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SEPTEMBER 2026

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Sharing Stories About Life on the Line

After covering the line trade for more than 20 years for *T&D World*, one of my guests for the Line Life Podcast put it perfectly: “line work is a big industry, but it’s a small world.” Over the years, I’ve had the honor of meeting lineworkers and their families from around the globe at the International Lineman’s Rodeo Week and shared stories about storm response, grid modernization projects and new tools and technologies.

Here at *T&D World*, we cover the line trade year-round with our weekly Line Life Podcast, bi-monthly Lineman Life newsletter and field-focused Electric Utility Operations in both our print magazine and on our website. One of my favorite projects of the year, however, is writing in-depth feature stories about life on the line for the annual Lineworker Supplement.

Over the years, I’ve profiled women in line work, troublemen, pre-apprentices, inventors in the trade, military lineworkers and volunteers for overseas electrification projects. I’ve also covered topics such as safeguarding mental health for first responders, responding to severe storms and the history of the International Lineman’s Rodeo.

For the 2026 Lineworker Supplement, we are continuing our tradition of celebrating the men and women who work on the line.

What’s Inside

For each Lineworker Supplement, I try to focus on storm restoration, safety and training and the culture of line work. For this supplement, this is what we have in store:

1. Lineworkers Around the World. All around the world, lineworkers are working on the line to power their communities. They often go by different job titles, but they have one common mission: to power their communities, build and maintain infrastructure and work safely so they come home to their families every night. I learned that no matter where you’re from and where you live, the line trade is one big community. RaeLynn Hawco, a power line technician in Canada, said the best part of the trade is the people.

“The friendships, teamwork and sense of accomplishment you get from completing a project or helping restore power after an outage make all the hard work worth it,” she said. “I genuinely love the work and the people in this industry.”

For this feature, I had the honor of not only connecting with Hawco, but also father-and-son lineworkers in England and a member of the first journeyman team at the International Lineman’s Rodeo from New Zealand. They shared stories of their training programs and focus on safety and how they are building new infrastructure to meet the growing demand for power in their service territories.

2. Training in the Trade: Every year, I try to focus one of my articles on training the future generation of lineworkers. Last year, I highlighted pre-apprentices, but this year, I shifted the spotlight over to the instructors in the line trade. After a career of working in the field, they are now inspiring others to pursue their dream of working on the line. They talk about making their transition from the field to the training yard and how they are



Amy Fischbach interviewed Jimmy Marinus from New Zealand a few years ago for the Line Life Podcast, and he’s now returning to the International Lineman’s Rodeo to compete on a journeyman team.

helping their students to sharpen their skills, scale poles and be prepared for the line life.

3. Line Wives. Back in 1994, we featured an article, written by another author, about the wives of linemen for the Lineworker Supplement. As a married mom of five, I thought it was time to revisit this topic by sharing how today’s women are balancing everything on the home front while their spouses are away on storm duty for days, weeks or months at a time. To find support and camaraderie, they are connecting with other line wives on social media groups and finding ways to support their spouses during storm restoration.

4. Storm Responders. I love writing about storms and sharing the lessons learned from rebuilding and recovery. This year, I’m focusing on best practices, tools and technologies that line crews can use to expedite restoration and safeguard their field workforce. Over the years, utilities and contractors have discovered ways to get the lights on quickly for their customers while supporting their line crews as they are away from their families.

Get Involved

I enjoy sharing stories of those who work on the line. If you want to be in the spotlight, swing by the *T&D World* booth at the International Lineman’s Expo, where you can participate in a future recording for the Line Life Podcast. Tune in at linelife.podbean.com to listen to stories about lineworkers on the go.

We air interview-style episodes on the first and third Fridays of each month and audio stories narrated from the print magazine for our ICYMI series. Once a month, we also drop a new musical playlist specially designed for the line trade in our “Line Life Listens” series. Learn more by subscribing to our Lineman Life newsletter and visiting tdworld.com/electric-utility-operations.

Thank you to all the lineworkers and their loved ones who participated in this year’s Lineworker Supplement. I look forward to seeing all of you during the 2026 International Lineman’s Rodeo Week.

Make sure you stop by our booth to get free temporary tattoos for line wives and kids and T-shirts celebrating America’s 250th anniversary for lineworkers. Travel safely and get ready to Rodeo! **TDW**



Jimmy Marinus (left) and Pomare Samupo of Powerline Hawke's Bay complete cross arm changes in New Zealand.

Lineworkers Around the World

Around the globe, lineworkers are working on the line to power their communities.

By **AMY FISCHBACH**

Over the last 14 years, Journeyman Lineworker RaeLynn Hawco has traveled across North America to work in the line trade. Along the way, she has met great people, worked in amazing places and faced new challenges that helped her to grow on and off the job site. “One of the coolest things about working in the line trade is getting to see parts of the country that most people never get to experience,” said Hawco, a power line technician (PLT) for Midlite Construction LP in Woodlands, Manitoba, Canada.

She has also discovered that at the end of the day — no matter where she is working — lineworkers have the same goal: to work safely and keep the lights on for the communities they serve.

“We work hard, look out for each other and take pride in the work we do every day,” she said. “The friendships, teamwork and sense of accomplishment that come with this trade are what make it so rewarding, and that’s something lineworkers everywhere can relate to. Being a lineworker is an incredible career no matter where you live.”

Jimmy Marinus, field team leader and “linesman” for Powerlines Hawke’s Bay Ltd. in Hawke’s Bay, New Zealand, agreed. He has been in the trade for 24 years and enjoys serving his community.

“At the end of the day, we all do the same job in different parts of the world,” he said. “Just because it looks different doesn’t mean it’s wrong or unsafe.”

While lineworkers globally go by different job titles, adhere to varying grid standards and employ diverse work practices, when you get down to it, they are all the same, said Liam White, an OHL (overhead line) engineer for National Grid in Skelton Grange, Leeds, United Kingdom. “We work hard, play hard and are top people,” he said.

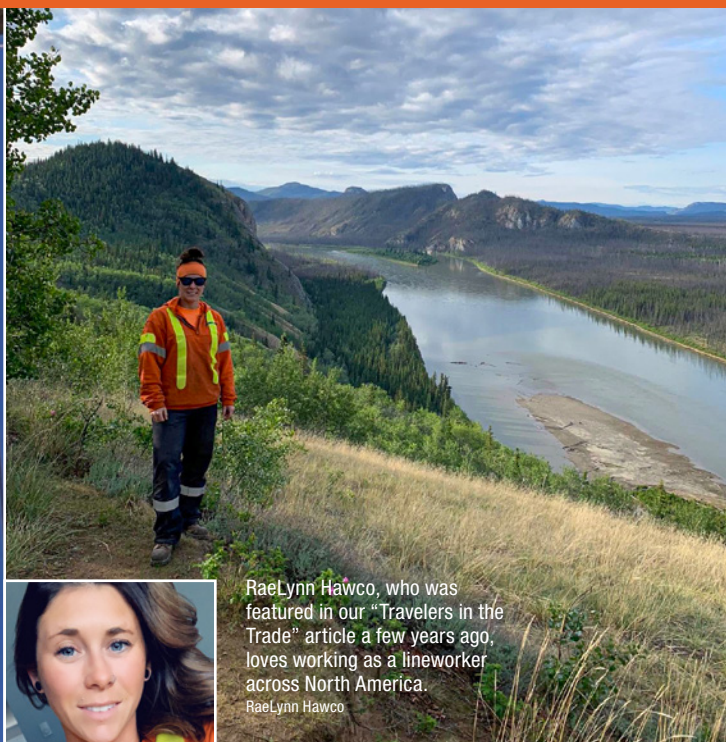
White, whose son is also in the line trade, said every day is different due to varying weather conditions and job sites and locations, and he enjoys the team dynamic and bantering with the other crew members. “Working on a tower is the best office in the world, when it is not raining or blowing a gale,” White said.

Around the globe, lineworkers are constructing and maintaining infrastructure to power their communities. In the United States alone, more than 120,000 work as power line installers and repairers, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. In North America, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) supports 250,000 utility and natural gas workers through 433 local unions.

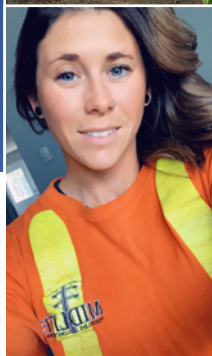
Here is a look at lineworkers around the world, from Canada to England to New Zealand, and how they are keeping the lights on and the power flowing for their communities.



Power Line Technician RaeLynn Hawco enjoys the camaraderie of the line trade in Canada and beyond. RaeLynn Hawco



RaeLynn Hawco, who was featured in our “Travelers in the Trade” article a few years ago, loves working as a lineworker across North America. RaeLynn Hawco



Traveling Through North America: Rae-Lynn Hawco of Midlite Construction LP

Hawco has worked in unique and challenging environments across Canada — from the mountainous winter terrain of the Yukon to the extreme weather conditions of British Columbia to the zig-zagging power line routes spanning Ontario’s countless lakes and waterways to Alberta’s oil sands.

“Each region brings its own challenges, requiring crews to adapt to different weather conditions, terrain and construction methods,” she said. “Whether it’s harsh winter conditions, remote access, difficult terrain or long hours during emergency response, lineworkers need to be prepared to respond safely and efficiently.”

She has had the opportunity to work on transmission and distribution projects and help with heli-stringing projects across Canada, where she said the future of the line trade in her country is bright. As the demand for reliable power continues to grow, she expects it to create lots of opportunities for skilled lineworkers to help build, maintain and improve the country’s electrical system.

“As Canada continues to grow, so does the need for reliable electricity,” she said. “New transmission and distribution projects are being built to help power communities, industries and future developments.

After spending her career on the line, RaeLynn Hawco now supports crews out in the field through her new role in the safety department.

No matter where the project is, the goal is always the same — making sure people have safe, reliable power when they need it. For me, it’s rewarding to be part of building and maintaining the infrastructure that keeps our communities connected and running every day.”

She started out in the trade as an apprentice and then topped out as a “power line technician” or PLT. Over her four-year apprenticeship, she gained hands-on experience in the field and completed the required hours for her apprenticeship “block.” She then passed her “Red Seal” exam, which allowed her to work anywhere in Canada. “One of the best parts of the trade is learning from experienced journeymen, and now I enjoy passing that knowledge on to the next generation of lineworkers,” she said.

