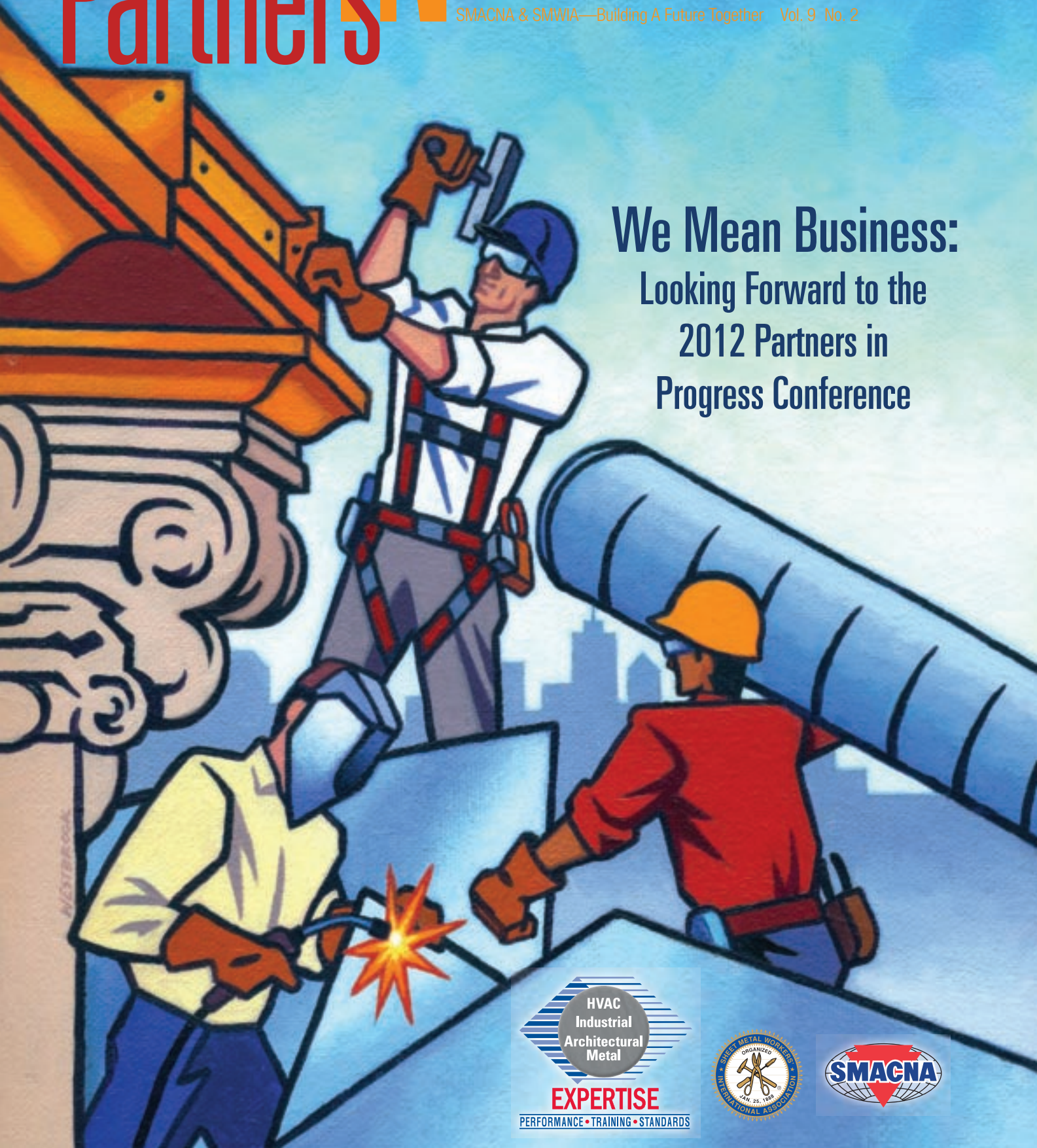


Partners **IN** PROGRESS

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**We Mean Business:
Looking Forward to the
2012 Partners in
Progress Conference**





Take the Wheel

Be in control of safety on
the job site.

By Ruth E. Thaler-Carter

Safety doesn't know how to tell time, it does know how to take it away from us when we least expect it. It's a philosophy that Dave VanCamp, president of Van's Industrial Sheet Metal in Hammond, Ind., takes to heart.

It's also the reason Gary Batykefer, administrator for the Sheet Metal Occupational Health Institute Trust (SMOHIT), wants to spread the word that preventing on-the-job accidents and work-related injuries is mostly a matter of will. "In almost all instances, safety is under your control," he says.

Robert Zahner, a SMOHIT trustee and senior vice president with A. Zahner Company in Kansas City, Mo., agrees. "People have to take personal responsibility for safety because lives are at stake."

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Best Practices in Safety and Health Training is the topic of one of the breakout sessions at the 2012 Partners in Progress Conference, March 8-10 at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas. Bob Hostinsky, apprentice coordinator for SMWIA Local 20, will be one of the panelists.

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He says that rule applies equally to himself and others in the company. “Even someone who has 30 years on the job can make a mistake. If I’m doing something unsafe on a job site, I would hope someone says something.”

Bob Hostinsky, winner of a SMOHIT Safety Matters Award and apprentice coordinator for SMWIA Local 20, believes the road to safety is pretty straightforward. “Workers need to wear the right gear, check their equipment, and slow down.”

Management has a responsibility not only to provide a safe environment and appropriate tools for the job, but also to emphasize the importance of working with safety in mind, agree both Hostinsky, who has served as his local’s safety director since 2005, and Scott Vidimos, president of Vidimos, Inc., in East Chicago, Ind.

