Tunneling into Grand Central

Photo exhibit sheds light on Sandhogs’ underworld
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General convention recounts success, sets agenda for growth

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ACTION AROUND THE STATE
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IN MEMORIAM
Richard Fitzsimmons Sr., 1933-2006

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MESSAGE FROM A LIUNA VICE PRESIDENT
The importance of safety training
Dear Brothers and Sisters:

In September, I had the honor to join with elected delegates from throughout our union for our 23rd General Convention. I was humbled to be elected to a second term of office and inspired by the historic challenges our delegates courageously accepted.

As we took stock of the last five years, we shared great pride in reaching many goals set by delegates to our 2001 convention. At that convention, delegates mandated a 20 percent increase in market share by 2006 and we exceeded that goal, increasing market share by 31 percent.

In 2001, delegates passed a resolution mandating apprenticeship for new initiates. At the time, only 6 percent of new members joined the union through apprenticeship – today it is 25 percent.

At our convention five years ago, we said that we must dramatically increase resources for organizing and growth – and we have, reaching $35 million in organizing resources from the International, the establishment of a Corporate Affairs Department and the hiring of strategic researchers.

We said in 2001 that we must strengthen our political program so Laborers have the voice in government and politics that we deserve. We did that – more than doubling our political contributions, making the Laborers’ Union one of the top five union political action committees in the U.S.

I am extremely proud to say that delegates and your General Executive Board were united in refusing to rest on our laurels. We said in 2001 that we must grow or die – and the same is true today.

At our most recent convention, we mandated another 20 percent increase in market share – and a 20 percent increase in membership. Delegates backed a historic resolution, which, through cents-per-hour contributions, will within three years bring organizing resources to $105 million a year. That is more than any construction trades union in North America and more than virtually any union in the entire trade union movement.

Delegates again supported opportunities for members and competitiveness for our contractors by backing another increase in the number of new initiates who enter the union through apprenticeship training. And we also took up the challenge of strengthening our voice in politics and government by supporting check-off language for contributions to the Laborers Political League in all construction agreements.

The next five years won’t be easy – nothing worthwhile ever is. But as I told convention delegates, it is our destiny to continue to grow so strong that any employer who would abuse Laborers fears our name – and become so well-known that every Laborer in need calls out our name.

With the enormous strength of New York State Laborers and with the leadership of General Secretary-Treasurer and New England Regional Manager Armand Sabitoni, Vice President and Eastern Regional Manager Raymond Pocino and Vice President and New England Assistant Regional Manager Vincent Masino, I am certain we will once again exceed our goals and expectations.

In Solidarity,

Terence M. O’Sullivan
General President
Laborers’ International Union of North America
Dear Brothers and Sisters:

As General President O’Sullivan has described in his column, we have just returned from our 23rd General Convention. I was honored to be re-elected to my position and I’m happy to report that we exceeded our goals set at the 2001 Convention. We have achieved a greater market share for union construction, improved our organizing, and implemented better training and apprenticeship programs. However, we cannot afford to rest on our past achievements. We face many challenges, even in New York where our non-union competitors continue to try to take away our jobs. At the 2006 convention, we voted to greatly increase our resources for organizing and take other steps to continue to grow our market share and improve wages and benefits for our members.

This issue of our magazine illustrates the ways we are working to improve the position of our union in New York. Our Concrete Workers District Council is successfully organizing non-union contractors by demonstrating the value of being union to non-union workers and contractors. The Concrete Workers District Council also has implemented a very successful apprenticeship program. The hard work and dedication of District Council Business Manager Barry Kaplan and his organizing and training staff is responsible for those achievements.

Our hard working Sandhogs (Local 147) continue to be recognized for their unique type of work under the streets of Manhattan in a major photo display at Grand Central Terminal. Unfortunately, we also mourn the loss of one of our union’s great leaders – Richard Fitzsimmons Sr. who was business manager of Local 147 for over 30 years. We will truly miss his great leadership and dedication to our union.

In May, we held our annual NYS Laborers’ legislative conference in Albany. Politics play an important part in ensuring that there is adequate work for our membership and contractors. Our union’s efforts led the fight to pass the Transportation Bond Act last year. Now we need to make sure that this $2.9 billion is properly spent. Our union leaders from around the state had the opportunity to meet with Senate and Assembly leaders to discuss the issues that are important to our members.

