

SPRINKLERFITTERS LOCAL NO. 704, DETROIT



100TH ANNIVERSARY
COMMEMORATIVE HISTORY

2021

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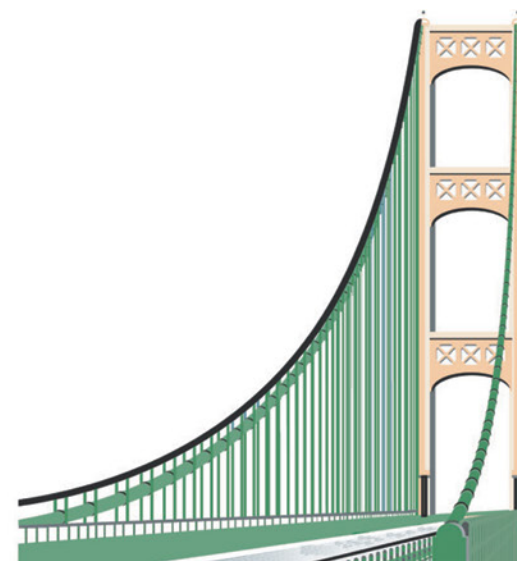
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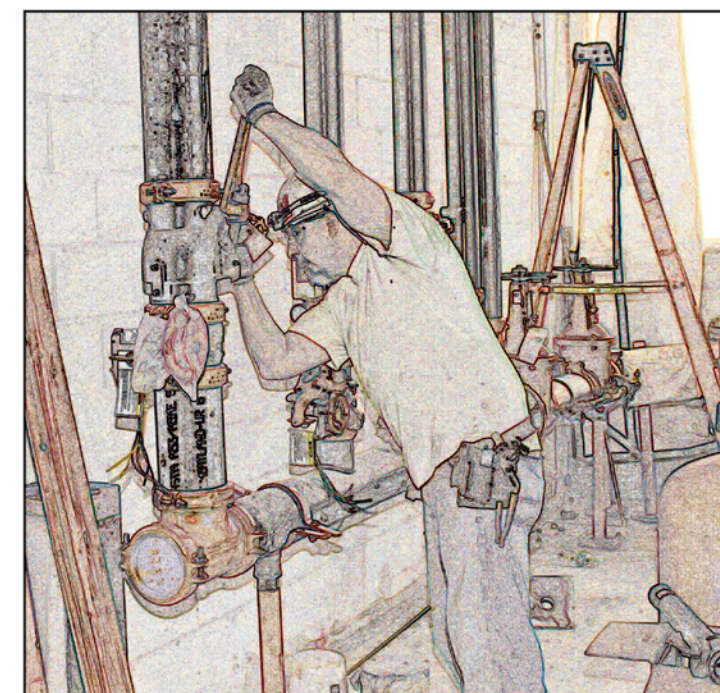
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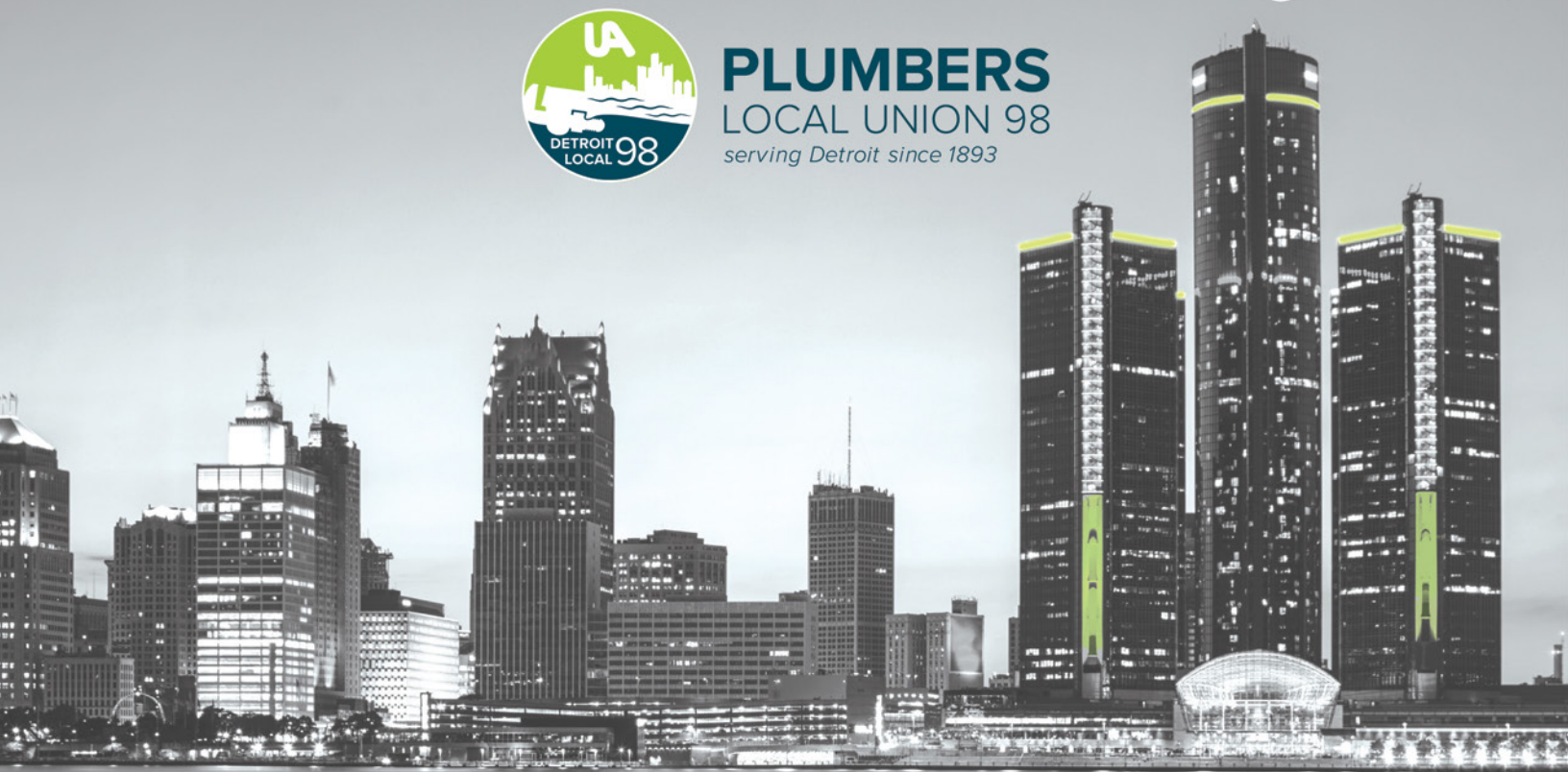
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*In recognition and appreciation for
your dedication to the labor movement
we extend our congratulations and best wishes
to the officers and members of*

LOCAL UNION 704

on your

100th ANNIVERSARY

from the

Officers, Members and Staff

of the

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SPRINKLER FITTERS LOCAL NO. 704, METROPOLITAN DETROIT
100TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION EVENT

Saturday, October 30, 2021
6:00 p.m. to Midnight

Motor City Casino
2901 Grand River Avenue, Detroit

Cocktail Reception 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Program & Dinner 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Entertainment & Dancing 8:30 p.m. to Midnight

U.A. 704



100 YEARS

WE CONTINUE TO ADAPT AND UNIFY TO PROVIDE SERVICE AND PROTECTION

Dear Members and Friends,

It is with great honor that I welcome everyone here to celebrate the 100th anniversary of United Association Sprinklerfitters Local No. 704. On behalf of the officers and members of Local 704, we welcome you to the City of Detroit to commemorate this very special occasion.

The United Association decreed that on June 21, 1921, the sprinklerfitters of Detroit would be granted a charter as a local union of the international. Since that day, the brothers and sisters of Local 704 (which at first was auxiliary Local No. 669) have installed, repaired and maintained fire-protection systems throughout the Metropolitan Detroit area.

Our work has become increasingly more sophisticated, as we have gone from installing basic wet and dry systems to Nitrogen systems, mist systems, CPVC, deluge and pre-action systems. Instead of threaded pipe mains, we now have grooved couplings. There are no more leaded underground joints; instead, we now have poly-fused underground mains. With technology always evolving in our industry, we are confident we will always be able to keep up through our state-of-the art training center.

Through the years, our members have been able to answer the call for any type of work the area can build. Be it an auto plant, stadium, casino, hospital, university, major warehouses, single-family dwellings or an 80-year-old hotel renovation, Local 704 members have been there for it all. And we will continue to install, repair and maintain our work with the pride of union members.

Over the years, Local 704 has seen the boom times as well as its downturns. From having to send our brothers to fight wars overseas to building the City of Detroit, the union was there. From the aftermath of riots in the streets to building world-class medical facilities, Local 704 was there. From a major economic downturn that affected southeastern Michigan hard to building arenas and Amazon warehouses, Local 704 still stood strong. Now, from a pandemic and its ever-increasing precautions to rebuilding the auto industry in the heart of Detroit, we are still here. It is a testament to say that whatever the world may throw at us, if we stand together as a union, we can overcome anything.

I would like to personally thank every past and present member for going out everyday and working for a better future. As a second-generation member, I am truly thankful for all of the men and women who worked so hard before me. I look forward to seeing today's members and the future members keeping the traditions and craftsmanship of Local 704 going strong into the future.