Another rewarding part of the trade is storm response and restoration work, she said. “I enjoy knowing that the work we do has a real impact on people’s lives by keeping the power on and communities connected. There is a tremendous sense of pride in working alongside your crew to restore power and get communities back

on their feet. Knowing that your work directly impacts people’s homes, businesses and daily lives makes the long hours and difficult conditions worthwhile.”

During her career in the line trade, she has had the opportunity to respond to storms not only in Canada, but also in the United States. For example, she said one of the most memorable experiences of her career was traveling to Louisiana to help with hurricane restoration efforts. While seeing the amount of damage left behind by the storm was eye-opening, she said it was also incredible to see lineworkers from all over come together to restore power and rebuild communities.

“We worked long days in challenging conditions, but everyone was focused on the same goal — restoring power for people who needed it,” she said. “That experience taught me the importance of teamwork, adaptability and staying positive under pressure. More than anything, it reminded me why I’m proud to be a lineworker and how rewarding it is to help people when they need it most.”

From her experience working in the United States during storm restoration, she learned the job is similar, but the biggest difference is the terrain. Each area comes with its own challenges and requires different equipment and construction methods, and she has discovered a mix of wood and steel poles and

As in the United States, National Grid's lineworkers wear fall protection and high-vis workwear to keep safe in the field.



transmission towers on both sides of the U.S.-Canada border.

To be prepared for a variety of different projects, she packs her truck with everything she needs to get the job done safely and efficiently including tools, rigging gear, materials and supplies. She also ensures her truck is stocked with PPE, including a hard hat, safety glasses, gloves, steel-toe boots and FR clothing, as well as fall protection, hearing protection or other specialized gear.

Because no two jobs are alike, the equipment can also change from day to day. Depending on the project, the PLTs could be driving crew, bucket, crane or boom trucks, excavators, backhoes or skid steers. To navigate the unforgiving terrain in Canada, they also drive “Nodwells,” rugged, multi-purposed tracked carriers, which were originally developed in the 1950s by Bruce Nodwell and now manufactured by Foremost.

“One of the coolest parts of the trade is all the different equipment we get to work with,” she said. “Whether we’re building new power lines, maintaining existing infrastructure or responding to an outage, having the right equipment on hand is a huge part of the job. That’s one of the things I love about line work — every day is different, and there’s always something new to learn.”

She said the line trade is changing all the time, and new technology is helping her and the other PLTs to work smarter and safer. One of the biggest advancements is the use of drones for inspections, she said.

“Instead of putting workers in hard-to-reach areas, drones can quickly inspect power lines and equipment while keeping people out of harm’s way,” she said. “We’re also using better communication tools, GPS technology, digital paperwork and upgraded equipment that help crews stay connected and work more efficiently. These tools allow us to spot problems faster, plan jobs better and respond more quickly during outages and storm restoration.”

Even with all the new technology, however, she said nothing replaces good training, experience and teamwork.

“The best tool on any job site is still a crew that communicates well and looks out for each other,” she said. “Technology helps make our jobs safer and more efficient, but at the end of the day, it’s the people behind the tools who get the work done and keep the lights on.”

For example, in addition to her power-line qualifications, she also holds a crane operator apprenticeship and a Class 1 license, which has allowed her to broaden her skill set and contribute in a variety of roles across projects. At Midlitz, she’s had the opportunity to work in materials, QA/QC and now Health and Safety. Today, her key responsibilities focus on supporting crews, improving safety processes and helping to build a stronger and safer workplace.

“Moving into Health & Safety felt like the right next step for me because it gives me the opportunity to support crews and help make the job safer for everyone,” she

said. “My goal is to be the safety person I wish I had when I was working on the tools as a linewoman — someone who understands the realities of the job, listens to concerns and helps crews find solutions that work in the field. No matter where my career takes me, I’ll always stay connected to the line trade,” she said. “It’s an industry I’m passionate about and one I will never leave behind.”

Powering the United Kingdom: Liam and Callum White, a Father-and-Son Duo from National Grid

Thousands of miles away from Canada, White has spent the last 36 years working in the line trade for National Grid in Skelton Grange, Leeds, United Kingdom. During his career, he has served as a “linesman,” SAP development engineer, OHL trainer, OHL engineer and team engineer and responded to his share of storms.

“They seem to get worse every year,” he said. “National Grid’s transmission system is built to last, but when there are emergencies, we all pull together and do what’s required.”

To safeguard the field workforce, National Grid offers annual tower rescue and First Aid training and equips its field workforce with PPE. For example, lineworkers wear helmets, steel-toe boots, orange high-vis overalls, work gloves and safety glasses. While working at height, they also don harnesses and use the Step-Safe double lanyard, work positioning lanyard and tower rescue kits.



Liam White, the son of a lineworker, is ready to work on the line after completing an apprenticeship at National Grid in England. Liam White



National Grid's field workforce maintains and builds transmission towers like these structures in Leeds, England.



Liam White (right) and his son, Callum, are proud to work as "linesmen" for National Grid in Leeds, England. National Grid

"Safety is key when you're working next to 400 kV and 200 ft high," he said. "We focus on team spirit, being your brother's keeper and looking out for one another."

Along with traditional work methods, the line crews are also learning live line and rope access techniques, and National Grid is introducing lighter equipment, improving procedures and developing more helicopter access work. "We need to adapt to new technology and then develop new procedures and introduce these into the line work safely and successfully," he said.

In England, the line crews don't work on DC towers or transposition towers. Instead, the lineworkers scale steel lattice structures with about 10 different design types depending on voltage and load requirements and location. For example, National Grid

has 50 to 100 T-Pylons, single-column, double-circuit structures, which require mobile elevated work platform (MEWP) access.

In his service territory, £31 billion of investment in the network across England and Wales will be completed between now and 2031, and in the Yorkshire and Humber region, the lineworkers are connecting the renewable energy projects to the grid through the Eastern Green Link connections.

White, who has spent nearly four decades in the line trade, is looking forward to retiring in the near future and watching his son, Callum, progress in the trade. With nearly four decades in the trade, he plans to retire in the near future.

"I am looking forward to watching him have a long and fulfilled career, just like

I've had, and be part of a team transforming the United Kingdom's electricity transmission infrastructure," he said.

Four years ago, he encouraged his son to go down the same career path and become a lineworker through the apprenticeship scheme. National Grid offers a three-year-long OHL apprenticeship program with the first year at National Grid's training facility learning basics and fundamentals. During the second and third year, apprentices spend more time gaining on-the-job experience with their "base team."

During his three-year OHL advanced apprenticeship, Callum learned the basics of overhead lines and spent time at the National Grid Training Centre at Eakring in Nottinghamshire, where he studied and completed a level 3 subsidiary diploma in power network while learning maintenance techniques from skilled OHL trainers.

Since he started at the utility, National Grid has shortened the apprenticeship from three years to two-and-a-half years. After completing their apprenticeship and working full-time with their base team, they can become a full-fledged journeyman lineworker, also known as a "linesman," and earn the title of "OHL craftsman." Eventually, they can work up to a "chargehand," a senior craftsman with supervisory responsibilities, similar to a foreman in the United States.

"When you become fully fledged is dependent on how much work you see and are involved in, which can vary in different regions," Callum said. "So far, I have



Jimmy Marinus (left) and Pomare Samupo train for the upcoming International Lineman's Rodeo. Jimmy Marinus



The Powerlines Hawke's Bay crew completes a de-energized high voltage cross arm change. Jimmy Marinus

really enjoyed my career, especially now I am out of my apprenticeship and can continue to progress.”

He said every lineworker — whether they are up on the tower or part of a ground

crew — plays a major role in making sure jobs and tasks are completed safely and to a good standard. That way, if an emergency occurs, they can act accordingly and fix damages as quickly as possible.

INTERNATIONAL LINEMAN'S RODEO: BRINGING LINeworkERS TOGETHER

A dozen lineworkers competed in the very first Lineman's Rodeo in 1984 in Manhattan, Kansas. Over the last four decades, however, it has grown into a global event with more than 5,000 attendees.

While New Zealand will be participating for the first time in 2026 with a journeyman team, the Rodeo has also had long-time competitors from Canada and also participation from lineworkers from England, Jamaica, the Philippines and Ireland.

To check it out, attendees have also traveled to Kansas City from Germany, France, Russia and South Africa to investigate possible future participation in the “Super Bowl” of Lineman's Rodeos. On the road to the Rodeo, these international competitors often participate in local and regional competitions in their home service territories.

During storm response, as well as every day, safety in the line trade is vital, Callum said. For example, the safety rules and national safety instructions keep National Grid lineworkers safe from the system when working on or near high-voltage overhead lines. They also rely on tower and trolley rescue procedures in the event of an emergency when they need to rescue someone safely during a worst-case scenario. The lineworkers adhere to working procedures outlined in the “M1 manual,” which consists of proven and tested working procedures for daily maintenance.

To perform their work in the field, they rely on a variety of different equipment and vehicles, including trucks with a capstan winch for lifting and lowering gear. They also stock their trucks with a tower rescue kit, ropes and rope blocks, lifting equipment and site demarcation

to establish a work area and danger zone. In addition, they rely on temporary, portable earthing leads called “drain earths,” available from companies such as P&B Weir Electrical and CATU Electrical, to safely discharge electrical energy to earth and protect workers from induced high voltages.

While the work can be challenging, Liam said he enjoys working outside and traveling to different places as an OHL craftsman. He also said line work is a mentally rewarding job when he and his crew members complete work and tasks to good standards.

Over the next 15 years, he is looking forward to being a part of the major projects underway in his service territory and the construction of the “T3,” which will go on for the next five years. He also plans to progress to higher levels within OHL when the time is right.

“There are lots of opportunities for progression, and my plans for the future are to learn as much as I can and be the best lineworker I can be,” he said. “I love what I do, and I hope to have a long and successful career.”

Working in New Zealand to Competing at the Rodeo: Jimmy Marinus of Powerline Hawke's Bay

While Liam White and his son, Callum, haven't been to Kansas City for the International Lineman's Week, he urged the committee to bring the event to England.

“Bring it to the UK, and we'll show you RODEO!,” Liam said.

One lineworker from overseas who will not only attend the 2026 International Lineman's Rodeo, but also compete, is Jimmy Marinus, field team leader and lineman for Powerlines Hawke's Bay Ltd. in Hawke's Bay, New Zealand.

