



Since Doug Wagner trained as an electrician, four other family members followed suit. Flanking Wagner (middle) are son-in-law Jeremy Kile, daughter Angie Kile, wife Pat and grandson Cody Kile, who is apprenticing as an electrician.

STAFF PHOTOS BY KATHY ANEY

## Family of electricians shares high-voltage career

By KATHY ANEY  
STAFF WRITER

Electricity courses through Jeremy Kile's family tree.

Kile is an electrician. His son, Cody, is apprenticing as an electrician. His wife, Angie, works as a locomotive electrician for Union Pacific Railroad. Her father and mother, Doug and Pat Wagner, are semi-retired electricians.

At holiday dinners, it is hard to avoid shop talk, try as they may.

"The conversation always turns to electricity eventually," Jeremy said.

In addition, another Wagner daughter, Laura Stone, works as estimator and managing partner at Hendon Electric in Hermiston.

This Hermiston family of electricians is a window into a profession that is very much in demand.

"Right now, because the economy is on a high note, there is a lot of construction," Jeremy said. "And where there is construction, there's a need for electricians. There's a nationwide shortage, not just of electricians, but in all trades."

"The recession really hit the trades hard," said Jennifer Hills, who manages the apprenticeship program at Blue Mountain Community College. "A lot of little employers went away during the recession."

Electricians are especially in demand. They come to Umatilla County from as far away as Portland to fill the gap, Kile and Hills said.

Regional Economist Dallas Fridley said electricians made the list of the top 20 difficult-to-fill vacancies in Oregon in 1917, the latest data on the topic. The construction industry in general showed vacancies in every region of the state.

"There were an estimated 627 vacancies for electricians in 2017, and 502 (85 percent) were difficult to fill," Fridley said.

Kile's son, Cody, 20, will enter the ranks of licensed electricians as soon as he successfully completes four years of classroom training at BMCC and an apprenticeship with Gordon's Electric. The second-year student, who grew up helping his dad do electrical projects around the house, remembers one day when he and his father readied a friend's home for an appraisal.

"We were redoing the outlets and cover plates — doing a trim out," Cody said. "I remember being a 16-year-old and my dad handed me a screwdriver and box of receptacles and said, 'All right, here's how you do this. The hot wire goes to this screw, the neutral goes to this one and the ground goes to this one. Go ahead and make it happen.'"

Cody also got comfortable around construction sites when he helped build a house during high school



Cody Kile checks the voltage in one of the electrical panels at Good Shepherd Medical Center during time as an electrician apprentice with Gordon's Electric.

as part of the Columbia Basin Home Builders Program. The home sits on a lot near Armand Larive Middle School.

Cody initially planned a law enforcement career, but changed gears after Army National Guard training as a Chinook helicopter mechanic.

"I'd been around electric all my life," Cody said. "I sat down with my dad. He said, 'Once you're in, you're in. You have to give it 110 percent all the time.'"

Cody attends class one evening a week. He first worked with a journeyman at Gordon's Electric each weekday, spending much of his time doing electrical jobs at Good Shepherd Medical Center, and now apprentices at Shelco Electric.

Each electrician in the family came to the profession on a slightly different path, with Doug leading the way.

"It all started with Doug," Jeremy said.

Doug completed an electrician course via mail and on-the-job training in Nebraska. He worked as a locomotive electrician for Union Pacific in Hinkle for 10 years and later opened Doug Wagner Electric with his wife.

Pat got her license as a way to lighten her husband's load.

"Doug was working too many hours and needed help," she said. "I went back to school to become an electrician."

Like her son-in-law and grandson would do later on, she entered BMCC's apprenticeship program in the mid-'80s and apprenticed with Doug. Pat, 31, was the only woman in her class. She faced skepticism from members of the all-male electrician trade board that oversaw the program for the state. One member wondered aloud if she could lift four-inch conduit.

"It was a different world back then," Doug said. "They grilled her pretty hard."

Attitudes have changed, they said, though males still vastly outnumber females in the trade. According to DataUSA, 97.9 percent of electricians are male. In Cody's cohort of 60 apprentices are two women.

Jeremy studied at BMCC 21 years earlier than Cody. After doing electrical work in the Navy, he came home to Hermiston, got a job at Marlette Homes and started dating Doug and Pat's youngest daughter, Angie. He got to know Doug, who urged him to pursue the electrician trade.