Respectfully and fraternally,

Greg Herman, Business Manager/Financial Secretary-Treasurer
United Association Sprinklerfitters Local No. 704



This book was proudly produced by

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U.A. Sprinklerfitters Local 704 and Union Histories give special thanks to the following for their contributions to this history book:

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The 100-Year History of U.A. Local No. 704

A CENTURY OF PROTECTING & SERVING GREATER DETROIT

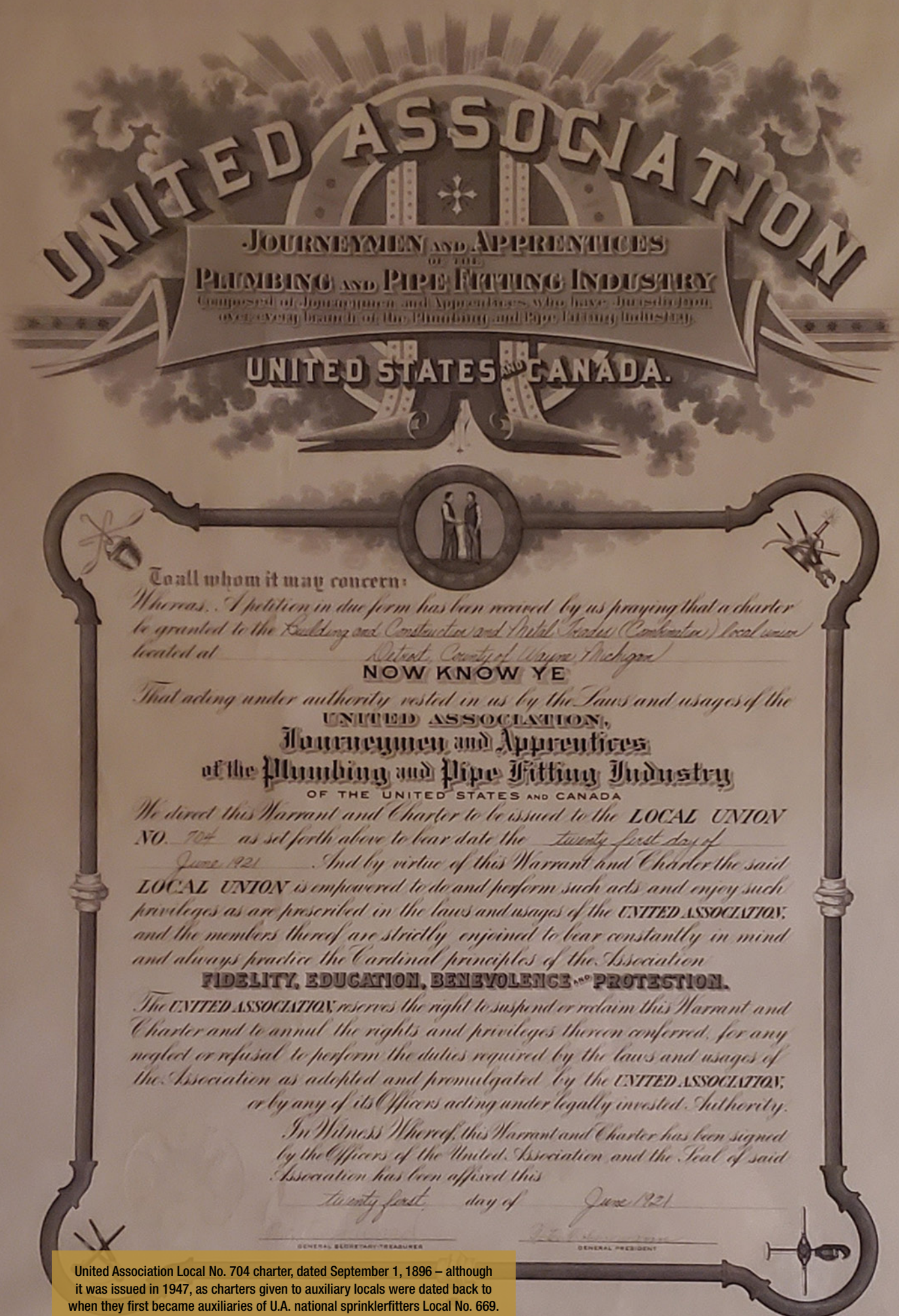


PRELUDE TO A PERMANENT LOCAL

Sprinkler-fitting tradesmen in the Detroit area first organized and were granted a charter from the **United Association of Plumbers, Gasfitters and Steamfitters of the United States and Canada (U.A.)** as sprinklerfitters and helpers (or apprentices) **Local No. 358** on May 3, 1907. After instituting the local during a meeting that day, U.A. General Organizer Edward W. Leonard optimistically announced in the June issue of the union's monthly *Journal* publication, "Ceremony was held under the most favorable conditions and with every prospect of becoming one of our vigorous locals. **Brother Bert Marr** of the new local is one of those whose efforts are wholly responsible for the creation of Local No. 358, and I hope that his zeal will be rewarded by a bettering of conditions for the sprinklerfitters."

But the local faced anti-union opposition almost immediately, as two of the four contractors working in Detroit to which it presented working agreements in June outright refused to negotiate with the local, much less sign the contract. The two non-complying companies went on to not only discharged members of the local whom they were employing, but they also refused to employ any man carrying a Local 358 union-membership card and likewise threatened to immediately discharge any employee whom they determined to be connected with the union. Furthermore, the contractors brought two Circuit Court of Wayne County, Michigan, injunctions against the local.

"It appears that the employing sprinklerfitters companies have concentrated all their efforts to crush Local 358," Brother Leonard declared



United Association Local No. 704 charter, dated September 1, 1896 – although it was issued in 1947, as charters given to auxiliary locals were dated back to when they first became auxiliaries of U.A. national sprinklerfitters Local No. 669.

in the December *Journal*. “During the short time Local No. 358 has been in existence, it has been necessary for this small local to stand the brunt of the opposition existing and being perpetuated by the employing sprinklerfitters companies. ... The instances cited are sufficient to show the bitter contest that is being waged against Local No. 358 by the employing companies.”

In that atmosphere, Local 358 fought to survive for another roughly three years before ultimately going defunct sometime in 1910.

The next year, however, General Organizer Frank J. Kennedy organized another local of 25 sprinklerfitters and helpers in the city. The U.A. chartered the group in November 1911 as **Local No. 557**.

DIRECTED BY THE INTERNATIONAL

Prior to the formation of both Local 358 and then Local 557, in 1901 the first two sprinklerfitters locals, one each from St. Louis and Chicago, joined the U.A. – which was a major step forward in bringing the various piping crafts together in the international union.

Fourteen years later and just four years after Local 557 was chartered in Detroit, the U.A. signed a major working agreement on April 6, 1915, the **National Automatic Sprinkler Association** (N.A.S.A.), an employer group of the larger sprinkler-manufacturing companies in the United States. Once in effect on July 1, 1915, the five-year contract fixed the journeyman-sprinklerfitters wage rate at \$4 per day with a built-in adjustment to \$4.50 per day for the last two years of the contract, which expired July 20, 1920. Previously, non-union sprinklerfitters were being paid \$1 per day in wages. The pact also established the eight-

U.A. FORMED OVER 130 YEARS AGO

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

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

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

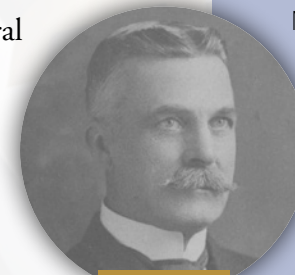
The U.A. endured through two world wars and the Great Depression, after which on January 1, 1947, it changed its name to the **United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry of the United States and Canada**. Throughout its more than 130 years, the U.A.'s skilled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

hour workday with a half-day on Saturdays throughout the year for the union's members.

Announcing the agreement in the May 1915 *Journal*, U.A. General Secretary-Treasurer Thomas E. Burke wrote, “After a very patient battle, lasting nearly eight years, our general president, Brother (John R.) Alpine, ably assisted by general organizer Brother Leonard and our



Patrick J. Quinlan



Richard A. O'Brien



Members of Detroit's U.A. sprinklerfitters Local No. 358 gathered for the city's Labor Day celebration in 1907.

second vice president, Brother Joseph Vallila, have entered into and signed up an agreement with all the great sprinkler companies on the American continent unionizing all their road men ... which we consider one of the greatest accomplishments that the United Association can record."

"We desire also to eulogize and appreciate the very fair spirit manifested by these large sprinkler establishments," Brother Burke continued, "when they decided to meet us in conference and their painstaking efforts in trying to meet as fully as possible our demands made upon them for the improvements of the conditions of their men." The general secretary-treasurer then emphatically summarized the achievement:

"We feel greatly elated over the success in securing this agreement for the sprinkling-fitters, not only because it will be the means of aiding greatly in protecting them and their trade and improving their conditions, but it also demonstrates the fact that the United Association is in a position to carry out the mandates of its conventions and especially the last convention, when we were ordered and directed to unionize all sprinklerfitters in our territory."

The U.A. then chartered **Road Sprinklerfitters Local No. 669** in May 1915 to represent the sprinklerfitters and helpers within its jurisdiction, all of whom would come under the new international agreement. The new local was officially named as such in the U.A. Constitution, Section 88, because most sprinklerfitters were "road men" who continuously traveled for the larger sprinkler companies from state to state in order to maintain their employment installing sprinkler equipment.