His company, along with sponsors Wagners and Mita Consulting, is supporting their trip to Kansas City, making it the first time a team from their part of the world is competing at the International Lineman's Rodeo.

“We had some amazing help from our sponsors, and without that help, this wouldn't be possible,” he said. “I think it's safe to say we will be the team who will be traveling the furthest from New Zealand to Kansas. We are looking forward to

representing New Zealand on the international stage and doing ourselves proud.”

Marinus will be competing with Pomare Samupo, a lineman, and Zane Berge, who will act as a groundman. Their manager, Haden Anderson, will also be supporting the crew from the sidelines. “We've been quietly training for the events now for a month or so,” he said. “There's a lot to learn and get used to as some of the work

practices are completely different from how we do them at home.”

For example, in New Zealand, lineworkers scale a variety of poles, so they use a blend of bucket trucks, light 4x4 utility vehicles and ladders to get to the top.

“We drive multiple different types of vehicles to the job site,” he said. “The most common is a line truck that has a hydraulic crane on the back. It could be a 4x2 or a

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4x4, and the truck gets used to drill our holes as well as stand poles and remove the old ones.”

In New Zealand, lineworkers install hardwood poles as well as those that are made from “softwood,” primarily made from sustainably grown Radiata Pine and then pressure-treated to withstand harsh in-ground and marine environments. In addition, they install new poles made from steel, concrete, fiber-reinforced polymer (FRP) and fiberglass. Marinus said lineworkers in his country are starting to see a big shift toward FRP products with companies like Wagners manufacturing poles and crossarms. “FRP products tend to be lighter, so the installs tend to be easier compared to heavier materials,” he said.

In his service territory, the lineworkers are focusing on strengthening the grid by building out infrastructure to support a huge push for renewables, especially solar. Like in other parts of the world, the crews are also focusing on storm response. As weather patterns change, so do the storms, which are becoming more frequent and sometimes more severe.

“We prepare the best we can, and once the storm hits and the dust settles, it’s all hands on deck to get the network back up and running and the customers reconnected,” he said. “No matter where you go, there is a huge emphasis on safety,

and that is at the forefront of what we do.”

While Marinus has worked on many different storms, one stands out in his memory — a huge snowstorm in the central North Island in 2016. This storm took down several poles, crossarms and conductor, and one area had nearly 300 poles down.

“These jobs are always interesting as there are crews from different companies and areas working together,” he said. “It really brings out the best in the industry.”

Safety is often a top priority when it comes to storm response and the day-to-day work in the field. As health and safety evolve, so do the responsibilities on the people out in the field. “We place a big emphasis on making sure we leave the job site safe,” he said. “We make sure what work we have done is in a safe state, that the public doesn’t get hurt and what we’ve done is checked and inspected.”

To train the apprentices to work in the trade, a typical apprenticeship lasts about two-and-a-half years, which includes four one-week modules, one two-week module and on-the-job training. Once the apprentices complete their final module courses and gain registration, they can train for high-voltage live-line work once registration has been held for two years.

After they top out, they often go by the job title of “line mechanic” in New Zealand, but the terms “lineman” or “linesman” get used as well, Marinus said. He said he has been in the trade for 24 years and landed in the career by luck.

“When I was in high school, a careers teacher told me about a job vacancy she’d seen in the local newspaper for an apprentice lineman at a local contracting company,” he said. “I had no idea what the job was, let alone heard about a lineman before. She helped me to create a CV and prepped me for the interview. The rest is history.”

Marinus said he’s been fortunate enough to come through the trade at a time when there was a lot of opportunity to travel. “The trade has taken me from New Zealand to the UK and Ireland to Australia as well as Fiji,” he said. “My journey has seen me go from an apprentice to a lineman, from a lineman to a foreman, then to a trainer and now a contracting company owner.”

GLOBAL LINGO FOR LINEWORKERS

In the United States, apprentice lineworkers typically complete a four-year apprenticeship program before topping out as a journeyman lineman, but in other countries, they perform the same work, but go by different job titles. Here are a few from around the world.

- **United Kingdom:** Linesman, Overhead Line (OHL) Craftsperson or Chargehand
- **Canada:** Powerline Technicians or Powerline Supervisors
- **Australia and New Zealand:** Powerline or Electrical Mechanic, also known as “Sparkies” or “Vollies”
- **France:** Monteur
- **Germany:** Linienrichter (translates to linesman or lineswoman in German)
- **Latin America:** Liniero
- **China:** Electrical Workers (also nicknamed “Spider-Men” by the local and national media for working on high-voltage lines)
- **India:** Linemen, Wiremen or Power Line Technicians (they are also called “Electricity Pilots” or “Electricity Protectors”)
- **Brazil:** Network Electricians or Distribution Electricians
- **Philippines:** Linemen or Lineworkers (but also affectionately called “Warriors of Light”)

A few of the biggest rewards of working in the line trade in New Zealand are the people in the industry, the trucks and equipment he gets to operate and drive and seeing places some people don't even know exist.

At the same time, he said one of the major challenges facing New Zealand is staff retention. Due to the cost of living, a lot of people in the trade are looking at alternatives overseas, he said. Like in other parts of the world, the country is also experiencing advancements with AI and robotics.

While it's challenging to predict the future for the line trade, he said he plans to enjoy it while he can. He said while line work may look different around the globe, lineworkers all have a similar mission.

"I love the trade and the people in it," he said. "That's why I think it's important that what we do while we are at work is to the best of our ability in order to get everyone back home safely to their families." **TDW**

EXPERIENCE THE WORLD: OVERSEAS OPPORTUNITIES TO WORK ON THE LINE

American lineworkers can volunteer to work overseas through organizations such as the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. If they are looking to work overseas, they must obtain their journeyman certification, a valid U.S. passport and a Commercial Driver's License. They can then explore these avenues.

- 1. Pursue contract work.** Large contractors, such as KBR hire IBEW lineworkers to work in locations like the Caribbean, Middle East or U.S. military installations overseas.
- 2. Check with your local IBEW signatory.** Some signatory contractors specialize in overseas work, which can allow a member to retain their U.S. pay and benefits while traveling.
- 3. Check job boards online.** Positions are posted on sites such as ZipRecruiter, which list international power lineman jobs.
- 4. Apply for a working holiday visa.** Lineworkers under the age of 30 can apply to work directly for utilities overseas for six to 24 months, depending on the country.
- 5. Enroll in the U.S. Army's Prime Power 249th Engineer Battalion.** Lineworkers can sign up either as active duty or reserve for Prime Power, which deploys worldwide to provide electrical power, infrastructure assessments and technical engineering for military operations or disaster relief. Consider swinging by their booth at the International Lineman's Expo or talking to the competitors in the military division for more information.

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Brittany Burrell, shown with her husband, Daniel, and family, enjoys meeting other line families at the Lineman's Rodeo. *Brittany Burrell*

Line Wives: The Power Behind the Power

They keep things rolling at home when their spouses are away on storm duty or responding to emergencies or middle-of-the-night callouts.

By **AMY FISCHBACH**

Lynne Swayne married her high school sweetheart 40 years ago, and today she's a proud line wife in Waterford, Michigan. Over the last four decades, her husband, Tom, has served as a journeyman lineman, general foreman and supervisor for DTE Energy, and her son-in-law just completed his apprenticeship and is now working as an overhead lineman.

"The line family is family, and I am fiercely loyal and protective of them," she said. "We share a bond that others just can't understand."

Line work isn't just a job — it's a family tradition, said Brittany Burrell, who has been married to Daniel, a journeyman lineworker for Duke Energy, for the past 16 years. Two years before they got married, he started his career in the line trade in underground work with a contractor before coming to Duke Energy 10 years ago.

"His dad, who recently retired from Duke Energy, was also a lineworker, so this work has always been part of our family," said Burrell, who lives in Henderson, North Carolina. "My oldest son has expressed interest in line work, and my brother-in-law is also a lineworker. I think it becomes a family tradition because there is a real sense of satisfaction in helping people. It is more than just keeping the lights on. The work is rewarding, challenging and meaningful."

LaCosta Diggs said her husband and son both work in the line trade. She has been married for nearly 32 years to Michael, a lineman for Middle Tennessee Electric, and their son, Collin, is a lineman for Jackson Energy Authority. "Growing up, all he ever wanted to do was be a farmer, and I think seeing the positive impact his father has made over the years made him realize he wanted to be part of that trade," she said.



Brittany Burrell, married to Daniel, a Duke Energy lineworker, worked with the other wives to do the laundry for crews during Hurricane Helene. Brittany Burrell

Balancing the Line Life

Because line work is demanding and not a typical 9-to-5 career, being married to a lineworker takes both patience and understanding, Burrell said.

“Storm work and long hours can take some getting used to, but this career has also provided a lot for our family,” she said. “I am proud of what my husband does, and I know he gets a lot of satisfaction from serving his community. When Hurricane Helene hit, he was gone a lot, and that was hard, but I also saw how important his work was to the people who needed help.”

When you are in a line family, storm duty becomes part of your life, and you learn how to adjust, she said. “In the beginning, it took some getting used to,” she said. “The job is unpredictable, and that can be hard at first. Over the years, I have learned to give more grace and be more flexible.”

Swayne said while she is very proud of her husband and enjoys the camaraderie of the line trade, living the line life does come with its challenges. “Most of the line wives I know, including myself, are educated, and we hold down full-time jobs while raising our families,” she said. “Our husbands could be out of state working storms or hurricane restoration. It’s a hard, but very rewarding, life. Many holidays and family events have been spent alone while our husbands are restoring power, and many times, line wives are single moms.”

She said it’s hard when there are major family events and holidays, and line wives’ husbands can’t be there.

WORDS OF WISDOM FOR OTHER LINE WIVES

1. **Be prepared to hold down the fort on your own.** “Your husband will be working ungodly hours with so many times overnight and out of state, and you may have to try to keep small children quiet while their dad is sleeping, as he may have literally worked days on end,” said Lynne Swayne, wife of Tom, a journeyman lineman for DTE Energy.
2. **Be supportive and learn to adjust to the unpredictable nature of the job.** “It’s not always easy, but understanding the importance of the work helps,” said Brittany Burrell, the wife of Daniel, who works for Duke Energy. “Patience, flexibility and community make a big difference.”
3. **Take time for yourself.** Marilyn Shepler said she connects with other line wives on social media and goes out to lunch with friends and family.
4. **Keep the faith.** Shepler also gains support from her church family and keeps close to God by reading the Bible or a devotional and praying.
5. **Stay strong.** There will be times when line wives have to be both the mother and father to their children when their spouses are away on storm duty or responding to emergencies, said LaCosta Diggs, married to Michael. “I have a great pride and respect for what the men and women of the industry do daily,” she said.



