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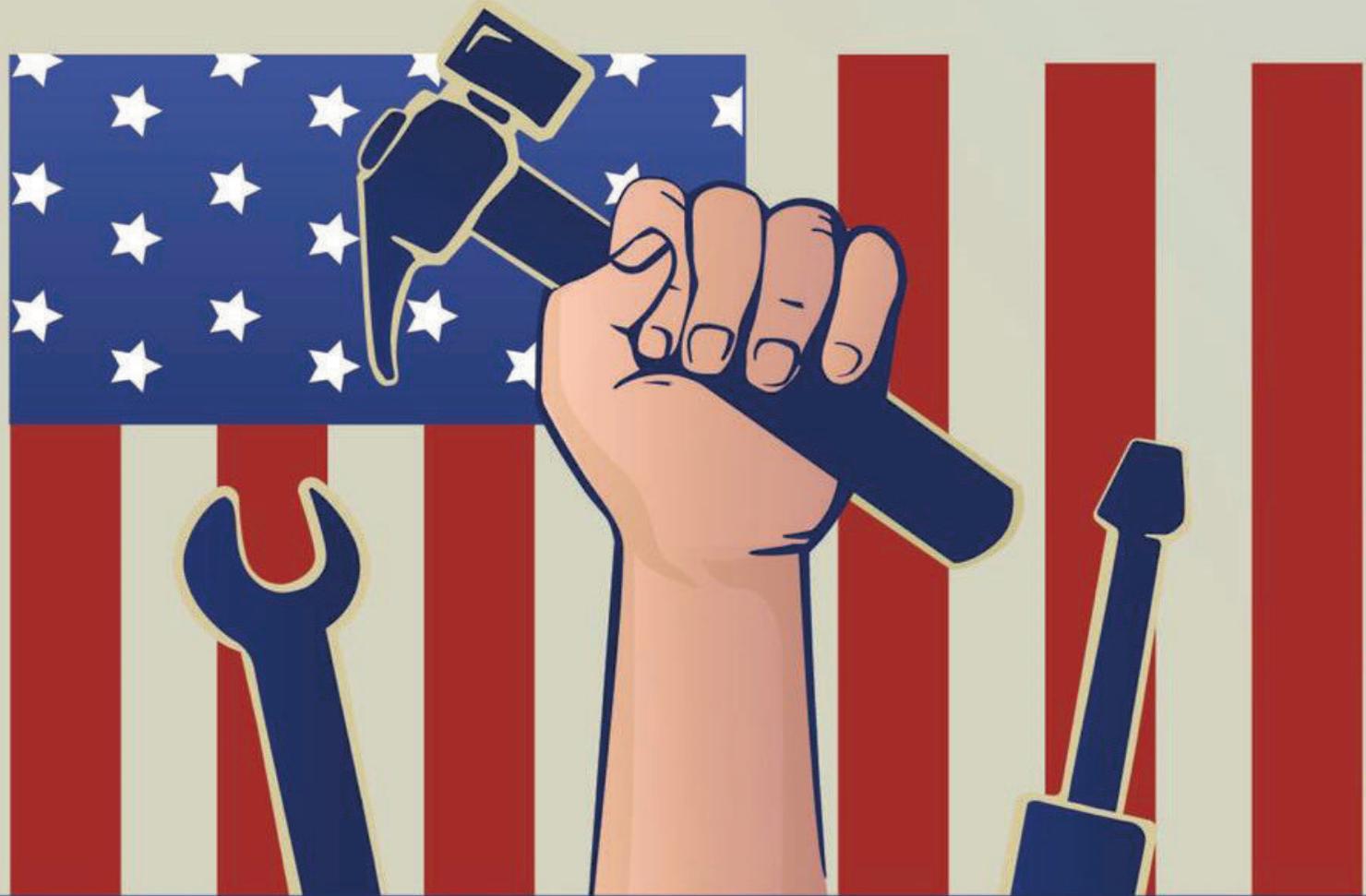
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HEROIC NURSES CONTINUE TO STRUGGLE WITH INADEQUATE PPE

By Steve Wishnia

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit New York in March, nurse Lora Logan's unit at the Veterans Administration hospital on East 23rd Street got switched to taking care of coronavirus patients—those showing symptoms who had either tested positive for the virus or were suspected to have it.

Logan, from Brooklyn, has been a medical-surgical nurse for almost 15 years, working at the VA New York Harbor Health Care System hospital. Her specialty, telemetry, was well suited for the epidemic: It involves observing patients' vital signs, such as heartbeat, breathing, and blood-oxygen level, from monitors at the nurses' station, outside their rooms.

"Whatever the patient has, you don't want it to spread to anybody else," she says.

But the hospital was plagued by shortages of personal protective equipment such as masks and gowns, and Logan got infected with the virus in April. She was out for almost two weeks. "I definitely got it on the job," she says.



She was uncomfortable returning to work, but says "I was more worried about my coworkers, because I didn't know if I'd exposed them."

Her unit returned to taking care of regular patients in May. The hospital's supply of PPE has "seen some improvement, but it's not where it's supposed to be," she says. In particular, the masks nurses are being given don't completely seal off air. (The VA says its equipment is "in accordance with Centers for Disease Control guidelines.") Logan wants the hospital to obtain N100 masks, which have a filter and can be reused safely.

"Stay safe, and take this virus seriously," she advises. For the federal government, she says, that means invoking the Defense Production Act to mandate that industries manufacture more PPE.