Our recent convention set high goals for the next five years. We have the resources and local leadership in New York to meet those goals, but we will need support from all of our union members to do this. Get involved in your union and help us make a better life for all of our members and their families.

Fraternally yours,

Armand E. Sabitoni
General Secretary-Treasurer
Laborers’ International Union of North America

‘We have achieved a greater market share for union construction, improved our organizing, and implemented better training and apprenticeship programs.’
One of the largest privately-owned buildings in the region, One Commerce Plaza has recently been a landmark that is easily recognized for all the wrong reasons. For the past several years, the 20-story building has been protectively netted to prevent loose marble tiles from falling. Laborers from Local Union 190 are working to prepare the downtown Albany building for a modern new skin.

The One Commerce Plaza work started in April 2006. Along with the Laborers, employed by Focus One Construction Company Inc. of Troy, are teamsters, carpenters and masons. Currently, 30 Local 190 members are on the job, working both day and night shifts, to remove the marble and patch the walls.

Working on a project like this is never without risks and three Local 190 members had a close call in June. The Laborers were rescued from the scaffolding where they were working outside the building — 18 stories up — after the brake on their scaffold riser failed. Firefighters rescued the men by sending down harnesses from inside the building and pulling them to safety.

“You always worry about members when they are completing this type of work,” said Anthony Fresina, business manager of Local 190. “All the training in the world cannot prevent accidents from happening. But it is the training that stops accidents from becoming casualties.”

The exact cause of the equipment failure has not been determined. Following the accident the cable was replaced and the workers spent additional time training on the safe operation of the scaffolding. There have not been any other problems, and the job is expected to be completed in December of this year.

Carrow Real Estate Services, LLC, which manages One Commerce Plaza, has two other Albany buildings that require work. Because of the success of this project, Laborers from Local 190 will be working on those projects.

“Our members did great work on this job — and I’m proud it will result in future work,” Anthony Fresina said.
A construction project in midtown Manhattan has become the setting for a successful union recruitment effort recently, bringing new members to the NYS Laborers.

The project, which began in January, involves the construction of two buildings located across the street from one another at 52nd Street and 10th Avenue. Because most of the work being performed is concrete and lumber work, there are more than 90 Laborers and 11 apprentices on the job from the Concrete Workers District Council – including Local Unions 6A, 18A and 20.

Six of those Laborers were recently recruited on the job site while they were working for IBK Construction, a non-union contractor.

Anthony Ortiz, an organizer for the district council, has lead a targeted effort to attract workers from IBK Construction to join the Laborers for three years. The concrete organizers have provided information to non-union workers that illustrated both the superior benefits offered by the union, and the unfair treatment they endure in their current jobs.

“We are all very pleased with the smooth transition of these non-union workers becoming union workers on the job site,” said Barry Kaplan, business manager of the Concrete Workers District Council. “This is a shining example of how persistence and diplomacy pays off for everyone – the worker, the contractor and the council. Our organizers will continue to get the message out to more workers who are not being treated properly.”

Philip Wilkos, a former IBK Construction employee who joined the union during the project, said he could not be happier with his recent conversion.

“All the information they gave us about the union is true – while the downside to staying in my old position was also true,” Wilkos said. “It took a while to build a level of trust before I could fully appreciate what they were trying to tell me. Now I’m happy to tell other workers from IBK that they can also improve their lives with better money, benefits and working conditions. I’ve been on the job for only four months and my standard of living has increased tremendously.”

Philip Wilkos
General Labor Foreman Charlie Giovinco agrees that they must “stay union” to keep the work moving forward. “I’ve been in the business for 21 years and the transition of the IBK men on the job has gone very well – almost seamless,” he said. “This is the way things should be working.”

When finished, both buildings on the work site will offer residential space on the upper floors and commercial space on the first two floors. The concrete phase of the project was expected to be complete by September, and the whole project will likely conclude by the end of the year.

The Concrete Workers District Council held its inaugural scholarship golf tournament June 8 at the North Hill Country Club in Manhasset, Long Island. The proceeds raised will benefit the Cement and Concrete Workers Scholarship Fund, which was established in 2004 to provide financial assistance to the children of members pursuing a college education.

