

Duluth Trades receive state volunteer award

By Lynette Swanberg
Community Services

The Duluth Building & Construction Trades Council received the Bea Kersten Community Service Award at the Minnesota AFL-CIO Convention last month in St. Paul. The project award was for their volunteer work on Duluth's Bentleyville Tour of Lights.

Nathan Bentley started showing holiday lights at the family's Esko, MN home in 2001. He moved it to Bayfront Festival Park in 2009. In 2010, Bentley called Ironworkers Local 512 Business Agent Darrell Godbout about an idea

he had for a "Christmas tree." "The tree was a multi-disciplinary project of architects, our Trades unions, and union contractors," said Godbout.

The tree is 17 tons of steel fabricated in three, 40 foot sections in Proctor that was shipped to the Ironworkers union hall in Hermantown.

At Bayfront 24 yards of concrete were poured as permanent footings for the tree.

The initial erection of the tree at Bayfront in 2010 kept 20 Ironworkers, including 12 apprentices, and two crane operators from Operating Engineers Local 49 working

two, 13-hour days to put together the 120 foot tree.

In 2011, Ironworkers constructed an 8 foot diameter ball added for the top. With over 100,000 LED lights defining the tree it is a piece of artwork.

Rarely is there a view of Bentleyville in the media where the Christmas tree is not featured.

"Without the contribution of supplies, equipment, and skilled labor we wouldn't have the tallest Christmas tree in the U.S.," says Godbout.

IBEW Local 242 members have volunteered their skill by building the electrical panels and power distribution cords. They continue their support through donations for billboard advertising, stocking hats for kids, and financial donations. After a theft at Bentleyville, IBEW 242 members rebuilt



Accepting the MN AFL-CIO Bea Kersten award were Mike Syversrud, Craig Olson, Darrell Godbout, Lynette Swanberg, Jeff Daveau, Darik Carlson, and Dan O'Neill.

(Steve Share, Minneapolis Labor Review Editor photo)

power distribution cords.

The free Bentleyville has grown from 150,000 visitors in 2009 to 206,000 in 2012. Visitors come a long way to view the beautiful holiday display, adding to the local economy. The venue also serves as a drop off site for food and toys for the Salvation Army's distribution to northeast Minnesota

and northwest Wisconsin.

We thank the Duluth Building Trades unions and their members for their ongoing work and support of Bentleyville. Congratulations, and now the rest of the state knows too because of the Minnesota AFL-CIO's Bea Kersten Award.

AFL-CIO/NEALC Endorsed Candidates

U.S. SENATE

Al Franken

U.S. HOUSE

COUNTY SHERIFF

Koochiching

Brian Jespersen