"Our fear is that as the surge continues, they're going to be moving equipment around from one part of the country to another, and we'll face a severe shortage," she says. "I'm no good to my patients if I'm lying in the bed next to them." ■

GROCERY STORE WORKERS TO SHOPPERS: PLEASE HELP US KEEP EVERYONE SAFE

By Naeisha Rose

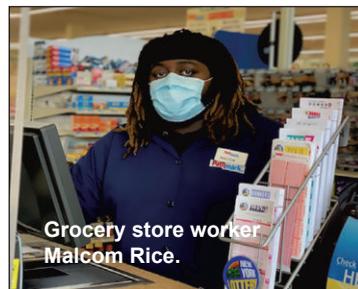
WDSU/UFCW Local 338 is comprised almost entirely of essential workers, a great many of them helping to keep New Yorkers fed throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the challenges, workers, especially those in grocery stores, have not backed down. The nearly 100-year-old union representing them now hopes shoppers and companies will do the same to prevent a second wave of infection.

"At the outset of this, there was a massive rush for essential retail items where people were stacking up, some were hoarding and there was an explosion in the stores where some people were doing tons of overtime working crazy hours in order to keep the stores open," union spokesperson Nikki Kateman says. "Things have tapered off and normal shopping has resumed, but the number of shoppers have increased a little bit because people aren't going to restaurants as often anymore."

Local 338 member Wally Waugh is a grocery store clerk at a Stop & Shop on Long Island.

"In the very beginning it was very stressful because we didn't know what we were going to get, how long it was going to be and with the panic buying and the frenzy of the media it made everybody a little nervous," he says. "The union worked excellently with the company and we were able to be kept informed, and from the outset we had what we needed and we adequate protective equipment despite the shortage going."

The CDC wasn't very clear in the beginning and people were under the impression they shouldn't be wearing masks at first, according to Kateman. However, once that guideline was overturned, Local 338 worked with supply chains to supplement personal protective equipment (PPE) like masks and gloves. They also fought for plexiglass in the stores where their members worked.



"At any point of potential contact with a member of the public, like customer service, deli or meat department — wherever there was a place of transacting there was plexiglass going up," says Kateman. "We've also adhered to social distancing by putting markers on the floor so that people know it's a one-way aisle."

Many workers like Waugh were putting in 12 to 15-hour days during the worst of the pandemic so far.

"We were trying to keep pace with what was going on," he says. "As time went on it and we got a better understanding of what was going [by our union] it became easier. We are still concerned about the way things are going, but we are comfortable now, because we have the proper equipment to do our jobs, we are kept informed and the supply line has opened up a lot, but most of the workers are weary since we don't know how long this is going to continue."

There are grave concerns about a second wave hitting the NY Metropolitan Area.

"People are letting their guards down," Kateman warns. At the time of this writing, Local 338 has lost six members to COVID-19. Many more have contracted the virus across different industries.

Waugh is grateful that the Oyster Bay Stop & Shop where he works decided to work with his union very early on to prevent more workers from getting sick.

"We even got text messages about where we could get tested," he says. "You know what it is; what alleviates the fear? It's that we know that we have a support system behind us. That is important. That gives us the confidence to go on. Not just the money — because I know a lot of us, if we had to choose health or money, — we would choose health. I would. It's that we are able to feel safe and comfortable because the union fights for us." ■

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TWU LOCAL 100 KEEPS NYC MOVING THROUGHOUT THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

STAYING AHEAD OF COVID-19 ALONG THE A AND J SUBWAY LINES

By Naeisha Rose

Like many Americans at the start of the year, MTA Train Operator Aaron Morrison was counting on 2020 being a time of renewal, full of fresh beginnings and major milestones. The nine-year Transit veteran had a new baby girl on the way — his first child.

"I was excited that she was coming," Morrison says. "She came on April 6, — but I wasn't allowed in the hospital because of the virus. I wasn't there when she was born."

Morrison, who works the A and J subway lines, was elated that his daughter arrived healthy and that she tested negative for COVID-19. There was reason to worry — both he and his wife, as well as a relative had survived the virus just prior to the birth. Morrison, however, felt deflated about missing a once in a lifetime moment.



Aaron Morrison

"I didn't officially get tested, but I do believe that I did have the virus because while I was out [on paternity leave], I had symptoms like aches, and I lost my sense of smell and taste," he says. "Her mother tested positive for the virus on March 29. That is what led to me being in quarantine. She had an official positive test."

Morrison recovered from his symptoms within three days. His wife, who developed a fever and bad cough, recovered in about a week-and-a-half. The couple's relative that was living with them in Laurelton, experienced fever and body aches too — but, thankfully, also recovered within the same period.

Morrison was fortunate enough to get approximately five weeks off (March 29 to May 4) to both quarantine and have parental leave during the height of the coronavirus pandemic. But when he returned to work, Morrison says it was "organized chaos."

"It was like every other day this person passed away, or this person passed away," he says. "It was really sad. I lost two people that I knew personally, that were train operators."

The pall of COVID-19 loomed over the entire workplace.

"It's different not seeing the passengers when you come into the station, and it is empty," he says. "Everyone is on high alert and wearing a mask. So I had mixed feelings because the passengers made the day go fast. The camaraderie and socializing weren't the same. It's gotten better from where it was — but it won't be what it used to be for a long time."

More people could have benefitted from more information from the government if it was not withheld, according to the train operator.

"I feel like they are doing a great job with the phases," Morrison says. "We were at the epicenter of this virus because we live in a densely populated city — but because we are wearing masks, social distancing, [and] closed when [we] did — we are where we are right now, unlike other places [in the country] that opened too early."

