

St. Louis/Southern Illinois LABOR TRIBUNE

Retired pipefitter fills niche, helps subs cope with OSHA

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Sometimes a man achieves greatness in retirement.

That may be true for Walt Taliaferro.

He may go down in construction history because he was the first to render a unique service to small construction subcontractors.

Taliaferro, a retired 18-year member of Plumbers and Pipefitters Local 562, runs a consulting company that helps small subcontractors comply with federal regulations from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

Unlike big companies and contractors, small subs cannot afford to hire full-time safety inspectors to help them cope with a maze of federal regulations.

But they can hire Taliaferro's consulting firm on a retainer basis.

That may not sound like fare for the Guinness Book of World Records.

Yet Taliaferro's company — National Safety Consulting — is unique: No other company in the United States performs that type of service.

The need for such a company began to dawn on Taliaferro in the mid-1990s after he listened to a U.S. Department of Labor representative try to explain federal safety regulations to a group of veteran construction workers at the Weldon Spring nuclear waste cleanup.

"I was embarrassed for the guy," Taliaferro said. "This inspector knew all about safety rules and



WALT TALIAFERRO

regs, but he didn't know anything about working with the tools on a jobsite."

Taliaferro thought: "There needs to be someone who understands federal safety rules and who can interpret that to the men on the job. So I sort of got involved that way, being an interpreter."

In 1998, Taliaferro took early retirement at age 62. Certified as an OSHA inspector, he thought of offering his services as a consultant to contractors as a way of bringing in an extra \$1,000 or so a month in retirement.

Taliaferro soon realized there was a big demand among small construction subs who needed help in OSHA training.

Before long, "I realized I was filling a niche," he said, because no other firm in the country was fulfilling such a need.

Taliaferro started a company, National Safety Consulting, and its client list steadily grew.

Here's what the company offers contractors:

- Safety inspections and accident tracking.
- Safety-training programs for employees.
- Safety manuals personalized for individual contractors.
- Fewer injuries on the job — and lower workman's compensation insurance premiums.
- A chance to participate in OSHA-approved contractor partnerships.

In the past decade, National Safety Consulting has expanded from Taliaferro's bedroom to its own office building in Chesterfield.

The company has 31 employees — including seven full-time inspectors and the rest working on individualized safety programs and manuals.

Taliaferro likes hiring retired union construction tradesmen because they know their trades and they're dependable. They include retired electricians, pipefitters, carpenters, laborers, iron workers, operating engineers and communications workers.

"Here's what we do," Taliaferro said. "We help save lives, lower insurance premiums and reduce injuries on the job. And that's the whole idea: To help each worker come home at night with the same number of fingers, arms and toes that he had when he left for work in the morning."