With the formation of Local 669, sprinklerfitters were taken directly into the U.A. as members and not into individual locals. Therefore, each sprinklerfitter actually held a general membership in the U.A. as the local was set up as a division of the international union and administered directly out of its general headquarters in Chicago.

The U.A. amalgamated Local 557 into the international Local 669 the following year. However, unlike in several other cities, the U.A. did not set up an auxiliary local in Detroit and, instead, the city's union sprinklerfitters were initially governed solely by U.A. international officers.

(It would not be until 1972 that Local 669 would function as an autonomous local union of the U.A.)

A BRANCH DEVELOPS IN DETROIT

As the sprinklerfitters of Detroit made significant progress and growth over the few years following their merger into Local 669 in 1916, the city's members vigorously lobbied for an auxiliary local of their own. Already by 1920, Local 669 auxiliaries had been established in Baltimore; Boston; Buffalo; Cleveland; Los Angeles; Newark, New Jersey; Philadelphia; Pittsburgh; and Providence, Rhode Island – where sprinklerfitters were allowed some manner of self-governance.

That year, the city's members of Local 669 also went on strike beginning May 1 for an increase in wages from their employing contractors. The members agreed to return to work on May 14 by a "near-unanimous vote" after General Organizer Leonard visited them on May 14 and explained the strike was in violation of the Local 669 international agreement because they "went out without first trying to adjust their grievances." He also assured them that General President John Coefield would address their request for an increase in wages with the company for which they were working.

Brother Leonard also acknowledged the need for a subsidiary local in Detroit and even declared in the April 1920 *Journal*, "They should be given recognition by the sprinklerfitters' employers in their request for an auxiliary charter." He went on to state:

"In my opinion, an auxiliary charter for the sprinklerfitters in Detroit should be agreed to, as this is more than the ordinary city for the sprinkler-fitting industry."

The U.A. granted Detroit an Auxiliary Local 669 charter on **June 21, 1921**, adding it to the ranks of the union's nine other auxiliaries. General President Coefield himself travelled to the city soon afterwards and presented the charter to **Brother George Tries**, who was the

auxiliary local's first business agent and secretary, after which Detroit's U.A. sprinklerfitters held general membership meetings every Monday afternoon in the Detroit Labor Temple on High Street (now East Vernor Highway).

During its 20th Convention held in Providence beginning September 19, 1921, the U.A. put its full support behind its member sprinklerfitters by approving a resolution endorsing the passage of legislation to provide for the installation of automatic sprinklers, and that it would "use every effort and influence to assist in obtaining this much-needed legislation." Brother Tries addressed the convention to report that a survey of the Detroit public school system had just been completed and found "conditions as far as fire hazards are concerned deplorable, and we understand the same situation exists pretty generally all over the country." He further declared to delegates at the gathering, "This matter of obtaining sprinkler legislation is very important, not only from the standpoint of our trade but from the standpoint of us all as citizens."

Then, with the Local 669 current two-year international agreement set to expire July 1, 1922, that April representatives from all of its auxiliary sprinklerfitters branches, including Brother Tries of Detroit, met in Washington, D.C., in April to discuss and make recommendations for a new agreement to present to the N.A.S.A. The sprinklerfitters' delegates reached an understanding and presented a plan for the continuation of the current Local 669 agreement for one year until July 1, 1923, at the existing wage scale of \$7.20 per hour for member journeymen of all auxiliary locals and all road sprinklerfitters. After the N.A.S.A. contractors accepted the proposal, the extension was unanimously approved by the auxiliaries.

The Local 669 auxiliary locals had also approved a resolution during their April 1922 meeting recommending a measure adopted by



the U.A. convention in Providence regarding the issuance of separate local charters for sprinklerfitter auxiliaries with 25 or more members “be held in abeyance for the one-year period, as we deem it inadvisable to attempt the carrying out of the convention’s action at this time because of the extreme depression existing in the industry.” In explaining their actions, the auxiliary delegates further conveyed that while they still favored separate charters in certain cities, they preferred that the U.A. postpone their issuance “until a more favorable time.”

The U.A. and the N.A.S.A. began negotiations for another new contract in February 1923. After subsequent meetings in March and April, the two groups signed a new, three-year agreement that went into effect on July 1, 1923, and provided an 80-cent wage increase to \$8 per day for sprinklerfitters and a 60-cent increase to \$5 per day for helpers, with a clause to open the agreement each year to discuss the wage scales.

When the new contract reached its first year on July 1, 1924, U.A. officers again went into negotiations with contractors for a pay increase for sprinklerfitter members. After several meetings, the N.A.S.A. agreed to raise the journeyman rate to \$9 per day and the apprentice rate to \$6.40 per day.

Meanwhile, as the effects of the earlier recession (referred to as the “Depression of 1920-1921”) continued to diminish and the so-called “Roaring Twenties” progressed, work opportunities increased for Detroit Auxiliary Local 669 and its situation steadily and markedly improved, despite ongoing non-union competition in its jurisdictional area. After visiting the city in late 1925, General Organizer Richard P. Walsh even reported in that year’s October issue of the U.A. *Journal*:

“This local is in a prosperous condition, all of the members employed <sic> and prospects are excellent.”

CONFRONTING DEPRESSION, WAR

But the **Great Depression**, the cataclysmic worldwide financial and societal disaster that was triggered by the U.S. stock market crash of October 29, 1929 (history’s “Black Tuesday”) and persisted throughout the 1930s, stifled Detroit’s Auxiliary Local 669 throughout much of the decade. In fact, as late as March 25, 1938, during a general meeting that day the local voted to allow any member who was unemployed for a period of four weeks to pay a reduced \$1-per-month dues “to stay in good standing with the U.A.” What’s more, on April 22 that year, the local discontinued paying salaries to its officers “as an economy measure during the present recession in business” before reinstating the salaries on November 1.

The devastating financial collapse likewise struck U.A. members across the country particularly hard as unemployment among their ranks soared during the decade. “Construction all but stopped, and this led to a significant decline in manufacturing,” the union’s official international 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.”

The U.A. history even notes that the *Journal* ran several issues during the early 1930s that offered advice on how members could stretch their wages 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. Meanwhile, as its overall international membership declined and the U.A. held no conventions between 1928 and 1938, “the union held it together,” its history declares.

U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s federal “New Deal” legislation to create jobs and combat the destructive effects of the depression provided

a measure of relief to the country and the U.A. membership. As part of the program, in June 1933 the U.S. Congress passed the National Industrial Recovery Act, which in part protected collective-bargaining rights for unions and set parameters to regulate industry for fair wages and prices (although the act would be declared unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1935 and permanently suspended).

The New Deal also established the Public Works Administration, an employment program for federally funded projects, and the Roosevelt government in November 1933 also created the Civil Works Administration, whose mission was to rapidly create mostly manual-labor construction jobs. Federally funded projects in the Detroit area that put labor to work during the balance of the decade included construction of the new Western High School, the Parkside low-rent housing development and Jefferson Station Post Office.

At that time, Auxiliary Local 669 members were earning \$1.25 per hour – or \$10 per eight-hour day – under their contract with the N.A.S.A. Privately funded jobs on which the local’s sprinklerfitters were working at the time included a project for the Detroit-based **Chris-Craft Boat Company**.

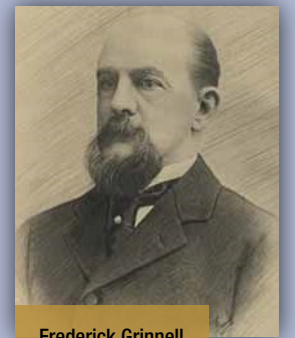
Meanwhile, the auxiliary local continued to request that the U.A. grant it a charter as an independent local of the union. To help bolster its campaign, the Detroit steamfitters even passed a motion during its October 22, 1937, general meeting to form a committee that would meet with Detroit’s U.A. plumbers **Local No. 98** and steamfitters **Local No. 636** “in regard to getting a charter in Detroit.”

The adverse effects of the Great Depression continued into 1939, however, to the point at which that February that local voted to suspend its practice of paying

HISTORY OF FIRE-SUPPRESSION SYSTEMS

(Abridged from “Building Michigan: Fireproofing, History in the Making,” by Marty Mulcahy; The Building Tradesman, June 26, 2020)

It’s not clear when the first fire-suppression sprinkler system was installed in a Michigan building, but at the time, the systems were expensive and were generally placed in factories or warehouses in an effort by owners to save property – and lower insurance costs. Michigan, was however, very much a leader in designing and constructing “fireproof” factories and commercial buildings through the use of the Kahn system of reinforced concrete, which was invented in the state.



Frederick Grinnell

“Automatic sprinkler systems have been used to protect lives and property in commercial and industrial buildings for more than a century,” *Fire in the United States, 1989-1998*, states. “Originally introduced to protect property, sprinkler systems also have been adopted for life safety in hospitals, nursing homes, hotels and apartment buildings.”

The first “modern” fire sprinkler system had its start in 1812, when Architect William Congreve installed the first one in the Theatre Royal in London, which consisted of a series of pierced pipes below a large container of water that was tapped in the event of a fire. From 1852 to 1885, perforated pipe systems were used in textile mills throughout New England as a means of fire protection – but they needed someone present to turn them on.

The first automatic sprinkler system was patented by Philip W. Pratt of Massachusetts in 1872.

Henry S. Parmelee of New Haven, Connecticut, is considered the inventor of the first practical automatic sprinkler head after he improved upon the Pratt patent and created a better, heat-actuated sprinkler system. In 1874, he installed his fire-sprinkler system into the piano factory that he owned.