The B Division train operator believes there will be a second wave of coronavirus. But Morrison is not afraid. The new dad believes that society is now more educated on how best to combat COVID-19.

"I think that this is going to be like the new version of the cold and flu," said Morrison. "There is definitely going to be a second wave, but we know what we have to do when it hits. Wear our masks, stay away from large groups in stores and protect everybody. One day, everybody is going to get this as the new vaccination." ■

PRESIDENT UTANO: 'WE FACED THE DANGERS AND PAID DEARLY'

By Naeisha Rose

Job security, mask enforcement, and increased COVID-19 testing were among the top union goals TWU Local 100 President Tony Utano pressed in a hearing several state Assembly and Senate committees held in August.

Utano also spoke reverently about the transit workers who perished during the pandemic, stressing the loss goes far deeper than statistics, which "don't tell the story of who these wonderful people were; the vital jobs they did in the fight against this pandemic; and, of course, the important lives they lived outside of their jobs as transit workers."

Utano, joined by Stations Vice Chairman Robert Kelley, testified after MTA Chairman Patrick Foye spoke at length about the MTA's multi-billion-dollar budget gaps caused by the pandemic. "Regardless of the financial concerns, layoffs of front-line workers cannot be tolerated," Utano testified. "We faced the dangers, and paid dearly in death and illness, for that responsibility. To now be told that our jobs may be expendable because of a financial shortfall is unacceptable, and quite frankly a break in a vital trust that keeps us coming to work no matter what the risks."

Utano asked the senators to adopt a statement declaring "no layoffs, no matter what."



Tony Utano

Kelley, a virus survivor who was hospitalized for three weeks, told the Senate and Assembly members the MTA should resume cash transactions in Station Agent booths. Transactions were suspended earlier in the pandemic because of heightened concerns about the virus possibly being spread by the exchange of currency. "We can't assist the ridership because we don't have money in the booth," Kelley said. "We know we want to safeguard our members, and that is the first thing of all. I want safety first, but there are ways and methods we can use to bring money back to the booth."

Sen. Leroy Comrie, co-chairman on Senate Corporations, Authorities, and Commissions, gave his support. "There needs to be an understanding that essential workers need to be maintained ahead of management and consultants," Comrie said. "You are the tip of the spear. That has to be commended. That has to be respected."

Utano also asked the legislators to back the union's call for real enforcement of the mask wearing requirement with law enforcement escorting riders who don't comply off buses and trains and issuing fines. The MTA also should regularly and systematically test workers for COVID-19 to weed out those who are sick but have not yet shown symptoms, Utano said, noting that the U.S. military academies and private colleges are doing just that with students.

The hearing was conducted by the Senate Transportation Committee, the Senate Committee on Corporations, Authorities and Commissions, and the Assembly Committee on Corporations, Authorities and Commissions. ■



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TWU LOCAL 100 KEEPS NYC MOVING THROUGHOUT THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

WHAT IT'S LIKE BEING BEHIND THE WHEEL OF A NYC BUS DURING THE PANDEMIC

By Naeisha Rose

The next time you hop aboard a New York City Transit accordion bus, there's a chance that 14-year veteran bus operator and third generation MTA employee Regan Weal will be behind the wheel.

"My mother was an operator and my grandfather was a dispatcher, so transportation was always around me," says Weal.

The dedicated bus operator has been on the job throughout the coronavirus pandemic. Weal wasn't sure just how infectious the virus was back in Mid-March. But then she found out that the hot Broadway show she had long been anticipating was canceled.

"I had tickets to the Tina Turner musical for my birthday — but then it was just canceled," Weal says. "That's when I realized how serious the virus was."

It wasn't until the city closed down in the last week of March that the MTA started to respond to the coronavirus, according to Weal.

"The MTA wanted us to just keep our distance from each other," she says. "We didn't get to the masks and Personal Protection Equipment [PPE] until much later."

Not only that, but even after the city entered lockdown, bus operators were still prohibited from wearing masks because they did not go with their uniforms, according to Weal.

"Then they said we could wear a mask if we felt like it, so we had to supply ourselves with masks," she says. "A month later, they supplied us with masks and PPE."

TWU Local 100 had to fight to get the MTA to provide PPE, which the operators didn't receive until mid-April. By that time, many operators had already gotten sick in March. A number of them, according to Weal, died the following month.

"We got things like masks and hand sanitizers," she says. "We were happy there was someone there to fight for us. It was nice to know there was someone that had our backs because we had to take care of ourselves. There was no Lysol — nothing. We had to clean our areas ourselves."

More than 150 bus operators, subway workers and maintenance workers have died from COVID-19. Weal wishes the MTA had acted a little sooner.

"There was a handful that died that I knew," she says "It would have been nice if they had supplied us with something so that we could have taken precautions during our route. You never know — but it may have made a difference."

Weal found working at the height of the pandemic to be overwhelming both mentally and physically.

"We had to change our whole routines," she says. "We have to change what we do in the morning and what we do in our cars. Do we carry our uniforms? Do we come in our uniforms? Don't bring the uniform when you come into the house. Wear a mask. Remember to wipe down your whole area, because that area is like a cubicle. That is our space. You've got to remember that, because you have to make a release to another bus operator. Then there is the problem of not wanting to be around others."

While operating her bus during the pandemic, Weal often helped other essential workers like postal employees, nurses and doctors get to and from work. She takes comfort knowing that her partner is also a bus driver, but she decries not getting the hazard pay that some other frontline workers received.