Brittany Burrell's daughter watches her dad compete at the Lineman's Rodeo along with the children of the other teammates.
Brittany Burrell

"The money is good, and I'm grateful — it has provided a wonderful life for our family," Swayne said. "But we had a vacation end early, and there have been countless kids' sporting events, Easter and Christmases when Tom wasn't here. I was certain that he was going to miss the birth of our first grandchild because he was doing hurricane restoration in Florida, but thankfully, he made it home just in time."

Marilyn Shepler has been married for 41 years to her husband, William, who spent four years in the power plant, four years in the line department and 34 years in the trouble department for Tampa Electric in Florida. During his career, he has responded to car-pole accidents, turned off power to customers and businesses for non-payment, performed cut-outs, replaced transformers and restored power following ice storms and hurricanes. In the beginning of their marriage, Shepler remembers crying and being worried, tired, angry and lonely when he went away on storms, and grateful when he came back home.

Life as a line wife has its ups and downs, she said. For example, she remembers taking her kids to practice and school sports by herself, going to weddings and parties without him and not having him home for birthday celebrations.

"He has worked so hard so I could stay home and raise our kids, but I have spent a lot of time alone," she said. "When we have him, it makes those times special. I'm grateful for the life we've had and thankful that he has made it through this life safely."



The days are long and the nights are lonely as a line wife, Diggs said. Her husband has been a lineman for 35 years and spent 27 of those years working for Jackson Energy Authority in Jackson, Tennessee, as an apprentice, lineman, lead lineman and apprentice trainer. They moved to the Middle Tennessee area in 2019, and he began working as a lineman for Middle Tennessee Electric to build and maintain power lines.

While he's away on storm duty, she has realized that she must be the strong one for her children because their father was already at work and doing his job. She said he couldn't be home for special occasions, like senior recognition ceremonies or sporting events, or support them as much as he wanted, but over the years, she realized it's part of the job.

"He has a demanding job that kept him away sometimes, but I am very proud of the work he does, and I would never want it any other way," she said. "As a wife, I worry, but as a line wife, it makes me proud just knowing that he is making a difference when it truly matters the most," she said.

Spotlight on Safety

While many spouses travel for work, leaving their families home to hold down the fort, the line trade is in a league of its own. For example, lineworkers can be called out in the middle of the night and on weekends and be away from home for days, weeks or even months at a time to restore power.



La Costa Diggs, shown with her family, has both a son and husband who both work in the line trade. La Costa Diggs



Line wives support their beloved lineworkers, who work in severe conditions around the clock to keep the lights on for their communities.

Sometimes line wives stay at home while their spouses travel for storm work, while others raise their families on the road.

Either way, they often worry about their husbands getting hurt or electrocuted on the job — or worse, Swayne said. For example, when she was a young line wife, she remembers having a foreman show up at her door. “I was absolutely panicked,” Swayne said. “It turned out that a wooden snatch block had fallen and hit Tom on the head, which he had to have stapled back together.”

At other times, her heart has skipped a beat worrying about her husband after listening to his stories about working in the field. For example, one time, he fed his lunch to hungry dogs while working in downtown Detroit, and when he worked in the Florida swamps during hurricane restoration, he sent her pictures of huge copperhead snakes. One incident, however, clearly stands out in her memory.

“Tom was held up at gunpoint as he was trying to turn the power back on in a man’s backyard,” she remembered. “He was ordered down from the pole, and he had a loaded gun held to his head. The SWAT team arrived, and the man eventually surrendered the gun and let Tom go.”

As everyone in the line trade is aware, electrical lineworkers often rank in the top 10 most dangerous jobs in America. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, they have a fatality rate of 18.4 to 20.9 deaths per 100 full-time workers.

SUPPORTING LINE FAMILIES: WAYS TO GET HELP

When a line family experiences the loss of a loved one, they can turn to not only their friends and family, but also special assistance groups, which can help support them in their time of need.

- **National Sisterhood United for Journeymen Linemen (NSUJL):** This 501(c)(3) nonprofit helps families of fallen or injured IBEW and utility lineworkers. They provide direct financial help, pay for therapy, and assist with mortgage or car payments.
- **Line Brother’s Keeper:** Founded by an injured lineman, this organization provides emergency financial, emotional, and physical help. They aid anyone from apprentices to journeymen. Find out more or request support at Line Brother’s Keeper.
- **Fallen Linemen Organization:** This nonprofit memorializes fallen workers and helps the families impacted by severe injuries. They also track accident data to promote safer work practices.
- **Fallen Linemen Foundation:** This group supports injured linemen, their families, and burn care facilities.

CONNECTING ONLINE: SOCIAL MEDIA GROUPS FOR LINE WIVES

Lineworkers' spouses have been connecting for decades on social media platforms to share advice, resources and support. For example, tags on social media include #linewife, #linemanwife, #LineWivesofInstagram, #ProudLineWife and #StormWife among countless others. For those line wives looking for camaraderie and support, the following are just a few of the many available to join as either public or private forums.

- **Linewife:** With 1.8K followers on Facebook, this group offers support, inspirational quotes and line wife merchandise to wives and girlfriends of lineworkers.
- **Powerline Wives:** This private group with 2.4K followers is a sisterhood for women who live the life of a power lineman's wife.
- **Lineman Wife:** Available on Instagram with more than 245 reels, this group was started on Instagram by a line wife after experiencing the

realities of lineman family life firsthand.

- **Line Wives:** With 2.8K members, this private group on Facebook is a place to share pictures and stories and express worries about a lineworker spouse.
- **Lineman Wives:** Designed for wives, girlfriends and mothers who love a lineman.
- **IBEW Tramp Wives:** A place where the wives of IBEW journeymen wiremen and linemen on the road can vent, give advice and have other people to talk to who are living with their husbands on the road or traveling the country with their "tramp."
- **Line Wife Buy and Sell:** This group is designed to support line wife-owned businesses.
- **Line Wife Tribe:** This Instagram page sells apparel and merchandise to celebrate the line life.
- **Linetok Wives:** described as a "travel SAHM line life clique who love tramping, friendship and fun."



Heath Burrell and his wife, Brittany, had the opportunity to celebrate Rodeo wins at the 2025 International Lineman's Rodeo.

Over the four decades, Swayne has attended many lineman's funerals, which she said is heartbreaking. One of the hardest experiences, however, was when her best friend and maid of honor in her wedding lost her husband in a job-site incident when he was just 33 years old, leaving her behind with two small children.

Keeping in Close Contact

Lineworkers often work long hours in severe weather conditions and are away from their families for lengthy storm restorations. Oftentimes, they work in remote locations with little to no cell phone coverage or way to contact their loved ones, which was even more challenging years ago. For example, when her husband first started his apprenticeship in the 1980s, before cell phones were widely available, Swayne remembers waiting for her landline to ring.

"The early days were really difficult, and it would break my heart when I'd miss a call," she said. "Fortunately, with cell phones today, it's much easier to stay in touch."

Diggs said when her husband goes out on storm, he reaches out when he can. When he doesn't have any cell phone coverage, he radios the control center, which reaches out to her by landline to reassure her that everything is okay. Burrell said during a regular storm, she usually tries to talk to her husband for a few minutes each night. "Sometimes communication is limited, so we do the best we can," she said. "Even a short conversation helps us to stay connected."

To connect with other line wives, many turn to social media, where special groups are active across all the platforms. For example, line families have access to Facebook groups, Instagram communities, YouTube channels and other online networks, which can be a great source of support, Burrell said. For example, during Hurricane Helene, she connected with another line wife through Facebook, and they were able to help with laundry and prepare meals for the lineworkers..

“There is a huge sense of community among line wives and line families,” Burrell said. “It helps us give back, stay connected and support one another when the job pulls our spouses away.”

Beyond line wives personally connecting on social media, some have launched official groups to coordinate assistance. For example, one public Facebook group with more than 50.5K followers is titled, “Feed Linemen: Tell Us Where You Are So We Can Bring You Food and Water.” This group, started five years ago, connects lineworkers on storm duty with resources. For example, the group has posted a list of supplies requested by lineworkers as well as their need for sleeping accommodations, hot meals and help with laundry services during storm response.

“I started this group because I read comments about linemen not being able to find food,” the founder of the group stated. “They are working hard to get our communities up and running. If you find linemen on your street, bring them water and snacks — random acts of kindness!”

Line families also help out each other when their loved ones are away for extended periods of time. For example, Diggs said her husband spent a month last summer in Guatemala running power to two villages, and his coworkers back home were very supportive. For example, they offered to mow the grass or do anything she needed in his absence. “We mainly stay in touch by having each other’s phone numbers,” she said. “We know that no request is too small or large for someone to come and help with. It’s more like family than coworkers.”

Coming Together

In addition to supporting their loved ones and fellow lineworkers during storm response, line families can also come together during the International Lineman’s Rodeo Week. For more than 40 years, lineworkers have competed in events like the pole climb and hurtman rescue with their wives, husbands, kids, parents and grandparents supporting them from the sidelines.

Burrell said seeing her husband compete in the Rodeo is one of the most memorable parts of being a line wife. Not only is it a fun time, but it also gives her

a better understanding of what he does every day and has helped them to build a community with other line families. She said seeing him in that environment makes her very proud.

Diggs agreed, saying her husband has competed in several local, regional and international Rodeos throughout his career. They have traveled to many different locations for him to compete, and along the way, they have made lots of new friends. “Just watching him being proud of the job he does is worth it,” she said. “We have met so many amazing people over the years, and I wouldn’t trade that for anything.”

Diggs said Michael has competed in every Tennessee Valley Rodeo since its beginning in 1998. One Rodeo, however, stood out in her mind — when her husband competed in the Tennessee Valley just two months and 10 days after having major brain surgery. “To say that I’m proud is somewhat of an understatement,” she said. “Michael has competed in the Rodeos since they began, and he loves it.”

