

# WINPISINGER CENTER MARKS

# 40 years

## Educating and Inspiring Machinists Union Members

**T**iwaan Bradley pulled up to the William W. Winpisinger Education and Technology Center for the first time in early August, not completely aware of what was in store during the week-long Leadership 1 class.

The new business representative for IAM District 4 described the center's entrance of beige and brown buildings reminiscent of the dorms at his old college

Beyond that appearance, everything else was different.

What followed during the week is what Bradley described as high-energy, interactive classes taught by passionate class instructors. The social interactions with his fellow IAM sisters and brothers that left him in amazement.

"It was really great. Going there really gets you refocused and energized," said Bradley, a former IAM Local I-064 shop steward at the IKEA in Westampton, N.J. "You leave there with so many more tools in your toolbox and you sharpened the ones you do use."

The cornerstone of the IAM's 67-acre southern Maryland facility is geared toward educating to benefit the union's membership. For Bradley, that also meant a shot of solidarity as classmates shared problems and their solutions as new IAM leaders.

"We are often in the realm of doing your job function and you feel as you are all alone," he said, referring to issues like getting members to attend meetings. "I see there's a lot support going on. So many people shared their stories and then you realize we have the same situations and how they overcame it."

▼ Tiwaan Bradley  
Business Representative, District 4







◀ The aerial view of the William W. Winpisinger Center in Hollywood, Maryland.

The class is already paying dividends for Bradley, who said he got a call from a classmate who sought guidance to solve an issue they were having in their local.

Strengthening the rank-and-file is among the key intentions set forth when former IAM International President William W. Winpisinger spearheaded the creation of the education center, which officially opened in Hollywood, MD in 1981.

The land, which touches the Patuxent River, was purchased in 1980 from the Retail Clerks International Association. The tract was formerly the Placid Harbor Yacht Club, which explains some of the present amenities such as a nine-hole golf course and a boating dock.

There's also a bit of irony as the estate was once owned by conservative radio commentator Fulton Lewis Jr., a staunch critic of labor unions.

The IAM education center's concept was inspired from Winpisinger's visit to the worker education centers in Scandinavian countries.

In the early years of the IAM facility, initially called Placid Harbor, the curriculum was largely focused on sharpening organizing skills to help grow the union's membership.

Prior to the establishment of the Placid Harbor facility, many of the union's education classes were taught at the IAM headquarters or in other urban centers across the U.S.

During Winpisinger's farewell address in June 1989, he referenced the importance of the center he started as ranking "as one of our proudest achievements. Information is power."

"At the Placid Harbor, thousands of us gather each year to learn the truth about ourselves, and our history, to share our experiences and to receive professional training in everything from collective bargaining to micro-computers," Winpisinger said in the address. "The IAM will have the best-educated, best-trained members and leaders in the world. That very immodest goal is the goal of Placid Harbor."

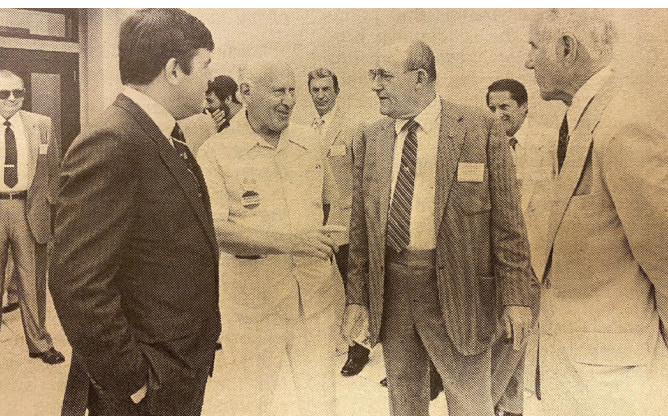
Now, 40 years strong, the IAM facility keeps expanding curriculum to stay in lock step with changes of the North American workplaces.

More than 100,000 people have participated in classes at the IAM facility since it opened in 1981. That includes members such as business representatives, shop stewards, district officers, and even IAM International President Robert Martinez Jr., who credits the center for helping shape his skillset.