"We have not received a drop of hazard pay, nothing!" says Weal. "The MTA says it is bleeding money because it is not collecting fares. We are here in the line of fire and I don't believe that the MTA is broke. We have no idea how the lack of fare collection affects them. I will never believe the MTA is broke!"

Weal does not believe that she ever caught the coronavirus, but if she had hazard pay, she would use it to buy more PPE for personal use to protect herself when she leaves her home for errands that aren't work-related.

"I just have to say to myself that it is not going to happen," Weal says.

In August, the MTA was expected to restart fare collections in the front of buses, but Weal is not too sure if she is ready for that, depending on the type of gear she gets before getting behind the wheel.

"They are going to take away the little protection that they have given us

on the bus," she says. "When the buses become crowded, riders will be on top of us in the front. We don't know what they are going to put in the front."

The MTA says that plexiglass or some other thick plastic partition that surrounds the cubicle-like area where the bus drivers sit, are protective options.

"We've seen the examples, but we just don't know individually, what we are going to get," Weal says.

Weal believes that "shower-curtain" partitions also being offered as a protective measure, will hinder her vision as a driver.

"I would prefer the plexiglass that would protect us from top to bottom because the curtain, you are going to have to pull it back at some point to see through the mirrors to drive," she says.

While Weal wouldn't mind retiring early — she refuses to quit despite how taxing working during a pandemic has been.

"There have been moments when bus drivers have broken down and started crying," she says.

Weal hopes that as the city enters the next phases of reopening, riders will continue wearing masks until there are no more cases of COVID-19.

"A lot of these people feel like we are moving into these [new] phases of reopening, so we don't have to wear a mask — but these are grown people," she says. "And if you see 30

people wearing a mask, and you are not wearing one — you know exactly what you are doing; you are in a confined space and not respecting the law. "At times, I [fear] some people are just over it." ■



Regan Weal

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SHARING GRATITUDE THIS LABOR DAY

By Michelle Zettergren,
President, MagnaCare

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WORKING CLASS HEROES



JOHN BRULLO—IUOE LOCAL 94

By Steve Wishnia

When New York City's public schools closed in March, John Brullo stayed on the job. The Staten Island school where he works as an operating engineer, P.S. 53 in the Bay Terrace neighborhood south of Midland Beach, became a city meal-distribution hub.

"We are feeding anywhere from 500 to 600 people a day," Brullo says. A Staten Island resident and member of International Union of Operating Engineers Local 94, he's worked for the city's school system for 25 years, the last five at P.S. 53.

P.S. 53 is one of the more than 400 schools where the Department of Education distributes packaged "grab & go" meals for children and adults, for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, from 7:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. For it to be safe, Brullo and his crew have to keep the building's systems running. The boilers have to be turned on every morning before people arrive so they can have hot water to wash their hands and dishes. And to prevent virus-laden droplets from lingering in the air, maintaining the ventilation system, the air-conditioning and exhaust fans, is crucial.

"Things we had to do once a week we now do three or four times a week," he says, speaking of checking filters, oil, pumps, and fans. "It's another intricate part that Local 94 plays."

"In the beginning, it was really tough, because everybody was really paranoid," he says. "Now we've got a system, it's the new norm. Everybody wears masks, everybody's social distancing."

At the height of the epidemic, Brullo had to work on Saturdays and every other Sunday, "but I was glad to," he says. "You'd be surprised at how many people count on the food they're getting." ■



STEVE MORRIS—IUOE LOCAL 94

By Steve Wishnia

Steve Morris, assistant chief engineer at 810 Seventh Ave. in Manhattan, noticed the drastic drop in number of people coming through the 42-story office building even before the city's coronavirus lockdown began in March. Within two weeks, it fell from about 2,500 a day to less than 50.

"It went from a bustling, busy operation to no people in the building," he says. "We kept working."

Morris, the father of a 2-year-old girl, is second in command on a crew of six operating engineers, responsible for maintaining the building's heat, plumbing, ventilation, and air-conditioning systems and more. He joined International Union of Operating Engineers Local 94 eleven years ago, after serving six years in the Coast Guard. He lives in Hackensack, New Jersey.

With the building virtually empty, the crew had to inspect its thousands of feet of pipes for leaks—when it's occupied, people normally complain about them, he says. "If we weren't there, it would've caused thousands and thousands of dollars' worth of damage"

The crew's hours were cut down to three days a week, with them receiving unemployment benefits for the other two days, but with the building back up to 400-500 people a day, four have returned to full-time work. They've installed hand-sanitizer and contactless soap dispensers, put microbe-resistant tape over commonly touched surfaces such as elevator buttons, and are responsible for enforcing the building's social-distancing regulations, particularly for contractors working there.