Between 1878 and 1882 some 200,000 Parmelee sprinklers were installed in mills throughout New England.

In 1881, Frederick Grinnell patented and began manufacturing an improved sprinkler head, part of the first practical automatic sprinkler system in the United States. Nine years later, he invented the glass disc sprinkler, eventually amassing 40 patents for improvements to his devices.

By 1895, the fire sprinkler industry had grown tremendously in the Northeast – but the lack of standards for hardware and installation was a problem. In response, a coalition of manufacturers and insurance-company representatives formed the **National Fire Protection Association** in 1896 to establish and disseminate fire-sprinkler installation standards.

Fire protection then started to become a part of national construction codes at the turn of the last century.



sick benefits to members who were unable to work because of illness or injury, for which the working membership had been paying a 50-cent monthly assessment to support. But by that time, as the economic despair showed signs of finally subsiding, several members were working with Local 636 on various jobs under control of that local, while other Auxiliary Local 669 members were performing sprinkler work on projects including the **General Motors (GM) Research Lab** that had been built in 1928 and a new **Montgomery Ward** store on Grand River Avenue in Detroit.

The outbreak of **World War II** in Asia and Europe during the late 1930s brought with it an influx of work for U.A. locals nationwide. As the demands of a wartime economy began pulling the nation and unions completely out of the depression, U.A. membership across North America would swell from 81,000 in 1941 to 210,000 members in just a couple of years, with many of those members working in shipyards, weapons plants, aircraft factories and other facilities to support the war.

As work opportunities increased in Detroit, Auxiliary Local 669 went on strike against the N.A.S.A. on July 1, 1941, to gain a \$13-per-day wage scale for journeymen and \$8 per day for apprentices. During the strike, the local assessed each member who was working and receiving \$13 per day from independent employers \$2 per day for a strike fund.

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, after which it declared war on Japan the following day and Germany and the United States declared war on each other on December 11. Almost immediately, Detroit factories retooled as America's largest industry shifted from making cars to bombers, tanks and more at unparalleled speed, turning the city into "the biggest war boomtown of them all," according to a *HISTORY.com* article.



Interior of the Willow Run Bomber Plant near Ypsilanti, Michigan, shown in 1944, for which members of Local 704 installed the fire-sprinkler system in 1941 before it was completed that year to build B-24 "Liberator" bombers for the U.S. military during World War II. (Furnished by the Detroit Historical Society.)



Among multiple military-related projects on which Detroit's union sprinklerfitters were employed during the war was construction of the Ford Motor Company's 3.5-million-square-foot **Willow Run Bomber Plant** near Ypsilanti, Michigan, which when completed in 1941 went on to mass-produce 8,685 B-24 "Liberator" bombers before the plant closed in 1945.

A FITTERS CHARTER OF THEIR OWN

Delegates from U.A. locals around North America attending the union's international convention in 1946 unanimously approved the reorganization of its sprinklerfitter members and their auxiliary branches of Local 669 into autonomous locals by granting them individual charters. During proceedings of the convention addressing

sprinklerfitters' local sovereignty, General President Martin P. Durkin noted, "It gives auxiliary organizations an opportunity to bargain with their employers on any subject contained in the agreement."

Additionally, as convention minutes recorded, the union's relationship with the N.A.S.A. was "sound and constructive," allowing it to have collectively bargained for new agreements "peacefully and satisfactorily." As such, earlier that year, the U.A. had negotiated an updated working contract with the contractors that represented several distinct improvements in both pay and working conditions, perhaps most notably increased wage rates for journeymen to \$1.75 per hour (or \$14 per day) and helpers to \$1.10 per hour (or \$8.80 per day). Upgrades in working conditions included paid vacations for

all sprinklerfitters on the basis of one week for one year of employment and two weeks for five or more years.

Additionally, an accord was also reached providing that when local charters were granted to auxiliary branches of Local 669, "such local unions would become parties to the agreement."

In the immediate aftermath of the convention's decision, Detroit's sprinklerfitters in November 1946 sent a letter to the U.A. general office requesting that they be granted a charter. What's more, the city's auxiliary members also asked that the international union notify the N.A.S.A. that they wished to renegotiate the international five-year agreement "in its entirety."

At long last, in 1947 the U.A. granted a local charter to the members of Auxiliary Local 669 of Detroit as **Local No. 704**. The charter was dated June 21, 1921, to coincide with the date their auxiliary charter was issued, and it gave the local jurisdiction over sprinkler-fitting work in southeast Michigan's **Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties**.

The following year, after learning the journeyman plumbers of Local 98 and steamfitters of Local 636 were earning \$2.40 per hour in wages, Local 704 informed the N.A.S.A. in March 1948 that it wished to negotiate a new wage agreement "to bring Local 704 up to par with Local 98 and Local 636." The sprinklerfitters during their May 28 meeting subsequently rejected an offer from the contractors for a \$2.37-1/2 hourly scale.

The new local then approved its own constitution, bylaws and rules of order, which were adopted by the membership on July 23, 1948. Regulations and features included a vote of two-thirds of all members present to declare a general strike; a \$15-weekly sick or disability benefit for all members in good standing for 12 months; and fines of \$50 for members who

were found working for wages below the local's scale and expulsion from the union for a third offense. Perhaps most notably, the "Pride in Work" section of the constitution stated in no uncertain terms:

"It shall be the duty of all members to take pride in their work and leave all jobs in a first-class workmanlike manner."

Work in its jurisdiction remained strong during the final years of the decade. Jobs on which Local 704 members were being employed into 1949 included upgrades to the **Chevrolet Warren (Michigan) Transmission Operations** plant (which GM would purchase in 1959) and the Plymouth, Michigan, factory operated by the **Burroughs Adding Machine Company**, which was the largest adding-machine firm in the United States at the time.

MAKING INITIAL GAINS ON ALL FRONTS

By the 1950s, Local 704 claimed jurisdiction over and was installing fire lines to buildings throughout Greater Detroit, and it also had contracts with and was furnishing craftsmen to excavating contractors installing underground water lines. Among specific jobs employing the local's members at that time was expansion of the **U.S. Rubber Company** (which became Uniroyal in 1961) tire plant on East Jefferson Avenue; conversion of the former Hupp Motor Car Company plant on East Milwaukee Avenue for new owner **Midland Steel Products Company**; and upgrades to the GM **Pontiac Assembly Plant** that served as the main facility for its Pontiac Motor Division since it was built in 1927.

With those jobs and more underway, the influx of work in the local's area had produced a shortage of fitters by 1951 to the point where member Brother Lyman Larson asked during the local's general meeting of March 23 that year why third-year apprentices could not go to



Local 704 Business Manager Thomas Devlin (left) points to the street-number sign of the new Union Square headquarters of his sprinklerfitters local at 2988 East Grand Boulevard in Detroit after the local and Firemen and Oilers Local No. 32 (whose business agent, Ed Kraft, looks on) moved to the location in July 1956. (Courtesy of The Building Tradesman.)



LOCAL 704 BUSINESS MANAGERS

After Detroit's sprinklerfitters were organized into an auxiliary branch of the United Association's national "road sprinklerfitters" Local No. 669 in 1921, the auxiliary was administered out of the union's international offices in Chicago and managed locally by a business agent. Detroit Auxiliary Local 669's first business agent was **Brother George Tries**, who served in that position into 1924.

Brother Edward J. Burrill had been the auxiliary's business agent since 1934 when the U.A. granted the branch an autonomous charter as Local No. 704 in 1947, after which he would serve as the local's first business manager.

Edward J. Burrill
1947 – 1952

Louis Berman
1952 – 1954

Thomas P. Devlin
1955 – 1977

Robert Weigand
1977 – 1979

Edward Manning
1980 – 1983

Glaine Stewart Sr.
1983

Harold Sievert
1983 – 1988

Patrick J. Devlin
1989 – 1999

Thomas McNamara
1999 – 2001

Robert Rutan
2001 – 2011

Greg M. Herman
2011 – present



U.A. Auxiliary Local No. 669 and Local 704 member **Brother Edward Burrill** was business manager of the auxiliary when the U.A. granted it an independent charter in 1947 to create Local 704. He served as the business manager for both Detroit sprinklerfitters locals from 1934 until he passed away while in office on May 10, 1952, at age 57.

work as journeymen (which the international union did not permit).

The local had gained a 20-cent hourly increase in wages from the newly named **National Automatic Sprinkler and Fire Control Association** beginning January 29, 1951, in a new contract that would expire on April 30,

1952. Then after turning down an offer early that year for a 5-cent hourly increase in new agreement, the local won another 20-cent-per-hour raise from the contractors that brought the journeymen hourly rate up to \$2.90 beginning May 1 – but only after the local agreed to forfeit its requests for fringe benefits such as increased payments to its insurance plan and additional paid holidays.

As work in its region continued to flourish, at one point in August 1952 there were more than 105 road sprinklerfitters from Local 669 working out of Local 704 to supplement its workforce. Projects the U.A. fitters manned during that time included an addition to a **Ford Motor Company** factory as the auto industry boomed and expansion of the Chrysler jet-research facility at the company's **Highland Park Plant**. *(On March 25, 1954, Chrysler made history by producing the first vehicle powered by a gas turbine engine, a 1954 Plymouth sport coupe, according to MotorCities National Heritage Area.)*

To better-administer its bustling jurisdiction and the growing number of sprinklerfitters employed within it, during a special meeting on June 30, 1955, the Local 704 membership approved a motion to raise its union dues to \$8 per month to pay for a fulltime business agent. After a special committee assigned to investigate the need for a fulltime officer gave a report on its findings during the local's August 12 general meeting, the membership again elected to hire and pay the salary of the business agent.

