



[GCEA News]

[what's inside]

- Invitation to Annual Meeting
- Employee Anniversaries
- Stop Wasting, Save Money

MAILING ADDRESS

P.O. Box 180
Gunnison, CO 81230-0180

STREET ADDRESS

37250 W. Highway 50
Gunnison, CO 81230

970-641-3520 [Gunnison]
970-349-5385 [Crested Butte]

gcea@gcea.coop [email]
www.gcea.coop [web]

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Paul Hudgeons, president
District 5 [Lake City]

George Besse, vice president
District 4 [Gunnison West/Powderhorn]

Bill LaDuke, assistant secretary/treasurer
District 1 [Crested Butte]

Chris Morgan, director
District 2 [Mt. Crested Butte]

Bart Laemmel, director
District 3 [Ohio Creek/Almont]

John Vader, director
District 6 [Gunnison East/Sargents]

Lou Costello, director
District 7 [at large]

NEWSLETTER EDITOR
Vicki Spencer



Touchstone Energy®

24/7/365: OUTAGE STORIES FROM YOUR LOCAL LINEMEN

BY ROGER GROGG || CHIEF OPERATIONS OFFICER || GCEA@GCEA.COOP

An electrical lineman is always prepared to heed the call to duty when the power goes out and problems need to be found and fixed.

We take great pride in keeping the lights on and work very hard to restore power in the event of an outage. I asked the line crews past and present to write a short story about a memorable outage to share with the membership. Maybe the next time you are waiting for your power to come back on you will have an idea of what is happening in the field to restore your service.



Roger Grogg

could spare any help. Our CEO, Jim Somrak, talked to our COO, Mike Wells, about the news and they decided to send one foreman, three linemen and two trucks with a pole trailer to move material.

The next day GCEA sent a crew to work with other

co-ops and contractors from all over to help Highline recover from the damage. When we made it there, Highline was happy to see the size of our crew. A Highline lineman, Zeke, oversaw command of our group and was in charge of our safety. Zeke helped us navigate their system and do switching on their system. Our first task was to begin repairs on a three-phase line that ran about 20 miles long, mostly



“Helping a Neighbor” by John Stoeber, working foreman [17-years]

Gunnison County Electric Association is susceptible to outages just as much as any cooperative. We have severe weather from heavy snow to lightning storms, extreme cold, strong winds and animal trouble. Highline Electric Association, a co-op located in the town of Holyoke in northeastern Colorado, called on GCEA for help during a massive outage they were experiencing. Highline needed help after a severe ice storm had demolished their infrastructure. They had lost service overnight to more than 10,000 customers due to broken poles and downed power lines. Although they had access to a supply of needed material, they were short on manpower to do the work and asked if we

“I am proud to be part of GCEA, Touchstone Energy and a group of people with the willingness to help others in need.” – John Stoeber

north and south, with a few east and west crossings. When we made it to the section of line we were to work, all you could see looked like a bunch of toothpicks sticking out of the ground, most of which had been shattered or broken due to the heavy ice. We did not ask many questions; we held our tailgate job briefing and just got started on the task. While we were working on the side of the road, people would stop and offer up coffee or hot chocolate and cookies to say thanks, [continued on page 8]

OUTAGE STORIES

[continued from page 7]

and then say how grateful they were we came to help.

We were working 16 hours a day, and after three days, we were able to energize the line and get the lights on. Zeke, our crew leader from Highline, let out a big yell. We looked at each other and said, "Woo! How many were we able to get turned back on?" Zeke replied, "Six. Hey, you guys, we just got six people on."

GCEA kept a crew out at Holyoke for two weeks due to the miles of line destroyed and the number of consumers in need. I am proud to be part of Gunnison County Electric Association, Touchstone Energy, and a group of people with the willingness to help others in need.



"From the Inside" by Sherry Booth, operations assistant [5 years]

From an office person's perspective, I can say there are times when we envy the linemen for the thrill of their jobs, their skills and their opportunity to work outdoors on a beautiful Colorado bluebird day. Other times, not so much. Like when it is minus 20 degrees in the middle of the night and they have to be on a swaying pole during a blinding blizzard. The support staff who arranges your account requests and helps get your new services installed is probably quite content to stay in a warm bed and slumber until the alarm says not.

December 6, 2007, the first call came in from dispatch at 9:15 p.m. It was the beginning of an extended outage experienced throughout the majority of GCEA's service area. The crews finally saw some relief over 28 hours later, only to return to the field for extended repairs over the next several days. This major storm brought over 2 feet of heavy, wet snow; left thousands of customers without power; multiple office GCEA employees working the phones and radio; and all 12 line crewmen, along with co-op engineers and a former journeyman, working overtime.

