

Careers in the Electrical Industry

By William L. Caynor Sr., Price Electric Cooperative CEO

When most people think about job opportunities at electrical utilities, they think of linemen. Although linemen are typically the largest percentage of an organizational structure, they are one of the smallest percentages of positions being sought in the industry over the next several years. The electrical sector is currently experiencing a mass exodus of the “Baby Boomer” generation leaving the workforce. These retirements create prospects for our graduating youth in a rural locality that exercises few career options. However, I would be remiss if I didn’t mention one significant factor. Some of the most talented linemen come from the nine hundred & five electric cooperatives in the United States. A couple of reasons for this is that many grew up on rural farms and can run almost any type of equipment and machinery. Another reason is that these individuals in smaller cooperatives are well-rounded because of greater exposure related to job assignments. They have to do almost everything, whereas in the larger investor-owned utilities employees are more specialized. This diversity develops knowledge associated with most aspects of operations.

In recent years, I have met several young men interested in pursuing the line trade and there are respectable technical schools in Green Bay and Eau Claire to craft your trade, but you hear little about other prospects. Does climbing seventy-foot poles with an inch of steel alloy strapped to your feet and supporting your body weight excite you? Does grabbing hold of energized conductors containing voltages as high as 19,900 volts that make your hair stand on end as you listen to it talk to in a way that can only be described as, “Pay attention to me!” sound like your dream job? Then the lineman career path is for you! If this doesn’t sound enticing, maybe you would be interested in electrical engineering? Trying to locate and attract electrical engineers today is nearly impossible. There are too few engineers and too many opportunities. At the cooperative level an engineer could design new line construction projects, actually stake it in the field, analyze system data to evaluate performance, execute GIS mapping, prepare and evaluate load studies, etc. The list is endless and thrilling to the right person. Maybe finance and accounting is more attention-grabbing to you? Would you like to process accounts payable, payroll, perform accounting closing procedures; prepare and post journal entries, etc.? How about member services? Member and public communication, billing, new services, load management, metering, etc. Maybe it’s human resources? Employee benefits, workers compensation insurance claims, etc.? Maybe it’s information technology? Do you like to work with software programs or computers? For those of you who like to work outside, metering and substation technicians have opportunities as well. The positions that will be the most in demand are within the supervisor and management categories. If you’re a lineman, there could be a chance to become a foreman and then a line superintendent and ultimately operations manager. If you’re an accountant, you could become a finance manager.

Today and in the near future, there are reoccurring vacancies at electric utilities around the United States as employees achieve what they have worked so diligently for--retirement. There are definite opportunities for the skills and attributes required to perform the jobs mentioned. Our Human Resources administrator, Wendee Wagner, will be looking for opportunities to talk to youth in the community to inform them of potential career choices that might be of interest to them in hopes of replenishing the electrical utility employment pool with hard working and clever Midwesterners.