Michael has served as chairman of the safety committee and instructor for the hurtman, bucket truck and self-repel rescue at the Tennessee Valley Rodeo. He has also competed in the American Public Power Association (APPA) Lineman’s Rodeo for 15 years and volunteered to serve as a master judge at the Kentucky Lineman’s Rodeo for the past nine years. Her family also traveled from Tennessee to Kansas for the

International Lineman’s Rodeo Week, where he placed as an apprentice in 1998, 1999 and 2000 and later a senior team in 2022, 2023 and 2024.

“He and our son also competed together in the contractor division, placing sixth overall,” he said. “They missed walking the stage by 23 seconds.”

Swayne said there is so much pride to watch them in their element. “I think the Rodeo is wonderful because families get to really see what these men and women endure, and what a true skilled trade line work is,” she said.

At the same time, however, she said the hurtman rescue is the one event that hits her hard whenever she is on the Rodeo grounds. “Knowing that they’ve had to literally save a fellow lineworker who may have been electrocuted or even caught fire on the pole or in the bucket — that’s very sobering to think about,” she said.

She encourages other line wives to stay strong and be proud to be a “line wife.” “I can’t imagine it any other way, and again, I am so grateful to be the ‘power behind the power,’” Swayne said. **TDW**

EDITOR’S NOTE: To celebrate line wives and all they do to support their beloved lineworkers, we will be giving away free temporary tattoos, designed by Nikki Chandler’s daughter, Grace, at the 2026 International Lineman’s Rodeo in Kansas City. Swing by the *T&D World* booth to also get your copy of the Lineworker Supplement and participate in a recording for a future episode of the *T&D World* Line Life Podcast, available at linelife.podbean.com.

LINE LIFE LISTENS: A MUSICAL TRIBUTE TO LINE WIVES

Music is the soundtrack of our lives, and we at *T&D World* wanted to share our love of melodies with our field audience. Since April 2026, we have released special musical playlists for our *T&D World* Line Life Podcast listeners for our “Line Life Listens” series.

In July, we aired a playlist dedicated to line wives, including a blend of inspirational and empowering songs and sentimental love tunes. Check it out at tdworld.com/electric-utility-operations.

If there are any songs you’d like to add to this playlist or if you want to share one of your own for Line Life Listens, email Amy Fischbach at afischbach@endeavorb2b.com.

Here are just a few of the songs on the special playlist for line wives:

- “Wife of a Lineman” by Chris Blaney
- “She’s Got His Back” by Thomas Martinez
- “Superwoman” by Alicia Keys
- “Better Together” by Jack Johnson
- “Fearless” by Taylor Swift



LINE

Training in the Trade

After working on the line, journeymen are preparing the next generation of lineworkers for a career in the trade.

By **AMY FISCHBACH**

About 45% of lineworkers will be eligible to retire within the next decade, according to the *2025 State of Power Line Jobs* by Lineman Central. This retirement wave, compounded by the demand for power and grid modernization, is fueling a skilled labor shortage. This year alone, 21,800 jobs are open for lineworkers, and the demand is expected to climb by 8.5 % in the next two years. A “Silver Tsunami” is hitting the line trade with Baby Boomer journeymen lineworkers walking out the door with three or four decades of experience, said Max Fuentes, a retired field supervisor, former training instructor for Northwest Lineman College, founder of Trade Tech, and owner of Fuentes Consulting.

Training to work on the line, however, often takes thousands of hours of on-the-job training and classroom instruction. As a result, electric utilities are investing more in training and education, and pre-apprentice schools are helping aspiring lineworkers to hit the ground running in their apprenticeship programs.

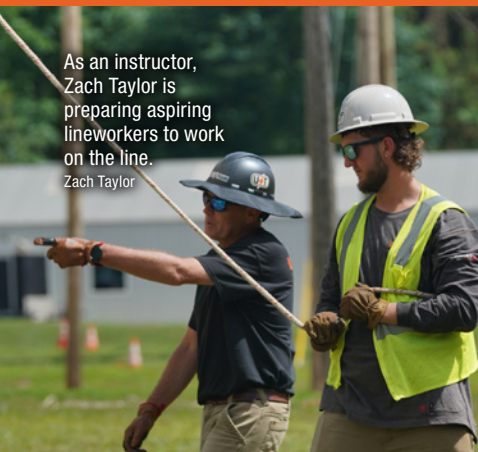
“The opportunities in our industry are wide open for anyone willing to chase their dreams,” said James Alexander, senior technical trainer for Orlando Utilities Commission (OUC). “The power industry is in extreme need of willing and competent individuals to lead us into the next generation for our industry.”

Alexander started in his apprenticeship program 30 years ago and now he’s preparing others for a career in the line trade. He said he loves working as an instructor and inspiring and training future lineworkers. “I feel our industry’s future depends on what we, the older guys, pass on and put into the apprentice programs across the country,” he said.

With more lineworkers nearing retirement, line instructors are shaping America’s future field workforce. Here are stories of four line instructors who started out their careers in the field and are now helping to train aspiring lineworkers to power their communities.

Zach Taylor: From the Field to the Training Yard

Zach Taylor, whose father worked in the line trade for 35 years, spent his career on the line before transitioning to work as a trainer for Utilitrain in Elkton, Maryland. The opportunities for



As an instructor, Zach Taylor is preparing aspiring lineworkers to work on the line.
Zach Taylor

today's students are growing faster than ever with aging infrastructure and advances in technology that require updates to the systems, he said. "I try to inspire students by explaining to them that this trade is not easy, but it can be extremely rewarding — from the lifelong friends you make on the road to restoring power after a big storm."

In 2004, Taylor wrapped up his four-year apprenticeship, and he said he wouldn't change a thing. For him, it was the right blend of classroom training along with field work to prepare him for the long days and nights that followed. "For me, the first few weeks were a bit intimidating, but then I realized that all the time spent in the field prepared me for training the next generation of linemen," he said. "I try to keep it pretty much the same as when I was learning because all the old guys who trained me were great trainers."

One of the most challenging parts of training today's students is explaining to students with no background knowledge of the trade all the career paths available to them: transmission, distribution, overhead and underground. He said that all the advances in equipment and technology make some tasks that used to be extremely difficult much easier today. "Technology is such a big part of everyone's lives that if the classroom and training yard don't have the latest advances in technology, you risk falling behind the times," he said.

Tools to the Training Center: Jason Mastin of Duke Energy

Jason Mastin launched his career in the trades as a journeyman electrician when a close friend inspired him to apply to Duke Energy Florida. While he was skeptical about starting over, it was the best decision

he has made for his career, said Mastin, manager, PGO technical training.

He started out as a groundman in the line distribution department, where he worked his way to journeyman lineman after completing the apprenticeship, which typically takes about four-and-a-half to five years. He said it was a definite transition from going to the field to the training department.

"You have to adjust from outside on the go, working long hours, to a slower, more scheduled pace," he said. "I still miss being in my tools and working with the crew from time to time."

Since he first started in the trade, he said technology has transformed line work with more computer-based training and programs. Tools have also been improved, which has made the work a little easier for the lineworkers, he said. The biggest difference, however, is generational in that not as many young people grew up the way he and others did. "Some of the life skills and experience working outside prior to coming into the program have changed considerably. It just takes a little more time getting them adjusted with one-on-one time."

He said each learner can be different when it comes to teaching them basic line skills, including how to climb a pole for the first time. "Some take to it like a squirrel, while others need that one-on-one time to help understand the fundamentals."

The introduction of the Buck Squeeze from Buckingham Manufacturing has changed the way he and the other instructors teach, he said. For example, when he started in the trade, he and the other lineworkers free-climbed without a device holding them to the pole while ascending and descending. "We only held on with our hands," he said. "Most of the students today say they wouldn't make it if they had to climb that way."

While scaling the poles or learning other skills of the trade, they learn that safety is the priority, and they must work safely not only for themselves, but also for their families and coworkers. "I try to help them understand that the craftsmanship of their work is a direct reflection of them. I also show them how what they do impacts their community — good or bad."

To provide real-life training to the students, Duke Energy also conducts



Jason Mastin started out in the trades as an electrician before shifting to line work, topping out as a journeyman and moving into the training department at Duke Energy in Florida.
Jason Mastin

energized training. Recently, the utility launched a new system that puts primary voltage on the line without the risk of electrocution. The technology is also making its way into the classroom as the students no longer use books. Instead, everything is on a tablet, and they can look up their training on the company's SharePoint.

This technology is helping lineworkers to expedite outage restoration and improve power reliability for the customer. He said the sky is the limit for the future of today's students.

Bill White: Moving from the Electrical Trade to Line Work

Another electrician who moved into line work and the world of training is Bill White, an instructor for Lineman Institute of the North East (L.I.N.E.) in Kingston, New York. He was the first one in his family or friend group to be a lineworker. He started out his career as an electrician, so most of his interactions with lineworkers involved house services.

"To be honest, I don't think I had a complete picture of what a lineman did," he said. "I came off the street into the local utility in my area, and the training had a real 'Boot Camp' feel to it. It was — you can do it, or there's the door. This was also still in the days when linemen free-climbed, and that sent a lot of guys walking. I quickly started to question what I had gotten into. I could tell right away that this was unlike anything I had done before."

When he topped out as a journeyman, however, he became an instructor for his company's apprenticeship program, so he was accustomed to training lineworkers. Once he started full-time at the pre-apprenticeship school, however, it became his sole function. Today, he spends most



In the classroom, Bill White explains transformer bank wiring to his students. Bill White

of his time with his students reviewing fundamental skills used in the line trade.

For example, for the first few weeks, he and the other instructors focus on proper climbing form, so the students learn how to climb the poles with locked legs, trust their equipment and adjust fall restraint belts. In many cases, students can get over-reliant on fall protection and get away from proper technique. “We know if properly adjusted, students won’t fall to the ground, and a lot of them will develop bad climbing habits that they can get away with for a time,” he said. “I’ve often heard students say, ‘I only cut out once today.’ The point is not to cut out at all, so we need to constantly reinforce proper form.”

To drive this point home, L.I.N.E. has a free climb pole with a harness and tether in the training yard. That way, the pre-apprentices can get a feel for relying only on their technique to keep them on the pole. By learning how to climb a pole before they start an apprenticeship program, it puts his students ahead of the game.

