

# Union Membership

## A Handbook to answer your questions:

- What Does the Union Do for You?
- What Are Your Duties as a Union Member?

Adapted from the IATSE Local 600 New Member Orientation Meetings.

Compiled by Steve Flint, former Western Region Director and Kim Gottlieb-Walker, Stills Rep, NEB.

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## Table of Contents

### Part I

#### History and Structure

How we became IATSE Local 600

The Role of the International, Regional Boards and Elected Officials, business agents and field reps

### Part II

#### What the Union Does for You:

- Negotiating Contracts
- About The Pension Plans
- Qualifying for the Pension Plans
- About The Health Plan
- Qualifying for the Health Plan
- Retirement
- Other Benefits of Working under Union Contract

## **Other Benefits of being a member of Local 600**

### **Our Publications:**

- The ICG Magazine
- Camera Angles
- Setiquette

### **Our Website:**

- [www.cameraguild.com](http://www.cameraguild.com)
- IATSE Yellow Pages
- Web chats

### **Member Services:**

- Availability List
- Training and Technical Seminars
- Career Counseling
- Screenings
- Scholarships
- Heritage Series
- The Film Showcase
- Networking Events
- Political Action

## **Part III**

### **Your Duties as a Member of Local 600**

- PAY YOUR DUES AND INITIATION FEES
  - REPORT ALL WORK
  - NEVER UNDERCUT THE CONTRACT
  - NEVER JEOPARDIZE YOUR HEALTH AND SAFETY
  - SUPPORT ALL STRIKE ACTIONS
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## **Structure of the Union**

The parent organization is the International Alliance of Theatrical and Stage Employees and Motion Picture Technicians, Artists and Allied Crafts of the United States, its Territories and Canada and it represents over 100,000 below the line film and theater workers. The President is Matt Loeb who is the chief negotiator for all contracts. The IA has both a theatrical division and a division devoted to Motion Pictures and Television Production.

The IATSE is divided into districts. California is part of District 2, which includes Arizona, Nevada and Hawaii.

Each local elects representatives to attend IATSE district and national conventions. Each local has both elected officials and hired business agents. The elected officials represent the membership and set internal policy; the business agents enforce the contracts and policies and to help protect the members from producer abuses.

Local 600 was the first national local, representing camera crews throughout the entire USA.

Internally, IATSE Local 600 has an elected President (who must reside in the western region), A western region VP, a central region VP and an Eastern region VP, as well as a Sec-treasurer and a Sergeant at arms and the members are represented on the National Executive Board by elected representatives from each classification. Each region has it's own elected council made up of their National Executive Board members and the next highest vote receivers from that region. Elections are held every three years and all members in good standing (dues paid!) may vote.

Local 600 has a hired National Executive Director (Bruce Doering) and each region has a hired Regional Director for the Midwestern (Central) Region, for the Eastern Region and the Western Region). We also have field representatives in each region who monitor our contract enforcement on the set and handle the day to day problems our members encounter.

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## **What the Union Does for You**

The primary job of the union is to negotiate the contracts under which we work and to protect our safety and well being from producer exploitation and to provide a means of receiving pensions and continuous healthcare, despite working for a variety of employers. This is a rarity in a free-lance industry such as ours, and we are fortunate to have a well funded pension and health fund with among the best benefits to be found anywhere in the country.

## **1. Negotiating Contracts**

Matt Loeb and the IATSE are the official bargaining agents for us... and we are part of 15 locals in the bargaining unit. Until fairly recently, there was only one Basic Agreement, which was all that was needed when all entertainment was produced within the studio system. As more and more independent, low-budget projects were produced, it became apparent that not all productions had the budget to adopt the Basic Agreement, and many of our members were working non-union with no benefits, so new contracts were developed for lower budget projects (as the Screen Actors' Guild had done) so that members working on these productions would still accrue benefit hours for their pensions and health plan qualification. No member may work for lesser pay or lesser conditions than those specified in the contract under which they work, though they may negotiate higher wages and better conditions if they can.

## **2. The Health and Pension Plans**

The Pension Plans: Local 600 members receive two parallel pension plans, both paid completely by the producers. The first is a Defined Benefit Pension Plan, in which, after a certain number of years and hours worked, the member will receive a defined benefit per month for the rest of their lives. The second is a Defined Contribution Pension Plan in which a certain amount is contributed to an account for every hour worked or guaranteed, as well as an additional percentage of one's scale wages (now at 6%) above and beyond what we earn, which is invested until retirement. Whatever the amount is at retirement age may then be taken as a lump sum or rolled over into a monthly annuity.

It was the Camera local that first suggested the additional percentage many years ago, despite the resistance of some of the locals who felt it would only benefit those making a high hourly wage... but they have all seen significant increases in their retirement funds because of this far-sighted provision.

### **Qualifying for the Pension Plans**

You must work 400 hours in a year's time to receive a qualifying year toward your pension.

