

Apprentice lineworkers achieve journeyman ranks

Three graduates began Bluebonnet careers as interns; two employees get advanced technical training certifications

By Connie Juarez

FOURTEEN apprentice lineworker graduates at Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative are now prepared to join the skilled team of journeymen who provide reliable service across the cooperative's 3,800-square-mile service area.

Three of those graduates began as lineworker interns at Bluebonnet, completing a six-month training program before beginning years of apprentice courses and on-the-job learning.

In addition to the lineworker graduates, Tristin Lagrone, a substation technician, received his certification from the U.S. Department of Labor. Dillon Stavinoha, a control center operator, completed a 10-month program and proficiency exam to receive a certification as a system operator.

Each program has unique requirements for study, testing, training and work experience. Bluebonnet's lineworker apprentice program requires 8,000 hours of on-the-job training, along with 672 hours of technical instruction, typically completed over four years. Program graduates receive certification as lineworkers from the Department of Labor.

For John Courtney, an apprentice graduate, the program offered a stable career with room for growth.

"I earned something I can really be proud of, something that's going to help me build a better future," said Courtney, who is based in Brenham. "If anyone's thinking about the program, I'd say go for it and give it 100%. It's going to be a challenge, but it definitely pays off."

Lagrone said he was inspired by the lineworkers he saw as a child.

"I grew up in Lexington, and I can remember as a kid watching Randall Bownds and other linemen come out



Fourteen Bluebonnet apprentice lineworkers completed years of required training to reach journeyman status. They are, from left, John Courtney, Dustin Barker, Dior Smith, David Martin, Preston Vaughn, Kyle Jenke, Brad Young, Stephen Braneff, Thurston Bennett, Colton Matthijetz, Trey Townsend, Colton Burch, Timmy Medack and Jordan 'J.D.' Boecker.
Sarah Beal photos

during storms and outages to restore power," said Lagrone, who is based in Giddings. "I thought that was pretty cool that they could get the lights back on." Bownds is an assistant field superintendent also working out of Giddings.

The best parts of his job, Lagrone said, are the variety each day brings and the satisfaction of helping his community.

Several apprentice graduates spoke about how much the program has helped them



Tristin Lagrone,
a substation technician.



Dillon Stavinoha,
a control center operator.

grow personally, emphasizing that the skills they've developed go beyond just their work.

"The leadership skills I've gained through the program have truly changed me as a person. I apply them every day — whether

it's in my role as a husband and father, or by stepping up to give my time in the community," said Thurston Bennett, who is based in Bastrop.

With the addition of this year's group, 153 Bluebonnet lineworker apprentices have graduated from the program since it began in 2004.

In addition to hundreds of classroom hours, apprentices gain extensive experience in the field, learning skills such as building overhead and underground power lines, restoring power during outages, maintaining equipment, and installing and repairing meters.

Paul Herzog, superintendent in Giddings, discussed the value of the program.

"This program gives local people a chance to get into a rewarding career. It's more than just a job — it's about building a future, learning skills that'll last a lifetime," Herzog said. "By offering these opportunities, we're not only making sure

our community has the right people to keep things running smoothly, but we're also building the next generation to serve and support the community for years to come."

The newest Bluebonnet apprentice graduates, in addition to Courtney and Bennett, are Dustin Barker, Jordan "J.D." Boecker, Stephen Braneff, Colton Burch, Kyle Jenke, David Martin, Colton Matthijetz, Timmy Medack, Dior Smith, Trey Townsend, Preston Vaughn and Brad Young.

Smith, Townsend and Vaughn began their careers as lineworker interns.

The intern program, which started in 2018, provides six months of technical instruction in line work. To advance into the apprentice program, participants must also obtain a power-pole climbing certification and a commercial driver's license.

Learn more about Bluebonnet's lineworker intern and apprenticeship programs at bluebonnet.coop/careers. ■

Lineworker Appreciation Day is April 14

Electric cooperatives across America will observe April 14 as National Lineworker Appreciation Day. Take time to recognize the hard work and dedication of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's lineworkers by visiting our social media pages on that day to see a special video tribute to our lineworkers. Not only are they on call to work — any time, any day of the year — to restore electricity during outages, but they install, repair, replace and maintain the cooperative's electrical equipment.