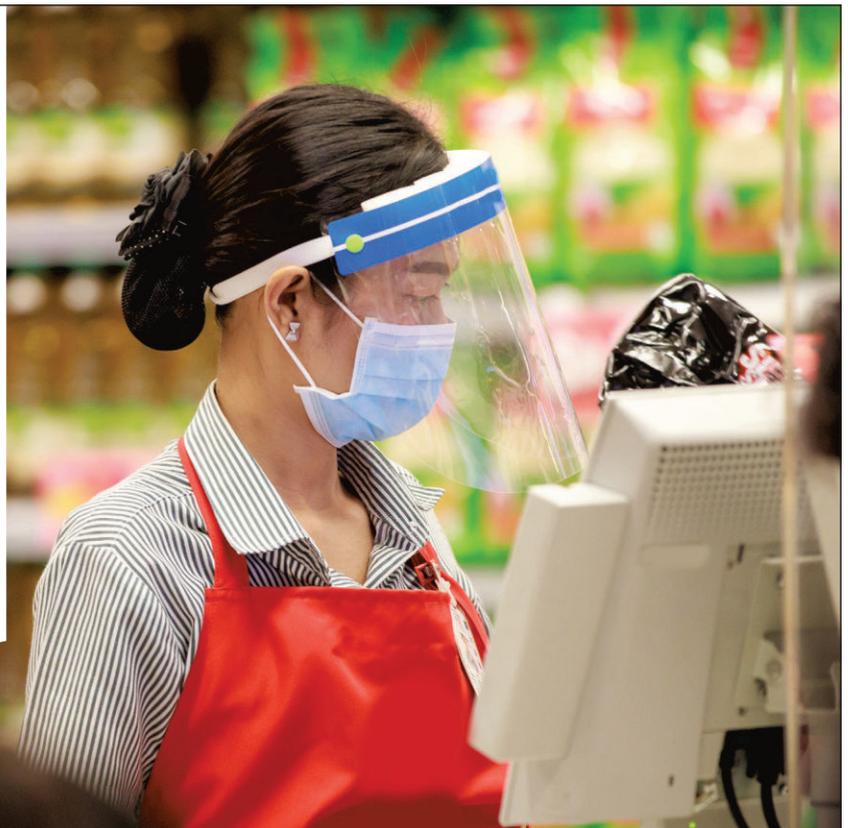
"If they don't wear a mask, we ask them to leave," he says.

Thankfully, he adds, no one on his crew has gotten COVID-19. "The pandemic was really frightening when it first started and we didn't know a lot about the virus," he says. "Now that it's gone on for a while, it's not so frightening." ■



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TRADE UNIONISTS TEAM UP WITH L.I. QUILTERS TO PRODUCE LIFESAVING MASKS

By Naeisha Rose

In nearly four months, about 30 women from the Long Island Quilters' Society have fabricated 10,000 masks to help frontline workers during the coronavirus pandemic. But the stalwart women were not alone. They had help from Bergen Metal and more than a dozen Sheet Metal Workers Local 28 members.

Local 28 Business Agent Brian Nigro heard Connecticut Sheet Metal Workers Local 40 were producing three-inch nose strips. In early April, Nigro and his Local 28 members helped distribute 15,000 of them to the Mask Makers Guild in Putnam County.

"There was this woman, Erin, who took them and was immediately thankful," Nigro says.

But there was a problem — the metal nose strips had hard edges and could be a "danger" to a person's eye.

Nigro wasn't offended by the criticism. Instead, he got to work and reached out to Robert Santoro of Bergen Metal — someone Nigro has known for 30 years.

"I asked him if he would be willing to buy a die for the machine that could make an oval shape, so it's more comfortable for faces," says Nigro. "[Santoro] had the die made and shipped in 24-hours."

Bergen then received a donation of 50 aluminum sheets that were punched into thousands of oval strips within four to five days.

When it came to shipping the items — the sheet metal workers had a novel idea.

"Bergen Metal is attached to a beer distributor — so, when they were making [the metal nose strips], they were putting them in empty beer cases," says Nigro.

Each beer case could hold up 8,000 nose strips.

"Rob Santoro spent his own money to get the die to stamp the oval shape, too."

It cost Santoro approximately \$1,000 to secure the solid-steel die.

Anthony Guerrero, the political action coordinator for Local 28, took in the orders, while Nigro got the new oval strips into the right hands.

"We sent nose strips as far away as Alaska," Nigro says. "There were quite a few orders made in Puerto Rico, too."

More strips went to Georgia, Connecticut, and the New York Metropolitan Area.

Recipients included Mary Ellen Orchard and the Long Island Quilters' Society, a volunteer organization dedicated to the art & craft of quilting, as well as serving the community.

"We sent 1,000 to Mary Ellen in Long Island, who was excited that ours were oval," Nigro says. "We later sent her 9,000 to 10,000 more."

Mary Ellen Orchard and the rest of the Long Island Quilters' Society have

been making protective masks since mid-March.

"When you take a strip and it is all right angles, you have to smooth it out to the contour of your nose — those four corners are like knives and they puncture the skin," Orchard says. "Once we got the rounded corners, we never heard a single complaint."

The Long Island Quilters' Society is largely comprised of retired women. When members learned about the need for masks after reading a Facebook post requesting 300,000 for hospitals in Michigan — they realized the coronavirus pandemic was widespread and they had to do something to help their union-strong community, which consists of hundreds of medical workers.

"There are about 13 to 15 hospitals, nursing homes and rehab centers in Long Island alone," says Orchard.

The Long Island quilters helped supply both medical workers and first responders.

"We were making the masks, but they kept flipping off, and someone just mentioned the metal clips online," Orchard says. "One woman filled out an application for 75 — but I filled out one for 1,000. I was like, 'go big or go home!'"

The Long Island quilters met up twice a week in Eisenhower Park and fabricated masks — each one taking more than 20 minutes to make.

"One of our members, Ronnie Medina, personally made 1,536 masks," says Orchard. "That was nearly four months [work]."

From mid-March to June, The Quilters' Society of Long Island succeeded in making more than 10,700 masks.

