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A Tribute to Lineworkers

Linemen are a unique breed of people. They must enjoy working outdoors in all weather conditions including rain, snow, and cold. They have a very physically demanding job and, by the way, did I say it is also very dangerous? Can you imagine grabbing a 33,000 volt line while it is energized with only a pair of rubber gloves on? Our linemen have a deep-seated desire to get the power back on after a storm and we should all be thankful for that type of devotion to their community.

Jim Hunter, Director, Utility Department, IBEW

In Florida, a Day of Appreciation for Lineworkers

Nobody knows better than Tracy Moore the risks lineworkers take every day that they get up and go to work: Her husband, Marc, died in 2002 while doing his job.

"I learned that day the true power in electricity," said Moore, in a story published by the Florida Municipal Electric Association, "and the true sacrifice our linemen make—all give some, some give all."

Her husband's death inspired Moore to ask her state legislature to recognize the importance of the work linemen do by commemorating August 26, the date of his death, as Lineworker Appreciation Day. Last year, the state passed a proclamation making the official designation.

"It's so easy to take our energy industry for granted," noted Lakeland Rep. Seth McKeel (R-40), the resolution's sponsor. "But when the power goes out, we rely on utility lineworkers to quickly get things back to normal. They are, literally, risking their lives every day on our behalf."

Lakeland Electric, where Moore worked, now joins with his widow every year to ensure their lineworkers know how much they are appreciated. A luncheon is organized, at which the proclamation is read and lineworkers are recognized as "first responders" for the work they do to keep the power flowing, particularly in times of crisis.

Betsy Livingston, Director of Training and Workforce Development at Lakeland Electric, said a good example of that occurred last fall when Hurricane Sandy struck the coastline of New York and New Jersey, wreaking havoc and devastation. Lakeland sent its linemen to the Northeast to help restore power to families and businesses that were struggling to survive in the wake of the storm.

“Our linemen left Lakeland at 4:30 a.m. and drove a caravan of bucket trucks to get to New York, where they worked tirelessly in the cold and the snow to get the lights and heat on,” she said. “It was the first time some of them had even seen snow. They are a really good group of guys who take such pride in their work. They are true heroes.”

Tracy Moore started the nonprofit Highline Hero Foundation to provide annual recognition for the state’s lineworkers, as well as offer assistance to other utility families who suffer the injury or loss of a loved one. At Lakeland, she personally took cakes to six Lakeland Electric Power Academy classes and talked with the students about the importance of safe work practices, Levingston said.

While Moore coordinates the activities of the recognition event, Lakeland Electric strongly supports it by providing the facilities, advertising, and whatever else is needed to show their linemen just how much the company appreciates them, and to take the opportunity to say, “Thank you!” Levingston said.

She said utilities all over the state and country participate in the annual commemoration, holding local events for their lineworkers. Moore is also working on making Lineworker Appreciation Day a nationally recognized designation.

For more information on Lineworker Appreciation Day, please contact Tracy Moore at 863-393-4317.

One Woman’s Path to Becoming a Lineworker

About 12 years ago, Jenna Smith was working in a warehouse, wondering how she could find a job that was more than just a job—one that could lead to a career, be both mentally and physically stimulating, and provide a living wage with benefits for her and her family. So she spoke with a career counselor at her local community college, who pointed her in the direction of Oregon Tradeswomen.

Oregon Tradeswomen offers pre-apprenticeships and other training to women who are interested in nontraditional jobs, such as lineworking and line clearance tree trimming. Executive Director Connie Ashbrook said they provide 30 hours of hands-on training by working with other women in the field, to help women understand what it would be like in a wide variety of nontraditional careers, such as utility work, construction, carpentry, roofing, and plumbing, and prepare to get into the apprenticeship program connected with those careers. The lineworker apprenticeship program, which appealed to Smith the most, is also one of the most competitive programs to get into.

“You have to have something to bring to the table, such as prior experience, or go to line school first,” said Smith, who was drawn to the program because, she felt, “it was a good personality fit for me. I wanted to work outdoors, work with my hands. I like the excitement of working at heights, and I wanted to do something that had a community service aspect to it.”

But as a single mother, Smith couldn’t take the time off, or the loss of income, required to go to line school, so she enrolled in the line clearance tree trimmer apprenticeship and decided to gain the experience necessary to ultimately transfer into linework.

The gamble paid off: As a line clearance tree trimmer, Smith learned to climb and operate a bucket truck, and learned the safety precautions needed to work around power lines. She also earned her commercial driver’s license, first aid/CPR and flagging credentials, and had experience working in inclement weather and working as a team on a crew. “I had all that to bring to the table four years later when I applied for the lineworker apprenticeship,” she said.

Smith has worked in the line clearance tree trimming and lineworker trades for the past 12 years. Today, she’s the training coordinator at Northwest Line JATC, a job that suits her perfectly since she oversees trainers and apprentices for both the lineworker and line clearance tree trimmer apprenticeship programs she previously completed.

“I thought I would eventually like to end up in a position like this, where I could give back to the trades that have been so good to me and my daughter, but I didn’t think it would happen so soon in my career,” she said.

Ashbrook said women like Smith are well suited for careers in the utility field, regardless of whether they are in the minority. “It’s an industry for people who enjoy a challenge,” she said. “You get out of it what you put into it. You need to dedicate yourself, body and soul.”

Women like Jenna Smith “have been very successful in this field,” she said, and make good role models for others who wish to pursue nontraditional jobs.

