

# Lennie Ellis succeeds Ron Jones at IBEW Local 659

MEDFORD — Southern Oregon's International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 659 has a new leader. Business manager Ron Jones retired June 30, and the Local 659 Executive Board appointed Assistant Business Manager Lennie Ellis to serve the rest of his term, which runs through June 2014.

Headquartered in Central Point just north of Medford, Local 659 represents 2,060 members from the Santiam River to California's northern three counties, and from the Pacific Coast to Harney County. It includes outside utility linemen and tree-trimmers as well as inside wiremen (construction electricians), municipal workers, water district employees, gas company workers, and about a hundred manufacturing workers at Pacific Crest Transformers in White City.

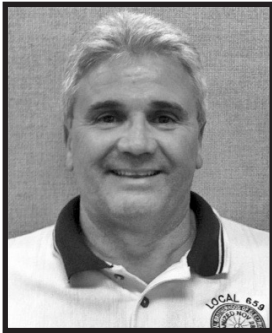
Jones, 64, retires after 45 years in IBEW Local 659, including 14 years as its business manager. Fresh after graduating from Lebanon High School in 1966, Jones followed in the footsteps of his dad and uncle, IBEW members. He worked as a groundman, an unskilled helper, assembling electric towers in Eastern Oregon. He studied engineering at Oregon State University. When he skipped a term, he got a letter from President Johnson, drafting him into the U.S. Army. He spent a year in Vietnam

as part of the First Signal Brigade, doing radio relay at Long Binh and Danang. Returning home in June 1969, he spent three years at Western Oregon College in Monmouth, working line construction in the summers. Jones decided he made more

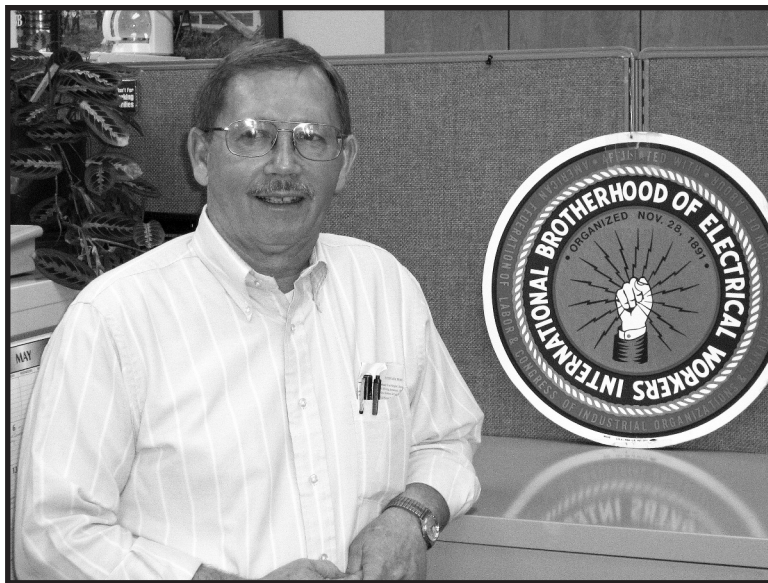
during those summers than he would with a university degree, and opted for a career in the IBEW, first in construction, and later as a lineman. In 1992, after 11 years at Pacific Power, during which he helped negotiate the outside line agreement, Jones was hired as a union representative by business manager Jim McLean. He was appointed to succeed McLean as business manager in 1998 and was re-elected to four three-year terms.

During his tenure, Jones says, line work got safer. When he started, linemen climbed poles to do their job; now they use bucket trucks. But management culture at Pacific Power also shifted, Jones said. Faraway financiers now call the shots, at a company that used to be run by local managers who'd risen through the utility ranks.

In retirement, Jones plans to explore the lower Rogue River, retracing the steps of his wife's grandfather, who mined for gold during the Great Depression. He'll also spend time with his kids; his oldest son is a journeyman lineman at a Bonneville Power Administration electric substation in Harris-



LENNIE ELLIS



Ron Jones, business manager of IBEW Local 659 for the past 14 years, retired June 30. He has been a member of the union for 45 years.

burg, Oregon.

Ellis, 57, was born and raised in Bend, and worked for his dad as a residential tree-trimmer after graduating high school in 1972. Lured by higher wages, he became a union tree trimmer at Northwest Tree Expert in 1973 and later, Asplundh — clearing tree limbs away from power lines. He worked nonunion in the early '80s as a supervisor for Trees, Inc., in Texas, but returned to Oregon in 1985, and to union work in 1987.

About a decade ago he sat in on a bargaining team, then became a union steward. When a union staff representative (assistant business manager) position became vacant in 2004, Jones invited him to interview. Ellis was hired and spent the next eight years negotiating labor agreements, handling grievances up through arbitration, and helping out in public and private sector union organizing campaigns. Now, as

business manager, he oversees a staff of eight: three assistant business managers and an organizer, a dispatcher/office manager, and three administrative support staff. Local 659 also hired two new

assistant business managers: Mike Scarminach, to replace Ellis; and Banjo Reed, to replace Chris Murphy, who resigned. Ellis is the seventh business manager since Local 659's founding in 1937.

Ellis said his priorities will be efficient use of union resources, and organizing new workers. Local 659 represents about 95 percent of the linemen in its jurisdiction, but only about 40 percent inside wiremen. And right now too many members are out of work. The local has about 45 inside wiremen and 18 linemen awaiting dispatch, and many members have left home to find work in other areas, including over 50 who are shacking up near Hillsboro to work at Intel's massive expansion project.

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