

Power of the People

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WOEC Grows Its Own

Throughout the U.S. there is a rapidly increasing problem for electric utilities. There is a serious shortage of Journeyman Linemen, Tree Trimmers, Engineers, Operations Managers, and Chief Financial Officers in the utility industry. This shortage is projected to be an increasing problem as over 50 percent of the current workforce is set to retire in the next five to eight years.

With the baby boomers entering their retirement years, the demand is seriously greater than the supply. None is being felt more immediately than the shortage of Journeyman Linemen. We, along with many other electric utilities across the nation are vying for the few Linemen available. California is offering \$20,000 signing bonuses while others are offering relocation packages or higher pay scales.

One of the reasons for the shortage is that, years ago, many utilities stopped providing an apprenticeship program which helped to constantly train and develop new Linemen. Over time, this created a smaller and smaller pool of trained Linemen to draw from. While they are starting to offer the apprenticeships again, it takes several years for an apprentice to become a certified Journeyman Lineman. It will take several years to build the pool back up again.

Here at West Oregon EC, we are also feeling the strain of finding and hiring Journeyman Linemen. When I came on board in July of 2005, we were already two Linemen short of where we needed to be. Since then, we have had one Journeyman Lineman leave to take a position at Forest Grove Light & Power to enter an apprentice program to become a Meterman, and we had to let a second Lineman go. This leaves us four Linemen short to accomplish all that we need to do. What are we doing to address the problem? We are taking several approaches, some of them short term and others long term.

We are advertising in a couple of trade publications and at the Union Hall for applicants. Realistically, we are among many others doing the same thing, so the chances are not high that we will be successful in finding all four this way. It will take finding some who like working and living in a rural environment with a lot of overtime hours. If they are married, their spouses will also

need to be able to live with these conditions. We have applicants who have come here to interview and declined because they or their spouses weren't willing to deal with a rural lifestyle and large amounts of overtime. It is a very real barrier to attracting and keeping good Linemen.

For a mid term answer, we have been maintaining an apprenticeship program and just had one complete his tests, training, and hours, and will become a full Journeyman Lineman later this month. A second apprentice is closing in on completing his requirements and we have two waiting in the wings ready to step into the program, should they be accepted. We have found the best way to obtain and retain good Linemen is to grow our own from within. The problem, as I mentioned earlier, is that it takes several years for them to be fully trained and certified. This leads us into the long term solution.

West Oregon and others fully realize that the available pool of Linemen needs to be significantly increased. In an effort to do this in a way that will directly benefit West Oregon, the Board of Directors approved a plan I submitted to provide two \$2,500 scholarships to graduating high school seniors within our service territory who are interested in careers as a Lineworker. The scholarships will be to attend the Vocational Outside Line Training Academy located near Warrenton. The cost of the 10 week training is \$3,600 plus the cost of their tools, so the scholarships we provide will go a long way towards covering their total costs.

The entry-level program prepares workers to enter the Outside Line industry with the basic knowledge of electrical systems, equipment, and safety to satisfy initial employment requirements. For us, it would train them to be qualified to start out as a Groundman. It is our hope that the successful scholarship recipients will go on to become Groundman, enter an apprenticeship program, and successfully become certified Journeyman Linemen, and then work here in the community where they have roots of family and friends. West Oregon is investing in our future and the future of our members by providing this training opportunity for local young men and women. Being a Cooperative means just that; we cooperate with our schools and communities to provide opportunities for the futures of our young people. The results will benefit us all.

Get your boats ready for summer, don't wait til you're at the dock

Thousands of boats will come out of storage this month as the weather finally warms and the long gray days of winter come to a close. "Water, fishing and boating go hand-in-hand with family fun," said Ashley Massey, Public Affairs Specialist for the Oregon State Marine Board. "Here are some reminders before boaters head out for the first big trip of the season."

If you are 60 or younger, and operating motor boats greater than 10 hp, boaters in Oregon waters must have either a boater education card or a temporary permit. Youths 12-15 must have their boater education cards when operating any size powerboat. If your 12- to 15-year-old plans to help run the boat, not only will the youth need the card, but the supervising adult will need a card, too. Those who are in a bind can log on to <www.boatoregon.com> and find approved Internet courses. The certificate you print once you've successfully passed the exam serves as a temporary permit for up to 60-days. Instructions on applying for the permanent boater education card are online, too.

Make sure your boat registration is current and that you have put the decals on your boat. If you forgot to renew your registration, check your mail. You should have received a renewal card in the mail in March that will allow you to renew online and print a temporary permit until your new stick-

ers arrive. If you can't find the registration reminder card, you can take care of it with one of the Marine Board's 125 registration agents. Most major sporting goods stores and boat dealers are registration agents. Get the full list of agents online or by calling the Marine Board.

Be sure your boat is in good shape before you get to the water. Don't wait until you get to the boat ramp to get your boat ready to launch. Preparing at home or near the staging area is courteous and prevents frustration for everybody.

If your boat's been in storage all winter, charge the battery, check all fittings and cables, make sure it has fresh gas, is full of oil and all other fittings have been properly greased, including the trailer's wheel bearings. It's wise to try everything out before you leave home.

Safety is everything. Check your life jackets, make sure each one fits the wearer properly and is in good condition. If it's too small, torn or water-soaked, it won't pass inspection. The Coast Guard Auxiliary and U.S. Power Squadrons conduct free vessel safety checks around the state and alert the boater if any safety equipment is needed. Remember to watch the weather and be ready to head in if the wind picks up. There's a lot of debris on some lakes and reservoirs, rivers can have a lot of brush and downed trees, and it's very difficult to see a waterlogged stump in a rough chop.

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