“They come in with a basic foundation in line work,” he said. “They have a long way to go for sure, but they can essentially be put to work on day one.”

At L.I.N.E., the instructors take a real-world approach by limiting the classroom time to explanations of the electrical system, theory and transformers. They then introduce bigger concepts in the field they may not be able to do on the property, like helicopter transmission work. The bulk of their time is spent in the training yard.

“Most students are hands-on learners, and so is this trade,” he said. “At L.I.N.E. we want them setting poles, running wire, hanging transformers and secondaries

— because that’s the job. Taking the time to introduce and understand concepts is necessary, but eight hours in a classroom to us, is not realistic.”

He said there are tremendous opportunities in the power industry. As such, the instructors push students to take every part of the course seriously and realize that resumes, interviews, applications and follow-up are all instrumental parts of landing a job in the line trade.

“To be able to secure a career that has steady work and pays well is huge in today’s world,” he said. “We always explain that there are many rewarding careers at any utility, not just overhead line. It is also a competitive market.”

He said the line trade is unlike any other, and a lineworker’s personal safety and the safety of brothers and sisters in the trade is paramount.

“The skills you learn and eventually master are a huge part of this,” he said. “We have to be on top of our students to understand this. Something as simple as tying a knot can make the difference between going home at the end of a shift or getting yourself or someone else injured. We want them not just to learn these skills because it’s part of the program, but to understand the importance of them in everyday work on the line.”

These skills could also be the deciding factor in landing a job, he said.

“If you come out of a school like ours, go to an orientation and climb with say, bent knees or can’t tie a knot, it’s not going to look good to say the least,” he said.

Pre-apprenticeship schools provide a great opportunity for lineworkers to pass on their knowledge and experience to the next generation, he said. He said they have definitely changed the industry and provide benefits to both unions and utilities.

“The more of our graduates who enter the field, the more companies come to us with positive feedback,” he said.

He said it is very rewarding to transition from a lineworker to an instructor in the line trade. “There are very few things like watching a student with fear in their eyes on day one, helping them through the program, graduating with confidence and then getting a call that they landed a job.”

White said one of the biggest challenges for line instructors is to get students to

understand that the line trade is unlike any other on the planet.

“It is not just a job, but a lifestyle,” he said. “Nobody has to deal with the danger, the hours, and the weather like linemen. Many students don’t realize how challenging this trade can be, especially when they are first starting out.”

One of the best ways he and the other instructors have discovered how to deal with this issue is to push the students through one day at a time.

“You also need to remind them of their progress — from day one, when they can barely take a step up the pole, to day two or three when they’re at the top,” he said. “As the days go on, if you can remind them of their progress, it helps to build confidence.”

James Alexander: Instructing Apprentices in Florida

Alexander’s cousins and family friends worked in the line trade, and they introduced him to the industry. In 1996, he started in the apprenticeship program, which at the time lasted for eight to 10 years and focused on overhead, underground, transmission and trouble work. Because OUC needed journeymen, he was fortunate to test early and topped out in seven-and-a-half years.

Now with OUC in Florida, he can train other lineworkers and gain computer skills. When he first started in the training department, he said the computer work was extremely intimidating, but because OUC has a good ratio of classroom and field work, he was able to quickly adjust.

For example, Altec teamed up with a tech company and is building the software around their products and controls, and OUC is getting realistic simulators that align with the needs of line work.

“There have been huge advancements in the world of training, such as AI and VR,” he said. “I don’t think anything beats real-world experience; however, new technology is just about as good in some cases. We are hopeful this technology will allow us to create and monitor many real-life situations that we can provide to the students where otherwise they may not get in training.”

Along with teaching the apprentices about new technologies, however, they



James Alexander, senior technical trainer for Orlando Utilities Commission, speaks at the Florida Lineman Competition, hosted by the Florida Municipal Electric Association.

also instruct them on the hands-on skills of line work. While he said today's world is at your fingertips, learning the skills of line work is not an instantaneous process.

"We guide our students by working beside them and doing the tasks over and over again until they are comfortable and display proficiency in their work," he said.

Case in point: he and the other instructors teach the basics at ground level by allowing the students to develop trust in their equipment.

"Once the student trusts their tools, they are far more comfortable performing at heights," he said.

Josh Hanawalt: Training in Texas

For our final line instructor, we are moving from Orlando to the Hill Country of Texas, where Josh Hanawalt works as the technical training manager for Pedernales Electric Cooperative. Hanawalt, who was recently a guest on the T&D World Line Life Podcast, has been in the trade for 21 years and supports his cooperative's apprenticeship program, which is an 8,000-hour, four-year endeavor.

For the last three years, his cooperative has honored the top apprentices through an "Apprentice of the Year" program based on acts of service, scores on assessments, character and performance in the field.

"We have more than 150 apprentices enrolled at our cooperative, and the training is demanding, and there are a lot of character-building moments over the four years," he said. "We developed this award as a way to celebrate and recognize them."

For 2026, the cooperative selected Benjamin Kent as its top apprentice out of nine finalist apprentices, chosen from PEC's vast 8,100-sq-ft service territory.

"Typically, our apprentices come in ranging from 18 years old to 22 or 23, and Ben had a little more life experience," he said. "During the climbing school, he walked up to me and said, 'Man, this is going to be pretty tough.' I was like, 'You got this.' Here we are four years later, and during that time, he exuded a lot of integrity and passion about strengthening others he worked with. He had a real sense of purpose about him."

PEC established its apprenticeship program in 2012 and began partnering with Northwest Lineman College two years later to take a hands-on approach to training.

"Our instructors have a mantra of teaching others and not just telling them by demonstrating first and then evaluating them and following up," he said. "Everything is hands-on at eye level here. We have a really great facility that our board of directors and leadership have invested in heavily, and it's paying off dividends to where when people show up, they say, 'Wait. Is this just for practice?'"

PEC delivers non-energized training most of the time but can energize the yard for certain parts of line work training, which is crucial given the increased growth of Austin and heightened demand for power, he said. For example, PEC is looking at installing double the number of meters in the next five to 10 years that were installed during its entire more than 85 years in existence. When he first started at the cooperative two decades ago, PEC had about 150,000 to 200,000 meters and is now coming up on the 500,000-meter mark, he said.



Josh Hanawalt provides hands-on instruction in the training yard at PEC.

"Living here in Austin in this Hill Country area — everyone's moving here," he said. "I feel like there's a ton of growth of businesses that are moving this area, and they're demanding reliable, safe power from our linemen."

Oftentimes, customers don't realize how much they value having the power on until it's gone, he said. As a result, it's a necessary requirement for the instructors at PEC to be able to demonstrate their live-line skills in a controlled environment. When he was training as an apprentice at the cooperative, he didn't have the opportunity to experience the hands-on training, he said.

"It was kind of 'see it once and then try to replicate it,'" he said. "Here you show up for two weeks at a time within a year, if not more, to evaluate and assess where you're at within the program."

During the climbing portion of the program, apprentices learn how to get their feet underneath them, go up the pole and find their rhythm. "There's a process in which you start trusting your gear, and then the next thing you know, you're on the top of a 40-ft structure all the way up to 8,500 ft and beyond," he said.

During the first year, apprentices learn how to climb, and the second year, they focus on learning about the transformers and grounding and the foundational tools of the trade. During the third year, they gain a hot-line glove certification, and by the fourth year, they are trained on how to operate the system, handle system protection and then lead crews.

"We don't expect our apprentices to know everything, but it's important for them to have some humility, determination and be able to work well with others, especially in the worst of conditions when you're probably lacking sleep and not having the mental bandwidth and then having to go home and rinse and repeat."

He said he has enjoyed helping with PEC's in-house apprenticeship program for the last six years and working with the supporting staff at PEC.

"This is a brotherhood, and it gives you a sense of purpose at the end of the day to know you're part of something bigger," he said. "I'm blessed for the opportunity to be here and work with people like Ben every day." TDW

Storm Strategies

Supervisors share tips for line crews to restore power safely and swiftly following a severe storm.

By AMY FISCHBACH



Michael Daddio, underground lead crew leader for ComEd, remembers the ice storm of 2016 like it was yesterday. Three inches of snow and ice covered the roads, and the wind was so strong, a parked car blew off the road and slid into a ditch. After 35 years at his industry, he has seen it all — from tornadoes to blizzards — which can inflict heavy damage in his service territory.

“High winds can knock poles and lines down, and winter storms can build up ice on lines and equipment, which can cause damage,” said Daddio, who started his career as a meter reader and worked his way up to mentoring foremen and leading teams of lineworkers. “Sometimes the ice buildup on lines causes outages without there being clear damage when viewed from a distance.”

He said he is proud to work for ComEd, which has the top reliability in the nation and is fully committed to upholding safety and doing thorough, efficient work. “Not every company is as safety-driven as we are. It’s a pretty awesome feeling to be a part of that.”

Coordinating Storm Response in Illinois

A nearby utility focused on safety and efficiency in storm response is Ameren Illinois. Kevin Place, director of electric operations, spent 26 years in the industry, with 15 of those years as a lineman.

While he was a lineworker in New York, he responded to Hurricane Sandy, and it was an experience he’ll never forget. “This storm devastated entire communities and destroyed a significant amount of the infrastructure,” Place said. “It was amazing to see the communities come together to support one another.”

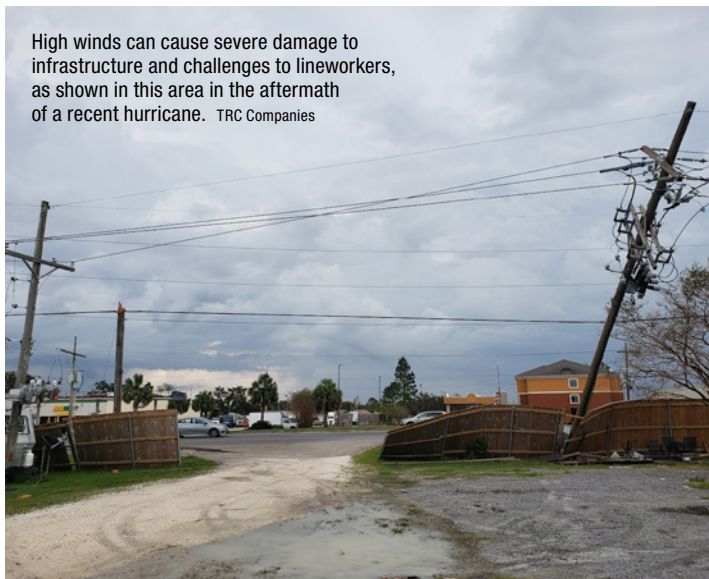
In his current role, he leads regional operations and oversees electric and engineering teams to ensure safe and reliable energy

delivery. He also drives operational efficiency through process optimization, budget oversight and labor relations management, along with fostering a culture of continuous improvement and community engagement aligned with Ameren’s mission.

