

Organized Labor

Happy Labor Day!
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Build Group Begins Construction of Condos in the Mission

◆ Union Funding Backs Project

By Paul Burton
Contributing Writer

Construction of the new 8-story, 114-unit condominium project at 2558 Mission broke ground in June. San Francisco-based Build Group is the general contractor for the project that includes three retail spaces on the first floor and one level of underground parking. The Giant Value store adjacent to the New Mission Theater that has been closed since 1993 was demolished to make way for the condominiums.

The 158,500 square foot condo building is not physically connected to the historic single-screen New Mission Theater, which will be converted to a new 348-seat main theater with 4 smaller screening rooms, a restaurant and a bar/lounge by a different contractor.

The project is the second one in the past year that Oyster Development is building with Build Group as the general contractor and using funds from the IBEW-NECA Diversified Underwritten Real Estate Fund (INDURE).

Oyster's 8-story condo complex at 1800 Van Ness also received a construction loan from the INDURE Fund, which "invests based on its

'Build-to-Core' philosophy in carefully selected development projects which are added to the core portfolio. This strategy is designed to create value, a modern portfolio and, as an ancillary benefit, good construction jobs." While the IBEW-NECA funding requires union trades workers on its projects, Build Group's Project Manager Nicholas Sammartino said the 2558 Mission condo project would have been built all-union anyway.

"It's an all union job," Sammartino said. "Most of the jobs I have done in the past 30 years have been all union. We prefer it that way. We have relationships with union subcontractors. And because of the complexities of the mixed-use project, we can get it done faster and more efficiently with a union crew. You get more bang for your buck

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Image courtesy of Kwan Henmi

The condo project in the Mission is being built using financing from the IBEW-NECA Diversified Underwritten Real Estate Fund, which ensures that projects are built with union labor.

Labor Day Special: Labor & the City

◆ Five Great Union Moments in San Francisco History

By Michael Messina

San Francisco is a union town. Whether its unloading cargo at the docks, running the transit system or working on new icons like the Transbay Transit Tower, the City runs on organized labor. Since the first skyscrapers began shaping the

skyline, it's been a place where working class people could thrive and have proven time

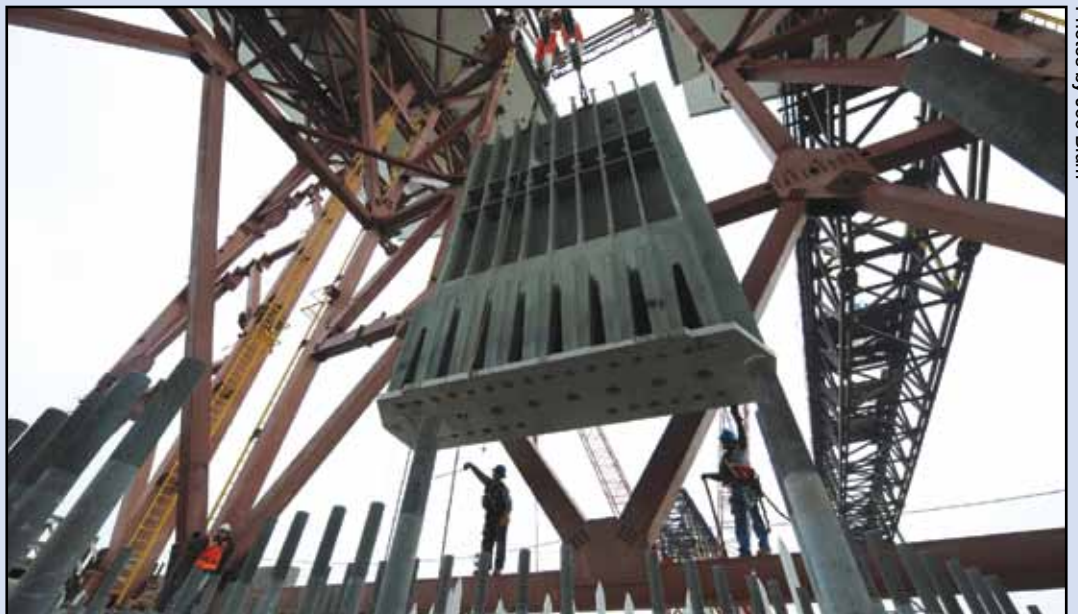
and again that they are a strong political and social force. This Labor Day, *Organized Labor*

highlights five important moments in our shared history.

