

IRON



WORKERS

by John H. Vargo, Publisher

Four years of college and debt until you are 45 or join a labor union with 4 years of apprenticeship, and get paid as you learn a trade.

Here Is One Iron Worker Who Has It All...

Ironworker, John Curtis with his newly minted wife, Marcee Clark are living the good life!

Shown here in one of their two boats, this a 21 foot Mako center console given to John by his wife as a wedding present when they were married on May 26, 2017 on the docks!! had made arrangement to take some photos of John Curtis who has been an Ironworker since 1982. I never expected to meet his wife or find a person that so truly fit as a companion to John.

What I experienced that cloudy Saturday morning in late September was two people who love boating, each other, and a way of life that many could only dream about.

The wedding gift boat is John Curtis's new fishing boat, however they have another boat they live on all spring, summer and fall. A 34' Sea Ray Sundancer kept at Riverfront Marina, in Newburgh, NY.

When I arrived early Saturday morning there the two of them were cleaning this magnificent yacht in preparation of a day and fun on the beautiful Hudson River.

What I found most interesting about the pair was the fact that both of them led the "good life" of boating before falling in love and getting married. Not one to sit around and have her husband wait on her, Marcee is ready and willing to be a real partner in every aspect of the boating experience.

Marcee Clark and John Curtis.





John Curtis began his career as an iron worker by going to Local 417 training School on Liberty Street, in Newburgh, NY in the early 80's. Then it was a three year apprenticeship course of working during the day and attending school at night. Today Local 417 in Newburgh, NY is preparing to build a huge new training facility, that will be four years of apprenticeship. This school will support the ongoing economic growth of the mid Hudson River Valley.

John currently works out of the Newburgh based Local 417 and specializes in bridge construction for Tappan Zee Construction. He has performed work on the George Washington and Newburgh Beacon bridges but most proudly the new Tappan Zee Bridge.

Second year students waiting for afternoon ironworkers class to begin.



Second year ironworkers, men and women studying post tensioning in class.



Ironworkers working with rod on the new Tappan Zee Bridge.

Local 46 Ironworkers working on rebar, (Tendons) on the new Tappan Zee Bridge.



When John Curtis began working as an ironworker in 1982 the schools that I describe below did not exist. Training, by and large was "on the job". Today Local 46 training school in Queens, NY is a good example of the high quality union workers they produce from apprentice to journeyman in four years...

When I was a very, very young man, I began my working years as a part time construction worker to my uncle and his company. These men had no mercy on me. By the end of the day I could hardly stand up.

By the time I was 19, (in 1955) I was working as a union labor out of Peekskill, NY. That did not last long as the lathers needed helpers and the job paid more than labors were getting. I obtained a permit to work with the lathers, a part of the ironworkers union. Lathers do a wide variety of steel work. One of them is tying up reinforcing rod and laying it out in concrete forms to be ready for the cement pour. I was given a pair of cutting pliers, shown how to use them to both cut and tie and said, "watch the old man".

The old man was a ramrod straight backed 60 year old iron worker, who had a work ethic that said, "do it my way or else" At lunch he would have a shot and a beer and a sandwich.

Fast forward to October 2017 and here I am visiting the school that replaced the tough guy ironworker. Now it is four years of training in school with pay.

Local 46 Training Center in queens had four different classes in progress from 4 pm to 8 PM.

Ironworker teacher Kelsey Mccabe teaching Document control, inventory control, post tension suppliers, etc.



The students were all 2nd year apprentices, divided up amongst different parts of the school. The Local 46 classrooms were spotless and the students, intent, smart and, I felt they were aware that there situation was far better than their friends out on the streets of New York City.

Today's labor unions whether carpenter, iron worker, electrician, plumber, steam fitter or heavy equipment operator all either have their own school or share a "learning center" with other complementary unions. This has created a safety and education standard "second to none".

On September 27, 2017 the New York City Council passed a law that requires all city workers to have passed a "school" before working on any job. The union locals have proven that their schools create a much safer and efficient way of life.

For John Curtis and Marcee Clark their life's work and relationship is set in stone.

This ironworker is getting the job done with pride, skill and integrity.

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