

Mohawk Valley News

Clark Energy Center

NEW YORK POWER AUTHORITY COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER • SUMMER 2005

POWER LINE REPAIR CREWS THINK HIGHLY OF THEIR CRAFT

A dedicated group of New York Power Authority employees works very hard every year to perfect its own form of “high-wire act.”

But it's no circus. It's just the opposite. These men take their act very seriously, because their lives depend on it.

They are the people who repair and maintain NYPAs high-voltage transmission lines across the state. The Clark Energy Center (CEC) in Marcy is the Power Authority's training center and main base for the linemen, most of whom live in the Marcy-Utica area. Many are veterans of their craft, but NYPA also is training a new crop of apprentices to assure the crews' expertise for years to come.

The job requires a depth of knowledge that takes years to master.

“Everybody learns this job one step at a time,” said Andy Cline, transmission supervisor at the CEC. “Every line repair crew has apprentices on the ground to organize the tools and pass them up by rope to the people on the tower as needed.

“While they're doing that, the apprentices are constantly watching what the guys are doing on the tower, listening to the communications, and following along with the written work plan,” said Cline. By the first day of



Transmission Supervisor Andy Cline, right, confers with Bill Baldwin, crew chief, during a session in the transmission training yard at the Clark Energy Center.

actual work on a transmission tower, an apprentice has a good idea of what has to be done and how to do it safely.

When you're working as high as 150 feet off the ground, often tethered to the tower or even a ladder by only a belt, “safety first” becomes more than a catch phrase — it's a life line. And there is little room for wasted movement.

Why would anybody want a job that can be physically exhausting, must be performed high in the air and exposed to every kind of weather, requires years to learn, and where you place your safety in the hands of your fellow workers?

The answer is—all of the above.

“I like working outside. I love the outdoors. I couldn't stand being inside all day,” is the response heard most often.

“We do something different every day,” said Todd Jones, a first-year apprentice. “It's never boring. I like the challenge. This is good physical and mental work. It's where I want to be.”

What about the extremes in weather?

“You dress for it,” said Gregg Baker, a third-year apprentice, matter-of-factly.

“Sometimes, you just suffer,” laughed Tom Bartolomie, a 20-year veteran.

And what about the extreme heights?



Most people with a fear of heights are smart enough not to apply for the job. Given that, working on the tower is considered preferable.

“On the ground it's hot, there are black flies, and we're often in muddy or swampy areas,” Baker said. “It's better to be up high. Once you break the tree line and get into the wind, it's cooler and there are no bugs.”

All the linemen say they like the sense of teamwork that evolves when everyone depends on everybody else in getting a job done.

“Most of the time we're in remote locations, so we really rely on each other,” said veteran Mike Roberts. Most crews work together for years. They cite “job security” as another attraction, along with “pays well.”

All say there is a clear satisfaction in doing what others can't. The bottom line, said Mike Dolan, another veteran, is that “we take pride in what we do, and we do it well.”

Many linemen previously were laborers or security officers for the Power Authority, but the CEC crew includes a former hockey player and even a former state trooper.

Bartolomie, Roberts and the other veterans are “high-voltage hot stick linemen,” utility parlance for the highest-level of expertise.



Top: Maintenance crews lower transmission line insulators to replace damaged disks. Center left: Steve Palencar demonstrates use of hot stick. Center right: Tom Bartolomie, left, directs apprentices Gregg Baker, middle, and Todd Jones. Left: Bird's-eye view of insulators and hot sticks.

They qualify to work on the Power Authority's 765-kilovolt (kv) line, the largest power line in the state. It extends 155 miles from the Canadian border to the Marcy Substation at the CEC. There are only a few other 765-kv lines around the country. NYPA also has many miles of lower-voltage lines.

“Hot stick” also is utility-speak for the fiberglass pole used to perform many transmission line repairs. The poles can be as long as 28 feet. With them, linemen often must pierce tiny cotter keys that hold together insulators—sometimes from 20 feet away—while standing on a tower. The insulating fiberglass, with a voltage tester attached, also helps to assure an area is “dead” before work is done on de-energized lines.

The line repair season begins in May with “spring training” at the CEC. It's a refresher

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CALENDAR OF AREA EVENTS

Several events and festivals are scheduled for the region for late September:

SEPTEMBER 17-18

Taste of Rome Art & Cultural Festival, W. Dominick St., Rome

SEPTEMBER 24

NYPA Wildlife Festival, Deerfield Wilderness Park, Deerfield

SEPTEMBER 24-25

Head of The Erie Rowing Regatta, Erie Canal Rowing Club, Rome

SEPTEMBER 24-25

Remsen Barn Festival of the Arts, Remsen

Power Line Repair Crews

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course for the veterans to sharpen skills after a winter spent on other maintenance chores. It's also a time for trainees to qualify for the next-highest skill level.

The training yard at the CEC has 18 transmission towers and other structures for instruction and practice. "It's an excellent facility," said Cline, himself a veteran NYPA high-voltage hot stick lineman. "We built it ourselves. Not many other utilities have anything like it. In fact, other utilities have asked to use our yard to train their linemen."



After the spring refresher, the line crews hit the trail for points around the state, mostly north and as far west as Buffalo, for summer maintenance work that runs into late fall. "It's a lot of living out of suitcases," Cline said. The crews travel during the week, staying in hotels at night, and are back

home on weekends.

A large portion of the repair work is replacing insulators that have been struck by lightning or used for target practice by local residents. Occasionally the crews must replace power lines that are damaged by weather or wear. [u](#)

Wildlife Festival Set For September 24

There will be something for everyone at the Fourth Annual Wildlife Festival sponsored by the Power Authority on Saturday, Sept. 24, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at nearby Deerfield Wilderness Park in Deerfield. Admission is free.

Back by popular demand is Ft. Rickey's Children's Discovery Zoo with its cadre of baby animals for petting. Kids can also cuddle up to some lovable llamas from Crooked Brook Acres; be amazed by Cynthia Page Birds of Prey featuring falcons, eagles, owls and more;



or maybe opt for the more traditional pony rides, hayrides or face-painting.

Not to be left out, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, or anyone who's still a child at heart, will enjoy displays from the Utica Zoo and Adirondack Museum, as well as demonstrations in tomahawk throwing, archery, flyfishing and more.

Walt Sherber of Warlord Samoyed will be there with his beautiful dog sled team, while award winner Mike Tyoe will demonstrate wood carving—with a chain saw, no less. Representatives from the state's Department of Environmental Conservation will be on hand to answer wildlife questions. There will be a variety of hands-on activities, including arts and crafts, fly-tying, wood-carving and more.

1. "Kids" of all kinds have fun at petting zoo.
2. State Sen. Ray Meier takes aim at the archery range.
3. Up close and personal with exotic wildlife.



And of course there will be plenty to eat. So be sure to bring your appetite, and friends and neighbors, too, for a day that will be wildly memorable.

The festival is held on or around National Hunting and Fishing Day, the fourth Saturday in September. The Deerfield

Chamber of Commerce also is supporting the festival. For more information on this and other NYPA-sponsored free Wildlife Festivals visit www.nypa.gov.

Mohawk Valley News

Mohawk Valley News is produced periodically by the New York Power Authority to update our neighbors on activities at our Clark Energy Center in Marcy and as a community newsletter for residents around the Valley.

If you have comments or suggestions, please contact Carol Rodino, community relations manager, at 315-792-8511, or by email at carol.rodino@nypa.gov.

