



History of the New England Region... 1953-2003



By the 1950's the United States had become a peaceful and prosperous nation. Hope for a bright future was firmly entrenched in the expectations of the working public. The second-half of LIUNA's century-long history was beginning with a booming construction market.

New England keenly felt this upswing and Laborers' Union took advantage of this amazing era by continuing to charter many new locals and organizing thousands of new members. From the state of Maine, where local 327 of Augusta attained its charter in 1954 to Connecticut where the Laborers began working on the new and pricey - \$464 million dollar Connecticut Turnpike, the Laborers' Union was flourishing. Another major development in 1960 was the groundbreaking of Hartford's Constitution Plaza where hundreds of Laborers were on the job for this multi-million dollar construction project.

Construction was not our only area of growth during this time; in 1954 we saw an upswing in the public employee sector as locals were organized across the region. In fact, Local 357 from Boston was chartered that same year. Throughout the 1960's our phenomenal growth in this sector continued.

Public employee locals formed in Massachusetts and Rhode Island in 1966. They included Local 1116 in Natick, Massachusetts; the Zambarano Hospital employees of Local 1134 in Pascoag, Rhode Island; public employees of Local 1139 in Quincy, Massachusetts; Local 1144 in Taunton, Massachusetts; Local 1156 in Framingham, Massachusetts; and the South Shore municipal employees of Local 1162 in Brockton, Massachusetts. The housing employees of Local 1217 in Providence, Rhode Island formed the next year in 1967. These new members could now enjoy many of the same health and pension benefits that their fellow members in construction could enjoy. Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, Rhode Island public employees were also organizing from areas such as the City of Providence and the Providence Civic Center. They came together to create Providence's Local 1033. As the 1960's rolled forward, many local unions continued to form in every state. In 1964 the Massachusetts Laborers' District Council and the Connecticut Laborers' District Council were both chartered, overseeing the many activities of the locals in their respective states. These were ground-breaking events in the sense that these were the first District Councils formed in the growing New England Region.

On the International level our Union's name was changed officially in 1965 to the Laborers' International Union of North America. The Union gained a new name, but maintained its same mission offering its membership the best representation available in the labor movement.

Due to the formation of a number of new locals throughout the state, a major development occurred in Rhode Island in 1967, as the Rhode Island General Council was chartered. This Council would soon become the Rhode Island Laborers' District Council, and would oversee the activities of all the Laborers' locals in the Ocean State, as Rhode Island joined its neighboring states of Massachusetts and Connecticut in forming a council of its own.

At this time in the New England Region, the leadership saw the need for training programs and jumped on board with both feet. It wasn't long before the New England Laborers' Training Trust Fund (NELTTF) was formed in 1968, soon becoming one of the nation's leading sites for the development of training programs for Laborers. Founded in Hopkinton, Massachusetts, the NELTTF began to conduct programs, and would soon set the standard for other training funds to follow.

As the 1970s began, the New England Region continued to grow. As training programs gained momentum with both labor and contractors more locals were being formed due to an increased number of organizing victories. Another source of pride for New England Laborers at this time was when New England Regional Manager Arthur E. Coia would be recognized as an International leader when he was elected to the position of LIUNA Vice President in 1971.

In 1972, another local was formed as Local 1322 Automotive Body Assemblers. It was chartered in Providence, Rhode Island. This local would grow over time to represent not only these workers, but also municipal workers and wastewater treatment workers in Cranston, Rhode Island.

A year later, a major development for northern New England Laborers occurred as the Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont Laborers' District Council was chartered to oversee the local unions in those three states.

In 1974 Laborers were now able to attend training programs at the New England Laborers' Training Academy (NELTA) in Pomfret Center, Connecticut, a much more accessible site for those Laborers living in southern Connecticut and parts of Rhode Island. Training in construction skills was conducted in six-week cycles at the scenic Pomfret facility, which was formerly the site of a Jesuit monastery.

As the decade progressed, two more public sector locals were formed as Local 176 in Worcester, Massachusetts was chartered in 1976 representing that city's public service employees, and Local 136 in Greenwich, Connecticut was chartered in 1977 representing that town's municipal workers.

New England's service on a national level continued as Vice President and New England Regional Manager Arthur E. Coia rose to the Union's second-highest office, becoming General Secretary-Treasurer in 1979. Not since Domenic D'Alessandro had

served as the Union's General President in the early part of the century had a New England Laborer served in such a prestigious position.

There were also major strides made in the area of member benefits. In the early 1970s & 1980s, the leadership made certain that New England Laborers would begin enjoying exciting new benefits like legal services and annuities.