Despite threatening skies, the day was a success, beginning with a brunch and followed by a shotgun start. Awards, raffles and scholarships were presented during a dinner after the golf tournament.

The money raised will be used for five scholarships available to the membership of the three locals that make up the district council – Locals 6A, 18A and 20. Students will be given $2,000 a year for expenses for each of the four years they attend college.

“Not only did this event serve as a boon for raising scholarship funding for our members’ children, an outing like this enables us to interact with contractors and get to know them on a more personal level, which is critical to building better working relationships,” said Barry Kaplan, business manager of the Concrete Workers District Council. “Because of the success of our first year, we are already planning for next
When Barry Kaplan joined Local 20 in New York City in 1973, there were no apprenticeship programs to prepare him for the work site. Instead, he learned his craft via the old school – on the job. His gritty education came through the variety of roles he played as a journeyman, including bucket man, lugger, foundation worker and shop steward. A year into his career, he took a break in his development to serve in the Army for four years. But upon his return, he picked up where he left off with the local.

Over the years, Kaplan has helped build several New York City landmarks, including the World Financial Center at the World Trade Center, the Marriott Marquis and the Wang Building.

In 1991, he was tapped to join the executive board at Local 20. Two years later, he was elected secretary-treasurer for the local. He continued his ascent when he soon became business manager as well, following the retirement of the previous business manager. He has since been elected and re-elected to the position.

In 1998, he became business manager of the Concrete Workers District Council and has been re-elected twice. The District Council is comprised of Local Unions 6A, 18A and 20, which collectively serve about 3,000 members.

Kaplan said among the changes he has seen during his tenure is the union’s increasingly mosaic blend as immigrant workers have swelled its ranks in recent years. In response to this, he has worked hard to help make the acclimation process easier for these men and women.

Under his direction, the District Council Training Center is working to establish English classes to help immigrant workers further their careers by learning the language. Training center staff also work closely with apprentices who do not speak English to help with translation.

“We’d like to offer even more services to help with the naturalization process, so that today’s immigrants are as successfully integrated as past generations were,” Kaplan said.

Kaplan lives with his wife Romilda in Brooklyn, and has two children – a 24-year-old daughter currently attending graduate school at the University of Buffalo, and a 21-year-old son in his second year at Borough of Manhattan Community College.

“FILL IN FIVE”

Tri-Fund magazine asked Barry Kaplan to fill in the blanks on five questions about himself:

1. People I’ve worked with all these years would be surprised to learn that: I’m an avid fisherman.

2. My first job was: Paperboy for the New York Post – a role that lasted two weeks.

3. The last movie I saw was: X-Men: The Last Stand

4. My favorite song on the radio is: Any Zeppelin Song

5. My favorite saying or quote is: “Nothing is impossible” – Winston Churchill
Earlier this year, Local 147 was the subject of a unique exhibit in Grand Central Terminal in New York City. The Sandhog Project, a photographic and video exploration of the world of the Sandhogs, portrayed Local 147 members currently working 800 feet below Manhattan’s busy streets to build the 60-mile-long City Water Tunnel #3 – and reinforce the two decrepit, existing tunnels to prevent a catastrophic water shortage in the city.

The exhibit included 16 life-size portraits of the miners mounted on cylinder light boxes – eight-foot-tall columns with Sandhog photos illuminated on the outside. These columns created a central passage to the scale-accurate video projection of the 12-foot-diameter water tunnel. The continuously moving tunnel image, shot in real-time and from the perspective of the mining train, simulated the Sandhogs’ daily journey on a typical stretch of the water tunnel.

This multi-media installation, augmented by towering images of the excavation, tunnel sounds and voices of the miners, introduced the public to the legacy and sacrifices of Local 147 members. The weeklong exhibit appeared in Grand Central Terminal’s Vanderbilt Hall.

The Sandhog Project was the first solo exhibition in New York by award-winning photographer Gina LeVay, who documented the subculture of the Sandhogs for more than two years. The project is part of a web site created by LeVay at: www.Sandhogproject.com.