The Local 704 membership then voted on July 6 of the following year to accept the terms of a new, one-year agreement offered by the National Automatic Sprinkler Association that pushed the journeyman wage scale to \$3.50 per hour when it went into effect on July 1 and paid apprentices on a percentage-based scale that increased every six months. Other provisions contained in the pact included maintaining a contractors' contribution of 7-1/2-cents-

per-hour worked by members into the local's **Health and Welfare Fund** insurance benefit for its membership, two-weeks of paid vacation and six paid holidays.

Also as part of the agreement, **Washtenaw County** was added to the Local 704 jurisdictional territory on January 1, 1957.

During that period, the local moved its headquarters from the fading Labor Temple and into the American Federation of Labor **A.F.L. Tradesman Building** on the city's Union Square section, which *The Detroit Building Tradesman* dubbed "labor's Main Steet" in an August 3, 1956, article. "Addition of the two locals (Fireman and Oilers Local No. 32 also relocated)," the newspaper continued, "has Union Square all but bursting at the seams with organizations that have banded together to make the Square the city's hub of labor activity."

The following year, Local 704 also affiliated with the new **Michigan Building and Construction Trades Council** as a founding member after it was formed in May.

By decade's end, Local 704 had grown to just more than 200 members, including apprentices. However, a shortage of piping and steel in 1959 caused delays in some construction projects in the Detroit region, forcing some of the local's sprinklerfitters to work jobs outside of its jurisdictional territory.

ONGOING FORTUNE WITH MAJOR JOBS

With jurisdictional oversight of the union sprinkler-fitting industry in Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw and Wayne counties as it entered the 1960s, Local 704 and its membership ratified a new, one-year agreement with the National Fire Sprinkler and Fire Control Association during a special meeting on October 6, 1961, that was retroactive to August 1. Among other features, the pact provided a 10-cent hourly wage increase for journeymen to \$4.07 per hour.

LOCAL INHERENTLY CONNECTED WITH STATE'S TRADES COUNCIL

Sprinklerfitters Local 704 was an inaugural craft-local member of the **Michigan Building and Construction Trades Council** when it was founded and chartered by the National Building Trades Council in 1957. Sixty-four years later, the council represents the interests of 14 craft unions including Detroit's sprinklerfitters and some 80,000 unionized construction workers in Michigan. It continues to administer project agreements with construction contractors, act as a liaison with the business and political communities and promote the hiring of a unionized construction workforce in the state.

Local 704 **Brother Patrick J. Devlin** was elected chief executive officer of the Michigan Building Trades Council in August 2005 and continues to serve in that position in 2021. Previously, he served as the local's business manager from 1989 until August 1999 and was also secretary-treasurer of the Greater Detroit Building Trades Council from January 1999 until it was merged with the Michigan Council in August 2005.

An ongoing building boom in Detroit during the early- and mid-1960s kept the local's membership busy throughout most of that period.

Sadly, however, on March 16, 1965, Local 704 member **Brother Paul E. Noll** died after he fell 25 feet while working on an overhead pipe in the Chevrolet Motor Division plant in Warren, which was the first on-the-job fatality in the history of the local. An active member of the local since 1946, Brother Noll was 47 years old at the time of his death.

With a membership of more than 160 sprinklerfitters and apprentices in late 1966, Local 704 received a new charter from the U.A. that indicated it represents a **Metal Trades Division** of the piping trades.

Strong employment conditions continued throughout the second half of the decade for Local 704. **Business Manager Thomas P. Devlin** was even able to announce during the



Local 704 Business Manager Thomas Devlin (left), U.A. General Organizer Wendell Straight (center) and Local 704 President Glaine Stewart (right) stand with 44-year member Harvey Furey (second from left) and 46-year member Delbert Foley (second from right) during a testimonial dinner in October 1969 honoring longtime retirees of the local. (Courtesy of *The Building Tradesman*.)

local's March 28, 1969, general meeting that the local's "work situation is still up" to the point there was a shortage of sprinklerfitters to man all of the jobs in its jurisdiction.

From that position, the local was able to negotiate another new, one-year contract with the contractors' association that went into effect on August 1, 1969, and Brother Devlin described in the July 4 *Building Tradesman* as "a good one that will advance the sprinklerfitter another notch up the economic ladder." After members ratified the agreement by an overwhelming margin, their journeyman wage scale increased by \$1.01 to \$7.80 per hour, while another 10-cents-per-hour worked by members for each contractor was designated for the local's **Supplementary Unemployment Fund** and 4-1/2-cents-per-hour worked would be contributed to the local's **Apprentice Training Fund**.

But the early 1970s brought with it a new host of challenges for Local 704. Foremost

perhaps, by that decade, some of Michigan's automobile companies began moving factories to so-called "right-to-work" states that had legislation in place that essentially exempted non-union employees from paying dues for union representation in organized workplaces, which reduced an important source of employment for the union building trades in the Detroit area.

What's more, by 1970 Local 704 and 10 of the 23-member craft locals associated with the Detroit Building and Construction Trades Council were involved in a scuffle with proponents of the "Detroit Plan," a campaign to boost the employment of Blacks in the building trades. The locals opposed to the plan argued that it violated the ban on quotas in the 1964 Civil Rights Act and that, because of the slumping Michigan construction industry, it was "no time to be inducting new members" into the local trade unions, according to an article in the May 9, 1970, *Detroit Free Press*.

Over the next five years, the plan remained in place and made some progress in its hiring goals before faltering and ultimately being suspended in early 1975. However, at that time the Office of Federal Contract Compliance (O.F.C.C.) placed mandatory hiring goals on seven Detroit locals after charging that "they weren't recruiting enough minority-group workers," the July 24, 1975, *Free Press* reported – although Local 704 was among five locals that were "given a clean bill of health by the O.F.C.C."

Meanwhile, the sprinklerfitters in July 1970 negotiated a new, three-year working contract with the National Fire Sprinkler and Fire Control Association that went into effect on August 1 and raised the journeyman hourly wage rate to \$8.75 the first year, \$9.65 the second year and \$10.60 the third year before ending on July 31, 1973. The agreement also increased contractors' hourly contributions to the local's healthcare insurance to 20 cents, 25 cents and 30 cents, respectively, each year; and to the local's **Pension Fund** for retired members to 30 cents, 40 cents and 50 cents, respectively, each year.

Despite the reduction of work traditionally generated by the declining automotive industry, Local 704 members remained regularly employed throughout much of the first half of the decade. As the local's sprinklerfitters worked on projects including construction of the first phase of the landmark **Renaissance Center** complex and its group of seven connected skyscrapers in downtown Detroit for a group headed by the Ford Motor Company beginning in 1973, Business Manager Devlin reported to a general membership meeting on September 12 of that year that "work is very good" and "all contractors want more men" – statements he would repeat often in his reports during the balance of the decade.

Numerous Local 704 sprinklerfitters continued working on the Renaissance Center,

LOCAL 704 UNION HALLS AND MEETING LOCATIONS

Detroit Labor Temple

274 East High Street
(Street name changed in 1928)
274 East Vernor Highway
1921 – 1941

Detroit Labor Temple

82 West Montcalm Street
1941 – 1956

Local 704 Union Hall

2988 East Grand Boulevard,
Room 310, Detroit
(Meetings at Labor Temple)
1956 – 1992

Local 704 Union Hall

32500 West Eight Mile Road
Farmington, Michigan
1992 – 2019

Local 704 Union Hall

23475 Northwestern Highway
Southfield, Michigan
2019 – present

including its central Detroit Marriott tower that would become the second-tallest all-hotel skyscraper in the Western Hemisphere, until the complex's first phase was completed in 1977. Meanwhile, beginning in late 1973 a large number of the local's members were also employed on construction of the massive, 80,000-plus-seat **Pontiac Silverdome** enclosed stadium, which further supported the local's full employment during that period until it was opened in August 1975. (*General Motors would purchase the Renaissance Center and move its world headquarters there in 1996, and the Silverdome would be closed in 2013 and demolished in late 2017.*)

Construction of additional significant projects within its jurisdiction, including the 20,000-seat **Joe Louis Arena** in downtown Detroit between May 1977 and December



1979 – after which it which would host countless events including National Hockey League games before it was closed in July 2017 and demolished in 2020 – and a large amount of work on hospitals and schools maintained consistent employment of the local's membership until the 1980s.

ROLLING ALONG WITH AUTO INDUSTRY

A severe economic recession in the United States from early 1980 through early 1983, which was exacerbated locally by the struggles of the U.S. automobile industry against foreign competition, plunged Local 704 into a sudden and extended period of low employment during those first years of the decade. With as many as 70 members unemployed at one point in July 1980 and 80 out of work at one time in February 1982, many of the local's sprinklerfitters traveled to other parts of the country to work with sister U.A. locals, some going as far away as California for periods of up to two years to remain working while opportunities in their home local's jurisdiction remained limited.

During that time, the local went out on strike beginning July 31, 1980, when it could not reach agreement on a new wage scale in a contract with its employing contractors. After nearly two months, the local accepted a new contract with a modest raise in wages that was brokered with the assistance of a federal mediator, ending the strike in late September.