### **Retirement**

If a member works for a certain number of years and a certain number of hours with at least one year after age 40 they can retire with not only both pension plans but with full retiree health care.

### **The Health Plan**

Our health plan is the best in the entire industry (better than SAG, the DGA or WGA) and is financially solid and stable because of some far-sighted negotiations. Many years ago, before videotape, DVDs or cable, the IATSE negotiated that we would receive 5.4% of the GROSS of any films sold into

secondary markets (of which there were very few at that time). Now that there are secondary markets like Video and DVD sales and rentals, cable and network TV, airplane movies, foreign markets, etc. the amount coming into our plans from those secondary markets is enormous and has enabled us to have one of the most comprehensive health plans in the country. It includes yearly check-ups, eyeglasses, chiropractic, psychiatric and prescription coverage for our entire families with only a \$50 deductible per 6 month period.

Because it is largely funded by union-made films going into secondary markets after their initial theatrical run, it is even more imperative that members call in EVERY job, union or non-union, because, if organizable, even a low budget film has the potential to bring in significant contributions to the health and pension plans when it goes into those secondary markets for rental or sale or for free or pay television.

### **Qualifying for the Health Plan**

Initial qualification requires 600 hours of work under a union contract within a one year period. Each subsequent 6 months requires 400 hours of work. Fortunately, negotiations created a "Bank" of hours which enables you to use extra hours beyond the 400 to help fill in for hours needed in the next period. Initially the bank could hold an extra 300 hours, but recent negotiations expanded the bank to 450 hours, which can be drawn from as needed to make the 400 hours needed in each six month period. The qualifying periods are flexible (they used to have rigid cut off dates in March and September which often left members with a single day short of qualifying) so that now many more members are able to qualify for and maintain their benefits.

### **3. Safety: Another Benefit of Working under Union Contract**

Your safety is of paramount importance... NO entertainment is worth being maimed or dying for. Producers can be very oblivious to the safety of the crew, so we have to be very vigilant to monitor the safety of the sets and locations where we work. Safety hotline numbers are available to anonymously report ANY potentially unsafe situation and our field reps will immediately respond when alerted to a safety hazard.

All members of the western region must complete Safety Passport training so they can recognize hazardous situations. As with job reporting, no-one will identify you as the person making the phone call but it is crucial that you allow our reps to intercept and correct hazardous situations before anyone is harmed.

When working on any project which may have hazardous situations, whether from smoke, cranes, insert cars, explosives, fatigue, etc... always check the safety bulletins available on the ICG's website and keep the safety hotline numbers handy.

Other Benefits of being a member of Local 600 The International Cinematographers Guild offers many other benefits for membership including:

**Our Publications:** The International Cinematographers Guild Magazine which highlights our members achievements and skills and is our face to the outside world...

**Camera Angles:** Our internal newsletter with information about contracts, guild news and important information all members need to know...

**Setiquette:** Our handbook guide to each classification within Local 600 and the requirements and duties of each member of the camera crew...

**Our Website:** [www.cameraguild.com](http://www.cameraguild.com) is a comprehensive site with both public and private (password) sections which includes everything from Safety Bulletins, Negotiation updates, Guild news, political action and the IATSE Yellow Pages, as well as a directory of members where you can update your credits and information, add your name to the Availability List, report jobs and pay your dues.

**IATSE Yellow Pages:** A service on our website which helps members when they are not working but have services or products they can offer to other union members. Still photographers and videographers who cover personal events, equipment insurance, hand made goods, classes in self-defense or scuba diving a wide variety of products and services are offered here and members are encouraged to look there first.

**Web Chats:** Occasionally, a distinguished member, generally a respected Director of Photography, hosts a live web chat to answer questions about the body of their work.

**Member Services:** Availability List: Every week, on Sunday, all members in good standing may call in or sign in on the website to place their name on the availability list. Any producer or production manager or DP calling to find needed crew members is faxed the entire list of those in the classification needed, so the job call comes directly from the production company. This service has resulted in many excellent jobs for our members but is rarely used.

**Training and Technical Seminars:** Our former president, George Spiro Dibie, initiated a series of technical seminars to keep our members on the cutting edge of new technologies as they emerge. Companies like Kodak, Panavision and others sponsor training for our members and our own most distinguished Directors of Photography participate in annual lighting workshops. Technological training has become a major priority and recent seminars have included training in Peds, Hi-Def, the latest digital cameras and hands-on 3D training. If there are areas in which you would like to see the union offer training, please contact the

Training Committee of the National Executive board with your suggestions and ideas.

**Screenings:** The guild offers monthly screenings of first-run films, usually held at the DGA in Los Angeles (a state of the art projection facility) and often has the camera crew present to answer questions afterward.

**Scholarships:** The union offers yearly \$1500. scholarships to the children and grandchildren of members with outstanding academic records. Completed applications are due each year on Jan. 31.

