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SMACNA contractor and SMART workforce work together on World Trade Center Memorial

L. William Zahner, president and CEO of A. Zahner Company, a member of the Sheet Metal and Air Conditioning Contractors' National Association (SMACNA) knows exactly where he was during the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center towers. "I was in Kansas City, meeting with an architect," Zahner says.

Greg Chastain, business manager for the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers (SMART) Local 2, was also in Kansas City. "I was an instructor for our joint apprenticeship training center," Chastain says. "We turned on the TV after the Trade Center was hit, and I was watching when the first tower fell."

Mark Stewart, a Local 2 sheet metal worker with Zahner, was in a Kansas City sheet metal shop when the first plane hit. He was on the phone with his wife when the second plane hit the South Tower.

"It was a surreal day, very weird, very solemn," Stewart remembers. "When we went outside after work, there were no airplanes overhead, not even near the airport."

It's fitting that these men were hard at work in the Kansas City sheet metal industry when the 9/11 attacks occurred, because Kansas City sheet metal played a unique role in honoring that day.

A. Zahner, a SMACNA Kansas City member, and craftspersons from SMART Local 2 produced the metal skin for the National September 11 Memorial Museum on the site of the former World Trade Center in New York.

"We're very proud of the fact that our contractor was selected to work on such an important project," Chastain says. "The September 11 Memorial helps bring healing to our country, and it's humbling that Local 2 is a part of that healing."

One might assume that a project as symbolic as the September 11 Memorial Museum would automatically go to an American firm, but international rivalry for the contract was fierce. The project's design, importance, and visibility garnered interest from firms across the globe.

Luckily, international competition does not intimidate A. Zahner or Local 2. "A. Zahner never backs down from a challenge," Stewart says. "If somebody else can't do a project, you need to let us take a look at it, because we probably can. The September 11 Memorial is probably the top on my list as far as being proud of a job."

"There are fingerprints of Local 2 team members on projects all over the world," says Chastain, referring to contracts completed in places as diverse as Bahrain, Dubai, Japan, and China.

Zahner loves seeing his staff's joy in the project. "The best thing that ever happens for me as the CEO is when the people in the plant or our engineering group take their families to look at the Memorial," he says. "You know they take pride in the work when they send me pictures."

Stewart has advice for anybody who visits the Memorial in person. “Look at the Memorial in different lights to see the way light reflects off the material and the metal,” he says. “Every change in the light changes the appearance of the building. It’s a little jewel in that area. There’s reflective stainless steel on the surrounding buildings, but that one’s the jewel.”

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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.

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