

Local 420 Members Are Heroes In the Aftermath of the Philadelphia Building Collapse



From left are Kevin Heffernan, Local 420 Financial Secretary-Treasurer, award recipients Apprentice David Heintz and Journeyman Chuck Slemmer, Local 420 Business Manager Anthony Gallagher, award recipient Helper Jeff Ware, Local 420 President Tom Redden, and UA General Secretary-Treasurer Mark McManus.



On June 5, 2013, at 22nd and Market Street, in Philadelphia, PA, there was a horrific accident, which occurred when a four-story building that was slated for demolition collapsed onto the neighboring Salvation Army store, killing two employees and four customers and injuring 13 others.

The emergency was broadcast on television into the wee hours of the morning once the army of first-responders was on the scene; however, within the first 30 minutes after the catastrophic collapse, the scenario had been very, very different. Steamfitters Local 420 25-year member Chuck Slemmer, Apprentice David Heintz and Helper Jeff Ware were working about a block away installing an underground pipeline when they heard the boom. They just started running—Brother Slemmer with his welding hood still on. They knew something was terribly wrong.

Journeyman Chuck Slemmer gave an emotional testimony about that day. He said, “As we approached the site, we saw other people were running from it—guys who were working there. We were the first ones on the scene, with about eight or nine other people, some from across the street. We saw it collapse. We were working about 100 yards away. We were there before the first-responders. We just started digging. We knew we had to get the people out. There was debris everywhere; a big piece of plywood that had nails sticking out was in the way and had to be removed. There were people trapped in the basement area. We were able to clear the debris away. We were digging with our hands and using buckets to remove the debris and bricks. We pulled out and carried away six or seven people. There was a makeshift stairwell that had filled in with falling bricks. There was a woman trapped beneath it. We were able to dig her out. Once the first-responders arrived—firemen and ambulance—they took over, and there were a lot of people on the scene. It was horrific. It didn’t need to happen.”

One witness told a CNN reporter on the scene that workers were apparently knocking down the taller building, and it

collapsed the wrong way. “There was a big aftershock,” he said. “There were people who fell over. There were people screaming and running across the street. We could hear people screaming inside the building.”

Steamfitters Local 420 Business Manager Anthony Gallagher was notably proud of the local’s members involved in the heroic efforts that day. He stated, “The immediate response from our members to this emergency situation was not surprising. It’s who we are as members of the United Association, as union brothers. Brothers Slemmer, Heintz and Ware never thought about their safety. They saw other people running from the building. Their only focus that day was saving as many lives as they could.”

Brother Slemmer said at one point he looked around, and all that he saw were union members in the debris—union members helping one another, firefighters and police and other first-responders. “It’s strange that I thought of that at the time, but I did,” he said.

At their annual swearing in of new officers and awards ceremony, the members of Steamfitters Local 420, Philadelphia, PA, recently honored their brothers, Chuck Slemmer, Dave Heintz, and Jeff Ware, for their heroic efforts that day. General Secretary-Treasurer Mark McManus was on hand at the ceremony during the award presentation.

The members presented the heroes with crystal eagles to symbolize their bravery in searching for and aiding in the rescue of the victims of the building collapse in Philadelphia. Now that is ... the Heart of the UA.

If you, or someone you know, has given generously of their time and labor for a good cause or has been involved in extraordinary charitable activities, we want to know about it.

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Please include as much information as possible, as well as photographs, preferably in color.