

Rural Life



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Education Opportunities Grow With Demand for Line Workers

BY RICH WILSON, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

In an unpredictable economy, having marketable skills means everything when it comes to getting a job after graduation. Highly trained, qualified workers are rare and much needed, especially in electric utility line worker positions. The set of skills acquired by students in a pre-apprenticeship line technician program makes them a valuable commodity in today's market and gives them a better chance of finding stable careers.



Rich Wilson

Electric co-ops need line workers. "The shortage of well-trained linemen will be serious concern for our co-op and our fellow co-ops," says Bill Wood, former general manager for San Isabel Electric Association.

Close to half of the co-op lineman workforce will be retiring in the next five years, putting trained line workers in high demand. As they have begun to realize the need for an influx of experienced workers, co-ops have started to think about the importance of education.

Wood is now an instructor and coordinator at the southern Colorado line technician program at Trinidad State Junior College. While general manager and CEO of San Isabel Electric, Wood cooperated with Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association to create the program for the training of a future generation of line workers.

The program prepares prospective linemen for apprenticeship in the field through either a one-year certificate or two-year associate of applied science degree. Students learn about electricity, overhead and

underground construction and rigging and safety. Acquired skills include climbing, placing and repairing poles, installing cross arms and insulators, pulling and sagging wire and setting transformers and meters. As the program has grown, the number of accepted students has increased to 25, with many of those stu-

dents securing a co-op apprenticeship after graduation. Most graduates can expect an earning potential between \$21 and \$34 per hour with benefits.

Students have not only comparative job security and a good salary as incentives, but also the support and assistance of local electric associations in finding a job after graduation. Southeast Colorado Power and Tri-State will provide internships and priority hiring consideration to those prospective line workers enrolled in a state line worker program.

The southern Colorado line tech program is not the only pre-apprenticeship lineman program supported by Colorado-based Tri-State Generation and Transmission. Tri-State has also donated money to Western Nebraska Community College in Alliance, Nebraska, to support its power line construction and maintenance school.

The western Nebraska power line construction and maintenance technology program provides a similar education to the line tech program at Trinidad State. Students may complete either the associate of occupational studies degree or the AOS diploma track, which fulfills 57 credit hours of the 66 required for an AOS degree. The program provides students

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Demand for Line Workers Leads to Growth in Education Opportunities

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with the training to apply technical knowledge and skills to install, operate, maintain and repair local, long-distance and rural electric power cables and communication lines. Students also learn how to erect and construct pole and tower lines. Upon completion of a degree, graduates have the skills necessary to work as power line technicians for utility providers, including co-ops.

Many scholarships for students interested in the Nebraska program have been offered by Tri-State and some local co-ops to encourage recruitment to the lineman profession. Scholarships and signing bonuses are also available from many co-ops. Some co-ops are willing to pay for the education of those who take courses and pledge to work as line apprentices after completing their studies.

Other states' co-ops are beginning to follow Tri-State's lead in actively recruiting new line workers by supporting educational programs. A one-year, state-of-the-art electric power training program will begin January 2010 at Dodge City Community College in Kansas. The program was designed by Sunflower Electric Power Corp. Hays, and four other Kansas co-ops hoping to encourage young people to choose the career of electric line worker. The co-ops are providing course materials, instructors and scholarships for needy students in the program.

In the area of continuing education,

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT LINE WORKER PROGRAMS:

Trinidad State Junior College

www.trinidadstate.edu, Rocky Mountain
Lineman School
800-621-8752

303-763-2000

Mesa Hotline School

www.mesahotlineschool.com
719-850-0072

Western Nebraska Community College

www.wncc.net, Powerline Construction and Maintenance Technology Program

Western Colorado Community College

www.mesastate.edu/wccc/index.html
970-255-2600

Mesa Hotline School at Mesa State College in Grand Junction offers extensive training for utility company employees from all over the United States. It is the only program of its type in the West, bringing manufacturers and consultants together to offer the best in advanced repair and maintenance instruction. Classes are held the first two weeks of May every year, consisting of two one-week sessions.