Whenever a new shipment of beer cases arrived, Orchard felt compelled to declare — "No, No, No — it's not me drinking. "This turned out to be an extremely satisfying thing for so many people," she says.

The quilters also received additional homemade masks from a theater group, an elderly couple living in Flushing, and a 94-year-old

woman.

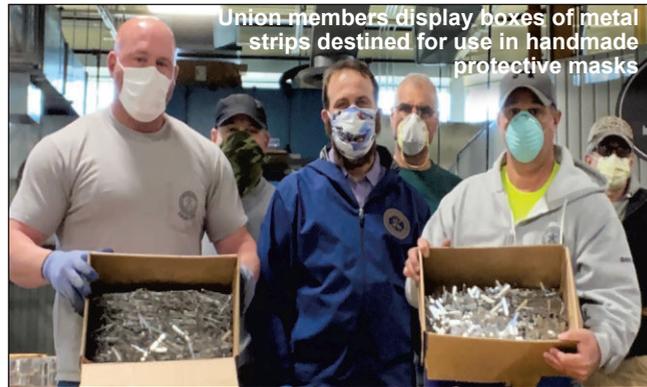
"We were almost in disbelief about this pandemic because it sounds too big," Orchard says. "I didn't live through the 1918 Spanish flu. This sounded almost make-believe, but there was a huge need in Nassau County."

After producing and procuring so many masks, the quilters are taking the summer off.

"Our workers were going back to work and the masks were limited," says Nigro. "Mary Ellen and her group made 500 masks in short order. That was very nice."

Nigro and Orchard have developed a close friendship and still keep in touch. The two have even become gardening buddies.

"He taught me how to grow my garlic," Orchard says. "It came out pretty well. He was sweet." ■



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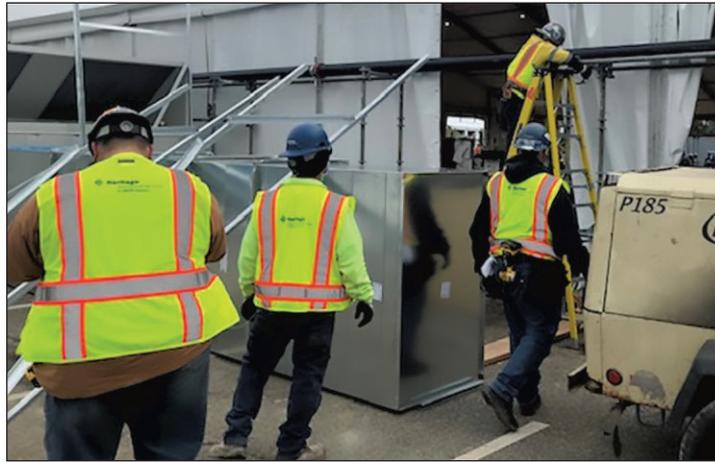
By Silver Krieger

In early April, it became abundantly clear to Governor Andrew Cuomo that New York State would need to construct several temporary hospitals fast — in order to confront the COVID-19 crisis. Four locations throughout New York City and Long Island were selected for construction. Local 28 Sheet Metal Union members worked on half of them.

Local 28 worked at Stony Brook University in Suffolk County and SUNY Old Westbury in Nassau County. Both of these new field hospitals needed to be completed in under one month and was completed under budget. Each of the hospitals were to house over 1,100 patients.

During this time, new safety protocols were also put in place to help protect workers from the Coronavirus. Those protocols, in fact, paved the way for statewide protocols in construction now in place. They include:

1. Temperatures taken to gain entrance to the job site
2. Two eight-hour shifts. Job sites sanitized every night
3. Masks required on-site
4. Social distancing guidelines followed where practicable



Local 28 Sheet Metal workers on the job site.

5. Hand sanitizers and hand washing stations made available throughout the sites

6. Heavy-duty equipment was required during these difficult projects. On the Westbury job, 50-ton air conditioner units — 34 in all — had to be installed. Six additional units — coming in at 20-tons each — were also needed for the gymnasium tents. There were similar numbers for the Stonybrook project.

Each job had nearly 30 journeypersons working on site. Additionally, there were also draft people sketching the job for all the trades to work off of, as well as shop people that had to fabricate all the

ductwork, adding up to another twenty workers for each shop. Unlike other skilled trades, Local 28 designs, fabricates and installs.

Delta Sheet Metal and Heritage Sheet Metal were both able to supply workers with proper Personal Protective Equipment [PPE] for the Stony Brook and Westbury projects, according to the union.

“It was a good thing for the union to be part of this effort,” Local 28 Business Agent Brian Nigro says. “There was a dire need for hospitals. We were proud to be a part of doing this for the patients and healthcare staff.” ■

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“Essential” and “hero” are terms that take on new meaning during this pandemic. They apply more so today to the thousands of UWUA members who operate and maintain utility services across the city. Under normal circumstances, your work is difficult and dangerous. At the height of a pandemic peaking in the hottest months of the year and under layers of PPE, it is even more risky, taxing and stressful.

When a UWUA Local 1-2 member was asked a few months ago why he takes on the risks he does to go into a home and restore utility service, he replied saying he hopes someone else would do the same for him. It speaks to the selflessness and dedication UWUA members bring to everything you do.

If ever there was a time to recognize those who left home to perform essential services while the rest of us did our part staying home, it's this Labor Day. Your work often takes place out of sight from the consumers who rely on you, but know that it doesn't go unnoticed.