“We work at a brisk pace, but expect the work to be performed in a safe manner. We do not ask our people to take risks,” Vidimos says. There are plenty of examples that safety saves money and improves productivity.

“Remaining accident-free is a matter of taking safety training and OSHA regulations seriously,” Hostinsky says. The difficulty is that no matter how many OSHA or SMOHIT training programs are available, how often safety committees meet, or how many times management or labor leadership urges workers to work safely, accidents and injuries still happen.

What’s the solution?

Sometimes rewards and incentive programs fit the bill, but every good safety director needs more tools at his or her fingertips. Hostinsky has found success employing scare tactics. “I tell stories constantly,” Hostinsky says, “and—sadly—some of them are my own.”

He draws on a lot of pictures and horrific movies. “I’m always looking for things to demonstrate the consequences of not taking safety seriously. You can preach all the rules in the world, but real-world experience really works.”

Enhancing safety is a matter of achieving a level of awareness. It works best when management and the union work together, says Lori Schmidt, executive director of the Northern Indiana SMACNA chapter.

“We’re in it together,” says Vidimos. “Unsafe work leads to higher insurance rates, which make a company less competitive, but it also costs workers wages.”

Local 20 is in the seventh year of an innovative safety program that involves a labor-management partnership. “Our contractors initiated the program and set up a separate fund to pay for instructors, equipment and materials, even reimbursing the guys for their time,” Hostinsky says.

Customers helped spur that commitment by requiring both craftspersons and contractors to take OSHA safety courses and be certified before they could step on site.

VanCamp has had a similar experience. “Our clients often develop rules that change the way we contractors think

Who is Your Safety Champion?

SMOHIT’s new Safety Champions program is an effort to identify a safety leader in every local. The Safety Champion can be a business manager, a coordinator, or an OSHA instructor. Currently, 30 champions are registered out of 160 locals, says Gary Batykefer, administrator for the Sheet Metal Occupational Health Institute Trust (SMOHIT).

Becoming a Safety Champion involves receiving all safety information from SMOHIT to use in training, keeping workers safe, and showing them how to protect their bodies and lives in order to get home safe and sound at the end of every workday.

“This is something to advance the industry. We want to heighten awareness so we can protect our guys and reduce costs of insurance compensation,” Batykefer says. Plans call for annual recognition of an exemplary Safety Champion from each of SMOHIT’s six regions.

Chapters can register their own Safety Champions so their members will know about resources available locally. Contact Batykefer at gbatykefer@smohit.org.



Check out the latest edition of SMOHIT’s free health and safety podcast series for the unionized sheet metal industry at smohit.org.



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about safety. Since we work in their facilities, we must follow their rules. These changes have been a good thing for us.”

While management has a vital role to play in a safe workplace—providing the right tools and training—personal responsibility is key.

“I truly believe that safety is under your control,” Hostinsky says. “Injuries and accidents are all, to some degree, preventable....We have safety glasses, gloves, hardhats—do we wear them? Do we take off rings and chains that might catch on something or conduct electricity?”

Making safety a conscious element of every job helps keep everyone safe, says VanCamp. “To remain safe on the job, our crew always needs to know what is in front of them,” he explains. “In other words, we must take the time to discuss the job to be done, even if it is a rush job or a small job.”

Vidimos shares that opinion. “The struggle continues to be making safety a part of the job and not something separate from the work,” he says. “A job is successful if it is done right, on time, within budget and *safely*.”

It’s all about taking the wheel instead of hoping that someone else is in control. “Each individual must take safety to heart,” Vidimos says. “Our craftspersons should work safely for their personal wellbeing, first and foremost.” ■

Ruth E. Thaler-Carter (www.writerruth.com) is an award-winning freelance writer, editor and proofreader. She has written for the St. Louis Labor Tribune newspaper, is a founding member of the National Writers Union and is married to a retired union steelworker.

Address Common Safety Issues

A safety program that can reduce the most common reasons for injury goes a long way toward sending individuals home each day to their families and friends. That’s why, under the Northern Indiana SMACNA contract, each member gets 12 hours of additional safety training after their usual work hours. What follows are some other ideas that have proven successful.

One of the most common safety issues for Local 20 is fall protection. “Our people do a lot of work at high elevations and on ladders and temporary work surfaces. They need to understand what to do, what to wear, proper procedures,” says Bob Hostinsky, Local 20’s safety director. Ways to convey the information include safety meetings, lockouts and tagouts, and simple experience.

Falls are also a concern at Van’s Industrial Sheet Metal in Hammond, Ind. President Dave VanCamp implemented fall protection rules that require wearing harnesses when working at heights. He also requires everyone on the job site to wear safety glasses. “Making safety a requirement had a dramatic effect,” VanCamp says. “Our eye injuries went from six per year to one every two years.”

VanCamp has created policies to reduce the danger from ‘pinch

points.’ “Press brakes, shears, and saws can all be extremely dangerous if misused. We implemented machine-specific training for each apparatus in our shop. Anyone using our machine must get the training before using a machine.”

A three-person safety committee reviews all close calls and accidents at Van’s and tweaks the safety program as necessary. The company relays safety concerns and issues through meetings with the foreman and crew and includes safety discussions in a weekly brief to the staff.

“It’s vital to involve *everyone* in safety training—from workers to designers, engineers and project managers,” concludes Robert Zahner, a SMOHIT trustee and senior vice president with A. Zahner Company in Kansas City, Mo.

“The most common safety issues at Vidimos, Inc. are cuts, strains, and eye injuries,” says Vidimos President Scott Vidimos. “Along with the safety training that is provided through the union, we require a ‘clear’ status in the industry’s drug testing program.”

“We also perform weekly toolbox talks with all craftsmen,” Vidimos says. Although content of the talks is discussed with management, the training is performed through key union members.