In 1981, considerable public attention focused on the dangers of asbestos, and with several states exploring asbestos removal, the New England Laborers' Training Academy began a pilot Train-The-Trainer program in this area, and by the end of 1981, trained its first 72 Laborers in asbestos removal, helping to secure asbestos removal projects for union contractors. By the middle of 1982, NELTA had trained more than 300 Laborers in the new work and the course began to draw favorable attention on a national level.

As our progress on many fronts continued, the International recognized the work of another New England leader Vere O. Haynes, Business Manager of Local 1224 in Hartford, Connecticut. In 1985, Vere was elected LIUNA Vice President, a position he still proudly holds today.

A year later in 1986, another public sector local in the Ocean State was founded as Rhode Island Judicial, Professional, Technical and Health Employees Local 808 received its charter, and as the 1980s were drawing to a close, major developments continued to occur in the New England Region.

In 1987, soon after receiving EPA approval, NELTA produced A Course to Health and Safety, a video highlighting the Safe Asbestos Removal Training Program, as the asbestos course would soon become the model for others to follow throughout North America. The Laborers-AGC Education and Training Fund would become so successful with these groundbreaking programs it needed to expand and in 1985 was re-located from its headquarters in Washington, DC to Pomfret, Connecticut where it stands today.

In 1989, the trustees of the New England Laborers' Training Trust Fund would approve the establishment of the Arthur E. Coia Scholarship & Education Fund, which would offer financial assistance to deserving college-bound students who were the sons and daughters of New England Laborers. Since the inception of this Fund, more than 400 recipients have received funding so that they could pursue their dreams of higher education in the nation's leading universities and colleges.

Also in 1989, the New England Laborers' Labor-Management Cooperation Trust (NELLMCT) was established to foster the spirit of positive labor-management relations between the Union and its signatory contractors throughout the Region.

That same year our region was honored again as New England Regional Manager Arthur A. Coia was elected to the position of LIUNA General Secretary-Treasurer, becoming only the second New England Laborer to hold this prestigious position.

As a new decade began, the New England Region experienced a surge of growth.

Massachusetts would embark on two major projects in 1992. The Boston Harbor Project would be constructed under the first Project Labor Agreement in the country's history. In addition, preliminary planning of Boston's Big Dig would begin for what would become the largest public works project in the nation's history. Both jobs would employ hundreds of laborers in varying capacities.

That same year the public sector in the Bay State experienced a major upswing as the Massachusetts Public Employees Council (MPEC) was chartered, overseeing all public employee locals throughout the Commonwealth. Connecticut also added another public sector local—Local 200 was created in Bridgeport, Connecticut, representing public service employees in that city.

New England's commitment to great leadership was affirmed again in 1993 when General Secretary-Treasurer Arthur A. Coia was elected LIUNA General President, becoming only the second New England Laborer to serve in this leadership position.

"Our permanency and progress as a Union depends on creativity, as we have always looked forward and planned ahead. This International has the strongest of foundations- our past. The past was built on new thinking, new ideas- and our courage in putting these ideas to the test. Today, we face new challenges and new tests... and we are ready". Commented the Laborers' new leader, General President Coia, shortly after being sworn in.

The following year presented new landmarks for the Union as the U.S. Department of Labor recognized the Construction Craft Laborer as an apprenticeship trade, opening the door for apprenticeship programs to begin throughout the International. The Tri-Fund concept continued to thrive and New England was out in front again establishing the New England Laborers' Health and Safety Fund to initiate programs to ensure the safety of workers on the job while promoting beneficial health habits for Laborers and their families.

Another significant event for the region in 1994 was the election of New England Regional Manager Armand E. Sabitoni to serve on the General Executive Board as LIUNA Vice-President.

With the economy and the Union continuing to thrive in 1995, the New England Region was expanded to include majority of the construction locals in New York City and Eastern New York State. The region grew to include New York City Locals 6A, 18A, 20, 29, 147, 731, 1010, 1018, 1042, 1175, as well as Local 1298 from Hempstead on Long Island.

Eastern New York locals joining New England would now include Local 17 in Newburgh, Local 60 in Hawthorne, Local 157 in Schenectady, Local 190 in Albany, Local 235 in Elmsford, Local 754 in Nyack, and Local 1000 in Poughkeepsie.

The 1990's were a great time for the New England Laborers, as the decade progressed, so did our market share. The construction market received a major boost in Connecticut in 1995 as the UCONN 2000 project began. Hundreds of Laborers would be employed at the state's university campuses on several multi-million dollar construction projects.

Our organizing persistence also paid off as more public sector locals were formed. Local 226 was chartered in Providence, followed by Massachusetts Local 1060 in Nantucket, chartered a year later in 1996. Local 255 in the Bronx, representing the lay Catholic teachers in the Diocese of New York City and Local 601 in New Rochelle would both join the Region in 1997.