Millions of people working from home have had the peace of mind knowing their basic needs would be met because of you. You've managed the uncertainty of seeing our fine city shutdown around you, seen your colleagues and family members face—and even succumb to this terrible virus—and been there to take calls from customers who lost service when Hurricane Isaias struck. All the while you've managed childcare, remote school and care for elder relatives.

Unfortunately, this year we won't be adorning floats or lining up with our families alongside our brothers and sisters to walk together in solidarity. We won't be sandwiched between marching bands and other community groups to pass out candy or spend the day celebrating at a big barbecue to honor our hard work. While it's a tradition I look forward to every year, all of that is on hold for good reason.

To our members who have had our back this year and always, thank you. Know that we've also got yours and we won't stop fighting for you.

In Solidarity,

James Slevin
National President
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TO OUR HEROES

We commend the members of Locals 79, 78 and 66 and the contractors of the Mason Tenders' District Council who answered the call to work on lifesaving essential construction projects during the COVID-19 pandemic. From Stony Brook to the Javits Center, emergency hospitals were built in record time thanks to your labor.



At the same time, we condemn NYC Real Estate Developers that profited and continue to profit off the "Body Shop" model during this pandemic that exploits the formerly incarcerated and underserved workers of color from around our city with poverty wages and unaffordable health insurance.

We thank Tish James for reaching a landmark \$1.5 million settlement exposing the ugliness of a Body Shop's harassment and retaliation against its black women construction workers. Body Shops target the formerly incarcerated and low-income Black and Latino workers as an exploitable labor supply for major real estate development projects in our city.

On this Labor Day, we must all commit ourselves to seeing an end to this system of modern-day slavery known as "Body Shops" and give a voice to the voiceless and pledge to expose those that put profits over people.

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COMPANIES OWE THOUSANDS TO WORKERS IN WAGE THEFT SCANDAL

By Silver Krieger

A rally on July 29th in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, drew attention to bad actors in a wage theft scandal, where workers are owed tens of thousands of dollars by Top Shelf Electric. Take It Back, a coalition consisting of multiple construction trade unions (New York State Laborers Local 731, Local 1010 and Local 79, Cement & Concrete Workers District Council 16, Bricklayers- Local 1, Tile, Marble and Terrazzo- Local 7, and Local 12- Insulators) is fighting against worker exploitation, wage fraud, safety violations, and raising the bar in an effort to ensure safety, respect, and dignity for all construction workers. They, along with New Immigrant Community Empowerment (NICE) an organization that builds the individual and collective power of immigrant workers in New York City organized the rally and have been spreading the word.

More than 20 workers, all members of NICE, were employed by Top Shelf Electric between August and December 2018. They worked at two different sites: Hallets Point in Queens, one on the Upper East Side.

They were not paid for several weeks of their work; collectively they are owed tens of thousands of dollars. Since then, NICE has been actively organizing with these workers around reclaiming their stolen wages, and has joined the #Takeitback campaign to advocate for dignified work for all construction workers, and to call out employers with exploitative practices, including Top Shelf Electric for not paying the workers, and New Line Structures (the general contractor on the Queens site) for hiring subcontractors with bad practices and avoiding accountability. Additional N.Y. non-union contractors onsite were Consigli (a general contractor) and RNC (concrete).

Joe Scopo, head organizer of District Council 16 of the Cement and Concrete Workers union, said, "[We have witnessed] wage theft, worker exploitation, workers not wearing harnesses, benefits not being paid, working without medical during a pandemic. [It's the] same story, these companies are still allowed to operate in New York City." ■

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TEI GROUP: WORKING SAFE, WORKING SMART

By Mercedes Augusta

As young field mechanics working around the clock, the two friends dreamed of working their way up the ladder, but they had no idea what their future would hold in the vertical transportation industry. From co-workers to business partners, Mark Gregorio, President of TEI Group, and Michael Staub, Executive Vice President of Operations, have known each other for over thirty-five years.

Two years ago, the TEI Group was awarded a contract with Turner Construction for a New Construction project at Columbia Business School, which is one of their proudest projects to date. Expected to be completed in October 2020, this work includes the installation of 17 elevators with 13 overhead gearless, 1 overhead geared traction, and 2 holeless hydraulic units. Accomplishments like these were not handed to the partners at the TEI Group. It took years of preparation, hard work and sacrifice to build the largest independent elevator company in New York.

Industrious at 14, the Brooklyn-native Gregorio worked several afterschool gigs. His best money spent was on Radio Shack kits that allowed him to repair appliances—it not only showed him that he could make a living with his hands but that he was good at it. After graduation, he went to work at NYC Transit Authority, while attending college. He, later, started working at Millar Elevator at 22. In 1981, Staub was embarking on what would be a fulfilling career. That October, the ambitious 21-year-old entered the workforce with a job at Millar Elevator, where he would later meet a young Gregorio. Together, they would work long hours, including at least two night calls per week and all the overtime they could get. Gregorio started as an apprentice and worked his way to become one of the youngest foremen on the job, while Staub had the same go-getter attitude as he rose from a respected mechanic to service foreman, service adjuster and, later, assistant supervisor.

At 30, Gregorio wanted more. Eight years at Millar had taught him the industry and allowed him to make lifelong friendships, but the entrepreneur in him prompted his resignation. He left Millar in 1994 and eventually became a partner of what would one day be the TEI Group. Although in two different

workplaces, the two friends kept in touch.

