



## **AIR TRANSPORT**

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## **DISTRICT LODGE 142**



### **LABOR DAY MESSAGE FROM DISTRICT 142**

September 3, 2010

*Labor Day differs in every essential from the other holidays of the year of any country. All other holidays are in a more or less degree connected with conflicts and battles of man's prowess over man, of strife and discord for greed and power, of glories achieved by one nation over another. Labor Day is devoted to no man, living or dead; to no sect, race or nation.*

— Samuel Gompers, the first president of the American Federation of Labor, 1910

One hundred and twenty-four years after it was first observed in New York City, most Americans regard Labor Day as the gateway between carefree summer and business-as-usual autumn, one last chance to toss Frisbees in the park and fire up the barbecue.

It's a shame that the holiday's purpose — to celebrate the working American men and women who built the strongest and wealthiest civilization in the history of the world — attracts so little attention in the mass media.

Perhaps it is because the big corporations that control so much of the media don't feel comfortable with the day's pro-union message.

Whatever the reason, most Americans are oblivious to the fact that labor unions made it possible for them to enjoy sunny afternoons — or any afternoons, for that matter — with their families and friends.

After all, unions lobbied for laws that set the five-day, 40-hour work week as the standard for all Americans, not just union members. We also fought for vacations, holidays and pensions to enable millions to appreciate their lives outside of the context of their jobs.

It's up to us as union people to provide our fellow Americans with some remedial education about the labor movement. That's certainly what Matthew Maguire, a member of the IAM, had in mind when he conceived of Labor Day in 1882.

Maguire envisioned a holiday that would celebrate those “who from rude nature have delved and carved all the grandeur we behold.”

The resulting parade and picnic on Tuesday, Sept. 5, was a huge success. Participants, who had to give up a day's pay in order to attend, cheered speakers who demanded establishment of the eight-hour work day.

Labor Day soon became an annual event, switching to the first Monday in September in 1884. The idea spread with the growth of labor organizations, and in 1885 Labor Day was celebrated in many industrial centers of the country.

City governments first endorsed these celebrations with municipal resolutions passed in 1885 and 1886.

The first bill to establish Labor Day as a state holiday was introduced into the New York legislature, but Oregon became the first state to pass such a law on Feb. 21, 1887. Later that year, four more states — Colorado, Massachusetts, New Jersey and New York — also enacted Labor Day holidays. Connecticut, Nebraska and Pennsylvania followed suit by the end of the decade.

In 1894, legislation making Labor Day a national holiday was rushed through Congress unanimously and signed into law a mere six days after the end of the Pullman railroad strike. President Grover Cleveland signed the law immediately because he wanted to reconcile with Organized Labor after the deaths of strikers at the hands of the U.S. military and U.S. Marshals.

Since then, all 50 U.S. states have made Labor Day a state holiday.

Labor Day remembers those who have labored for our country since its founding. It also commemorates the growth of the modern American Labor Movement, one that has grown from its roots in the colonial craft guilds to today's strong, vital union movement with membership numbering in the millions.

The work done by the American worker has contributed to the highest standard of living and the greatest production the world has ever known. It has brought our country closer to the traditional American ideals of economic and political democracy.

I am proud that a day has been set aside to honor the men and women who have been responsible for so much of the nation's strength, freedom and leadership — the American workers. I hope you are too.