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Bay Bridge Worker Photos Featured at City Hall

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Photos by Joe Blum

Ironworker foreman Carlos Valverde and Ironworker Josh Galvan installing shear plate at tower foundation T1. ABF engineer Andre Markarian observes, 2010.

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Retired Boilermaker Joe Blum Turns His Camera



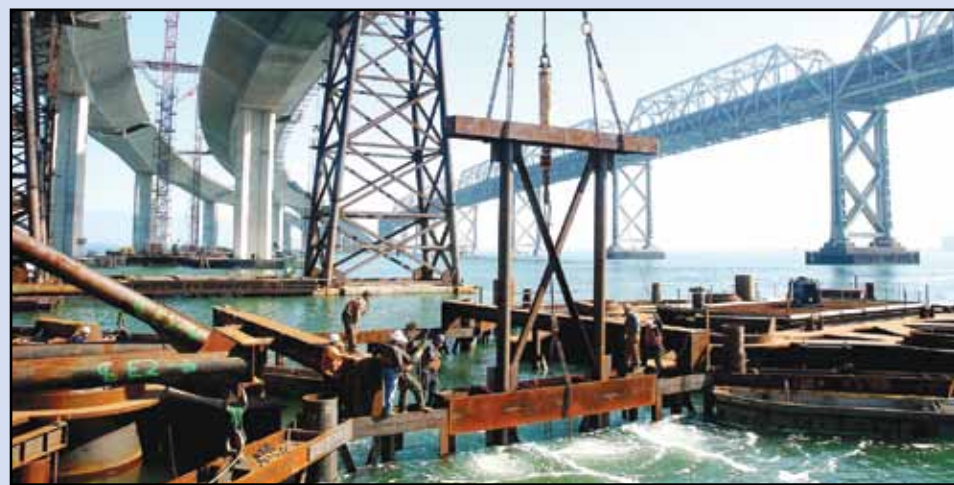
Laborers carrying cans of Grikote anti-corrosion paste on the south-side span south catwalk in the fog, 2012.



A member of Painters is seen painting the skyway, 2007.



Ironworker foreman Carlos Valverde and Ironworkers Josh Galvin and Augie Solis work hard to take a cable off a shackle, 2010.



Marine superintendent Eric Edwards, Pile Drivers Cory Pakes, Dave Lang, Johnny Wong, Chris Puglisi, Jason Pleasants, and surveyor Terry Dennis installing the final wale frame connector piece for E2 foundation, 2006.

By Richard Bermack
Contributing Writer and Photographer

Construction workers converged on San Francisco's City Hall recently for an unusual reason: the opening of an art exhibit.

Beginning at a reception in July that drew hundreds of people, a photography show by former construction worker Joe Blum has been on display. Blum, who retired from the trades after working 25 years, has been documenting construction of the Bay Bridge since 1998, focusing on workers of all trades. Now, 85 of his large-format color photos are hanging in the halls of power, highlighting the skill and hard work of building trades members working on San Francisco's newest icon.

Blum turned to photography, a longtime hobby, after he left construction, and immersed himself in the world of ironworkers, pile drivers, operating engineers, laborers, electricians, painters, cement masons, and other building trades working on the new bridge.

"I wanted to photograph from the workers' perspective and capture and document how they take the engineers' plans and drawings and

transform them into living structures of steel and concrete using their craft skill and brains," he explains.

The result is a collection of powerful images of workers wrestling with mammoth objects, using their sheer strength to join together by hand the pieces of the eastern approach to the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge. Other photographs show workers balancing on cables hundreds of feet in the air, with panoramic views of the city in the background. All the photos give a sense of the scope and immensity of building the bridge. They illustrate the fact that even with 21 century technology, it is still people using their hands and working as teams that build America.

"It's not so often that you see photos like this," points out Catherine Powell, director of the San Francisco Labor Archives and Research Center at San Francisco State University, and one of many attending the artist's reception on July 11. "Joe's photos portray a certain heroism of working people. I love the beauty of the large equipment, the angles, and the way the workers are so closely working together in the middle of all this heavy machin-



Former boilermaker Joe Blum turned to photography after his retirement and has spent years documenting the construction of the new Bay Bridge.

ery. You can see how dependent they are on each other for safety. To have the photographs displayed at City Hall is very significant."

The Bridge Builders will be at the San Francisco City Hall Gallery, on the ground floor and North Light Court, open Monday through Friday, 8 am to 8 pm until September 27.