Smith, who now recruits women and minorities for lineworker training and helps provide them with full scholarships to attend line school, offered this advice to someone who wants to break into these male-dominated fields: “Come out and do your job and work hard every day. You’re there to do a job like everyone else. Don’t let anyone tell you that you don’t belong there.”

For more information about NW Line JATC, go to www.nwlinejatc.com.

For more information about Oregon Tradeswomen, please contact 503-335-8200 x 21 or www.tradeswomen.net.

Nation Recognized Gulf Power Line Personnel on National Lineman Appreciation Day

April 18 was National Lineman Appreciation Day and Gulf Power Company joined utility companies across the nation in recognizing the efforts of the men and women who work in all sorts of weather at all times of the day and night to keep Northwest Florida’s electricity flowing.

“Whether it’s going on storm duty, restoring a customer’s power, or just turning on someone’s power for the first time, the work Gulf Power crews do every day puts the customer at the center of everything we do,” said Jeff Rogers, Gulf Power Corporate Communications Manager. “These men and women are truly heroes and this day is to honor them.”

Gulf Power has approximately 176 employees who work on the company’s transmission and distribution lines.

While the state legislature has made August 26 Lineworker Appreciation Day in Florida, the U.S. Senate has approved April 18 as National Lineman Appreciation Day with a resolution that honors utility workers for “keeping the power on and protecting public safety.”

Part of Gulf Power’s mission is to help other companies when natural disasters knock power out to hundreds of thousands of customers. In 2012, Gulf Power sent lineworkers out of state to help restore power on six different occasions. One of those was a trip to Pennsylvania and New Jersey following Hurricane Sandy in October. On New Year’s Eve, a Gulf Power crew was in Arkansas providing assistance following a snowstorm.

For their assistance, Gulf Power was awarded the 2012 Edison Electric Institute Restoration Assistance Award.

“Our line workers are committed to getting customers’ power back on, whether here in Northwest Florida or across the country,” Rogers said. “That’s what they do and we’re proud they are being recognized for their efforts.”

For Lineworkers, the Training Never Ends

Training lineworkers is a lengthy process that involves imparting much technical expertise and careful attention to safety procedures, typically over a three-year apprenticeship period. But as the workforce ages and an increasing number of older, more experienced lineworkers retire, utilities are pressed to find ways to move new workers into the pipeline quickly and to ensure that those already there are keeping up with changes in technology.

Southern California Edison (SCE) has been fortunate in that, unlike many utilities, it has not faced a shortage of qualified applicants for its lineworker apprentice program and entry level positions, said Jeff Pickford, supervisor of apprentice training. But one area in which the company has noticed a growing need in recent years is in supplemental training—the on-the-job skills refreshers and updates that ensure workers are exposed to a wide range of potential scenarios as well as the most up-to-date technology.

“Right now we are developing a skills training program for our journeymen and foremen, which is a refresher course for working with hot sticks and rubber gloves,” Pickford said. The three-day course is held at the company’s facility in Chino, CA, and will eventually become mandatory annual training.

Pickford said the company had already run two pilot programs and was about to run a third as it looks at how best to deliver this supplemental training.

In addition, they have been utilizing mobile training for underground switching techniques the past year and a half and are looking to continue developing more mobile training programs involving grounding and rigging skills. This course involves sending instructors out to the service centers in each territory with a mobile trailer that holds a wide range of equipment workers may encounter on the job. Training on the equipment is given to all who work at the center, from apprentices up to the foremen running the show.

“It’s being done because in the job classification of being a journeyman lineman, you have to continuously improve your skills,” Pickford said. “You may not see every piece of equipment all the time. We may be using different equipment in rural versus urban areas, for example. And it’s human nature to forget things you learned if you don’t practice them regularly. Also, this brings them up to speed on new equipment. It helps them get that exposure and stay up to date.”

So far, response to all of the supplemental programs has been very positive, Pickford said.

“Based on the feedback from our folks as well as my own experience in the field, I believe hands-on training is among our best tools to keep our craft people focused on safety and engaged in becoming better at their trade,” he said. “This of course ensures that the work gets completed, and contributes greatly to the ultimate goal of everyone going home safe every day.”

“Southern California Edison linemen play a critical role in maintaining SCE’s reliable electric distribution system,” said Gregory McDonald, principle manager of safety and environmental services. “The company is proud of the comprehensive training it provides its linemen so that they can work safely in this important function.”

For more information about Southern California Edison’s supplemental training programs, contact Jeff Pickford, Southern California Edison, at 626-688-8189.

Start Planning Now for Careers in Energy Week!

Now is the time to start preparing for Careers in Energy Week—to be held October 14-20, 2013. CEWD has a wealth of ready-to-use materials on the [CEWD site](#), including bill stuffers, an essay contest, lesson plans, and a coloring book, provided by the National Energy Foundation. If your state has not declared Careers in Energy week, a sample proclamation template is available for your use. If you have any questions, you can contact Valerie Taylor, CEWD Educational Consultant, at valerie@cewd.org.

Upcoming

Northwest Regional Meeting

Spokane, WA
May 7, 2013

West Regional Meeting

San Ramon, CA
May 9, 2013

National Energy Education Network

Indianapolis, IN
August 22-23, 2013

Careers in Energy Week

October 14-20, 2013

[Resources for Members](#)

State Energy Workforce National Forum

Arlington, VA
November 6, 2013

CEWD Annual Summit

Arlington, VA
November 6-8, 2013
[Click here to register!](#)

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