



Rite' Strategy Leads to Steady Work for New Jersey Local

For decades, Jersey City, N.J., Local 164 electricians were among the many hundreds of union tradespeople who built nearly two dozen ShopRite grocery stores in New Jersey and New York.

So, when company chairman Lawrence Inserra was presented with a developer's plan to use nonunion workers to construct a new ShopRite in Wyckoff, Local 164 Business Manager Dan Gumble was among those left scratching their heads over the sudden change of course.

"The Inserras have been all-union for over 50 years," said Gumble, who noted that the workers at all of Inserras' stores are represented by the United Food and Commercial Workers Union. "That's a big reason why we encourage our members to shop in their stores."

Gumble has a personal connection with the Inserras that goes back even further, he said. "Larry's grandfather had a butcher shop in Lyndhurst," said the business manager; his parents and extended family members had been regular customers.

Even though that modest shop ended up being the forerunner of what would eventually become a successful chain of ShopRites, the Inserra family's connection with each of their stores remained strong.

"Larry and his family are still involved in their ShopRites' day-to-day operations," said Gumble. "They're good people, and our values line up – we both do a lot of charity work in the community."

The Inserras also had a longstanding reputation for personally supervising the construction of their stores, Gumble said. For this new ShopRite, however, the family was considering entering a lease agreement that would instead allow a developer to have full control of the project.

On its own, that would not necessarily have been a problem, the business manager said. The trouble was that the developer was planning to work with nonunion contractors on the project, rather than the

ones with whom the Inserras had grown familiar and comfortable, and that this plan was making the family feel uneasy.

As soon as he could, Gumble launched a campaign to convince the Inserras and the developer to put that work back into the hands of union workers. Giving it some thought, it occurred to Gumble that although he and Lawrence had known each other and worked together for years, the chairman had never visited the local's training facility in Paramus.

With that in mind, Gumble set up a formal tour, inviting Lawrence and his company's head of construction as well as leaders from some of the other building trades in the area.

"We met like gentlemen and immediately found some common ground," Gumble said. "I hooked [Lawrence] up with some history about Lyndhurst and his family. It was like old home week."

Throughout the tour, Gumble touted Local 164's deep commitment to the IBEW's Code of Excellence, the union's five major values — safety, professionalism, accountability, relationships and quality — that help demonstrate why IBEW remains the best choice for any job.

"We've had impressive results building relationships with businesses using the Code to show the value of working with Local 164," Gumble said. "Everyone was impressed with the training center and with the fact that we teach the Code of Excellence to all of our members."

Happily, his strategy helped change the Inserras' minds. "They told us that we are the 'real deal' and that they would be glad to do business with us," Gumble said. "They said, 'You guys walk the walk.'"

"Larry went back to the developer and said, 'Look, we need to work with these folks,'" Gumble said. The developer agreed, and after months of steady work for Local 164 members and other union trades, the 62,000 square foot Wyckoff store held its long-anticipated grand opening in January.

Gumble credits the Code of Excellence for this successful result. "We were able to turn that job around," he said, "but we couldn't have gotten that meeting — or the work — without that relationship."