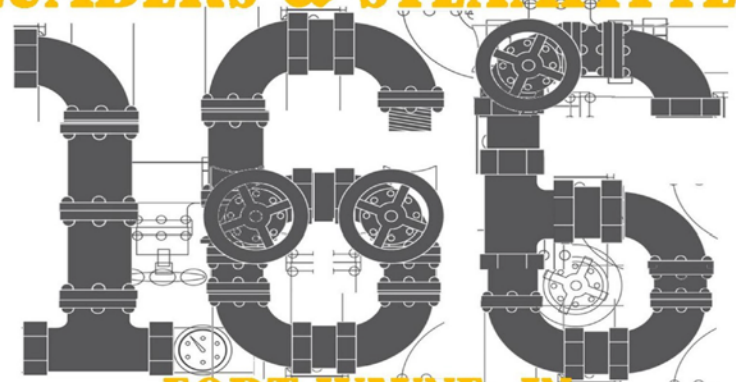
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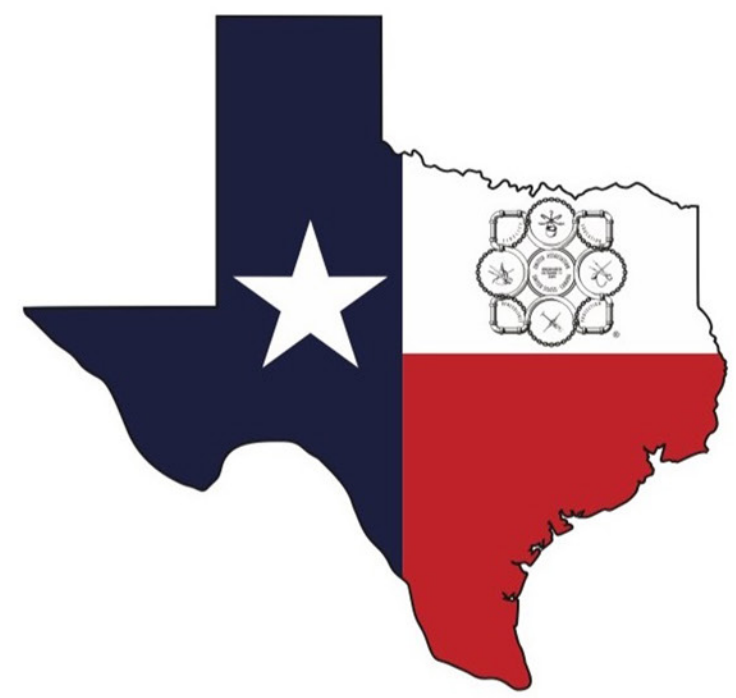


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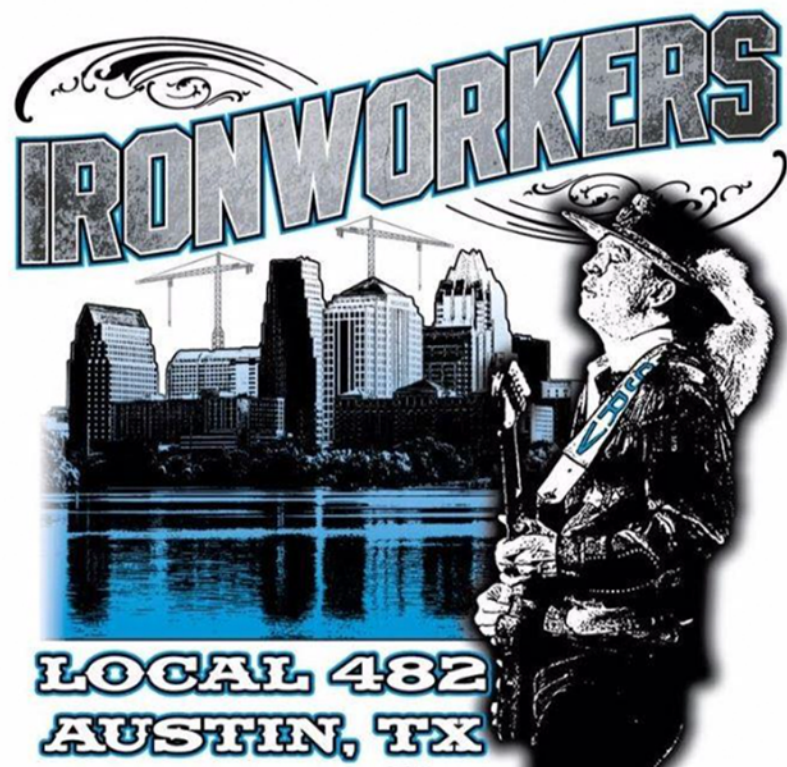
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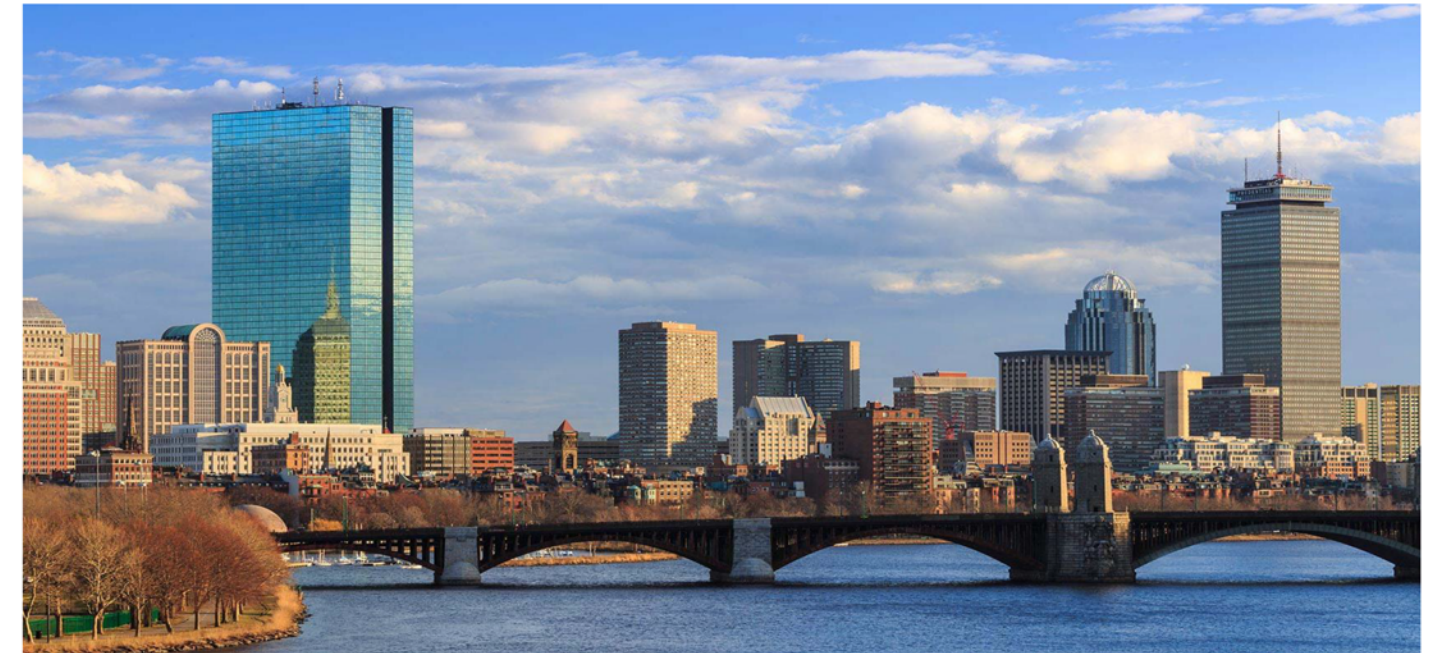
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Jake Holbrook
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From the Officers, Members and Staff of
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on their
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Larry Mazzola Jr.
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