In addition, he helps to coordinate storm response following significant wind damage caused by storms throughout the year. Following the high winds in his service territory, line and tree crews clear the roads and lineworkers replace the broken poles.

To ensure that all the team members with storm roles are ready for whatever weather comes their way, Ameren Illinois organizes a robust annual training. “We also have multiple storm trailers stocked and ready to mobilize when needed,” Place said.

High winds can cause severe damage to infrastructure and challenges to lineworkers, as shown in this area in the aftermath of a recent hurricane. TRC Companies





Lineworkers prioritize safety when responding to severe storms, such as back-to-back Hurricanes Helene and Milton.
TRC Companies

Focusing on Storm Safety and Service Nationwide

TRC Companies, which supports dozens of utilities and co-ops across the country, makes safety a top priority when it comes to storm response, said Chris Duncan, director of distribution operations for TRC in Ohio, who has been in the utility industry for 18 years.

“Storm response is dangerous work, and we want everyone to get home to their families safely, so we put an enormous focus on that in our internal training and in the preparation we do with utilities and co-ops,” Duncan said. “We’re proud to have a record of zero safety incidents for our storm response teams across the dozens of deployments with thousands of team members.”

Throughout his career, storm response has been a major focus, Duncan said. He currently oversees a large storm response team that supports dozens of utilities and co-ops across the country. “We have hundreds of storm response professionals who act as an extension of utility crews to perform damage assessments, restore service and strengthen infrastructure,” Duncan said. “Our teams have been deployed to nearly every major storm over the past several years. We have also done long-term recovery work in locations hit particularly hard by hurricanes, including Puerto Rico, western North Carolina and the Gulf Coast of Florida.”

Because TRC works with so many utilities and co-ops across a large geographic area, its lineworkers have responded to every kind of severe weather event, including hurricanes, tornadoes, winter storms and other unnamed storms that are strong enough to disrupt service.

The damage depends on the severity of the storm, he said. In some cases, there may only be minor damage across a small area. Due to the impact of wind, debris and uprooted trees, it may only require a short deployment with a small number of teams. On

the other hand, a severe event like Hurricanes Helene, Maria and Fiona may inflict much more damage across a larger area.

“In Puerto Rico, for example, many of our team members did months-long deployments helping residents regain service after those devastating hurricanes,” he said. “I’m incredibly proud of the work our teams do. In so many ways, they are on the front lines of helping communities recover from these disasters. And it is so rewarding to see the impact they have.”

One of the memorable recent storms, however, was Hurricane Milton in October 2024 for two reasons — it had a large deployment, and it came so soon after the large-scale Hurricane Helene response. “Hurricane Milton was an incredibly powerful storm that devastated the Gulf Coast with damage from the wind, storm surge and flooding,” he recalled. “The impact on the power grid was severe, and a large number of customers were without power for days.”

The Milton deployment came right after TRC had already deployed 132 storm responders for Helene recovery.

“Those teams had worked incredibly hard on a 16-day deployment there, and so many of them immediately volunteered to help with Milton,” he said. “It ended up being our largest deployment ever, with 152 storm responders supporting two utilities on the Gulf Coast. These deployments by our team are completely voluntary, and I am so proud of how many people stepped up, including those that had just done such tiring work for the Helene response.”

After responding to severe weather nationwide, both Daddio and Duncan offer their best practices and strategies for others so they can be prepared for anything that comes their way — even before a storm rolls into their service territory.

1. Be packed and ready to go. Daddio and the other lineworkers keep a three-day bag in their lockers. That way, if severe

The Mobile Command Vehicle eases storm restoration by providing workspace and connectivity to crews no matter where they are located.
ComEd



weather blows into their service territory, they can throw the bag in their bucket truck and be ready to hit the road for a long period of time. They also keep extra boots on their trucks just in case they get wet or snow-packed during storm restoration.

2. Practice performing storm repairs. The line crews at ComEd train for storms and emergencies, and they practice with a variety of simulated storm repairs on pieces of equipment commonly damaged from severe weather.

3. Conduct storm drills. At TRC, preparing for storm response is a year-round process. “The perception outside of the industry is that storm response is just for certain parts of the calendar, but we all know that it takes year-long planning and preparation,” Duncan said.

For example, TRC conducts extensive safety drills before teams are deployed, which allows them to react to real-world conditions for common and uncommon situations that exist in storm zones. In addition to internal training, TRC works closely with utilities to ensure there is alignment on safety processes.

4. Share safety best practices. In many cases, TRC’s best practices are more extensive because they respond to more storms than a smaller utility or co-op. In these situations, TRC takes on an advisory role to establish shared safety practices that can become organizational standard operating procedures.

“This kind of collaboration and sharing of best practices is one of the things I love about this industry,” Duncan said. “When storms happen, teams come together from across the country to help, and there is a true spirit of sharing and learning when it comes to safety.”

5. Partner with in-house storm response teams. TRC focuses on early planning with the utilities and co-ops that it supports by participating in planning and training with their in-house storm response teams. That way, they can ensure that they are aligned not only with deployment strategies, but also with technology.

“When teams come in from across the country to collaborate on a joint storm response effort, there can be coordination snafus and communication breakdowns that hinder the effort,”



Inside the storm trailer, a ComEd employee can perform her work, even in areas without power or cellular connectivity.



ComEd dispatched line crews to a storm restoration zone to help rebuild and repair infrastructure following a tornado.

Duncan said. “That’s why we put a big focus not only on advanced planning, but also using the same processes, systems, technologies and applications as each of our clients. It allows us to operate within their workflows, using their preferred equipment and materials, following their best practices and working seamlessly as an extension of their team.”

6. Set up pre-identified base camps.

ComEd has base camps located all around its service territory with large parking areas set up as rally points. Crews can set up storm trailers, park trucks and have increased staff report to these pre-assigned staging areas. Ameren Illinois also focuses on early communication and staging by discussing any additional resource requests ahead of any predicted major storms, Place said. “We have storm calls throughout the event to ensure we are moving resources where needed.”

7. Keep everyone on the same page.

When contractors come in to help, they must get onboarded to meet safety rules. In addition, they are required to learn the language used to talk to the dispatchers when they call into the operations control center.

“That’s what keeps us safe, and that’s our best practice because safety comes first,” Dadio said. “We want to turn everybody’s lights on as fast as possible, but if we don’t do it safely, then it’s for nothing.”

8. Invest in new tools and equipment.

ComEd crews pilot different tools to see if they are the right fit for their processes. For example, the lineworkers rely on a ST800 service tester to expedite restoration. If they arrive at a house that’s missing one of three legs of power, they can clip on to it while it’s energized and then go to the source, whether it’s a transformer or pedestal. They can then find the exact cable they’re on so they’re not dropping another customer to fix the first one, which saves a lot of time, he said.

9. Leverage the power of drones.

Daddio, a certified drone operator, said drones have become very helpful when it comes to storm inspection.

“I’m on the drone team, and on one of the storms this year, it was tough to find the damage causing an outage,” he said. “I flew the drone seven or eight miles down the line and found the issue after

RAPIDLY RESPONDING TO STORMS: COMED’S NEW MOBILE COMMAND VEHICLE

Over the years, ComEd has operated a fleet of storm response vehicles. The utility acquired its latest and most advanced vehicle — the Mobile Command Vehicle (MCV) — in December 2025 to replace a retired mobile command bus. This new vehicle cuts setup time from 90 minutes down to 10, saving valuable time in emergency response situations.

“It was designed to give restoration teams a modern, mobile operations center that can be deployed directly into storm-impacted areas,” said David Bunge, senior manager of emergency preparedness for ComEd. “By bringing communications, dispatching and restoration support closer to the work, the vehicle helps crews stay focused on restoring power safely and efficiently.”

The MCV serves as a centralized operations hub in the field and provides crews localized access to maps, outage tickets and safety information. Restoration teams can receive work assignments, coordinate response efforts and communicate with crews from a single location. With built-in power generation and space for 14 workstations, the MCV can support restoration operations for up to three days without external power.

While the processes that the vehicle supports are standard, the major benefit is the efficiency and local crew oversight that it enables. Crews can receive work packages and job detail on site near the power outages instead of driving to the closest ComEd reporting center. This is beneficial to customers since it speeds restoration and increases work efficiency.

“Having storm response resources out in the field, closer to the damage helps streamline restoration operations and

supports safe, efficient decision-making during major events,” Bunge said.

Following an EF3 tornado in Kankakee County on March 10, 2026, ComEd deployed the MCV during restoration efforts, and it provided a field-based command center. Restoration teams coordinated response activities, conducted damage assessment, accessed outage information and supported crews working in the affected area.

“The Mobile Command Vehicle helped bring critical resources and dispatchers closer to where the work was taking place, which makes communication processes even more efficient when every moment is critical,” Bunge said.

Reliable communications are essential during storm restoration, so we designed the MCV to have triple redundancy for cellular connectivity, with AT&T, Verizon and Starlink, so if any one of those systems goes down, another will pick up the connection. The vehicle also has built-in power generation, allowing crews to work in shifts uninterrupted for up to three days. That allows restoration teams to remain connected and continue coordinating response efforts even when local infrastructure is impacted.

“The MCV will continue supporting storm restoration efforts, emergency response activities, training exercises and special events,” Bunge said. “It is designed to provide flexible command-and-control capabilities wherever they are needed, helping ComEd coordinate response efforts and restore service safely and efficiently. It can also be taken on mutual assistance to support when ComEd crews are requested to help restore damage following storms in other states or regions of the country.”

zooming in on the porcelains on certain poles. The cameras on our drones are incredible, and the zoom capability really helps to get a visual on equipment to see any abnormalities that would not otherwise be possible to see very easily.”

Place said Ameren Illinois also flies drones out following storms. The drone operators film footage of the impacted

area to assess damage so the line crews can prioritize repairs and expedite restoration.