Western Colorado Community College, an institution associated with Mesa State, also offers a program for students to achieve an electric line worker certificate. Through the program, students learn basic skills in electricity, line work, installation, repair, cable splicing and system testing, along with other knowledge vital to line workers. Through this education, students receiving a certificate are prepared for an apprenticeship in the field.

Current high school and college students would be smart to learn more about pre-apprenticeship lineman programs as jobs continue to open up for new linemen. The training provided by a program in addition to a few years of apprenticeship can add up to a productive, satisfying career as a co-op line worker.

RETURN TO WINTER HOURS

Southeast Colorado Power Association will return to winter hours November 2. Winter hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.



YOU COULD BE A WINNER

If you find your name in this issue as follows (Win* your name, account number), please contact Paige Horn at Southeast Colorado Power, 719-384-2551 or 800-332-8634, to receive a credit on your next power bill. Last month's winner was Ben De Vorss, account #401520000.

Consider a New Heating System This Winter

If you plan to be in your house for a long time, say five years or more, it may make a lot of sense to change your heating system to a new, efficient system and save money. New, high-efficiency gas furnaces can replace your old propane or natural gas furnace and reduce operating costs for the life of the equipment.

Air-to-air heat pumps can be added to your current heating system and will provide cheaper heat for most of the heating season, except when the temperature goes below the mid-20s, and your regular furnace takes over. Air-to-air systems also provide central air-conditioning.

Geothermal systems will heat your home for one-fourth to one-third the cost of propane and up to one-half the cost of natural gas. Geothermal systems also cool your house.

To find out more, go to www.earthcomfort.com.

JACK'S ENERGY CORNER

Energy Efficiency Tips

- ❑ Replace lightbulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs. They use only one-third of the energy needed by incandescent bulbs, and they last for five years. Swapping out the five most-used bulbs in a house with CFLs could cut \$60 worth of electricity every year, which more than makes up for the higher price of the CFLs. However, many energy companies have rebate programs for CFLs. Sometimes they cost as little as \$2. Check with Southeast Colorado Power Association. WIN*Illiff Chick*, Campo account #301960100
- ❑ Get a service check on the furnace annually. Checkups are not only important for safety and efficiency, they also help the furnace last longer, too.
- ❑ Upgrade to better furnace filters, and change them regularly. Indoor air quality and energy efficiency depend on how clean those filters are and how well they work. Look for pleated filters. They cost more (about \$10 to \$15), but they make a profound difference.
- ❑ Put in a programmable thermostat. This can save as much as 30 percent on heating and cooling, depending on how well the house is insulated and on the heating system. In the winter, program the thermostat so that the house is cooler when no one is home during the day and when everyone is in bed at night. When the weather warms up, set the temperature higher during the day.
- ❑ Caulk all windows. Experts estimate that tiny leaks around doors and windows let as much heat escape from the house as an open window does, so seal up those leaks and save some money. One option is to use removable caulking. When spring comes, peel it off and open the windows.
- ❑ Put film on the windows. A film that blocks the sun's heat from entering or leaving the house will make a big difference in utility bills. It's easy to install and a lot less expensive than replacing the windows.
- ❑ Choose the right kind of exterior doors, including the garage door. Look for insulated fiberglass models. They look like wood, but they are five times more energy efficient than wood.
- ❑ Add weather stripping to all exterior doors. Weather stripping is available at any hardware store or home center, and it's another easy way to prevent air leaks.
- ❑ Pay attention to how ventilation fans are used during the winter. While it's important to remove excess humidity from the bathrooms and kitchen, the fans also remove heated air. In fact, one can suck all of the heated air from a house in about an hour.



PROTECTION FROM ELECTRICAL HAZARDS

Accidents around the home result in millions of injuries to the most vulnerable members of your family — young children and pets — each year. For example, approximately 2,400 children receive emergency room treatment annually for injuries caused by inserting objects into electrical receptacles, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

With a few precautions, these and other injuries can be avoided.

