

ORCAS POWER & LIGHT COOPERATIVE

Main Office: 183 Mt. Baker Road, Eastsound, WA 98245-9413
(360) 376-3500 • Fax: (360) 376-3505 • www.opalco.com

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Orcas Power & Light Cooperative
Contact: Suzanne Olson
360-317-7203
solson@opalco.com

ORCAS POWER & LIGHT COOPERATIVE GRADUATES THREE LOCAL-GROWN APPRENTICES

6/27/2008: Four years and 8,000 plus hours on the job later, three of OPALCO's Apprentice Linemen: Kai Burleson from Lopez, Roger Sandwith from San Juan Island and Dan Watters on Orcas – all native islanders – are “topping out,” which is lineman lingo for completing the apprentice program and reaching the 100% mark on the union wage scale as Journeymen Linemen. In an era where apprenticeship opportunities are fast disappearing, OPALCO is committed to this time-tested tradition. OPALCO's Apprentice Committee, made up of six experienced linemen, three from management and three from the line crew, manage the rigorous program. Two other Journeymen Linemen, Jay Fowler and Kevin Zoerb, came through OPALCO's apprentice program, and Apprentice Lineman Sean Parsons is in his first year of the program with the crew in Friday Harbor.

Back in 2004 when these apprentice positions were advertised, more than one hundred applicants competed for the three spots. Once hired on, OPALCO's Journeymen Linemen mentor and train the Apprentices, alongside a prescribed progression of work experience and training. The first year the Apprentices got on-the-job training as ground men and took a correspondence course to prepare them for the next three years of the program. Years two through four included classroom time every other Saturday (November through May) at the Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee School in Seattle and five weeks spent with other apprentice linemen at Camp Rilea in Oregon. The first year of camp is climbing school (two weeks); year two is distribution hot-sticking school (two weeks) and year three, which they finished in May, is a week-long transmission hot-sticking school. Safety is a major focus throughout their training and all apprentices become certified in CPR, First Aid and pole-top rescue. General Foreman Steve Eyler was quick to point out that all three Apprentices were in the top five percent of their class in the program. “Our three guys consistently got top marks and evaluations,” said Eyler. “We're real proud of them.”

OPALCO recognized the tremendous dedication and achievement of the three graduates at a company BBQ and award ceremony on June 25th in Friday Harbor. Manager Randy Cornelius, a former Journeyman Lineman himself, presented them with bronze linemen statues and expressed his appreciation for their hard work and success. “You are the next generation,” said Cornelius, “and will be the backbone of OPALCO's line crew.”

Foreman Mark Cleary remarked on the exceptional quality of these three new Journeymen, “They came in with the attitude, aptitude and common sense that was needed – but what is amazing is how well they’ve done in all their classes, on the job and how well they fit in to the crew. They are all three skillful and ready to handle whatever comes their way.”

Meet OPALCO’s new Journeymen Linemen: the skilled tradesmen who will be out there in the middle of the night and during the storm to restore your power.



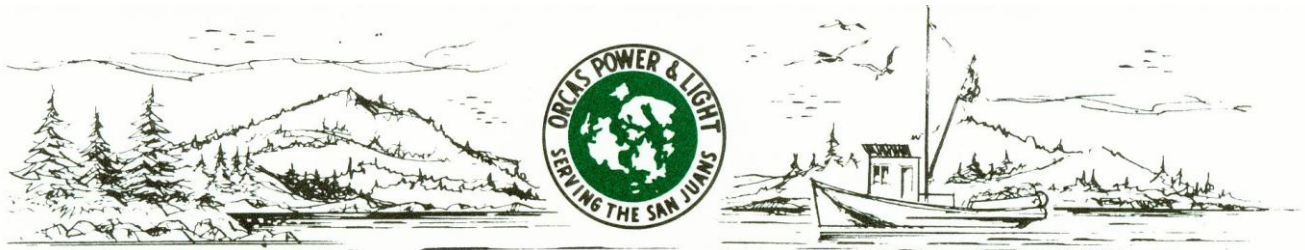
Kai Burleson loves his job. He grew up on Lopez Island and graduated from Lopez High School. After high school, he worked in Seattle as a boat rigger and detailer before coming back to Lopez to work as an electrician. As an electrician, he worked with OPALCO linemen on jobs and really admired what they did – the type of work, the variety of situations and their travel around the islands. When the apprentice positions opened up, he jumped at the opportunity. About his experience as an apprentice Kai said, “I loved going to school and found it really interesting. It was very helpful to be able to apply the learning every day at work.” Kai pointed out that Washington and Oregon are the only states where linemen still use hotsticks, a very specialized tool, to work with energized lines. Because of the training and skill set required to use hotsticks, most states have gone to linemen’s rubber gloving. The greatest challenge in the job for Kai is also what he likes most: every day he faces different problems to solve – each job is a new place, a new challenge. When not at work, or on “stand by” for outages, Kai likes to spend time with family and friends and is looking forward to getting his SCUBA certification.



