



KPUD Apprentice Lineman Jess Beierle, left, works with Lineman Robert Dorais on a pole over the gorge. PHOTO COURTESY OF ROBERT DORAIS

Hard-Working Apprentices

Klickitat PUD's two apprentice linemen, Jess Beierle and Greg Dechand, are entering their final year of apprenticeship. The hard work and the commitment they have displayed is admirable.

Both Jess and Greg are lifelong Klickitat County residents.

"I love this area," Jess says when asked what drove him to apply with KPUD.

Greg agrees that staying in Klickitat County and near his family was a huge factor in his decision to apply with KPUD.

Jess and Greg began with KPUD on July 30, 2018, as pre-apprentice linemen, also known as groundmen. Jess worked with the Goldendale line crew and Greg with the White Salmon line crew.

During their first year, the groundmen assisted the linemen with their daily jobs by completing many of the manual labor tasks. This included loading and unloading supplies and preparing materials for jobs.

This exposure helped them determine if this line of work was suited for them. After a successful year as groundmen, the pair was able to apply for the linemen apprenticeship.

A lineman apprenticeship is a combination of on-the-job training along with classroom and field instruction, which culminates in the participant becoming a journey-level worker.

The additional instruction is provided through Northwest Line Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee, which provides training in outside line construction and power line clearance tree trimming.



LEFT: Jess Beierle, left, works on a pole at NW Line JATC. RIGHT: Greg Dechand helps with line maintenance from a bucket truck.
PHOTOS COURTESY OF JESS BEIERLE AND GREG DECHAND.

“The lineman apprenticeship has six steps,” says John Starr, Klickitat PUD line superintendent. “They are able to advance one step every six months over the course of three years.”

During this time, apprentices are required to attend in-person instruction in Warrenton, Oregon, one Saturday every month. They also have one remote training class monthly via Zoom.

Instruction ramps up each winter, when apprentices attend more intensive training at Camp Rilea. During the first and second year of apprenticeship, the camp is two weeks in duration, and during the final year it is a week-long training.

“This camp is a chance for them to learn with a large group of their peers from across the Pacific Northwest,” John says.

While on-the-job, Greg and Jess are paired with a journeyman lineman to complete daily duties. This includes installing new overhead and underground services, inspecting power lines and poles, climbing poles to repair overhead lines, completing routine maintenance on service equipment during planned outages and responding to unplanned outages.

“The apprentice linemen aren’t on call, but anytime I get called out on an outage, I’ll call Jess,” says Robert Dorais, Goldendale journeyman lineman. “You never know what you’re going to see, and the more exposure they get, the better quality future lineman we are producing.”

Once the apprentice linemen complete their six steps with NW Line JATC, Klickitat PUD contacts the local union to schedule the

required journeyman linemen testing. Upon passing, the former apprentices can be recognized as journeyman linemen.

John estimates Klickitat PUD has offered the lineman apprenticeship program for approximately 40 years. John and the apprentice linemen have a lot in common, since he completed the same program about 36 years ago.

“Being in a rural county, it can be difficult to recruit journey-level linemen, who are used to the amenities of larger cities,” John says.

The most recent Klickitat PUD lineman to complete his lineman apprenticeship was Robert Dorais, Jess’s partner. He has been with the utility for 4 ½ years. Robert entered the program with four of the six steps completed while working on a traveling line crew. He finished step five and six with KPUD.

“The best part about being at Klickitat PUD is getting to be home every night,” Robert says.

Labor stats indicate the demand for linemen is expected to grow by 9% through 2022, and by 2023, the nation will need about 29,000 linemen, according to the Center for Energy Workforce Development.

The lineman apprenticeship creates opportunity for local talent to train and grow with KPUD.

“Being locals, Greg and Jess are more familiar with the diverse service territory within Klickitat County, which is a plus,” John says. ■