“We were very happy to work with Gina throughout this project,” said Richard Fitzsimmons, business manager local 147. “Attempting to portray a realistic glimpse into our world below ground is a challenging but important effort, giving the public a better understanding of what we do, where we do it and how critical it is to all New Yorkers.”

Francis X. McArdle, management trustee for the New York State Laborers LECET Fund, who recently ended his 20-year stint as managing director of the General Contractors Association, is taking on a new role with the recently created National Commission on Surface Transportation Funding.

Appointed by Senator Hillary Clinton, McArdle will join the 12-member body for five years to research and develop how existing and new federal transportation projects should be funded.

Driven by increasing congestion, trade, population growth and oil prices, the commission was created to determine how these factors impact the nation’s groaning transportation system and ways to relieve the strain. The group will also research the declining balances in the Highway Trust Fund and the emergence of innovative private sector funding streams.

Studies suggest that American businesses are facing growing costs from transportation problems, which could affect the country’s ability to compete in the global economy. Polling data also indicates that traffic congestion is negatively affecting the quality of life for Americans and driving up housing and social costs.

McArdle will continue to serve as a management trustee for LECET and trustee of the Laborers’ Health & Safety Fund of North America.
A picket line at the downtown Albany Hampton Inn did not stop this year’s annual New York State Laborers Tri-Funds legislative conference. Instead, in a show of solidarity with the restaurant workers union, the conference was quickly relocated to the nearby Crowne Plaza hotel.

The conference, which helps nurture new and longstanding relationships between labor, state and legislative leaders, took place May 15th. Participants in the lunch portion of the event included Albany Mayor Jerry Jennings and New York State Comptroller Alan Hevesi.

“I am a sheriff for prevailing wage . . . I want to make sure things don’t get worse before the governor leaves office.”

— Susan John, Assembly Labor Committee Chair

An update on the progress of legislation relevant to Laborers came from a variety of speakers, including New York State Senate Minority Leader David A. Paterson (D-Manhattan), Senate Labor Committee Chairman George D. Maziarz (R-Newfane) and Assembly Labor Committee Chair Susan John (D-Rochester).

“We have created an environment in New York state where our own students are leaving. We need to use Eliot Spitzer’s plan to create development and change in New York state.”

— David Patterson, New York State Senate Minority Leader

LIUNA General Secretary-Treasurer and New England Regional Manager Armand E. Sabitoni discussed a range of issues facing LIUNA at the state and national levels and opened the floor to concerns of local business managers and representatives. Other speakers included New York State Laborers’ PAC Lobbyist Thomas Hartnett and Heather Briccetti, who gave a legislative overview.

The program concluded with a legislative reception at the New York State Museum, located in downtown Albany’s Empire State Plaza.

“We need to get the transportation projects out the door. It is time to start construction – it is important that we get these projects started and people working.”

— George Maziarz, Senate Labor Committee Chairman
Each election season, the NYS Laborers carefully review the candidates up for important statewide positions and identify the leaders that best represent the issues and concerns that are important to our union members. This year, after careful consideration, the Laborers proudly endorsed Hillary Clinton for re-election to the U.S. Senate, Eliot Spitzer for governor and Andrew Cuomo to be our new attorney general of New York state.

During her first term, Senator Clinton made sure New York got its fair share of federal transportation funding and helped pass the $2.9 billion Transportation Bond Act. As New York state attorney general, Eliot Spitzer demonstrated his commitment to Laborers by prosecuting contractors who violated prevailing wage and other labor protection laws. While serving as Housing and Urban Development secretary under President Bill Clinton, Andrew Cuomo worked closely with the labor movement to provide more housing and construction jobs.
Laborers from New York City and across the state are mourning the loss of Richard Fitzsimmons Sr., former business manager of Local Union 147. Richard, 73, passed away unexpectedly in March. He is survived by his wife, Anne, and his four children, Victoria, Richard Jr. (who is the current business manager of Local Union 147), Nancy Ann and Christopher.

Born in the South Bronx in 1933, Richard was the son of John and Agnes Fitzsimmons and had three brothers and one sister. Two of his brothers were fellow Sandhogs – members of Local Union 147.

Richard joined Local 147 in 1954 after a disappointing experience serving in the U.S. Navy. Lured by recruitment posters that promised of “seeing the world,” he instead only saw Guantanamo Bay and other posts in the Caribbean.

