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Indiana Sheet Metal Firm Provides Intubation Protection for COVID Doctors

Indianapolis, IN—Inserting tubes into the trachea of COVID-19 patients to prepare them for ventilation care is one of the riskiest procedures for doctors on the front lines of the coronavirus battle, as the slightest discharge puts them at risk for infection.

But thanks to the combined expertise of Sheet Metal and Air Conditioning Contractors' National Association (SMACNA) and Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers (SMART), doctors throughout Indiana's Community Health Network and beyond are now safer as they scramble to save lives.

Indianapolis-based signatory contractor member Bright Sheet Metal Inc. and the skilled workforce at Local 20 designed and are producing intubation boxes that are placed over patients to give doctors an extra layer of protection.

Rob Groff, project manager for Bright Sheet Metal, says, "As of late April we've made about 35 boxes that have been distributed as far away as Duke University in North Carolina—and it looks like we'll be constructing at least 100 more in the weeks to come."

The project began in early April when a Community Health North doctor read about intubation boxes being used in Taiwan and contacted Bright Sheet Metal, which has a long history of serving hospitals (in addition to HVAC and air/hydrionic balancing, it has built operating tables and other health care components).

Groff says, "We received drawings Friday morning, and by 5:30 that afternoon we had a rough prototype ready."

Doctors studied the prototype, requested a few changes, and over the weekend Bright Sheet Metal built a smaller version with two metal panels and two plexiglass panels (one of which has two holes through which a doctor can insert his gloved hands to perform the intubation), plus large grooves on the bottom so the box can lie across ventilation hoses without damaging them.

Groff says, “That prototype was approved the following Monday and we quickly provided Community Health North with a run of 12 boxes, which were put into use immediately.”

Since then, Duke University has asked Bright Sheet Metal to explore the idea of building larger boxes with vacuum attachments for intensive care COVID-19 patients who need to be isolated from other patients.

Scott Parks, business manager at SMART Local 20, says, “The very nature of our business dictates that we have to be problem solvers at every level, and over the years Bright earned a reputation for always being able to build a better mousetrap, so to speak – and they have really distinguished themselves with the intubation boxes.”

Tracy Wilson, executive director of The Sheet Metal Contractors of Central Indiana & Fort Wayne, says she is not surprised that Bright Sheet Metal has joined forces with the medical community to combat the coronavirus. “The company has a long history of stepping up even during good times. Its president, Hank Meyers, is a long-time SMACNA board member and has also presided over many SMART Local 20 initiatives, such as its health and welfare fund.

“To say we’re proud of them would be an understatement.”

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The International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers (SMART) and the Sheet Metal and Air Conditioning Contractors’ National Association (SMACNA) have a labor-management partnership that is more than 75 years old. The goal of these Partners in Progress is to maintain an effective cooperative effort that demonstrates their expertise in the heating ventilating and air conditioning (HVAC), architectural metal, and industrial sheet metal markets. For additional information, visit pinp.org.