

# The IBEW SPARQ

A quarterly newsletter highlighting IBEW values

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## Building a Culture of Safety on the Job

Good wages, benefits and working conditions are hallmarks of the IBEW's strong contracts. But there's one condition more fundamental than anything else: ensuring that members return home healthy and unharmed every day.

as our industry has changed so dramatically," said Kim Greene, president and CEO of Atlanta-based Southern Company Gas. "Maintaining our safe operations is absolutely paramount. Having trained, skilled, confident workers is the key to that."

finally asked workers for their opinions, responses poured in.

"People care about safety. They had something to say, and boy did they say it," Greene said. "They let us know that we were paying way too much attention to the small stuff and were being distracted from the big stuff...that we were operating in many ways by being lucky, not necessarily by being smart."

Management realized that "we'd created a culture where people weren't reporting, a culture of being hard on people who tripped and fell, being hard on people who smashed their finger, being hard on people who got an insect bite and might have blown a period of time of no injuries for a work group," she said.

Partnering with the IBEW and safety experts, Southern Company Gas began concentrating on critical risks, the tasks most likely to cause serious injuries or fatalities. The result, along with the company's response, might surprise you.

"This year, the recordable incident rate is as high as it's been in 10 years," Greene said. "But I feel like our company is safer than ever. I don't think we're having more injuries, I think that people are telling us about it now."

Working with the IBEW, she said, "We're creating a learning environment where it is clear that we really care about keeping people safe."



Beyond the bargaining table, the IBEW is partnering with employers to build a true culture of safety.

"Our members do an excellent job looking out for each other and minimizing risks. But that's not enough," International President Lonnie R. Stephenson said. "Employers have to be every bit as committed to job safety as we are."

With the IBEW's input and encouragement, they increasingly are.

"We've had the privilege to work side by side with our IBEW partners

Greene told the audience at the IBEW Membership Development Conference in Chicago in August how her company changed its approach to safety after consulting with workers.

For years, management focused on an OSHA metric known as the "recordable incident rate" that measures work-related deaths, injuries and illnesses. Deciding the rate was too high, they cracked down on employees, demanding they "work smarter." The rate dropped, but something wasn't right. When the company



What does SPARQ mean to you? Have an idea for the newsletter? Email [theSPARQ@ibew.org](mailto:theSPARQ@ibew.org)



# Making Rail Travel Safer for Everyone

For more than a decade, IBEW members have been making rail travel safer through their installation and maintenance of positive train control, or PTC.

The system pairs wayside markers with sensors onboard locomotives, using a GPS system that further automates safety-related components such as speed, braking and other warnings and signals. It can alert an engineer of potential problems or even slow or stop a train for safety reasons, greatly reducing the possibility of human error as the cause of a rail accident.

IBEW members, along with members of other unions including the Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen, handle all aspects of the PTC system.

“Members from our railroad branch and several other branches have been major players at every step of the PTC installation process,” said International President Lonnie R. Stephenson. “We’ve brought to this project the know-how to handle the numerous systems



and equipment to get the job done right.”

The Federal Railroad Administration reported that by the end of 2018, PTC was operating on almost 46,000 of the nearly 58,000 required rail route miles—83 percent of the required freight routes and nearly one-third of the required passenger routes.

Although no system is perfect, PTC removes the possibility for human error.

“Before, there used to be stacks of papers to consult, so if someone missed an order for whatever reason, they could cause a serious accident,” said Jeff Allred, vice general chairman for IBEW System Council 16. “Now PTC can take over.”

For members working on or near the rails themselves, this also means a safer worksite.

“PTC knows where the sharp curves are, where work zones are, so the trains have to slow down or stop altogether,” Allred said. “It’s a safer situation all around.”

## SPARQ GOES LOCAL

### IBEW 2019 RENEW/NextGen Conference

More than 500 young leaders attended last year’s IBEW RENEW/NextGen Conference and learned about the difference they can make every day in their workplaces and in their union when they commit to the IBEW Code of Excellence. RENEW and NextGen members are serious about their roles in building a strong IBEW—and demonstrating the core values of SPARQ is part of making that future a reality.

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**RENEW**  
Reach out and Engage Next-gen Electrical Workers