However, the "Big Three" U.S. automakers (Ford, Chrysler and GM) led a revitalization of the U.S. automobile industry beginning in the early 1980s that ultimately took hold by mid-decade. As part of their individual efforts, each company even developed joint manufacturing facilities with several Japanese automakers, with Ford investing in Mazda, Chrysler in Mitsubishi Motors and GM in Suzuki and Isuzu Motors.

Within Local 704's region, as part of an expansion of its production capabilities GM erected its new **Detroit-Hamtramck Assembly Plant** for its Buick/Oldsmobile/Cadillac Group in the city's Poletown neighborhood (which was razed for construction of the plant) beginning in 1982 with a sizeable amount of labor from the local. Its substantial sprinklerfitter workforce installed underground piping as well as sprinkler installations and equipment for the plant before it opened in early 1985, after which the first vehicle, a Cadillac Eldorado, rolled off the assembly line on February 4, 1985.

Local 704 members gained another source of major manhours when Ford began building a vast new **Mazda Motor Corporation Plant** in Flat Rock, Michigan, in 1985. Once online in 1987, the factory (which has since become Ford's Flat Rock Assembly Plant) produced the Mazda MX-6 and Ford Probe coupes.

With those and multiple other large projects underway in its jurisdiction in 1986, including installation of a sprinkler system in the 27-story **Patrick V. McNamara Federal Building** in downtown Detroit that had been opened in 1976, employment greatly improved for Local 704 members into the second half of the decade. In fact, by May 1986, 84 traveling sprinklerfitters from other U.A. locals were working in the Local 704 jurisdiction to provide manpower for the over-abundance of jobs.

Construction beginning that year of the **Chrysler World Headquarters and Technology Center**, the North American headquarters and main research-and-development facility for Chrysler in the United States, in Auburn Hills, Michigan, supplied Local 704 with yet another substantial source from which members were employed. Indeed, building and subsequently fire-protecting the 5.3-million-square-foot complex was a large source of manhours during the late 1980s for the local's sprinklerfitters, who also installed underground piping for the project, until it was completed in late 1991.



Employment remained plentiful for the Local 704 membership throughout the final years of the decade, during which members helped build the 22,000-seat **Palace of Auburn Hills** multi-purpose arena in Auburn Hills, Michigan, from June 1986 through August 1988 (after which it was closed in 2017 and was demolished in 2020.) Also during that time, construction of several large condominium complexes in the region, among various other projects, further provided jobs for Detroit-area union sprinklerfitters.

A new contract with the **National Fire Sprinkler Association** (N.F.S.A.) that went into effect on August 1, 1989, would also carry the local into the next decade, when the agreement expired July 31, 1991. The deal immediately raised the local's journeyman-sprinklerfitters wage rate to \$21.14 per hour and would eventually increase it to \$21.89 per hour for the final year. It also provided for eventual contractor contributions of \$2.65 per hour worked by Local 704 members into the local's Health and Welfare Fund, \$2 per hour worked into its Pension Fund and 60 cents per hour worked towards its Supplemental Unemployment Benefits.

COUNTERING NON-UNION INTRUSION

By the late 1980s and into the 1990s, a large number of non-union sprinkler contractors and general contractors were working on projects within the Local 704 jurisdictional territory. With 67 members out of work at one point in November 1991, the local became so concerned about the increasing infiltration of unorganized laborers that it began discussing the creation of a "target fund" that would collect financial resources to combat non-union contractors.

Jobs generated by construction of the **Media Union** (now the James and Anne Duderstadt Center), an Integrated Technology Instruction Center on the University of Michigan North

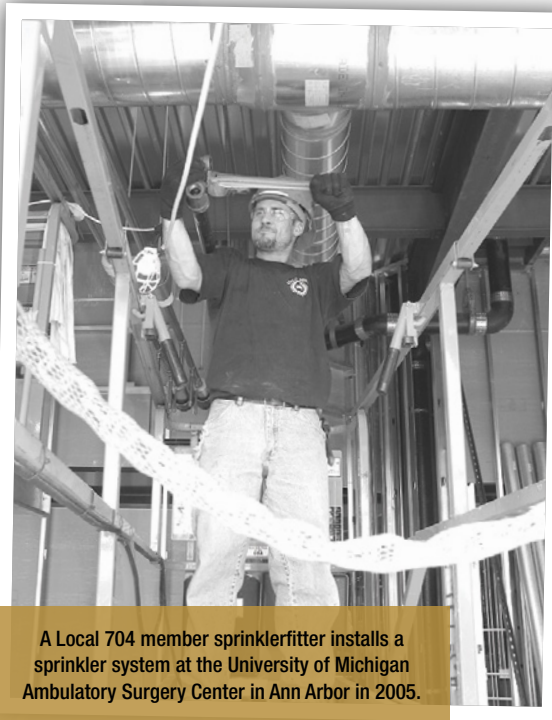
Campus in Ann Arbor, helped ease some of the local's employment deficiencies. Before it was completed and opened in 1996, several of the local's sprinklerfitters worked on the 250,000-square-foot facility, which would house the school's Art, Architecture and



A Local 704 member sprinklerfitter works on installation of the sprinkler system in the new Comerica Park Major League Baseball stadium in Detroit in 2000 for its opening that April.



A Local 704 member sprinklerfitter installs a sprinkler system at Greenfield Village in The Henry Ford history museum complex in Dearborn, Michigan, in 2003.



A Local 704 member sprinklerfitter installs a sprinkler system at the University of Michigan Ambulatory Surgery Center in Ann Arbor in 2005.

Engineering Library; College of Engineering Computer Aided Engineering Network; and Digital Media Commons.

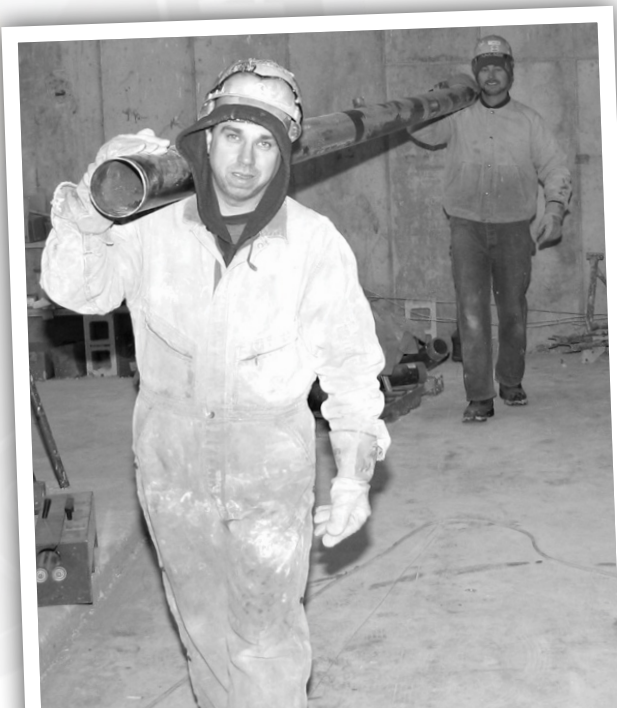
Meanwhile, by 1995 Local 704 had put a **Target Fund** in place, which **Business Manager Patrick J. Devlin** reported during the local's July 12, 1995, general meeting was "helping to beat non-union in a big way." As a result, the local even had a few travelers from other U.A. locals working in the Detroit area servicing mostly smaller jobs. What's more, by late 1995 an increasing number of projects in the Local 704 jurisdiction were being awarded to contractors signatory to its collective-bargaining agreement, including work at the University of Michigan and **Wayne State University** in Detroit, where hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of new construction was transforming its campus.

Brother Devlin further announced to the membership at its November 8 general meeting that year that the pipe trades in Michigan were suffering from a "manpower shortage." Subsequently, several of the local's employing

contractors did not bid on jobs because they already had a large quantity of work at that time and into 1996.

More sprinkler jobs, both overhead and underground, began in the local's jurisdiction that year as well, and the local picketed most others that were being installed by non-union companies while also using the Target Fund to aid its employers win contracts. As such, the fund helped contractors to lower their bids as it supplemented the wages of the local's members, thereby allowing contractors to reduce labor costs.

As work continued to boom for Local 704 in 1997, which was highlighted by a large amount of school jobs and ongoing work at the Renaissance Center and the Chrysler Technology Center, the City of Detroit launched a downtown revitalization plan that would transform the area with the assistance of numerous union sprinklerfitters. At the center



Local 704 member sprinklerfitters work on construction of the new Joan and Sanford Weill Hall at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor in 2006. The building would house the school's Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy when completed later that year.

Continued after next page.

Apprentice and Member Training DEDICATED TO PREPARING ITS WORKFORCE

From the time Detroit's sprinklerfitters were organized as United Association (U.A.) Auxiliary Local No. 669 in 1921 to their being re-chartered as U.A. Local No. 704 in 1947 to their 100th anniversary of solidarity in 2021, they have trained their apprentices – or "helpers," as they were called during the earlier days – using a system of apprenticeship, through which they work side-by-side with experienced journeyman members on jobsites to learn the trade while also being paid. Local 704 and its predecessor auxiliary have likewise provided their journeyman sprinklerfitters with additional training to maintain and upgrade their skills and industry knowledge throughout the century.

However, while the Local 704 apprenticeship was a structured program by the time the local was chartered in 1947, it was that year that the local and the **National Automatic Sprinkler Association** (N.A.S.A.), which consisted of the local's employing contractors, first set up a dual, labor-management **Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee** (J.A.T.C.) with representatives from each organization to arrange and administer a more-formal program to train apprentices. That year, the local's apprenticeship consisted of five years of formal, coordinated education that involved on-the-job training that was supplemented by classroom instruction arranged by the U.A. Pipe Trades District Council.

