

Lineworker Pre-Apprenticeship Program

GENERATING ELECTRICITY AROUND A CAREER IN ELECTRICAL LINE WORK

Most of us take it for granted that our lights will come on with the flip of a switch. But who makes that happen, and what will we do if there is nobody keeping our electrical infrastructure maintained and repaired? Unless we are intentional about training the next generation of lineworkers, the possibility becomes more real that the lights could indeed go out.

The demand for electrical lineworkers is growing at a pace that far exceeds the number of graduates completing certification programs in North Carolina. Commerce projections indicate that the need and demand will steadily increase for years to come. In fact, the Carolinas Energy Workforce Consortium (CEWC) is projecting the need to hire roughly 1,300 lineworkers every year for the next five years in North Carolina. As experienced lineworkers retire, the reality that we may not have enough people to support our current power grid — let alone keep up with our growing population and energy demands — is alarming.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- Helps fill the growing demand for, and widening shortage of, certified electrical lineworkers
- Offers students an opportunity for a career that pays a livable wage and affords opportunity for advancement without college debt
- Provides career training options for students who want solid, hands-on careers but do not necessarily want a traditional college degree
- Demonstrates how communities and organizations can pool resources together to maximize benefits for everyone

While there is no single answer to the problem, one unique partnership has come together to create their part of a solution while giving local high school students a solid career option without college debt. Johnston County Public Schools, the Towns of Benson, Clayton, Selma, and Smithfield, and Electricities (a membership organization including public power communities in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia), with the assistance of NCWorks NextGen, developed a pre-apprenticeship program to help students develop their career potential during and after their senior year of high school.

While still in high school, participants receive 80 hours of relevant instruction on 10 Saturdays throughout the academic year. After graduation, a selected group of applicants (who meet the legal age requirement) participate in paid work experiences to complete their pre-apprentice hours and gain hands-on knowledge. All of these learners (those who completed the education hours only, as well as those who had on-the-job training) are then prepared to enter the workforce as groundsmen, giving them immediate potential to earn at least twice the minimum wage.

Further, they are then qualified to enroll as apprentices through the previously existing Electricities apprenticeship program. As participating apprentices in a state registered program, they can enroll in an electrical linework technology certificate program at a North Carolina Community College and have their tuition waived—and they will be better prepared to be successful in their coursework than their peers who are just learning about electrical work for the first time. Thus, in just 16 weeks and after successful completion of the program, students can enter the workforce as certified electrical lineworkers with a beginning salary in excess of \$50,000 and no college debt. As they progress through the remainder of the apprenticeship program and gain additional experience and training, their income potential quickly increases to the \$75,000 range and beyond.

Initially spearheaded by the Town of Benson with an idea and a generous in-kind grant, the other towns and Electricities pooled their physical and human resources to provide the backing necessary to enable the opportunity to be offered to Johnston County Public School students. They view their contributions as an investment in young people and their own communities, as well as a way to start a pipeline that will produce high-quality lineworkers who can help fill the growing demand in the field. Together, everyone involved is flipping a switch that will help us all keep the lights on for years to come.

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Town of Benson
919-894-3553

lineworkpays.com



PARTNERSHIPS



PROGRAM FUNDING

This program is made possible through the generous support of state and local partners. Partners came together under a cost sharing agreement to provide at least \$7,500 to cover 80 hours of instruction and curriculum. While the Town of Benson initially offered to provide use of a practice field and bucket truck, the Towns of Clayton, Selma, and Smithfield also joined in offering human resources and equipment.

- ElectriCities is providing instruction and materials as well as scholarships for individual student needs (boots, hard hats, etc.)
- ElectriCities and/or a Town(s) are also providing financial assistance so that program personnel from Nash Community College can instruct students, making the transition to higher education more seamless.
- NCWorks NextGen is assisting with paid student internships post-high school graduation.
- Career Development Coordinators at Johnston County schools help students with information and registration.
- Initial startup costs to replicate a similar program in another community are estimated at around \$15,000.

SKILLS ACQUIRED BY STUDENTS

- Safety (including basic safety, First Aid/CPR, fire extinguishers, and OSHA; later including more advanced safety topics such as pole top rescue)
- Introductory skills (tying knots, using hand lines with block and tackle, constructing basic lines at lower heights, and splicing wire; later including more advanced skills such as tool/equipment placement, using hand tools, using power tools, line/bucket truck operations, inventorying, and working at greater pole heights)
- Construction math and construction drawings
- Team building
- Work zones (including flagger certification, work zone safety equipment, and work zone protection)
- Electric power service theory (including connections, 3-Phase banks, transformers, switching procedures, troubleshooting, underground installation and service, and underground locator training)

ABOUT THE SERIES

Brought to you by the NCWorks Commission, the Spotlight on Local Workforce Innovations series showcases local innovations in collaborative, employer-led workforce development partnerships across our state. The series will highlight promising practices that can be replicated across North Carolina.

The NCWorks Commission is the state's Workforce Development Board. Led by a private sector chair, the 33-member, Governor-appointed commission includes representatives from the business community, heads of state workforce agencies, educators, and community leaders. The commission's mission is to ensure North Carolina has an innovative, effective workforce development system that meets the current and future needs of workers and businesses to achieve and sustain economic prosperity.