After serving three years, Richard went to work for the New Haven and Hartford Railroad, but found that line of work “too tame.” He soon moved on and found his true calling: the world of the Sandhogs. As a miner’s helper, Richard embraced his entry-level job, taking dirt, sand and rock that miners hacked out and dumping it into a “muck bucket.”

After spending many years as a Sandhog, Richard was approached by his fellow members to run for the business manager position in 1965. This was no small task, given the history of the business manager position at the local up to that point. There had been no long-term tenure for the position. Richard rose to the challenge. He defeated the incumbent and ran every year after without opposition – until his son Richard Jr. took the position in 1995.

In his new role, Richard quickly realized that political action would need to play a huge part to make gains for his membership. His efforts are best illustrated by his work early on to continue City Water Tunnel #3. When the project was halted, he developed a political action committee funded by his membership to keep the lines of communication open with individuals who could ensure the future of the tunnel – and work for his members. Due largely to Richard’s efforts, the third city water tunnel is still under construction today.

During his years in office, Richard was heavily involved on several labor, civic and fraternal fronts. Some of the organizations he served with include: Political Advisory Committee of the New York State AFL-CIO; the Legislative Committee of the Maritime Port council of NY and NJ; and the executive board of the Irish American Labor Coalition.

“Rich’s absence will be felt for years to come,” said Armand E. Sabitoni, General Secretary-Treasurer and New England Regional Manager. “He was a hard-working leader and an excellent resource for the Sandhogs that are working today. He was also a kind and caring man, whose presence made a difference both at work and at home. We will miss him greatly.”

In Memoriam:
Richard Fitzsimmons Sr.
1933-2006
This April, the Mason Tenders Training Fund (MTTF) officially opened its new training center with a special ceremony. A project many years in the making, the center will provide Laborers with first-rate construction skills to better serve signatory contractors.

With 21,000 square feet of space, the state-of-the-art school will offer classes, hands-on training and continuing education to thousands of members and new apprentices. The facility is located at 42-53 21st Street in Long Island City.

Many union dignitaries, contractors and politicians attended the grand opening ceremony. Attendees and speakers included Terence M. O’Sullivan, General President; Armand E. Sabitoni, LIUNA General Secretary-Treasurer and New England Regional Manager; Terence M. O’Sullivan, LIUNA General President; Paul O’Brien MTTF Management Trustee; Raymond M. Pocino, LIUNA Vice President, Eastern Regional Manager and MTTF Labor Trustee; Robert Bonanza, Mason Tenders District Council Business Manager and MTTF Labor Trustee; New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg; City Council Speaker Christine Quinn, New York State AFL-CIO President Denis Hughes, and Sean Brennan, Director of the Mason Tenders District Council Training Fund, who served as host of the event.

“A lot of hard work went into making this building a reality and we are very pleased with the end result – which is already serving our first apprentices,” said Raymond M. Pocino, LIUNA Vice President and Eastern Regional Manager. “We are also very appreciative of the backing our New York City officials have offered. Their presence at this grand opening demonstrates their support and recognition of our commitment to building a better city.”

The new Mason Tenders District Council training center in Long Island City has 21,000 square feet of space for classes and training.
The New York State Laborers’ Health and Safety Trust Fund has again teamed up with the Associated General Contractors of America New York State Chapter (AGC) for what has become an annual partnership to help raise awareness for work zone safety during the busy summer travel months.

In 2005, the Laborers collaborated with the AGC to successfully advocate the passage of the Work Zone Safety Act in the New York State Legislature. The bill has since become law and imposes stricter penalties for drivers speeding through highway work zones.

“The second poster in the campaign illustrates the knowledge many Laborers have in mind but probably never speak,” said Michael Kelly, executive director of the Health and Safety Trust Fund. “Being a union member is a team effort and Laborers must work together to foster a culture of safety in the workplace. We hope these posters continue to help communicate our message that individual actions have a tremendous effect on the overall safety and efficiency of the worksite.”

New Health and Safety Poster Stresses Working Together

Highway Work Zone Safety Making the Legislation Understood

The New York State Laborers’ Health and Safety Trust Fund recently added a new edition to its ongoing poster campaign. Developed from a 2005 Laborsafe story, the new poster’s theme is the importance of working in numbers for safety.