Roger Sandwith was a commercial fisherman in Alaska and worked in wastewater management in Bellingham before returning to his home in Friday Harbor, where he was raised and graduated from Friday Harbor High School. He said wherever he worked, he noticed the linemen were always on top: “the best of the best,” and he decided to join them. Roger’s favorite part of the job is working with overhead lines. “I like to be able to see and be proud of what my brothers and I have built,” Roger said. “Overhead is the true art of the trade.” In addition to his busy schedule of work and training, Roger has competed in two Lineman Rodeos: the Andrew York Rodeo in Wenatchee where he competed in pole climbing events and a pole-top rescue exercise; and the Washington Hurt Man Rescue with Foreman Rex Guard. In the hurt man rescues, one lineman climbs a pole to rescue a dummy, then lowers him to the ground by hand lines with a partner. The pair administers CPR, trading off, until the time is up. Spending time with his wife and kids is Roger’s top priority when not working. Their nine-year-old son, Gunnar, is already climbing the pole in their backyard and practicing his line work. “Gunnar is all about being a lineman,” reported his proud father. Seven-month-old Finn probably won’t be far behind. Roger expressed his gratitude toward all of Journeyman he was able to work with and learn from.



Dan Watters is an OPALCO legacy lineman—his grandfather Jack Cadden was one of OPALCO’s early linemen, serving from 1949–1987. Jack recalled his own lineman training and said, “I showed up on the job one day and saw what they were doing, and the next day I was climbing poles.” He is impressed with Dan’s training and accomplishment and said, “We’re all real proud of Dan.” Dan grew up on Orcas and graduated from Orcas High School. He worked for Island Excavating for about six years and also studied diesel mechanics at Bellingham



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Tech. One aspect of the job that took some getting used to was getting up in the middle of night for outages – but the highlight of this first part of his career was toward the end of the 2006 snowstorm. “We’d been working 60-70 hours,” Dan explained. “It was grueling, but when we were done and knew most everyone on the island had power again – that felt pretty good.” Working with energized lines is also something Dan found a little unsettling at first. “The crew really mentored us, brought us along and ingrained good safety and work habits,” he said. “You just learn to work with it.” Outside of work, Dan collects old tractor engines and belongs to the Early Days Gas Engine and Tractor Association and the Puget Sound Antique Tractor and Machinery Association where he shows his restored engines.

All three graduates expressed their gratitude and appreciation to the many experienced Journeymen, Foremen and Managers – and to each other – for helping them along the way. “The OPALCO Journeymen put Apprentices first,” said Roger. “We were always treated with respect – it’s a mutual respect,” added Kai. “There wasn’t any one mentor who watched over us – everyone was a mentor. We had tremendous support.”

For the latest information about OPALCO, go to: www.opalco.com; sign up for our email newsletter (<http://www.opalco.com/about/email-signup/>); and follow us on Facebook (Orcas Power & Light Cooperative) and Twitter (@orcaspower). OPALCO is our member-owned cooperative, powering about 11,000 members on 20 islands in San Juan County since 1937.

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