10. Assign a point of contact during storm response. At ComEd, a foreman or lead crew leader serves as a point of contact and knows where all the crews are situated during a storm response.

For TRC, one of their best practices is a safety-first model for team



ComEd crews replace a utility pole in the aftermath of a tornado. ComEd

structure. For example, each crew has a highly experienced senior assessor who takes the lead on site assessment and remediation work. This person is paired with a driver who has significant safety responsibilities, not only while driving, but also when the assessor is out of the vehicle.

11. Infuse technology into the trucks. Most crews at ComEd have been upgraded to trucks with built-in computer systems so they can access maps and receive tickets and updates on the road. As a result, they can stay in constant contact and communicate more efficiently.

“That helps since the faster we can be in our communication processes and getting crews to the right places, the faster we can make repairs and restore power to customers,” Daddio said.

12. Layer clothing for better protection. Since he first started in the trade, Daddio said the clothes for lineworkers have gotten more advanced.

For example, they now have different options for hot and cold weather. During the summer, when they are restoring power following a storm, they can wear lighter clothing that is still more comfortable than heavier garments, and in the winter, they can layer clothing to stay safe in frigid conditions.

13. Install smart devices in the field. Over the years, ComEd has invested in the grid by installing different pieces of equipment, like protective relay systems, which are all in communication to help to avoid, spot or restore outages.

“We have so much protective equipment on our overhead and underground

systems,” he said. “Most of our system is in a loop and sends constant communication so we can pinpoint where outages and issues are at.”

In the future, he expects even more automation and protection technology to be added to the system. For example, he said he’s like to see a way for equipment and lines to automatically de-energize when damaged.

“When a line goes down, it would be de-energized before it hits the ground,” he said. “That would be the ultimate goal so it wouldn’t hurt anybody and would be huge for public safety.”

14. Establish a mobile command vehicle. For ComEd, the main innovations it has used for storm response technology come through accessibility.

“Our newest mobile command vehicle can essentially do everything that our main operations control center can do, but it can be brought out into the field and help crews directly in the hardest hit areas,” he said. “Having dispatchers on site during storm restoration helps greatly with efficiency and communication as crews can get printed maps, outage tickets, weather updates and work assignments from a localized point.”

Ameren Illinois also has a mobile command center. “We can use it for heavy hit areas, so we are close to the work and need,” Place said.

15. Focus on quality of work, not just the speed of response. Duncan said one of the things he sees evolving in a positive way is the understanding that quality of work matters during storm response.



ComEd crews repair and replace several damaged poles after an EF3 tornado in Kankakee County.



Severe storms damaged electrical equipment in Kankakee County, Illinois. ComEd

“The most urgent goal is to restore service, but if it’s not done right, this could become a large safety concern or a costly fix later,” he said. “Minimizing the need for rework after a storm response can save a significant amount of money for utilities and co-ops, and early planning and standards-setting is the way to achieve that.”

Because having the right incentives is important, utilities should consider building their contracts not just around speed, but also around quality, he advised.

“When you combine that with early planning and standards-setting, you can dramatically reduce the need for rework and can also drive practices that increase resiliency for the next storm,” Duncan said. **T&W**



Luke Wollin, Ameren Illinois SVP of Operations and Technical Services, watches Lineworker Jodie Reinhart use a remote control to set a new power pole near Carlyle, Illinois, after high winds and severe weather knocked down several poles along a rural highway. Ameren Illinois

LOGISTICS AND SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT: KEY TO EFFICIENT POWER RESTORATION AT AMEREN ILLINOIS

By **BRIAN BRETSCH**, Ameren Illinois

In late June, a series of major storms swept through downstate Illinois over a two-week period, and Ameren Illinois crews, with the assistance of mutual assistance crews, restored power to homes and businesses. The weather events, including tornadoes, affected multiple counties in the mid-section of the state, with several communities experiencing significant damage. In all, more than 300,000 outages were restored during the events. Restoring power in the wake of widespread weather events requires advanced preparation and a well-executed logistical response plan. Ahead of the forecasted storms, Ameren Illinois staged storm material trailers in the north and east regions of its service territory, ensuring crews had immediate access to essential equipment, tools and materials. Throughout restoration, the utility replenished the inventory continuously to keep pace with the scale of damage.

In total, crews replaced more than 850 utility poles and miles of downed power lines. In some harder hit areas, such as Charleston, lineworkers had to literally rebuild sections of the electric grid. “Think of our storm trailers like a mobile warehouse,” said Merit Vanpelt, senior manager of Supply Chain Operations for Ameren Illinois. “This mobile fleet contains essential materials our crews need to get a large number of poles, structures, wire and hardware in the air in a relatively short period of time.”

Behind the scenes, the Ameren Illinois Material Distribution Facility crews support field-based teams by fulfilling material replenishment orders throughout the event. Strategic internal

processes enable continuous material availability in abundance statewide.

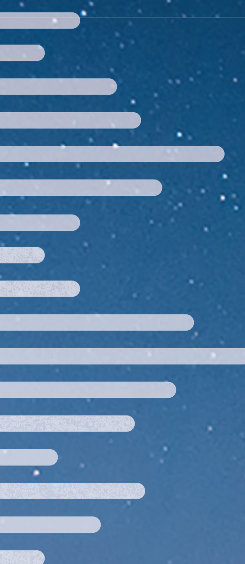
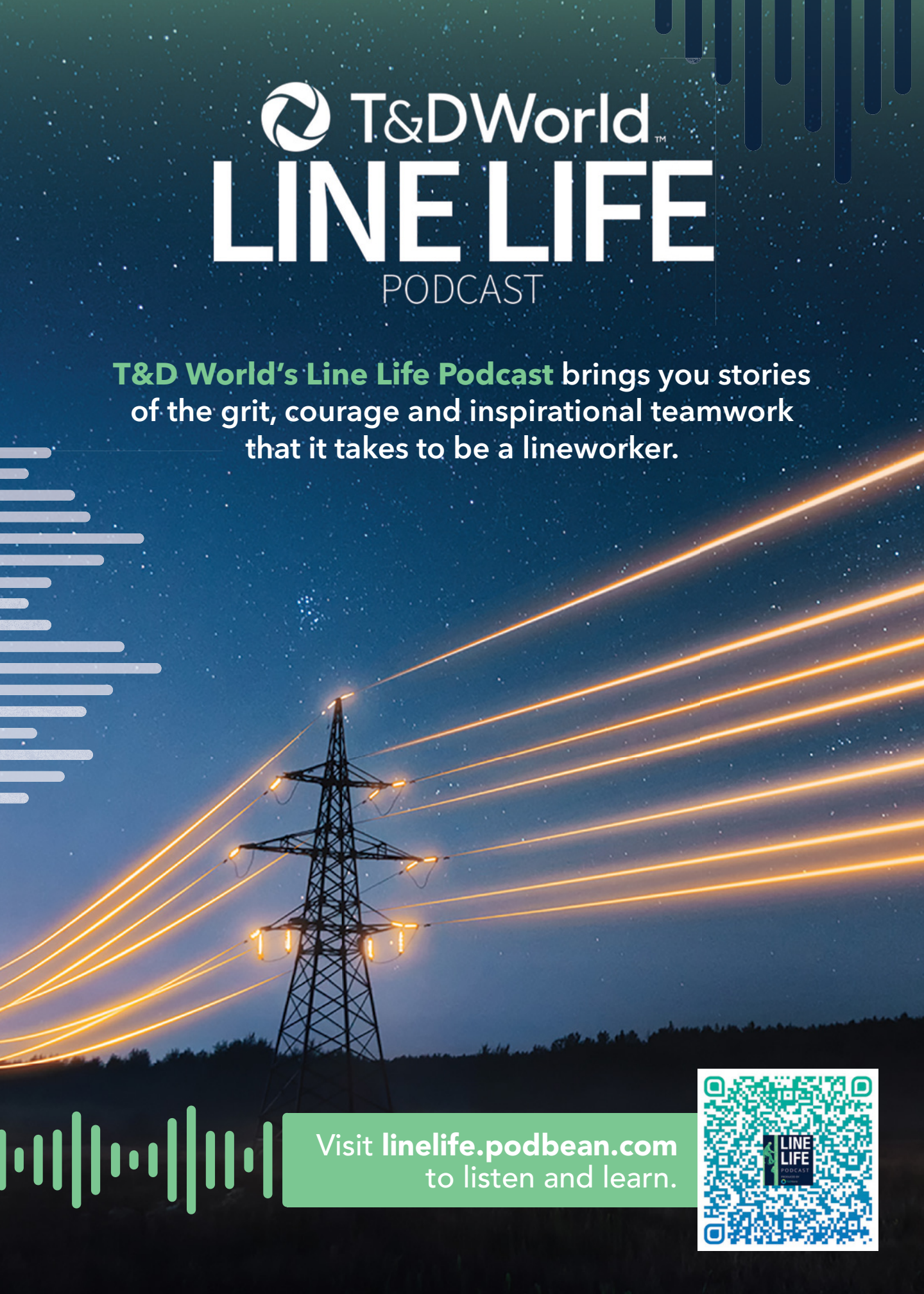
Strong partnerships with suppliers ensure just-in-time availability of critical materials. Most of the company’s wooden poles are sourced from Bridgewell Resources Utility & Construction Group in Bluford, Illinois, which maintains a continuous inventory of power poles dedicated to Ameren. As storm response efforts ramped up, Bridgewell coordinated pole shipments to affected areas.

When severe weather is forecast, Ameren Illinois activates not only its crews, but also its supply chain partners.

“When the company places crews and field support personnel on alert for a pending storm, pole distributors are contacted at the same time to be ready to roll shipments to assist in restoration efforts,” Vanpelt said. “In the event of a storm, we work with engineers and distribution design to assess how many poles are broken or damaged to make appropriate orders with Bridgewell.”

This coordinated approach — combining the Ameren Material Distribution Facility, pre-staged resources, mobile infrastructure and responsive supplier support — enables Ameren Illinois to quickly mobilize materials and personnel anywhere in its service territory, helping accelerate restoration while maintaining a strong focus on safety.

Logistical considerations even extend beyond hard materials, noted Steve Wolters, senior director of electric operations for Ameren Illinois. “We really have all the capabilities to manage the movement of people and product for a large-scale event,” he said.



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