

# Powering Chicago's Growth



IN-TECH Solar

Chicago labor-management partnership paves path toward a stronger electrical industry

Made up of members from the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 134 and the Electrical Contractors' Association (ECA) of the City of Chicago, a labor-management partnership known as Powering Chicago is helping forge a safer, more reliable and more highly trained path in the metro area's construction industry.

Powering Chicago works to improve communication and cooperation between electrical labor and management, as well as to establish the highest standards of safety, reliability, training and expertise for its members and their customers. Powering Chicago's efforts are focused around creating better construction, better careers and better communities throughout the City of Chicago and suburban Cook County.

"Our members are elevating industry performance through their commitment to safety, the level of experience they bring to every job and their reliability, while also investing in the future of skilled labor through an innovative five-year apprenticeship program," says Elbert Walters III, Director of Powering Chicago. "Powering Chicago exists to promote the union electrical industry in the Chicago region and help

## Powering Chicago

**DIRECTOR**  
Elbert Walters III

**LOCATION**  
Westchester, Illinois

potential customers understand why skilled union labor is the best choice when high-quality electrical work is needed."

Through its programs and outreach efforts, Powering Chicago aims to improve opportunities in the electrical industry, raise industry standards and ultimately become the "voice and the choice" for all electrical needs in the Chicagoland area.

### BETTER CONSTRUCTION, CAREERS AND COMMUNITIES

Powering Chicago's mission is realized in the programs and opportunities it presents members. This not only benefits the member electricians and electrical contractors, but also their construction partners, clients and the community at large.

"What sets the union electrical industry apart in the Chicago area is the education and training our members receive, both through our apprenticeship program and ongoing opportunities to gain new skills throughout their careers. As a result, they are among the most skilled

electrical workers in the industry," Walters says. "When a project needs to be completed on time and on budget and with the highest possible standards of quality, we're equipped to deliver that...Doing this work well means a lot to us because our members don't just work in the communities where they operate, but live there, too."

Community outreach is also a major point of emphasis for the union electrical industry in the Chicago area. One challenge in the industry, Walters says, is a narrative of exclusion that's a holdover from the past. Powering Chicago is working to combat this directly through multiple programs that attract diverse talent to the field. It participates in Chicago Public Schools' Chicago Builds Program, which exposes youth to the electrical industry through a two-year construction training program. It also works with Women in the Trades, an organization that helps women find careers in what has traditionally been a male-dominated industry, and attends hundreds of community events each year to expose Chicago-area residents to the career opportunities that exist in the union electrical industry.

**POWERING CHICAGO** ⚡

**IBEW 134/NECA**

Chicagoland's Union Electrical Team

**BETTER CONSTRUCTION.**  
**BETTER CAREERS.**  
**BETTER COMMUNITIES.**

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"We invest in people who are willing to invest in themselves, work hard and build the skills necessary to meet the standard we hold ourselves to," Walters says. "We're engaged in outreach on a daily basis, and I think that's how we'll overcome the misperception that a career in the union trades is inaccessible to many people."

#### 21ST CENTURY ELECTRIC

In addition to building opportunity in the industry, Powering Chicago members are also helping lead the charge on transformative work in the green building and renewable energy space. Its members have been a part of numerous renewable energy projects throughout the Chicago area, including the Chicago Transit Authority's effort to transition to an electric bus system.

"Sustainable, renewable energy is here, and it's going to continue to grow...In 2015, we built a renewable energy training field at the IBEW-NECA Technical Institute to ensure that our members are well-equipped to work with the latest advances in sustainable technologies. It's a 125-foot by 350-foot field that consists of a 100-foot steel tower, a 60-foot enclosed tower, fixed tilt arrays and dual access systems that harness the sun's energy," Walters says. "We are more than prepared to meet our customers' needs as the world transitions to renewable energy sources."

Other projects include two Net Zero-certified buildings—the state's first Net Zero municipal

building, the Countryside Municipal Complex completed in 2019, and the \$30 million, LEED® Platinum-certified Sunset Ridge Elementary School, completed in 2018. Upcoming projects for Powering Chicago members include The 78, a 62-acre mixed-use community; the mixed-use development at Lincoln Yards; and a new global terminal expansion at Chicago O'Hare International Airport.

As Powering Chicago continues to encourage the use of new technologies that allow for more efficient, precise work and trains its members to excel in the electrical industry of tomorrow, it plans to simultaneously educate its communities about the benefits of choosing IBEW Local 134 electricians and ECA contractors. This awareness, Walters says, will help reinforce the union electrical industry's standing as the first choice for electrical work in the region.

"We're excited to continue pushing the boundaries of technology and raising the standard of work in the construction industry, while helping Chicago establish itself as a leader in renewable energy. We're also excited to continue educating residents and potential customers about what we provide on jobsites and beyond. We want to make sure that everyone in metro Chicago knows that with the union electrical industry, they are getting the best training, the best skills and, ultimately, the best bang for their buck...All of that ties into the fact that we provide better construction, better careers and better communities." ▮

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