It didn't take long before Gregorio called on his old Queens buddy, Staub, who was climbing the ranks at New York Elevator. In March 1997, Staub joined TEI and oversaw the field and service operations. The opportunity was an ideal fit for him. "Having a technical background helped but, in this position, you also need patience and good people skills." In 1999, Gregorio became the President. Alongside their team, the partners started crafting the company vision, building it from a small elevator maintenance company to the largest independently-owned company, offering New Construction, Modernization, Repair, and Maintenance services to meet the vertical transportation needs of the residential and commercial real estate markets within the NY/ NJ metropolitan market.



Today, with an impressive team and dynamic partners, including Mark Gregorio, President, Michael Staub, EVP of Operations, Raymond Downs, SVP of Environmental Health & Safety, Wayne Locker, VP of Technical Support and Education, Kevin Lynch, SVP of Modernization and Construction, Juan Rondon, Chief Financial Officer, and Angela Williams, VP of

Code and Violations, TEI Group is regarded as the standard. TEI Group has been remained open throughout the pandemic, providing 100% servicing. Also, to increase safety during these times of crisis, TEI Group donated 9,000 N95 Masks to their longtime colleagues at the International Union of Elevator Constructors Local One as well as to the Archdiocese of New York. Covid-19 may have changed the nature of social interaction, but it has not changed the quality, nor the reliability, of the TEI Group's elevator and escalator equipment and services.

"TEI Group is proud to be recognized by Labor Press for continued dedication to both our employees and customers, particularly during the spread of Coronavirus. In NYC the average person may ride an elevator more times in a single day than many others do in one year. The brave men and women operating behind the scenes to keep this vital means of transportation open for hospitals, apartment complexes, and government buildings which must remain in operation at all times are the lifeblood of NYC. We proudly salute those of you in the field" ■

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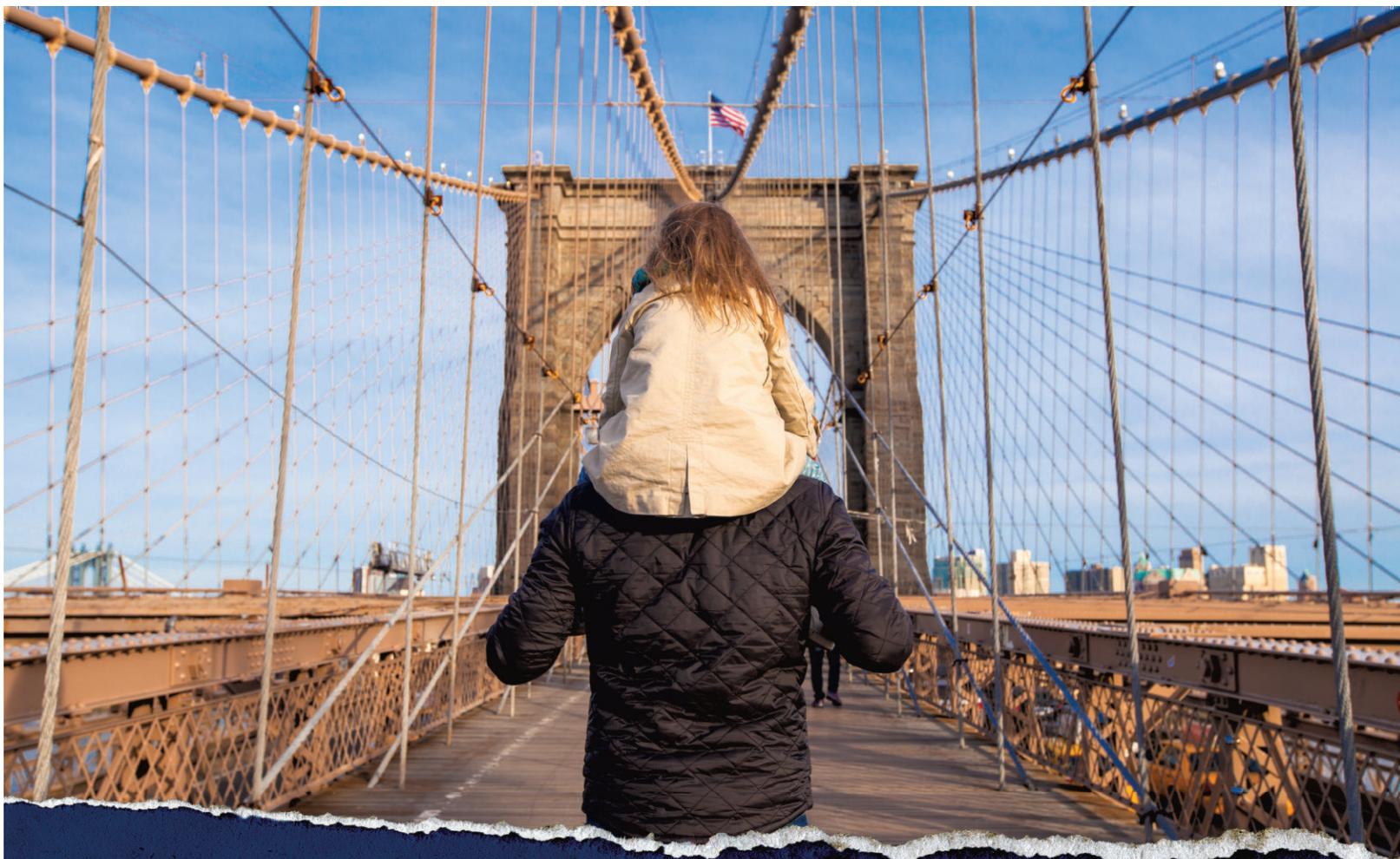
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