

IUPAT DC 7 Scholarship Application

When my grandfather first joined the IUPAT 63 years ago, he had little idea of the vast effect it would have on his life as a whole. As someone entering the construction trades after completing two years of service in the U.S. Army, he needed a way to effectively join the workforce and make a living wage. The IUPAT made his goals possible and more by putting him on a path where he could receive specialized training during his apprenticeship to set him up to become a master glazier. Throughout his 42 years of being an active, working member of Local 941, my grandpa didn't have to worry about whether he would be able to put food on the table as the IUPAT helped to negotiate fair wages for glaziers. At the same time, the union made sure he was guaranteed a safe, hospitable work environment, and lobbied politicians to get the laws to back their workers up. Without the continuous efforts of the IUPAT District 7 members, my grandfather could not have provided his family with the resources they needed to pursue their respective interests. All three of his kids were able to focus on their education, with each obtaining undergraduate degrees from UW-Madison in varying fields (a feat most blue collar workers couldn't dream of their children achieving). Although the world has changed a lot in those 63 years since my "Pop-pop" joined the union, unions are still hugely important in today's society.

Unions maintain numerous benefits for vastly different laborers across the globe. Firstly, the collective bargaining power of unions is what makes them so useful for individual workers. In my opinion it is this foundational characteristic of all unions that keeps them relevant today and into the future. In a time where large corporations dominate the employer landscape, individual workers have almost no say in any aspect of the jobs they spend much of their lives doing. When laborers can pool their resources and knowledge together in the form of a union, a lot of employee benefits can be ensured. The worker benefits that need to be put in place actually

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do happen because of the collective strength of an effective union. This leads to another major reason why unions remain relevant: worker protection. Even as the trades become safer and more streamlined through technology and legislation, there is still a great deal of risk that comes with most blue collar positions. In addition to inherent physical risks, more complex situations with workplace safety are bound to arise. All of these possible issues can be responsibly handled when a union is involved whereas they can turn ugly quickly when there is no group protecting workers from corporations or powerful owners who may not have their workers' well-being prioritized. There have been quite a few workplace safety problems in large non-unionized corporations that the media has shed light upon in recent years, but there are countless other bad situations that go unnoticed every day. Finally, unions still are integral in getting workers the appropriate and fair compensation and benefits they deserve. Especially as inflation and the cost of living rise, people's wages need to increase to account for those factors. It can be seen that large-scale legislative action takes years and years to happen, so unions can use their collective bargaining power to step in and get people the money and benefits they need to support a high-quality life. Life happens quickly, and in a sense unions will forever be the groups to make important changes happen so that workers in the trades can continue to pursue their dreams..

I believe that if I were ever in a position to join a union I would. The reasons I believe unions will remain relevant that I previously laid out are essential to workers in any field. My own father has seen the consequences of not being part of a union in certain lines of work. He lost several thousand dollars in non-vested retirement funds because his position was not within a union. Additionally, a weak healthcare plan in a different non-unionized position during the birth of my older brother cost my family thousands of dollars in out-of-pocket costs. My family would not have experienced those losses had there been union protections associated with those jobs. I

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can understand that paying dues and being an active member of a union would mean some work and additional expenses for myself, but I think the benefits outweigh those drawbacks. I know that for the majority of my time in a union I more than likely would not be reliant on it, yet there will always be those less fortunate than myself and I would be more than happy to help support my co-workers. I also really admire the training programs most unions offer to members. I love the idea of being able to continue my education at UW-Madison in a specialized field to the point of me eventually becoming an instructor and many such positions have the opportunity to join a union.