

Six employees, who started as Bluebonnet's first line worker interns in 2018, have received U.S. Department of Labor certification. Today, they are journeymen line workers. They are, from left, Dylan Dussetschleger, Zackary Handrick, Brooks Kasper, James Flores, Tra Muston and Ty Duesterheft. Photos by Sarah Beal



Bluebonnet's first line worker interns receive journeyman certification

By Alyssa Dussetschleger

Brooks Kasper was 19 when he became a line worker intern at Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative. He did not know many details about the job, the rigorous training he would receive or the welcoming culture of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative.

"I was excited to get started, but didn't realize what was ahead in my career," said Kasper, who is now 23.

Kasper was one of the first line-worker interns at Bluebonnet. For some in that group, it was their first full-time job. "They looked young, some looked a little scared and nervous, but I could tell they were excited to be there, eager to learn and that they were going to do well," said Aaron Seeliger, Bluebonnet's assistant superintendent of operations for the co-op's Maxwell and Red Rock service centers.

The line-worker internship program at Bluebonnet began in 2018. The program focuses on hiring local candidates and introducing them to electric line work and Bluebonnet's focus on safety and service to its members.

Kasper and the other interns spent their first six months in the classroom at a Bluebonnet facility, learning about safety, which is of utmost importance at Bluebonnet. Interns also received technical instruction on line work, earned climbing certifications and obtained commercial driver licenses. Then they began training in the field alongside journeyman line workers. Now six of them have

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become U.S. Department of Labor-certified journeyman line workers and Bluebonnet's first graduates of the internship program.

Their names and hometowns are: Ty Duesterheft from Maxwell, Dylan Dussetschleger from Lexington, James Flores from Elgin, Zackary Handrick from Somerville, Brooks Kasper from Giddings and Tra Muston from Rockdale.

They received their certification in October 2021 after more than four years, which included 672 hours of technical instruction and 8,000 hours of on-the-job training. They will work with crews out of Bluebonnet service centers in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Maxwell and Red Rock.

The youngest intern graduate, Dylan Dussetschleger, grew up in Lexington and started the program at 18. Now 22, he works across the 3,800-square-mile Bluebonnet service area, performing maintenance on power lines and poles, restoring power and repairing equipment. "I never knew when I started I'd find a career I loved. The intern program has

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APPRENTICE LINE WORKER GRADUATES



Trevor Eckert
of Brenham



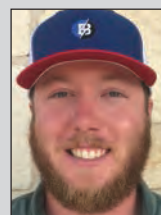
John Horton
of Ledbetter



Frank Garza
of Kyle



Joshua Tristan
of Kyle



Matt Waltzer
of Bastrop

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changed my life," he said.

The most recent class of interns began their training in July 2021. "The new intern class will gain more knowledge and have more experience to put them farther ahead," Duesterheft said. "New interns are placed in the field and begin observing line worker crews their first week."

Handrick, who works out of the cooperative's Brenham Service Center, looks forward to teaching new interns. His advice for them is to take it slowly. "You're not going to learn everything after your first day on the job," he said.

In addition to the intern graduates, five other employees completed Bluebonnet's apprentice line worker program and received Department of Labor journeyman certification in 2021. They are Trevor Eckert of Brenham, John Horton of Ledbetter, Frank Garza of Kyle, Joshua Tristan of Kyle and Matt Waltzer of Bastrop. They work with crews out of Bluebonnet service centers in Brenham, Bastrop, Giddings and Maxwell.

Apprentices go through approximately four years of coursework and on-the-job training to earn their certification. Some come to Bluebonnet with previous line work experience, while others are new to the trade.

Bluebonnet began offering an apprentice program in 2004. There are now 28 apprentices (including 11 who began in the intern program) and 52 journeyman line workers on staff.

Two other Bluebonnet employees also received certifications for specialized work. Justin Siegler of Giddings completed the Electric Meter Tester Certification program through the Northwest Lineman's College and received his Department of Labor certification last year. The four-year electric meter tester certification consists of 30 proficiency exams and 8,000 hours of on-the-job training.

Mason Mertz, a control center operator who lives in Bastrop, completed a 10-month program and proficiency exam to obtain his System Operator Certification from Northwest Lineman's College in 2021.

CERTIFICATION RECIPIENTS



Justin Siegler
of Giddings,
Electric Meter
Tester



Mason Mertz
of Bastrop,
System
Operator



Pictured, from left, are Cindy Dooley, Cedar Creek Schuetzen Verein vice president; Kate Ramzinski, LCRA regional affairs representative; Marlene Waak, Cedar Creek Schuetzen Verein member; Margaret D. "Meg" Voelter, LCRA board member; Conway Waak, Cedar Creek Schuetzen Verein vice president; Mark Johnson, Bluebonnet's Giddings-area community development representative; Byron Balke, Bluebonnet Board assistant secretary/treasurer; Stuart Markwardt, Cedar Creek Schuetzen Verein president; Kyle Merten, Bluebonnet's Brenham-area community representative; W.T. Marth, Cedar Creek Schuetzen Verein member; Glenn Treude, Cedar Creek Schuetzen Verein secretary; and Vicki LaRue, Cedar Creek Schuetzen Verein member.

Bluebonnet, LCRA award grant to help renovate Carmine Hall in Fayette County

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative and the Lower Colorado River Authority recently provided grants to Carmine Hall in Fayette County. The grant is part of LCRA's Community Development Partnership Program to give back to the communities it serves. Bluebonnet is one of LCRA's wholesale electric customers and a partner in the grant program. Cedar Creek Schuetzen

Verein, the non-profit social organization that operates Carmine Hall, received a \$6,000 grant to pay for three new restroom stalls, including one that is accessible for those with disabilities, new flooring and fixtures, a new vanity and inset sinks.

Applications for the next round of grants will be accepted in July. Learn more at lcr.a.org/cdpp.



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