With the Construction Craft Laborer now an apprenticeship trade, work began in New England to have each state adopt Laborer apprenticeship programs. Connecticut was the first to accept in 1997 and the regional programs were up and running as Massachusetts, Maine, and Rhode Island also adopted Laborers' apprenticeship in 1998.

With the decade drawing to a close, the first Demolition and Decommissioning (D&D) Agreement in the nation was reached in 1999 at the Maine Yankee Nuclear Power Plant where northern New England Laborers were on the job with the necessary training required to dismantle one of the country's largest nuclear power facilities. Soon after, a D&D agreement would be reached at the Connecticut Yankee Nuclear Power Plant for Connecticut Laborers', decommissioning and dismantling another one of the country's major nuclear power plants. These projects continue to employ Laborers today.

That same year, two additional public sector locals were formed in Massachusetts as the municipal workers of Local 544 in Newton and hospital employees of Local 381 in Somerville received their charters.

The new millennium began for the New England Region with an energized spirit and an unprecedented increase in construction activity. To meet the upcoming challenges and showcase our talents, the New England Laborers' Training Academy in Hopkinton, Massachusetts sponsored our first Skills Demonstration Day. For the first time the skills and talents of our Laborers both in the construction and hazardous waste remediation industry were showcased. By witnessing firsthand the capabilities of our Laborers, contractors and other industry experts developed a new understanding and appreciation for our many skills and abilities.

The Union also gained ground in northern New England as the apprenticeship program in New Hampshire was approved.

With work opportunities growing, the Region was focused on bringing new members into the LIUNA ranks, thus was born the Laborers' New England Region Organizing Fund. This fund's commitment to expand its market-share in construction and related industries would penetrate every level of the Union.

The year 2000 continued to be a busy one as two additional public sector locals were formed in Massachusetts as Local 380, representing hospital workers began in Cambridge and Local 956 in Waltham, representing public employees were chartered.

Expansion continued throughout the year and the Region grew as locals from upstate New York joined the ranks. Now included in the region would be Local 7 in Binghamton, Local 35 in Utica, Local 91 in Niagara Falls, Local 103 in Geneva, Local 186 in Plattsburgh, Local 210 in Buffalo, Local 214 in Oswego, Local 322 in Ogdensburg, Local 433 in Syracuse, Local 435 in Rochester, Local 589 in Ithaca, Local 621 in Olean, and Local 1358 in Corning.

The next year 2001 was surely a banner year for the New England Region. We were pleased and proud to see two of our region's top leadership move into International offices. Armand E. Sabitoni was appointed and later elected to the position of General Secretary-Treasurer, becoming the third New England Laborer to serve this prestigious office. He would also continue to serve as New England Regional Manager.

The International Union's Executive Board was enhanced when Vincent R. Masino was appointed LIUNA Vice-President while also serving as New England Assistant Regional Manager.

In the pursuit to venture into innovative and cutting edge ideas, 2002 witnessed the opening of the New England Laborers'/Cranston Public Schools Construction Career Academy in Cranston, Rhode Island. This charter school would focus on the educational advancement of young men and women, allowing high school students to receive their diploma while studying a broad based construction curriculum.

This incentive to cultivate future laborers would be extended to Medford, Massachusetts where the New England Regional Office would join efforts with the Massachusetts Laborers' District Council, Local 22, and school department officials to develop a program at Medford High School where students can learn about the Laborers Union, our craft, and the benefits of becoming a member of the Union.

The benefits of both projects would surpass expectations. Providing students with these opportunities not only exposed them to alternative educational options leading to a career in the construction industry, but will also insure that there will be future qualified Laborers ready to take on the job when today's laborers retire.

The Region was off to a productive start as our anniversary year began with the state of Vermont having their apprenticeship-training program approved by the state. Now, all six New England states are participating in Laborers' apprenticeship training.

At LIUNA's 100th year celebration this April, the New England Region was given accolades for our new and innovative approaches to industry issues. The possibilities of what the New England Region will be able to achieve in 2003 and beyond are endless.

"The New England Laborers' story is a living history and an ongoing story, and one that cannot be told on a few pages. It lives in each of us and in the accomplishments and struggles of those who came before us. The work we do every day on behalf of our members and their families is a testament to our former leaders and to each and every man and woman who proudly carried the Laborers' Union in their hearts. I am proud to be a part of this tradition, and I will never forget what it took for us to get where we are today. We are a proud and unique Region, a leader in many ways, and our legacy will continue so that our children and their children can understand the honor and pride of being a true Laborer," said Armand E. Sabitoni, General Secretary-Treasurer and New England Regional Manager.