- Install tamper resistant outlets that protect against small children inserting foreign objects into them. The simple plastic caps typically used can be easily removed by some children.
- Keep electrical cords tied up or out of sight.
- Unplug all appliances — such as hair dryers or coffee makers — when they are not being used.
- Keep appliances out of children's bathrooms.
- Teach children not to touch appliances when they have wet hands and to keep appliances away from water.
- Teach children other basic safety tips, such as staying away from outlets and not touching electrical cords.

Some of the same tips apply to pets:

- Keep electrical cords away from cats and puppies that love to chew on them.
- Make sure night-lights and appliances are fully plugged in. Partially exposed prongs can be a temptation to curious critters.
- Keep halogen lamps away from pet play areas. If knocked over, they could start a fire.
- Keep appliances in bathrooms away from water. Playful pets can knock radios or curling irons into water, creating a dangerous situation.
- Discourage cats and dogs from curling up for naps behind electrical equipment, such as computers.

By following these simple precautions, you can keep your children and pets safe.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

Windows provide great views of the outdoors, light, ventilation and solar heating in the winter. Unfortunately, they also account for 10 percent to 25 percent of your heating bill. High-performance Energy Star-labeled windows can cut your heating and cooling costs by as much as 30 percent. Sources: U.S. Department of Energy, Alliance to Save Energy

Eliminate the (Electrical) Scares at Halloween

Halloween haunts usually mean strings of decorative lights, fog machines, strobe and black lights, “animatronics” (animated displays) and other electrically powered decorations. These things all add to the ambiance of your creepy house, but they also create the added dangers of fire, electrocution and other nasty and potentially dangerous accidents. It is important that you look for and eliminate potential dangers from your Halloween lights and decorations that could lead to fires and injuries.

Carefully inspect each electrical decoration. Cracked or frayed plugs, loose or bare wires and loose connections may cause a serious shock or start a fire. If you find any of these problems, discard damaged light sets and replace damaged power cords.

Fasten outdoor lights securely to trees, house walls or other firm supports to protect the lights from wind damage. Use only insulated staples to hold strings in place, not nails or tacks. Or run strings of lights through hooks. Don't staple or nail through light strings or electrical cords — you could damage the wire insulation.



Don't overload extension cords or allow them to run through water or snow on the ground. Before using any light strings, animated displays or other electrical products outdoors, make sure the product is approved for outdoor use.

Use no more than three standard-size sets of lights per single extension cord. Don't use electrical decorations or light strings on materials that could catch fire. It is important to turn off all electrical

light strings and decorations before leaving home or going to bed. Follow the use and care instructions that accompany your electrical decorations.

Following simple instructions and using common sense can keep you, your family and your trick-or-treaters safe and happy this Halloween. Make sure the scares are just for fun, not because of an electric accident.

Schedule a Home Inspection

October is Home Inspection Month — the perfect time to call an electrician to inspect your home's electrical system.

Unless your house is brand new, fire hazards could lurk behind the walls in your electrical wires. Frayed wires, loose connections and overloaded circuits could be dangerous.

If your house is more than 20 years old, schedule an inspection right away. You need to know if your home's system can handle today's load of computers and large electronics, and you should install ground fault circuit interrupters to prevent electrocution.

Before the electrician arrives, do your own mini home inspection. Look for:

- Extension cords that have become

permanent fixtures. Extension cords are made for temporary use only, so rearrange furniture to move your electrical device closer to an outlet so you won't need the longer cord.

- Outlets that spark when you insert or remove a plug, and loose outlets that won't hold a cord.
- Overloaded outlets. If every outlet requires a power strip, have your system upgraded with several more outlets.
- Open outlets within the reach of children. Plug open outlets with plastic safety plugs to keep little fingers out.

Notify your inspecting electrician of these and any other concerns, and ask what he can do to help make your home a safer place.

CHANGE FURNACE FILTERS THIS FALL

Keeping the filter on your furnace (gas or electric) clean makes the furnace run efficiently. Change the filter every month of the heating season (or year-round if the filter is also used for air-conditioning). Be sure you insert the new one so it faces the right way. The filter protects the blower and its motor. A clogged filter makes the motor work harder and use more power, so change your filter this fall in preparation for the heating season.



Daylight Saving Time ends Sunday, November 1. Be sure to set your clocks back one hour.