



A line of communication to the members of LU 614

November 18, 2008

SPECIAL EDITION

2008 IBEW WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

In July of 2008, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers hosted a women's conference in Washington D.C. Two Local 614 stewards, Barb Federici (Production Tech III in Power) and Lori Messere (High Bill Consultant in PED) eagerly accepted the opportunity to represent Local 614 at the conference. The following is their description of the trip.

On July 17-19 of this year, we were privileged to attend the IBEW International Women's Conference in Washington D.C. It was a great conference and we are pleased to have had the opportunity to participate.

We rode the train to DC and since our hotel was only 2 blocks from the train station, we decided to be good team players and save our local some cab fare by walking to the hotel. Unfortunately, we went the wrong way. The way we were heading, it would have been about 5,000 miles to the hotel! After about 9 blocks, we realized there was a problem, and we asked some people for directions. We got a little concerned when no one seemed to know where our hotel was, but we eventually met someone who put us on the right path. We finally arrived at the hotel, each about 5 pounds lighter. Did we mention that it was in the high 90's and almost 100% humidity that day? If it wasn't the most uncomfortable day of the year, it was certainly in the top 5.

We arrived to find our hotel undergoing renovation, another huge convention in progress, and our room not ready yet. We must have looked pretty pathetic because the desk clerk gave us a key to the fitness center so we could take showers there. Clean again, and smelling much better, we headed for the IBEW Headquarters for a tour.

We met President Hill and toured his office. His office has a view of DC that is to DIE FOR, and a rocking chair that is a replica of the one President Kennedy used. We were very impressed with Mr. Hill, both for his hospitality to us that afternoon, and for his presence throughout the conference. The tour ended with a visit to the IBEW's museum, which took us through the history of our union and of labor in the United States. We were especially moved by the story of Henry Miller, one of the first labor organizers. He died in 1896 after falling from a pole while working in the dark to restore service. Because of his support of the union, he was often assigned the most dangerous jobs, and this was certainly a factor in his death. It is amazing what we have that we take for granted. We need to remember the price that was paid.

That evening, there was a rooftop reception at the Headquarters, hosted by Local 26 of Washington D. C. We met many sisters from other locals across the U.S. and Canada.



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The next two days featured short morning sessions to get everyone moving and inspired, followed by small group workshops. We attended workshops on Health Care and the 2008 elections, and another on politics: why it matters and what we can do.

Friday evening held an incredible reception hosted by the International. It was here that we first became aware that our local needs a pin to represent us. Many sisters from other locals gave us their pins, each with a special representation of the local. The high point of the night was when the long-suffering photographer managed to get all 200+ of us together for a group picture.

Saturday morning started with a few speeches and then came the most invigorating part of the conference: Lynn Marie Smith performed her repertoire of union-supporting songs set to familiar tunes. She had almost everyone in the room singing and dancing. Her message was individual power – YOU can be an agent of change. One person CAN make a difference.

One thing we came away with was an understanding of the value of blue-collar jobs in building women's self-esteem and ability to provide for themselves and their families, and the powerful role unionization has played in getting and keeping those jobs. It gave both of us high motivation to continue working in non-traditional jobs. With the union's backing, we have the power to be and do much more than we could as individuals.

We also came away with a deeper appreciation for the men of our local. Many of the women we met shared stories of barriers and resistance they had experienced within their locals and the struggle they went through to get where they are today. That was one thing to which we could not personally relate, because we are fortunate to have supportive leaders who not only allow us to participate, but encourage it. Our brothers in our local have never made either of us feel unwelcome or different, and for that we are so grateful.

When we were invited to attend the conference, we had no idea what to expect. We certainly never dreamed that there would be hundreds of IBEW sisters there. The number of women at the event was amazing and becomes even more amazing when you consider that they are only a subset of the total number of women IBEW members.

We were also surprised at how union membership ran across various trades, industries and businesses. Even with this broad cross-section, we met and became close to several other women attending the conference. We came as strangers and left as friends. We realized that we all have a common purpose and desire: a decent living for our families and ourselves. We came away better union members, more aware of the need to be involved in our local and how that lets us tap into the power of unity.
