SHEET METAL | AIR | RAIL | TRANSPORTATION

SMART

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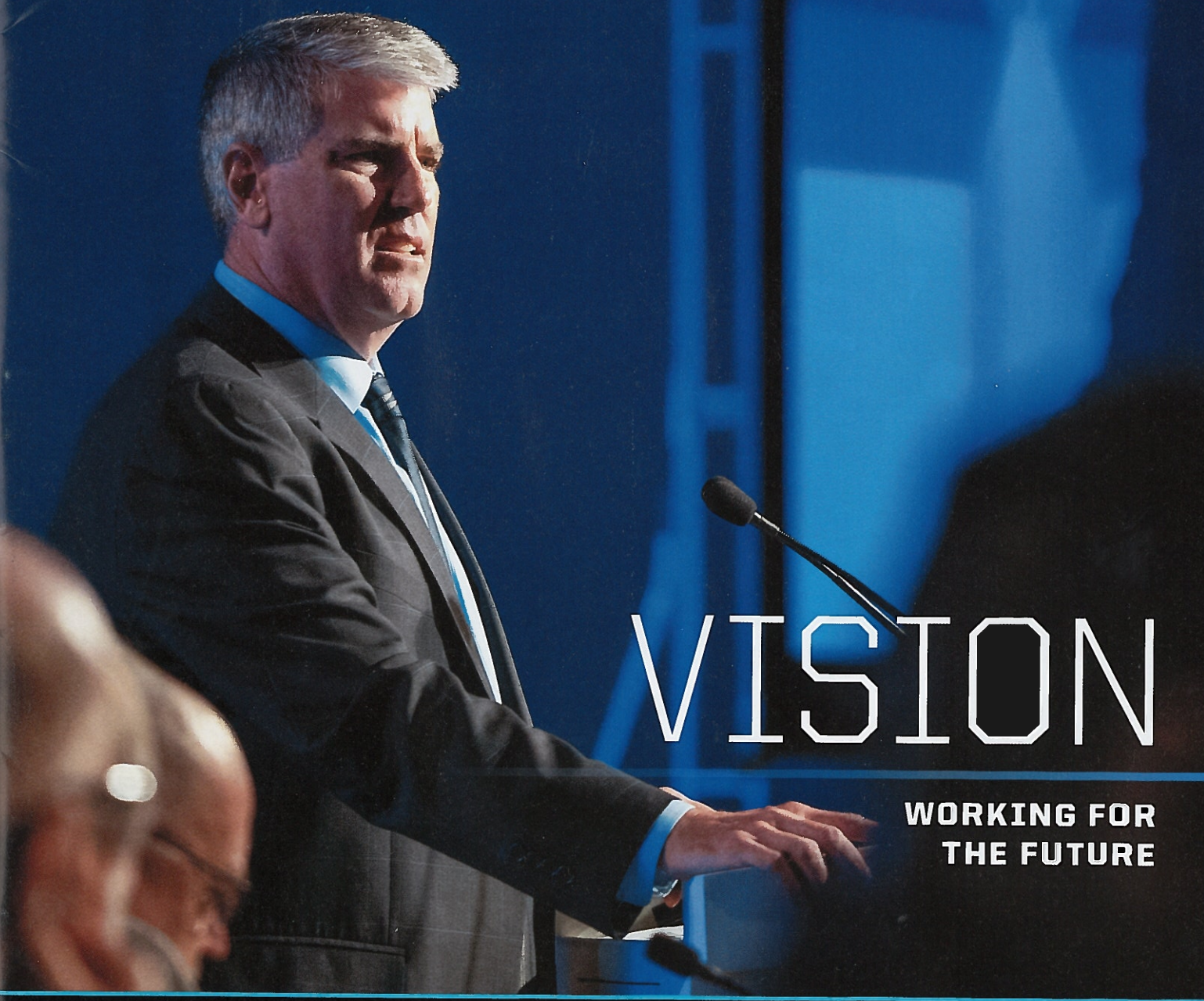

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Building Trades' Health Scans Save Life of DOE-Site Worker

Larry Buckner has ridden motorcycles near his East Tennessee home since he was 14. In those winding hills, he figures he can ride for four hours yet be within 10 miles of his house and never hit the same road twice.

That is, until health issues made it impossible for him to ride at all. And if not for Building Trades National Medical Screening Program (BTMed), things might have been much worse.

A retired member of SM Local 5, Buckner's first worked at the U.S. Dept. of Energy (DOE) Oak Ridge site in 1975. Over the years, he worked there often, from a few weeks to a year or more.

"We did heating and air mostly," Buckner remembers. "New duct work, reworking old duct. Tearing out and modifying, changing filters. That's where you get into a lot of dust, changing the filters out."

"When you're there, they pretty well assure you that everything's safe. I think that they intend for it to be, but there's a lot of unknowns out there," he said. With active DOE jobsites dating back to World War II, workers' "unknowns" have added up.

"They didn't keep good records then," Buckner continues. "One building might have had nuclear warheads and later it'd be a library or a medical facility."

It has taken years of research to identify the hazards to workers at DOE's nuclear sites, but the evidence is clear: if you worked construction on those sites, your health was put at risk.

Larry Buckner

Building Trades Respond

That is why, when a letter from BTMed offered free medical screening, Buckner knew it was a good deal.

The BTMed program is open to all who have worked construction on a DOE site. It does a work-history interview to identify the hazards a worker was exposed to and a comprehensive medical exam. Both are free of charge.

At Buckner's first exam, he felt fine; his health checked out, too. But a couple of years later BTMed offered a low-dose CT scan, and though he felt well, the scan showed he was in the early stages of multiple cancers.

Luckily, the cancers were still treatable when he had the scan. After treatment including surgery that removed his esophagus and right kidney, Buckner is now improving.

Without the exams, Buckner believes "it all would have progressed to where there wouldn't be anything for anyone to do. So the screening definitely saved my life."

BTMed also educates, so Buckner can stay on top of his health to enjoy the years ahead and even get back on his beloved motorcycle soon.

"I highly recommend that anyone who can, should participate in the BTMed program," he reiterates. "I wouldn't be here now if it hadn't been for that." ■

If you or someone you know worked construction at Oak Ridge or any other DOE site, visit btmed.org or call 1-800-866-9663 to learn more. BTMed is coordinated by CPWR – The Center for Construction Research and Training. Article courtesy of CPWR.