

On the Road With Mike Klemm: Station Visits Always on the Schedule



Machinists District 141 President Mike Klemm was greeted by over a hundred Local 914 members at a recent station visit at EWR. Meeting directly with members on their home turf has become a regular part of Mike's tenure as President.

With the potential for three simultaneous contract negotiations becoming more likely, the President of District 141 of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers is working to stay connected with front-line workers.

For anyone leading an organization with over 40,000 members scattered from Massachusetts to Pago Pago, staying connected can be a real challenge.

Even the most tech-savvy leaders value the importance of face-to-face communication and see no substitute for just showing up at workplaces and hearing from workers in person, on their turf. When the organization you lead is the largest district in the largest territory of the IAMAW, the challenge is indeed great.

IAMAW District 141 President and Directing General Chair Mike Klemm spends a lot of time on airplanes, but he sees that as a way to have meaningful connections with the members he has pledged to represent. "When I am not in contract negotiations, station visits are the best use of my time," according to Mike. "The time I spend on airplanes helps me organize my thoughts so I can communicate better when I get to interact with the members at their jobs. When your thoughts are organized, you can be a better listener. And listening to what the members have to say is the main purpose of a station visit."

At a recent visit to Liberty International Airport in Newark, NJ, Mike spent the day visiting every corner of the airport to converse with members informally. He tries to visit every hub station at

least once per year. Many times, these station visits yield concrete results. [After listening to insights from Kirk Griffiths, an IAM ramp worker in Houston, TX](#), Mike negotiated a smaller time frame for submitting day and shift trades for all airport-based employees at United Airlines. The new 4-hour window, an improvement over the previous 24-hour requirement, brought more flexibility and fewer job terminations due to attendance problems.

With two major airline contracts up for renewal in 2020, and ongoing negotiations at American Airlines, station visits have become even more important. “Not everyone is ready to share all their concerns when put on the spot at a station visit. So that’s why we encourage members to watch for and fill out the surveys we put out before we begin negotiations. We rank issues according to how many members mention them in the surveys, and that tells us what’s really important. There may be some issues that are specific to one region or city, but there are always concerns that affect every member. That’s what we need to address in a contract that will work for everyone.”

Local officers and committee members usually join Mike for the station visits, which helps when members bring up issues that are location-specific. It also allows for some reflection on the issues discussed as the visit wraps up. At Terminal A in Newark, Erica Boyce was vocal about her frustrations with short-staffing, but was excited to hear about several cases where union representatives fought for and saved jobs. “You’ve got to get loud and proud,” Erica said. “Advertise your successes.” That exchange ended the day on a high note, as Mike got ready for the drive out to Long Island, New York, to see his family.