

Joe Hughes, Director of Government Relations - International Union of Painters & Allied Trades
District Council 57

IUPAT DC 57 covers commercial and industrial painters focusing on coatings for critical infrastructure such as bridges, energy sector (gas, oil, power plants) and water storage facilities. We also represent Glaziers (Architectural Glass & Metal Workers), Drywall Finishers and Sign & Display Workers.

I grew up in Harmar Township (PA District 33) and attended local public school in the Allegheny Valley School District. I recently purchased a commercial property in Springdale Borough and it is in the process of being renovated.

I went through the Glaziers Local Union 751 apprenticeship program and worked in the trades as a Glazier for 25 years.

I believe that a conversation concerning blight should include a deeper look into past times before the blight occurred. What were the economic conditions of these times and why was there less blight?

Locally in the 1980s the booming steel industry was rapidly decimated. Pittsburgh was going through it's second Renaissance of building which offered displaced steel workers an opportunity for a career in the union building trades. We are currently experiencing a continual loss of manufacturing jobs due to relocation and automation of facilities. This loss of middle-class jobs is a definite precursor to increased blight. Jobs leave...people leave.

We need to realize the discrepancies between current job trends in manufacturing versus construction and focus on which sector potentially provides the best opportunities for a spot in the middle class. We currently have a nationwide shortage of skilled Trades Workers. If there is going to be funding directed towards blight and the ensuing construction then we need to be concerned with who will be performing the work. Does it help the long term fight against blight if the workers are underpaid and not living within the local region? There is no doubt that local communities would be better off with more skilled Trades Workers living in them to provide for the local economy so I will make the case for Apprenticeship/Local hire language to be in place for publicly funded projects.

I will site Lawrenceville as an example of mistakes that have been made in the effort to eradicate blight.

I will also make the case for better local workforce development that is coordinated with the Union Building Trades.