Jeremy entered the BMCC program, apprenticing for Shelco Electric, where he continues to work today.

Angie came next. She was one of 625 people put out of work when Simplot closed its Hermiston potato processing plant in 2004. Angie, who did quality control at Simplot, took advantage of government money for retraining and jumped into a fledgling electrician and mechanical maintenance program at Walla Walla Community College. Since she started in the middle of that first year instead of the beginning, she faced initial frustration.

"You can't learn electricity by osmosis," she said. "It doesn't work that way."

Fortunately for her, she lived with an electrician who filled in the gaps. She earned her license and now works as a locomotive electrician with Union Pacific Railroad, the same job her father did early in his career.

"I work on the same locomotives he did," she said. "Some of the guys I work with remember my dad."

As Jeremy and Doug's careers progressed, they acted as journeymen to apprentices of their own. Doug and Jeremy have both served on the state electrician trade committee that guides the program. Jeremy, who currently serves on the committee, praised the latest crop of applicants to the program.

"We got 37 applicants last time we opened the pool and there were 20 already on the list," he said. "I'm impressed with the quality. This is one of the best groups to come through in a long time."

Those matched with a contractor must complete 576 hours of classroom education and 6,000 to 8,000 hours of on-the-job training.

Jennifer Hills, who facilitates the matching of apprentices and contrac-

tors and keeps records, has watched the program evolve for her 27 years as director of apprenticeship. The program now offers apprenticeship programs for a variety of trades, including electricians, plumbing, construction, industrial maintenance mechanics, sprinkler fitters and programmable logic controllers.

Hills sees employers stepping up to the challenge and offering more apprenticeships as the economy improves. She expects the electrician shortage will work itself out.

"I think it's a matter of time," Hills said.

In looking back, Jeremy Kile doesn't regret his career choice.

"It is challenging," he said. "And you get to see the fruits of your labor."

## Hermiston woman celebrates 100 years

By JADE MCDOWELL  
EAST OREGONIAN

A Hermiston resident celebrated her 100th birthday this week.

Joan "Jo" Katherine Lagerberg, who currently lives at Guardian Angel Homes, turned 100 on Tuesday.

Her son Phil Hamm said he couldn't say for sure what her secret to longevity is, but he does know that she was an avid walker until recently and has always been involved in her community.

"I'm sure genetics are part of that, but being active is important, and having a sense of purpose," he said.

Hamm said she is also tough — something she had to be when raising five sons on her own.

Lagerberg was born in Milford, Iowa, in 1918 as the fourth of eight children.

According to information provided by her family, her parents spoke German but encouraged their children to speak only English, because after World War I "it was best to be American."

Lagerberg graduated from Milford High School as a valedictorian and trained as a milliner afterward. In 1941, she traveled from where she was working in Montana to live with her sister in Seattle, and when she got off the train on Dec. 7 she was greeted with the news that Pearl Harbor had been bombed.

In 1944, she married serviceman Ed Hamm and after the war they moved to Bend and had five sons before divorcing. Phil Hamm, the "baby" of the family, said he was grateful to his mom for all she did for her sons, including letting him raise racing pigeons.

"We used to have 100 pigeons in the backyard," he said.

To support her family, Lagerberg found work in Bend as a sales representative for Deschutes Memorial Gardens in Bend and eventually bought the cemetery. She was married to her childhood sweetheart Ted Lagerberg in 1982, but he died six years later.

Lagerberg moved to Hermiston in 1990 to be closer to family, including grandchildren. She left for five years to live in Portland, but returned to Hermiston in 2013. Hamm said she used to coordinate trips for seniors through the Hermiston Senior Center.

Now she resides in Guardian Angel Homes' memory care facility. She has six grandchildren, four great-grandchildren and one great-great-grandchild.

She celebrated her birthday early with family over the weekend and with Guardian Angel Homes staff and residents on Tuesday.

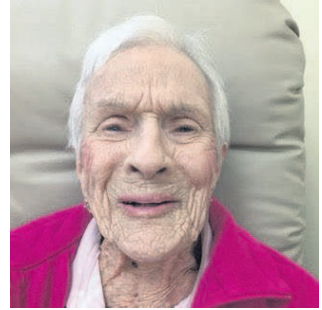


PHOTO CONTRIBUTED BY PHIL HAMM.  
Jo Lagerberg turned 100 on Tuesday.

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