As a teenager, Chad Flagg took karate lessons across the street from Exposition Park in South Los Angeles, where he now works in a 700-yard-long, 30-foot-deep construction pit.

He’s one of about 100 Building Trades local union members who are currently working at the 11-acre site to replace a onetime parking lot with the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art. Before the museum’s scheduled opening in fall 2021, about 3,600 local union members will be on hand, and many of them are local residents. A Project Labor Agreement with the LA/Orange Counties Building and Construction Trades Council sets targets for hiring Angelenos, disadvantaged residents and veterans.

The $1.2 billion, five-story museum will include exhibit galleries, theaters and gardens. It is the creation of “Star Wars” impresario George Lucas and his wife, Mellody Hobson, and will house an unparalleled and growing collection of art and cinema artifacts.

It joins three other high-profile projects—the current LA Coliseum renovation and the completed USC Village and Banc of California Stadium—that have emphasized local hire, in partnership with City Councilman Curren Price and the Building Trades.

“We are seeing the genuine growth of job opportunities in South LA, powered by the commitment of private investors, institutions and our elected officials,” said Ron Miller, Building Trades Executive Secretary. “You pair that with the apprenticeship training systems of the Building Trades and this is a job-creation machine.”

Ground broke this past March with general contractor Hathaway Dinwiddie. In September, Flagg, 34, was dispatched to work, less than a mile from the home he shares with his wife and children.

“Right here I’ve got a sense of security and a sense of accomplishment every day,” Flagg said.

“I like being able to tell my kids I worked here, I grew up here and this used to be that way.”

Flagg joined UA Local 250 as an apprentice, after completing a LA Trade Tech/Building Trades construction training program called SLATE Z.

The work he is doing at the site is difficult and complex.

Flagg guides pipes down 370-foot-deep wells drilled at the site to circulate water for the air conditioning. Water from the museum’s cooling system will flow down...
the wells where it is cooled to 43 degrees and sent back up.

The cooling system is one of several building innovations the Trades are implementing.

“Have you ever seen rebar that thick?” asks Julio Varela, a foreman from Iron Workers Local 416 for Gerdau Steel. He points to steel cylindrical supports that will hold up a two-level underground parking structure. The reinforcing bars are thicker and more densely packed than at most jobs where he has worked.

Varela may also win the prize for shortest commute: He lives a block from the job.

He said he used to play soccer on the field at Vermont Avenue and 39th Street, where the museum is being constructed. “Now it’s history,” Varela said. “Reason I’m happy is, it brings jobs to the community. You get to work with young apprentices—teach them the ropes.”

The soccer field is being relocated nearby, another good thing for Varela’s three children who are growing up in South LA. He said he is hopeful the development will “revitalize the community.”

Right now, the Roofers are finishing the underground waterproofing to make sure the parking garage does not flood.

Oscar Aguilar of Roofers and Waterproofers Local 36 has been working on site since May. The 29-year-old apprentice said he’s grateful to be working anywhere, but said this project is a standout.

“You’ll see a building and say, ‘I worked on that,’” Aguilar said. “I’ve only seen pictures but it looks pretty nice.”

Aguilar said he has been installing hundreds of yards each day. The site spans seven football fields.

Jose Torres, 50, a Laborers Local 300 journeyman, has been shoveling concrete footings. He immigrated from Jalisco, Mexico to Los Angeles where he became a Laborer 20 years ago.

He rides his bike a couple of blocks from his home. His last job was at the soccer stadium nearby.

“Too close,” Torres joked. “For me, it’s very nice.”

Torres’s fellow Laborers call the journeyman “El Tigre” for his effort and upbeat attitude. He said he can retire soon, but doesn’t want to because he enjoys his work.

Torres lives with his wife and two children, who attend middle and high school nearby.

**LUCAS**

**CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11**

Isamar Marroquin, 26, is a first-year apprentice with UA Local 78 Plumbers, working for Murray Co. Marroquin is a graduate of the Second Chance Pre-Apprenticeship Bootcamp, a program of the Building Trades, Anti-Recidivism Coalition, LA County Federation of Labor and LA Trade Tech College. The graduates are formerly incarcerated individuals who prepare for new lives and new careers in the Building Trades.

Edward Davenport, journeyman working for Bragg Crane.
Next to Torres was Theo Credle, 34, from Compton, who was also finished with work that day. He is a tower crane operator with Operating Engineers Local 12. Credle said he tries to focus on his work and not the heat for the eight hours he is in his “box.”

“A job’s a job, so it’s significant,” Credle said. “It pays me.”

Like the apprentice Flagg, Credle said he was brought on the job through a local hire arrangement, but said he would work anywhere he was sent.

Flagg said the Lucas Museum was “invaluable to the community.”

“At this point I feel like I’m a pillar of the community,” Flagg said. “If there’s one that grew up here, born and raised, experienced the ins and outs of life here, it’s me.”

By the time the project finishes, 3,600 local union members will have worked here.