

NECA's St. Louis Chapter President on Local 57

Written by Administrator

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Doug Martin - President of the St. Louis Chapter, National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA)

Our NECA contractors are proud to have worked for more than 100 years with the IBEW to create the standards for today's electrical construction and communication industries. We've dedicated generations of hard work to build our industry's capability to deliver the highest quality installations and develop the standards for safety and electrical performance excellence. NECA and the IBEW have also worked together to create apprenticeship programs that train our electricians and communication technicians to achieve world-class skills.

It is unconscionable that Terry Nelson and the carpenters decided to generate membership by undermining the standards of hard-working IBEW electricians and professional NECA contractors. Construction unions have historically worked together to establish fair prevailing standards for wages and benefits in exchange for our on-going investment in developing the highest skills and safety. As a result the St. Louis area has greatly benefited. The union construction industry has trained and retained excellent craft workers, improved construction safety and delivered the highest quality installations possible.

In forming Local 57, Nelson undermines not only the IBEW's standards, but the carpenters as well. It is extremely hypocritical for the carpenters to legitimize (and even subsidize) open shop contractors and publicly promote their workers as union craftsmen. Local 57 workers were all trained by non-union contractors. Putting a carpenters union label on non-union trained workers and promoting their substandard skills is a betrayal of the standards and quality that the IBEW, the building trades and previously the carpenters worked a century to build. I wonder if the average union carpenter understands how much Nelson's decision to create Local 57 will expand open shop construction in St. Louis. When customers can no longer equate union construction with superior quality and better-trained workers, there is little reason to choose to build union.

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Nelson has produced numerous do not patronize flyers urging the public to avoid businesses that select open shop contractors or cut fair wages and benefits because those actions lower working standards, hurting the entire community. As the voice of the carpenter, that rings rather hollow. Those in construction eager to drive wages down at the expense of skill are embracing Nelson's efforts to undermine the NECA-IBEW standards. With Nelson's help, they can perpetuate an unfounded stereotype that construction prevailing area standards are too expensive for today's markets. In the long-term, I believe Nelson's Local 57 will undermine the standards of every construction union in our region and ultimately will result in lost work for many union contractors and cost their union workers jobs - including the carpenters.

NECA contractors are signatory to IBEW agreements because those agreements create the most effective tools for us to train, develop and retain the best-skilled, most productive workforce. NECA Contractors, working with our better-trained IBEW workforce, are successfully competing every day for electrical and communication work throughout our region. We will continue to compete and deliver cost-effective electrical and communication work with superior quality, higher productivity and better long-term value for our customers and the St. Louis construction industry.