That the repairs were completed in such harsh conditions and with no accidents

"I am grateful to have a good job and leave to go home to a warm house." – Sherry Booth

or safety mishaps is a testament to our line crews' diligence and training. And, we all pulled together to help them get the lights back on and your heaters working. Meals were delivered into the field, wives and families were called with updates on their spouse's line patrolling and locations and the company Christmas party (planned for the 8th) was rescheduled so the linemen could get some sleep and be celebrated after the weather abated.

I am a GCEA employee and I am a member. I am grateful to have a good job and leave to go home to a warm house. On behalf of the inside staff and those we serve who appreciate the reliability of electricity, "Thank you, guys."



"When Nature Calls" by Ron Copenhaver, GCEA journeyman [11 years]

The majority of power outages are usually routine problems. Underground cable failure, lightning and severe weather are some of the main contributors. However, on two occasions in my career at GCEA, I've been called out by an unlikely culprit — the North American beaver. GCEA's line crews go to great lengths to trim or remove "danger" trees that are within 10 feet of high-voltage overhead lines. But beavers have the ability to drop trees into the lines from a much greater distance.

The first and most spectacular beaver-caused outage occurred in late December approximately 1 mile west of the Gunnison headquarters. A single beaver downed a 40-foot-tall aspen tree and managed to knock out the power on the entire Gunnison West circuit all the way to Arrowhead subdivision. We quickly found the problem and made repairs after two trips across a waist-deep creek. I suspect beavers are more well-prepared for December wading than the line crew because we had some cold, wet linemen.

The second outage occurred mid-

August in the Almont area where our overhead line crosses the Gunnison River near a small island located between channels in the middle of the river. There is a small grove of trees on the island and, as you may have guessed, this is prime beaver habitat. Beavers being beavers, they caused the lights to go out. This outage was of a much smaller scale than the first, but repairs could only be completed by wading through the river and finishing what the beavers had started.

While wildlife related power outages are infrequent, these instances just go to show that linemen never know what they are heading into when dispatch calls them into service.



"Caddy Shack" by Jeff Hanggi, Crested Butte foreman [15 years]

Underground cable failures are a common cause of outages for GCEA. Line crews use information supplied by consumers to locate the affected area and then use various techniques and equipment to isolate the problem to one section of cable. Using our VON faultfinder, we send several thousand volts of direct current down the cable, which exits at the fault and makes a popping noise in the ground. This gives us our spot to dig up the failed cable.

What we usually find is a small hole in the cable or splice that has allowed the electricity to escape. One morning in Crested Butte South, however, we found a different culprit. After digging up our cable, we found a dazed and confused pocket gopher that had been chewing on a splice in the cable. After discovering 14,400 volts of electricity in the center of the cable, he probably had second thoughts about his meal choice, especially after the initial jolt was followed by several more pulses of voltage as we tried to locate the fault.

We relocated the seemingly unharmed pocket gopher to a safe location and proceeded to make repairs to the cable. This incident added one more item to a long list of challenges we face in keeping the power on.



“Safety First” by Levi Littrell, Crested Butte journeyman [5 years]

Most people from outside our area would be surprised to find that a tiny town hidden from the rest of the world, deep in the Rocky Mountains, and completely isolated in the winter, is supplied with electricity. Nevertheless, the five or six hearty folks winter over in Gothic and enjoy all the comforts that electricity provides.

That all changed just before Christmas 2010. A series of warm, wet snowstorms had raged on for days and slammed the upper end of the valley. Snow had been sticking to tree branches and caused them to fall into power lines. Branches and whole trees were snapping like twigs. The heavy snow was also sticking to power lines, making them sag dangerously low. Three days into the storm, our linemen were barely able to keep up with all the problems — a tree branch burning in the line in town, a line sagging dangerously low, a blown fuse leaving a whole street out of power. On and on it went and among all this every two or three hours the folks in Gothic, who must have had GCEA on speed dial, would call in. “We’re doing fine, but the power is out again.”

One night, since I was the lineman on call in our area, I had been receiving all the after-hours calls from dispatch. After the third or fourth time I had gone out that night in the midst of the storm, the dispatcher laughed and said, “Maybe you should just sleep in your boots tonight!” Every time the power would go out in Gothic I would gear up, head to the end of the road in Mt. Crested Butte, dig out a switching cabinet that feeds power to Gothic, cross my fingers that the power would hold, and throw the switch that feeds the 14,000 volts of power down the four miles of lines to Gothic. “One of these times it’s not going to hold,” I kept thinking to myself as I imagined the lines going through tunnels of aspen and crossing avalanche prone slopes on its way to Gothic. The snow storm had been raging for days, and four or five times over the course of the week preceding my night on call, the power had gone out, and

four or five times, it came back on when I had thrown the switch back in. But luck finally ran out one night as the worst of the storm blew through. The power would just not stay on.