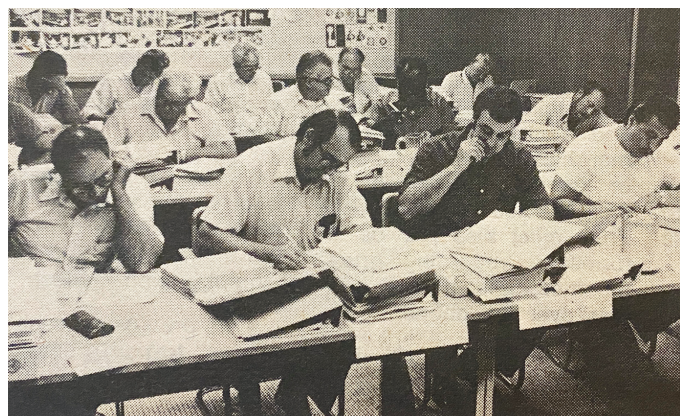
The facility, often referred to as W3, is also a rarity in the labor movement.

Very few U.S. labor unions have a dedicated, full-time education and training facility. The center employs dozens

▼ IAM International President William W. Winpisinger speaking with members during the formal dedication ceremonies of the Placid Harbor Education Center in 1984.



▼ A group of IAM Directing Business Representatives attend an organizing class at the Placid Harbor in 1982.



of workers, including instructors, maintenance crew, and kitchen staff. All are union members.

"Because education is highly valued in the IAM, that has helped our capacity to adapt to the changes that occurred in the environment and that has allowed us to persist and to sustain ourselves where other labor organizations have struggled because education is often seen as an extra," said Winpisinger Center Director Chris Wagoner. "Education is the cultural DNA of the IAM and I think the Winpisinger Center is a reflection of the value that is placed in education by the membership."

The property also houses the IAM Workers Memorial, which is dedicated to the remembrance of those who lost their lives while on the job. The bricks surrounding the memorial bear the names of fallen members along with bricks donated from lodges and proud members of the IAM.

### Adapting to Changes

The center's rural landscape has changed a lot since its early days of a few organizing classes held in the basement of the two-story colonial-style mansion.

Construction of classrooms and administrative facilities started in 1982. The IAM has also added onto the center since then, including the construction of dormitories, multi-media enabled classrooms, and computer labs. The hallways are donned with displays of several Machinists-made products ranging from food containers, Miller Lite beer cans and replicas of Boeing Co. airplanes.

The curriculum has also been expanded through the years with classes such as arbitration, pension fundamentals and negotiation preparation for bargaining committees. The lessons have also been expanded to Spanish-speaking and French-Canadian classes.

The center is also gearing up for more classes in coming months intended to grow leadership from the IAM's female members.

"It is a recognition that the workplace and workforce demographics is changing and as an organization we have

to change with it," Wagoner said. "It's changing to how we teach and how to mentor women leaders. It's the same for Spanish leaders and we can mentor and help them develop."

The classes have also been retooled for more interactive, real-world simulations.

"There's a lot simulation-based education, including one-on-one organizing like contacting someone at their door, and even arbitration where they are presenting a case of where you are in negotiations," Wagoner said. "We've learned that as adults there is a lot learning that comes from doing."

The installation of Martinez at the helm of the union in 2016 also ushered in some changes to organizing classes at the W3, especially with a focus on strategic organizing tools.

Martinez, a former Southern Territory Education Representative, said he takes education very seriously in the growth of the IAM.

"Knowledge is power. Our union is stronger today because of the cutting-edge lessons at the center – from collective bargaining to organizing," he said. "It's all important education to help strengthen and expand our great union."

