

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



**A**braham Lincoln once said, “The strongest bond of human sympathy, outside of the family relation, should be one of uniting all working people of all nations, tongues and kindreds.”

All too often we become so trapped in the business of everyday life that we overlook the personal freedoms and choices that living in North America allows us. The ideals espoused by IBEW’s founding members tend to fade if we fail to recall them. It can become easy to forget that the “Union of Hearts and Minds” is a movement that has the power to change the lives of workingmen and -women for the better.

Sometimes we are reminded of the impact of the labor movement in small ways. One recently organized member of Local 606 in Orlando, Florida, wrote a letter to his business manager, Harry Brown, who shared the letter with Fifth District International Vice President Mel Horton. Vice President Horton published the letter in his district’s newsletter. The message in the letter is important enough to share throughout the Brotherhood.


This past February, Brother Bulent Cankaya of Local 606 celebrated his induction as an American citizen 20 years after arriving here from Turkey. During Brother Cankaya’s initial American journey, he suffered personal and professional hardships that likely tested his spirit.

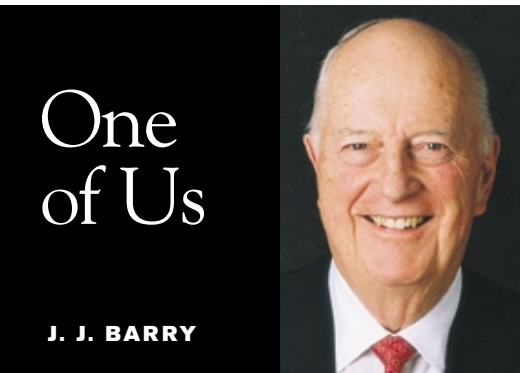
Brother Cankaya spent 16 years in Central Florida doing non-union electrical work in an atmosphere that was not outright discriminatory, but nevertheless, “something was missing,” as he said. “I did not have any common things with the people I worked with; I was always an outsider.” He spoke of his family’s financial difficulties, his need for Medicaid to offset the increased financial burden of caring for a son suffering from spina bifida. But the hard times in the new land were about to change for Brother Cankaya.

In April 1996, he met a member of Local 606 who talked about the IBEW and explained the benefits of union membership.

He liked what he heard and joined the union. “When I became a member of the IBEW, everything changed. I saw friendships form at work. They called me Brother Bulent.” When he was completing his citizenship application, he was asked about his affiliation with any club or society. Without hesitation, he proudly wrote “...I am a member of the IBEW Local Union 606, Orlando, Florida.”

Union membership has allowed Brother Cankaya to realize his American dream. He has saved enough money from electrical contract work to make his first down payment on a home. He has also been able to replace Medicaid with increased health benefits that have defrayed the costs of his son’s treatment and provided coverage for all family members. Brother Cankaya points out that he never thought he would become an American citizen prior to joining Local 606. “Today, I am a citizen, union member, house owner, have health insurance for my family, have made real friends. The IBEW has made my American dream come true. In every job they say, ‘Bulent is a local man.’ I think I like this part the best,” he said.

That’s the part we like best too, Brother Bulent. Sometimes it takes the perspective of the newest members in our ranks to remind us all of what we have by being part of the IBEW. 



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