Patrolling the line on snowmobiles or snowshoes was impossible since we were in high avalanche danger. Natural avalanches were happening on many slopes and human triggered slides on steep slopes were guaranteed. Our only option was to take our snowcat down into the bottom of the East River Valley where we would be safe from avalanches with the hope of getting a glimpse of the lines with binoculars or a spotting scope. First, Crested Butte Mt. Resort ski patrol had to make it safe for us to drive into the valley bottom. After a morning of throwing bombs and making ski cuts, they gave us the green light — it was safe to drive into the valley.

With longtime Crested Butte lineman Dan Oberosler at the helm and myself navigating, we slowly crawled our way into the East River Valley and up towards Gothic. Finally, late in the afternoon we made it to where we could safely climb up out of the valley and get a look at our power lines. The problem soon became obvious. An avalanche had ripped down the side of the steep canyon walls and torn the line down. It was buried somewhere underneath the debris.

After consulting with ski patrol safety experts, management and Crested Butte Mt. Guides, we decided that it would be safest to come back the next morning with an avalanche expert and mountain guide. Gothic would be out of power for another day.

The next morning we loaded up the snowcat again. Three Crested Butte linemen, guide Jayson Simons-Jones and a snowcat full of repair parts, headed up the valley again. Jayson surveyed the scene and agreed that we needed an expert opinion to determine if the slope was safe for us to get on and fix our line. He called in another guide. After inspecting the slope, they determined it to be safe.

An hour later, we had pulled the ends of the wire from the debris field, spliced them back together and reattached the lines to the poles. We gave the lineman stationed at the switching cabinet the go ahead to

try the line and we all held our breath. The line held and after two days without power, the folks in Gothic who had weathered almost 100 inches of snow and no electricity celebrated the lights coming back on just in time for Christmas.



“A Different Time” by Mike Wells, chief executive officer [38 years]

In times past, we would send postcards out with our bills so that most of our rural members could read their own meters. This practice ended somewhere around the end of the 1960s or early 1970s but when used, it saved a lot of time and travel for the small number of employees we had back then.

I started working for GCEA in the early 1970s, and the memory is still fresh of how we once received a postcard with the meter reading and a short note. It read something to the effect of, “Just thought you might like to know that my power has been off for a week or so and when you get out this way maybe you can stop by and check it out.” At that time, we were starting to see some growth in the service territory, and the ski area was starting to take shape along with the new town of Mt. Crested Butte. We saw that electricity was no longer a luxury but was becoming a necessity in our largely rural community and this changing attitude required a higher degree of reliability in our system. Apparently, this old-time member remembered how it was before he had electricity and was not entirely reliant on it for his needs.

I hope you enjoyed the stories as much as I have. It gives the crews a warm feeling to know that there are people who are patient and appreciative of their electric service and the work we do. Even though keeping the power on is hard work, facing the challenge of outages is one of the most rewarding aspects of a lineman’s job. Of course, we would prefer to have a system with no outages; however, I believe this to be almost impossible. At GCEA, we continually update and improve our electrical system and continue to make great progress in system safety and reliability.

You are Invited to Gunnison County Electric Association's 72nd Annual Meeting

Don't
Miss It!

June 28, 2011

- 4 p.m. – Tour GCEA's headquarters and visit display booths
- 5 p.m. – Barbecue dinner (Kansas style)
- 6 p.m. – Business meeting and elections followed by door prize raffle (Members must be present to win)



[Employee Anniversaries]

- Jo Anne Bateman**..... accounting assistant
1 year
- Vic Dean**..... meter reader and
AMR technician
10 years
- Rocky Ferran**..... staff engineer
5 years
- Jeff Hanggi** Crested Butte
working foreman
15 years
- Levi Littrell**..... Crested Butte
journeyman
5 years
- Vicki Spencer**..... energy use and
communications specialist
3 years

congratulations!
we value our employees

STOP WASTING ENERGY & SAVE MONEY



Join other local businesses in their efforts to stop wasting energy.

Sign up for a low-cost GCEA Commercial energy audit and learn how you can save money.

Audits may be free after rebate.

Call GCEA at
970-641-3520
for details.

