



NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

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Statewide Magazine Profiles Local Electric Lineman

Glen Allen, Va. — Unless you happen to count an electric utility crew member among your family and friends, you may not have considered the realities of a career that involves keeping the lights on no matter what. “When Duty Calls, Linemen Answer,” the cover story for the August issue of *Cooperative Living* magazine, take a closer look at the day-to-day experiences of electric-line workers by profiling Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative (MEC) lineman Paul Underwood.

Published by the Virginia, Maryland and Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives (VMDAEC) for Virginia’s consumer-owned electric cooperatives, *Cooperative Living* is the largest-circulation magazine in the Commonwealth, with approximately 1.2 million readers.

Author Debbie Blue Winn, a public relations representative for MEC, starts the article with a hypothetical classified ad that describes the range of skills involved. “In addition to being physically demanding, the lineman’s job is mentally challenging and requires knowledge, skill and the ability to stay laser-focused on what he is doing,” Blue writes. “Line workers are in close proximity to anywhere from 7,200 to 14,400 volts of electricity, and must wear industry approved personal protective equipment even in 100-degree weather.”

Paul Underwood explains how good communication among members is an essential part of working safely. “Before we begin a job, we have a ‘tail-gate’ session to make sure everyone understands the plan and knows their role.” He continues, “And when we are working with energized lines, there’s no conversation going on among us about the ball game that was on TV last night, or where we want to go on vacation. We don’t want to be distracted from the job at hand.”

As you might expect, one of the most demanding aspects of a line worker’s job is being on duty round-the-clock when outages occur, along with the potential of interrupted plans. Paul recalls,
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“last December, I was hoping I wouldn’t be called into work on the day of my daughter’s first birthday party. I didn’t want to miss that special occasion!” He admits, “I have missed Thanksgiving dinner, the opening of Christmas presents, my wife’s birthday and other family gatherings because I was working outages.”

MEC President and CEO John C. Lee, Jr. is especially proud that the co-op’s lineman team of Paul and his co-workers Bad Clark and Jason McKinney earned the coveted Jimmy Gardener Award earlier this year for their top-scoring overall performance at VMDAEC’s Gaff-n-Go Rodeo.

“These men put their lives in each other’s hands every day,” notes Lee. “In doing so, they become far more than co-workers; they form an unbelievably strong bond.”

A lineman’s spouse and children must also be willing to make sacrifices. Paul’s wife Kendele says, “It continuously amazes me how he doesn’t mind having to leave in the middle of the night when its storming like crazy outdoors...he has a passion for helping others, and I really admire him.”

About MEC: Headquartered in Chase City, Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative is a member-owned electric-distribution utility serving more than 31,000 meters in 10 Southside Virginia counties. For more information about the cooperative, visit www.meckelec.org.

About *Cooperative Living*: Published for members of Virginia’s consumer-owned electric cooperatives, *Cooperative Living* is mailed to more than 496,000 addresses across the state, 10 times a year. For more information or to view issues online, visit www.co-opliving.com.

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