Before the end of that decade, that sprinklerfitters' J.A.T.C. set up an apprentice school at the **Detroit Apprenticeship Training School** in the former Joseph F. Majeske School on Trombly Avenue in the city's Poletown neighborhood to provide classroom and shop space for its training program. Other building-trades locals had been providing their training at the Apprenticeship Training School, which had been located in several different buildings before moving into the Majeske School in 1947, since 1924. (*The Majeske School was demolished during the 1980s.*)

"Shop work varies according to the type of trade, but all trades have an imposing workspace in which to build the products required of the apprentice once he attains coveted journeyman status," an article in the September 1, 1961, *Building Tradesman* described the school. "In general, the school supplies the related training which supplements on-the-job experiences."

By the second half of the 1960s, Local 704 and the **National Automatic Sprinkler and Fire Control Association** (the contractors' successor of the N.A.S.A.) had established their "Apprenticeship Standards for the Sprinklerfitting Industry of Detroit and Vicinity." These curriculum requirements continued to include a five-year apprenticeship, during which apprentices initially attended one full day of school every other week.

Local 704 moved its training classes and labs to the new, 27,000-square-foot **Pipefitting Industry Training Center** in Troy, Michigan, after U.A. Local No. 636 opened the facility in August 1975. Then in 1992, the local moved its training center into the new union hall it opened on West Eight Mile Road in Farmington, Michigan. The local purchased a new, larger building on Northwestern Highway in Southfield, Michigan, for its headquarters in 2019, into which it also built a modern, state-of-the-art training center.

After 100 years of training its workforce, the local and its employing contractors of the **National Fire Sprinkler Association** (N.F.S.A.) continue to fund and manage the five-year apprenticeship-training program through an agreement in their collective-bargaining contract. From its new facility, the program is taught by instructors who are prepared and certified by the U.A. Instructor Training Program and who have factory-certified training.

In order to graduate to journeyman-level sprinklerfitter status, apprentices must complete 7,780 hours of on-the-job training while employed by signatory contractors and under direct supervision of Local 704 journeymen, as well as 720 hours of in-class training and instruction. In addition to practical industry applications and processes, the training program focuses on safety and provides Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) 30-hour safety courses and C.P.R. and first-aid classes.

Sprinklerfitters Local 704 also offers continuing-education opportunities for its journeymen that include upgrade training and certification, as well as an associate degree program through the United Association.





Local 704 members install a sprinkler system during the renovation of the Crisler Arena at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor in 2011. (Courtesy of The Building Tradesman.)

of the renewal project and the many manhours it would produce for the local's membership was construction of the 40,000-seat **Comerica Park** Major League Baseball stadium from October 1997 until April 2000, and the 65,000-seat **Ford Field** domed National Football League stadium from November 1999 to August 2002 – both of which worked scores of Local 704 craftspeople.

A major expansion of the **Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport** beginning in 1996 that initially added the new, \$1.2-billion, 97-gate **Midfield Terminal** likewise utilized many Local 704 members, whose contributions to the project included underground piping as well as sprinkler installation work, before the terminal was completed and opened in February 2002 (at which time it was named after Wayne County Executive Edward H. McNamara). Additionally, an ongoing stream of work at the various automobile plants in the area provided even more employment opportunities for the local's members throughout much of the remainder of the decade.

During that period, a new, four-year contract with the N.F.S.A. raised the local's journeyman-sprinklerfitters wage rate to \$27.18 per hour on August 1, 1997. The pact then decreased the scale to \$27.13 per hour before providing total hourly raises that would be distributed among wages and the local's three fringe-benefit funds of \$1.30 on August 1, 1998; \$1.35 on August 1, 1999; and \$1.40 on August 1, 2000.

Still, Local 704 continued to contend with many non-union sprinkler companies that were working in and around Detroit in the late 1990s and beyond.

FROM BOOM TO BUST IN 'Y2K'

Still bolstered by abundant work being supplied by construction of the airport terminal; the city's new stadiums; projects at Wayne State, Michigan and **Michigan State University**; and numerous auto-plant jobs as it made its way into the new "Y2K" (Year 2000) millennium, a rush of building work throughout the region beginning in



2000 further boosted employment for Local 704. The spike and a flood of maintenance work performed at facilities under the **U.A. National Maintenance Agreement** would help keep the local's membership consistently busy throughout the next seven years.

Meanwhile, as early as 2000, the local was benefiting from the successful results of an organizing blitz it had undertaken and its picketing of many non-union projects in the area, as many general contractors were hiring the local's signatory sprinkler and underground contractors. In one particular instance that year, the Bell Telephone Company hired one of the local's employing contractors whereas the corporation historically used non-union labor for its construction work, while in December the local turned a large apartment job in Troy, Michigan, from using non-union fitters to hiring Local 704 members.

Another tangible example of the local's ability to organize occurred in September 2001 when Three Towers Fire Protection Group, which formerly was the non-union Vanguard Design Sprinkler Company with which the local occasionally had contentious relations, signed a collective-bargaining agreement with Local 704. After announcing the accord, Three Towers President Stanley Sikorski stated in the September 28, 2001, issue of *The Building Tradesman*:

"It's in the best interests of the company, and it's in the best interest of our workers that we become a signatory contractor. There were jobs out there that we just couldn't bid on because we weren't union, and now I think we have unlimited potential."

Into 2001 and through 2007, more work at the auto plants as they continued to regenerate, including the **GM Pontiac Assembly Center**, as well as maintenance projects throughout its jurisdiction were just a few of the numerous projects that kept the Local 704 membership

constantly employed. Construction of the new, 29-gate **North Terminal** at Detroit Metropolitan Airport, which would open in September 2008 to replace its Berry and Smith terminals, also increased employment opportunities after work began in 2005.



Local 704 member Jeff Gray installs a coupling on a sprinkler cross main on the third floor of the old Ford Motor Company Piquette Plant Museum in Detroit during installation of a new sprinkler system for the historic facility in 2011. (Courtesy of The Building Tradesman.)



Local 704 member Mark VanderLoop works on the third floor of the then-98-year-old David Whitney Building in Detroit during its renovation in 2013 to create retail space, a boutique hotel and apartments. (Courtesy of The Building Tradesman.)



Local 704 member Frank Kessler sets a pipe in what would become a Department of Natural Resources lab area during renovation of the Globe Tobacco Building in Detroit in 2013. (Courtesy of The Building Tradesman.)

Elsewhere during that time, members worked on a \$475-million expansion to the **Greektown Casino** and construction of the new, \$750-million **MGM Grand Casino and Hotel** in downtown Detroit that opened in October 2007. Additional projects that provided members with steady manhours across that period included construction of the **Henry Ford West Bloomfield Hospital** in Oakland County that would open in 2009, GM's fuel-technology building and a new Federal Express warehouse; ongoing university and public-school work; and many new commercial stores throughout the region.

With its stable employment conditions, during that time the local expanded to roughly 400 members by 2005.

On the heels of a five-year agreement with the N.F.S.A. that expired on July 31, 2006, Local 704 and the contractors' group signed another five-



Local 704 members work on an expansion project for the GM Detroit-Hamtramck Assembly Plant in Detroit's Poletown neighborhood in 2014. (Courtesy of The Building Tradesman.)



Local 704 member Jason Hill works on pipe for a new fire-suppression system during renovation of the former Detroit News Building in 2016. (Courtesy of The Building Tradesman.)

year deal that was in effect from August 1, 2006, until July 31, 2011. The contract initially set the journeyman-sprinklerfitters rate at \$38.23 per hour for the first year and contributions to the local's healthcare plan at \$6.60 per hour, its pension plan at \$2.85 per hour, its unemployment benefits program at 25 cents per hour, its Training Fund at 29 cents per hour and its industry target fund at 10 cents per hour. Over the ensuing four years, the agreement provided annual wage-and-benefit increases totaling \$7.90 per hour – taking the total pay package for the local's journeymen to \$56.22 per hour for the final year of the contract.

However, the **Great Recession** that gripped the United States from late 2007 to mid-2009, which was considered the most significant economic downturn in the country since the Great Depression, severely throttled the construction industry throughout the nation and especially in Michigan into the following decade. As work for Local 704

consequently diminished, at one point in 2010 its active membership was down to about 275 sprinklerfitters and apprentices, and in June 2010 more than 190 of its members were unemployed. While several regions in the state made strong construction employment gains compared to the rest of the country between August 2010 and August 2011, as a September 26, 2011, Associated General Contractors report states, overall, "construction employment is still stuck in low gear, with employment levels only near what they were about a decade ago."

During the recession, the manhours worked by the local's membership declined from 746,000 hours in 2007 to 589,000 hours in 2008 to 334,000 hours in 2009 and down to about 140,000 over the first half of 2010. To help counter the economic impact on the local resulting from those substantial reductions in manhours and, accordingly, the working-assessment dues it collected, the local eliminated



its organizer position and its business manager and business agent each took 5-percent salary cuts for two consecutive years.

Although employment continued to lag, in 2011 a slowly growing number of Local 704 members were out on jobsites. Among those projects on which the local's sprinklerfitters were gaining employment that summer was the installation of a new sprinkler system in the **Ford Piquette Avenue Plant Museum**, Ford Motor Company's first automotive manufacturing plant at Piquette and Beaubien streets in Detroit that was completed in 1904. The unique project involved a small crew of fitters installing some 2,500 feet of four- and six-inch-diameter sprinkler pipe and 587 sprinkler heads around the old sprinkler system, which was left in place as an "architectural artifact," according to an article in the August 12, 2011, *Building Tradesman*.