The goal of the new poster is consistent with the overall program: to improve safety for Laborers across the state. Stressing the role of personal responsibility in lowering the risk of injury for everyone working on a job site, the poster also lists safety procedures Laborers should practice each day before stepping on the site.

“The second poster in the campaign illustrates the knowledge many Laborers have in mind but probably never speak,” said Michael Kelly, executive director of the Health and Safety Trust Fund. “Being a union member is a team effort and Laborers must work together to foster a culture of safety in the workplace. We hope these posters continue to help communicate our message that individual actions have a tremendous effect on the overall safety and efficiency of the worksite.”

NEW HEALTH AND SAFETY POSTER STRESSES WORKING TOGETHER

HIGHWAY WORK ZONE SAFETY MAKING THE LEGISLATION UNDERSTOOD

The New York State Laborers’ Health and Safety Trust Fund has again teamed up with the Associated General Contractors of America New York State Chapter (AGC) for what has become an annual partnership to help raise awareness for work zone safety during the busy summer travel months.

In 2005, the Laborers collaborated with the AGC to successfully advocate the passage of the Work Zone Safety Act in the New York State Legislature. The bill has since become law and imposes stricter penalties for drivers speeding through highway work zones.

An important step in helping to make highway work zones safer for Laborers, the law charges a mandatory $50 surcharge for violations occurring within active construction work zones and imposes a 60-day license suspension for drivers convicted of two or more speeding violations in work zones.

The money goes to a highway construction and maintenance safety education fund that provides education, advocacy and increased awareness of the laws relating to safety in active work zones.

This year, the partners created a radio advertisement that explained the law in plain terms and stressed just how much speeding in a work zone will really cost—both to the driver and the workers in the highway work zone.

The radio spots ran the week prior to the busy July 4 travel weekend and could be heard in the Albany, Binghamton, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Utica and Hudson Valley.
Dear Brothers and Sisters:

We have just returned from our 23rd General Convention in Las Vegas. As General President Terry O’Sullivan and General Secretary-Treasurer Armand Sabitoni have told you in their columns, we had a very successful convention. I greatly appreciate the support of all of the delegates from New York who re-elected me as Vice-President for the New England Region. While our union has accomplished a lot in the last five years, we face many challenges.

One of those challenges is to continue to improve the skills and safety training that we provide to all of our members. That training is especially important as the technology in the construction industry changes and as the safety risks that we face on the job also change. In order to provide access to the training that our members need, we need to continually improve our training facilities and programs. The Mason Tenders District Council just opened a new training facility in Queens (page 13). This facility will provide convenient access to skills training, safety classes, and other programs for their members throughout the New York City region. With more than 20,000 square feet of space, the training center provides the necessary space and facilities for hands-on training for many different jobs. Complete hazardous waste training, which had been difficult to provide, will now be available at the facility. Other locals and district councils throughout the state are also upgrading their training. The Concrete Workers District Council has just graduated its first apprentice classes, and the Local 147 Sandhogs have just started several new training courses.

In addition to skills training, safety training is also essential. Safety training is not just learning about new safety and health issues. We all need to be refreshed about the daily hazards that we face on the job. Members from Local 190, in Albany, had a reminder of that when three members working on the exterior of a 20-story building had to be rescued when their scaffold failed. In addition to repairing the equipment, their contractor worked with the Eastern New York Laborers’ Training Fund to conduct additional scaffold safety training for everyone working on the building. We have been fortunate to be able to expand our safety and health training throughout the state through a grant from the New York State Department of Labor to the New York State Laborers’ Health and Safety Fund.

We all need to support our training programs. Take advantage of the training classes available to you to learn new skills or refresh yourself on what you already know. Always take the time for safety training, your life and health are too important to risk.

Sincerely and Fraternally,

Vincent R. Masino
Vice President
Laborers’ International Union of North America

‘Safety training is not just learning about new safety and health issues. We all need to be refreshed about the daily hazards that we face on the job.’
The original charter for Local 157.

From 1969 to 1974, 450 members of Local 157 worked on the Gilboa Dam, the largest project ever built by the local.

Vintage cars in front of Local 157’s first union hall hint at the era.