An exhibit of Blum's black and white photos of the bridge work will be at the Harvey Milk Photo Center, 50 Scott Street (Duboce Park) through October 3.

Rick Damboise, Local 378, expresses his admiration for Joe's work: "It's really amazing seeing these photos here at City Hall. I was out there with my camera,

like a lot of the guys, and we can't even imagine how Joe got some of these shots. He was all over the bridge and the tower,



on Union Sisters and Brothers at Work



Three Ironworkers, including Jake Mesche and Darryl Webb, work together to drive pins into a crossbeam, 2010.



Operating Engineers surveyor, Lori Delgado, guiding the truss fit, 2009.



Ironworkers C. J. Biskner, Matt Cochran and Jerry Kubala connecting 600-ton shackles and heavy rigging to OBG deck lifting frame lug, 2010.



Electricians Dave Altom and Arnold Li receiving suspender rope light from crane, 2012.

and he really captured a sense of what it feels like to be working on the bridge, how big everything is and how high off the ground, and the view you get from the tower looking over the city.

“We got to know Joe. He always had a smile on his face, and it was interesting to talk with him because he knew about construction, what was going on, and how to capture it. In the photo of the guys hooking the sections of the bridge together and trying to put the rigging in place, you can see the strain in their faces and how hard they are working.”

“I’m right here on the left,” observes **Steve Batiste, Local 377**. In the photo Batiste is helping stabilize a humongous shackle that engulfed another worker like the jaw of a whale, while a third worker attempts to drive in a 400-pound shackle pin. The shackle is capable of supporting 600 tons. Four of them attach to the heavy rigging on the crane that lifts the bridge pieces into place. How hard is it to get the pin in the shackles? Batiste admits,



“Sometimes I’m not sure I’ll make it, but with the help of all my coworkers we pull through. They’ll say, ‘Come on, old man, let’s get this thing going.’ It takes a lot of teamwork and adrenaline. ‘Steve stop worrying,’ they’d say to me, but someone has to worry. If you’re not worried, then I’ll worry. I guess I’m the worrywart on the job.”

“I talked to Joe, and I knew he had a vision about his work. So I wasn’t surprised he could do it. But the photos came out even better than I ever imagined.”

“That’s me,” states **Ed Meyer, Iron Worker Local 378**, pointing to a speck of a figure about the size of his finger tip. He’s standing on a beam that’s part of a large trestle dangling over the water, suspended from a crane, and about to be connected to another piece of the false work used to build the self-anchored section of the bridge. Meyer was the foreman of a raising gang, and his job was to figure out the geometry and direct the crane operators and his crew to join together the massive pieces of the bridge. It takes



a lot of mental and physical power, as well as knowing who on your crew can do what, Joe explained.

Meyer was one of the first workers on the bridge. Before he retired, he found a 22-year-old kid full of energy and intelligence and trained him to take over his gang. “I knew how sharp this kid was and that he was on it. Now he’s running the crew,” Meyer boasted. “That’s the best feeling, to pass on our skills and know that our trade is in good hands. I take a lot of pride in the iron trade, and that’s why we’re so happy for Joe and his exhibit. Joe is one of us.”

Jerry Kubala, Local 377, another worker on the bridge, shares Meyer’s enthusiasm for the photos. “My favorite photos are of working with the big shackles. They are very heavy work. Some of the shackle pins alone are 400 to 800 pounds. It takes a whole crew to put one together. It’s very intense, hard work, and Joe knows how to capture it. I moved here 12 years ago, and this exhibit makes me feel like I’m part of San Francisco.”



Carlos Valverde, Local 377, Foreman of the Raising Gang: “You have to be confident to be part of the raising gang. You need to be

driven by the need to build things. We got the tower another 30 feet up in the air, and that’s what drives you, that’s what gets you going every day. It takes a lot of trust among the guys you work with, and you build that with time.

“We really appreciate Joe being out there. A lot of guys out here put in long hours, and you start to feel like a robot. The only recognition you get is, ‘Hey, we’re going to work Sunday.’ Joe coming out here almost every day, even when the conditions were tough—fog, rain, wind and cold—meant something to us. And with that simple push of a button, he captures so much of what we do. You can look at almost any of these pictures. I think the regular person that sees these picture can grasp a little bit of it, but to us, it makes it worth the long hours. On big projects like this, when they are finally over, you feel like you left a little bit of yourself there.”