MAJOR LOCKOUT, SLUMP OVERCOME

In the wake of that depressed period, 25 Local 704 members were locked out of their jobs for more than two-and-a-half years beginning September 15, 2011, by seven contractors of the N.F.S.A. after the two sides failed to reach agreement on a new working contract and the local went on strike beginning August 1. Key to the impasse was the demand of the companies imposing the lockout, which included five fire-protection companies that used non-union "scab" workers in place of the locked-out Local 704 sprinklerfitters, that a new contract contain a two-tier wage level with a \$21 per hour cut, which the local flatly rejected.

During the lockout, the local's other signatory contractors kept some 200 members employed after signing interim contracts under the terms of the former N.F.S.A.-negotiated pact, which had expired August 1.



Local 704 member Rick Willis threads a pipe during renovation of the University of Michigan Intramural Sports Building in 2016. (Courtesy of The Building Tradesman.)



Under **Business Manager Greg Herman**, who took over that position in 2011 shortly after the lockout began, the local finally broke off negotiations with the N.F.S.A. on January 20, 2014, and then pledged to handle all new contracts on an individual basis with each contractor. Soon after, Local 704 and the N.F.S.A. reached agreement on a new, three-month working contract that increased the journeyman-sprinklerfitters wage to \$42.11 per hour on August 1, 2014, until January 1, 2015. It then provided five 50-cent-per-hour raises every six months through January 1, 2017, before the contract expired on July 31 that year.

But throughout 2011 and 2012, Michigan's construction industry struggled to fully rebound as the state mirrored an ongoing lack of stability in the national construction industry, limiting work within the Local 704 jurisdiction. However, the local countered those precarious conditions by increasing its use of its Target Fund to gain work with positive results;



Local 704 member Justin Villanueva wrenches on a main drain line serving the fire-suppression system for Eastern Michigan University's Strong Hall renovation and expansion project in 2018. (Courtesy of The Building Tradesman.)



Local 704 member Dave Farrell measures a Victaulic elbow fitting while working on the 34th floor of the David Stott Building in Detroit in 2018 during renovation of the apartment and office tower that was built in 1929. (Courtesy of The Building Tradesman.)



Local 704 members (left to right) Rob Penfold and Mike Blair install fire protection at the administrative building of the Edsel and Eleanor Ford House in the Village of Grosse Pointe Shores, Michigan, in 2019. (Courtesy of The Building Tradesman.)

from December 2011 to December 2012, the local gained 30 percent more targeted work than it had the previous year.

What's more, the fund already had a history of success. As of April 11, 2012, for instance, it had "recovered" 40 jobs that otherwise would have gone non-union, amounting to 14,000 manhours on \$2.4-million worth of jobs, using \$374,000 of its target fund. In 2012 alone, in fact, 20 percent of the work performed by the membership was from targeted projects, which generated 216 jobs and created \$18 million in work, 102,000 manhours, \$8 million in wages and 61 fulltime jobs. Ultimately, the local's return on investment from the fund that year was \$6 recovered for every \$1 spent.

A large number of projects secured under the U.A. National Maintenance Agreement further enhanced employment for the local during that time, including upgrade and upkeep jobs at GM's Tech Center, Pontiac plant and **Milford (Michigan) Proving Grounds** automobile

testing facility. More work became available for the local's members when in late 2012 Chrysler began a two-year, 1-million-square-foot remodel of its **Mack Avenue Engine Complex** in Detroit to retool it to produce new Pentastar V6 engines.

While the total manhours worked by Local 704 members increased in 2012 over the previous year and remained strong in early 2013, the cyclical nature of the construction industry was in full display once again when work in the local's region slowed considerably during the second half of that year and well into 2014. Regardless, projects on which members were employed during that time included resurrection of the 19-story **David Whitney Building**, which was built in 1915, in downtown Detroit for use as retail space, professional offices, apartments and a hotel; and renovation of the 1888-built **Globe Tobacco Building** in the city to serve as a Department of Natural Resources lab area and house various tech and small businesses.

Among other projects employing union sprinklerfitters elsewhere, GM expanded its Detroit-Hamtramck Assembly Plant beginning in November 2013 – the facility's first major expansion since it opened in 1985 – with Local 704 members performing sprinkler system and underground supply-line installations and upgrades. The five additions totaling 500,000-square-feet would provide the company with additional room to store parts on site and to move materials more easily when completed in late 2014.

In late 2015 and 2016, when the construction industry began to shake its slump in earnest, additional work for Local 704 included installing a new fire-suppression system during renovation of the former **Detroit News complex**, including the main, five-story original building built from 1915 to 1917. Employment at the multiple universities in the area continued, as well, with sprinklerfitters making installations for projects including the renovation of the University of Michigan Intramural Sports Building in 2016.

HIGHS AND RECOVERY INTO YEAR 100

Re-emerging from the extended phase of stagnant work and employment and entering the beginnings of a period of prosperity that would carry it to its 100th anniversary in 2021, Local 704 and the N.F.S.A. quickly negotiated a new, five-year working contract in early 2017 that the local's membership ratified on June 29 before it went into effect on August 1. The agreement initially set the new journeyman-sprinklerfitters wage rate at \$43.75 per hour, after which it provided annual \$2 hourly increases to the local's total wage-and-benefits package for each ensuing year of the pact, which expires on July 31, 2022.

Contributions for the local's fringe benefits likewise escalated regularly, with the Health and Welfare Fund receiving \$10.76 per hour beginning January 1, 2019, and the Pension Fund \$6.60 per hour on that date; and the Training Fund receiving 59 cent per hour,



Local 704 member Spencer Kanagy works on the fire-sprinkler system for expansion of the Henry Ford Cancer Institute at the Henry Ford Health System in Detroit in 2019. (Courtesy of The Building Tradesman.)



Local 704 member Steve Bauer works on expansion of the McLaren Macomb Hospital in 2019 on the day before he would retire after 41 years as a member of the local. (Courtesy of The Building Tradesman.)

the Industry Fund 20 cents per hour, the Supplemental Pension \$7 per hour and the U.A. Training Fund 10 cents per hour all on August 1, 2017 – after which the local could add to each fund from the annual total increases.

Other features of the contract included an updated scale for apprentice pay, from 40 percent of the journeyman rate for Class 1 (beginning) apprentices up to 85 percent for Class 10 (final term) apprentices.

As work in its jurisdiction continued to escalate, projects manned by the local's skilled workforce in 2018 featured renovations of the 38-story **David Stott Building** apartment and

office tower in Detroit that was built in 1929 and the 122-year-old **Wagner Place** hotel in Dearborn, Michigan, as the centerpiece of Ford Motor's development of a two-city-block area on the west side of the city. More manhours were provided from other projects that included upgrade and expansion of Eastern Michigan University's **Strong Hall** to house numerous labs for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) courses; and construction of the **Six11** off-campus student-housing complex in Ann Arbor.

Then in 2019, ongoing auto-plant retooling for new vehicles – and especially electric automobiles – that was working union sprinklerfitters in the local's territory was bolstered with the start of a massive conversion of the Mack Avenue Engine Complex into **the Detroit Assembly Complex – Mack** for the next-generation Jeep Grand Cherokee and a new, three-row Jeep SUV and plug-in hybrid models. Elsewhere, Local 704 members were also at work on jobs such installing

the fire-sprinkler systems at the **Henry Ford Health System's Cancer Center** in Detroit and the emergency department and trauma center expansion at **McLaren Macomb Hospital**, as well as construction of multiple, large **Amazon** warehouses in the region.

With employment flourishing and its membership growing, in November 2019 Local 704 moved from its offices and union hall on West Eight Mile Road in Farmington to a new, larger and more-modern location at **23475 Northwestern Highway** in Southfield, Michigan, which the local renovated to fit its administrative and apprentice and journeyman training needs. As such, the local built a new, state-of-the-art training center into its new hall.

But like much of the nation, the deadly Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic impacted Local 704 and its membership in 2020 and into 2021, as the local closed down its union hall and training programs in the spring of 2020 while countless jobsites shut down with little to no notice. With Michigan issuing a "Shelter in Place" order for the entire state in March 2020 to help slow the rampant spread of the disease, the local provided information to its members to help them stay safe as the pandemic continued into 2021.

By that time, however, construction work had opened back up and the building boom from which the local had been benefitting picked up where it had left off, as members returned to projects including continuing work on the Detroit Assembly Complex – Mack, which would begin producing Jeeps in spring 2021, and the Amazon facilities. Among other of the myriad work employing Local 704 craftspeople

as the local entered its 100th-anniversary year were an increasing supply of residential and commercial complexes, upgrades to auto plants and university projects such as Michigan's new **Central Campus Classroom Building**.

Throughout a century of serving and providing fire-protection to the City of Detroit, the City of Ann Arbor and southeast Michigan's Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw and Wayne counties, Local 704 has continued to meet the changing industry demands by providing with the latest information and installation techniques through apprenticeship training and journeyman upgrade programs. This has enabled – and will continue to allow – the local to provide its employing contractors with the National Automatic Sprinkler Association with a workforce that produces quality installations, inspections, service and repair for fire-protection systems, as it has since June 21, 1921. ♦



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