**Heritage Series:** In the interest of preserving our rich and fascinating history, Local 600 has established "The Heritage Series" of taped interviews with our most distinguished members. Any member may check out these tapes (currently being transferred to DVD) to learn about the history of those they may have the opportunity to work with some day. Those who work on EPK crews may apply to be a part of the Heritage Series documentary crews which we will soon be making available to other locals to record their part in the history of Motion Pictures and Television.

**The Emerging Cinematographers Awards:** Every year, Local 600 holds a contest for the best short films made by camera crew members OTHER than Directors of Photography. This is a chance to show your unique talents and receive recognition and attention. The films are then shown in both a showcase in venues around the country.

**Networking Events:** To facilitate our members ability to network with each other, we have numerous social events throughout the year, including our annual gold tournament, deep sea fishing trips and holiday parties and special screenings for members' families.

**Political Action:** Sometimes members wonder why the union would become involved in politics... and the answer is because your well-being and future depend upon it. Our contracts can easily be undermined by anti-union legislation.

**An example:** In California, state law required that overtime be paid after 8 hours and so it was not something which we needed to negotiate each time we had a new contract. Under Pete Wilson, that provision of state law was eliminated by his anti-union Labor Relations Board and so the producers began pressing to eliminated time and a half after 8 hours in our contracts. By replacing Wilson with a more labor friendly governor and pressing for a return of the 8 hour day as state law, it was removed as a negotiation factor and we could concentrate of improvements to the health plan (like the expanded bank of hours).

When it was recognized that California had one of the lowest unemployment payments in the entire United States (though not the cheapest state to live in by

any stretch of the imagination) our local, working with the L.A. County Federation of Labor initiated a postcard campaign (“The Pink-slip Blues”) which had over 10,000 union members sign and mail pink postcards to the Governor in favor of increasing unemployment benefits. The campaign prevented the Governor from vetoing the legislation and the pen which signed the bill increasing those benefits is now framed in the office of the man who originated the idea of the postcard campaign, our Western Region Director, Steve Flint.

Our political action is not based upon Political Party but on what legislation and which legislators are pro-labor and which are against. Unions are the only voice working people have so we must speak up when our members standard of living, health or safety will be affected. We monitor what is happening politically and will let you know when there is legislation or elections that will impact your future.

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## **YOUR DUTIES as a MEMBER of Local 600**

### **Paying Your Dues and Initiation Fees**

The union has no other source of income except for initiation fees and dues from its members.

If you do not live up to your financial responsibilities, we cannot continue to exist, to keep the office functioning, to have representatives in the field to fight your battles for you or provide the myriad services we offer. Initiation fees may be paid off over two years with no interest. If you are having financial difficulties, come in to consult with the staff to create a more workable payment plan. Dues credit can be earned by helping organizing efforts on striking shows.

### **Reporting All Work**

This is an absolute requirement of membership. The union will not stop you from accepting Non-Union work AS LONG AS YOU REPORT THE JOB TO THE UNION OFFICE so it can be determined whether the job is organizable or not.

It is to your benefit if it can be organized because it can then provide valuable hours toward your health and pension coverage and the residuals can help support our health and pension plans. Your call to the union will never be revealed to the producers your position on the crew will not be jeopardized.

It is not necessary for every member of the camera crew to report the same project as long as there is a designated reporter who calls the job in as soon as possible, preferably before the job actually begins, by faxing call sheets and providing as much information as you can about budget, locations, staffing, etc.

Do not assume that any production is too low budget or insignificant to report. The union is very good at determining whether a production can be organized or not and does not call for strikes capriciously. Now we even have contracts



adaptable to projects below \$500,000. The only way we know what kind of work our members are doing and where we should be creating contracts is by your calls.

### **Never Undercut The Contract**

On union projects, always find out what contract you are working under so that you can make sure not to forego any of the provisions... you may not work for less than scale or for lesser conditions than specified in the contract.

### **Never Jeopardize Your Health and Safety**

If you are working on a production that regularly has hours exceeding 14 hours a day, call the office field reps so that they can intercede... fatigue is the leading cause of accidents, both on the set and on the road going home. If you have worked an exceedingly long day and the production company offers you a hotel room for the night, accept it... if they have to do it often enough, perhaps they will start scheduling more reasonable days.

You are entitled to a bump in pay for each shot and an extra hazard insurance policy if asked to shoot in a hazardous situation, but you must ASK for it for it to be instituted. Let our field reps know when hazardous situations arise so they can be the ones who take the heat and protect your well-being.

Be sure to check the safety bulletins on our website whenever you know you will be shooting with any hazard involved (smoke, scaffolding, explosives, insert cars, etc).

### **Supporting All Strike Actions**

If the union determines that a show is organizable and asks the crew for authorization cards, it is your duty as a member to sign an authorization card.

When a strike is called, withdraw from the set and **DO NOT CROSS THE PICKET LINE UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES**. This is the bottom line of union membership.

Most shows organize very quickly... a few require extended strikes... but whatever the circumstances, support your union organizers and field reps.

And don't forget to register to vote, stay informed and **VOTE!**