### Teaching During the Covid-19 Pandemic

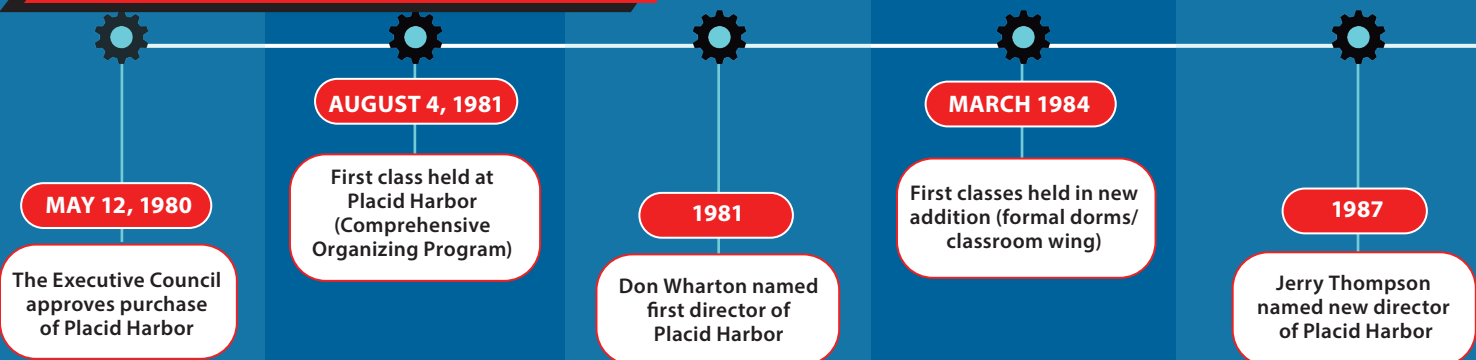
Winpisinger Center faced an unprecedented challenge in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic that forced its year-long closure.

Bradley was part of the first class of resumed in-person lessons. Prior to the reopening, the center was operating classes online with Zoom calls and other virtual tools.

The virtual classrooms were a bit of an adjustment, Wagoner said, and at times missing the true Winpisinger experience.

Many of the lessons learned by members don't come from the front of the room, but from the course participants, Wagoner said.

### KEY DATES IN WINPISINGER CENTER HISTORY





"It's very difficult to match that with online learning because those opportunities for serendipitous learning by where I'm just talking to somebody and it that is not going to happen online," he said. "It's not like the nature of the forced interactions here that occurs."

The center reopened in August with several Covid-19 protocols such as room capacity limits, constant sanitizing by facility staff, a Covid-19 vaccine requirement and mask mandates.

Bradley's comments echoed among other participants in the inaugural class of resumed in-person learning.



▲ Veronica Guzman, Local 66 Shop Steward

Veronica Guzman, an IAM Local 66 shop steward at the Milwaukee Art Museum, summed up her week-long experience at the Winpisinger Center as "very nice and eye-opening for me."

Guzman, who moved from Puerto Rico to Wisconsin three years ago, said she was nervous when she arrived at the Winpisinger Center, but that quickly faded.

"I didn't know what to expect when there were people from all over the place coming there," she said. "But, when it comes down to it, we are a union with a lot members who put aside the cultural and political differences as we are working toward the same goal."

Guzman recently wrote about her experience in the Local 66 newsletter, adding that the week's lessons helped her to push away from growing up "constantly hearing that the unions are all a bad thing. It is bad for companies who abuse their employees."

"Having the opportunity, thanks to the union community, to attend classes at the Winpisinger Center has given me the tools to become a better shop steward," she wrote. "I

feel much confident and able to guard over employees' rights and enforce employers to comply with what is stipulated in their contracts."

The reopening of the Winpisinger Center comes at a great time as the center is such a key piece in shaping the IAM's current and future leaders.

The center has been touted with even shaping the IAM's top leaders like Martinez and IAM General Secretary-Treasurer Dora Cervantes. Both Cervantes and Martinez have been taking classes at the Winpisinger Center for years, including the leadership training.

"The lessons at the center always prove very beneficial. Education is such an important investment to helping our members organize workplaces, strengthening collective bargaining and gaining the workplace protections they deserve," Cervantes said. "I speak as someone who has taken many classes at the Winpisinger Center and treasure the leadership skills and institutional knowledge that has helped me be the person I am today – a proud unionist."

As for Bradley, he's already excited for the more classes on his schedule in the coming months.

"I have plans to keep coming back and take as many classes as I can," he said.

■ TR



▲ The first class held at the William W. Winpisinger Center since the facility temporarily closed its doors in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

