

## HIGH VOLTAGE FUTURE: APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM LIGHTS A WAY FOR UTILITY WORKERS

San Isabel Electric Association is training the next generation of electric utility workers, providing good-paying jobs and an opportunity to serve the very communities they call home.

“This program isn’t just about building careers; it’s about keeping the talent and skills of our youth in our communities, and keeping families intact,” SIEA General Manager Ryan Elarton said. “Enabling individuals to work close to their families and friends ensures that the benefits of skilled employment aren’t just for the co-op and the community; they aren’t just economic but they’re deeply personal.”

In March, a class of four proved they have everything that it takes to do the important and sometimes dangerous work of keeping the electricity flowing. Lineworkers Billy Bloesser, Jesse Madril, and Matt Zagar, and Meter Shop Technician Devon Jensen are the latest to complete the co-op’s rigorous apprenticeship program. It’s no small task with 77 textbooks and tests, and more than 7,200 hours (about four years) of fieldwork. The final written test assesses their comprehensive knowledge and readiness for the field.

One distinctive aspect of SIEA’s apprenticeship program is the mentorship provided by seasoned colleagues, who boast more than a decade of experience. Jensen took the final exam two years into the program, his mentor said. He took it as a practice test to use to help him study, but passed it the first try. The mentorship approach not only imparts technical skills but also cultivates a deep sense of responsibility and camaraderie among the apprentices. It’s a passing of the torch from one generation of lineworkers to the next.

Unlike a traditional college or trade



▲ SIEA Lineworker Billy Bloesser



▲ SIEA Meter Shop Technician Devon Jensen



▲ SIEA Lineworker Jesse Madril



▲ SIEA Lineworker Matt Zagar

school route, SIEA’s program leaves students debt free when their education is complete. Apprentices earn a comfortable paycheck every step of the way; they gain valuable skills and build a secure financial future. By the time their training is complete, they’re not just certified journeymen — they’re also free of education-related debt and ready to hit the ground running as valuable assets to the company and their communities.

That’s what attracted the men to their trades: a way to better their financial future, and stay in the communities they were reared in. The apprentices all had friends or family members of friends who worked for SIEA and saw what a great company it is, and how well they were able to provide for themselves and their families. All four men got their foot in the door as tree trimmers, and when

apprenticeships opened up in the line of work they were interested in, they were hired.

SIEA is dedicated to maintaining a skilled and reliable workforce for the future. While opportunities are limited, typically at least one apprenticeship position — either in linework or staking engineering — and one or two entry-level positions are open and posted each year. The co-op has 11 apprentices in various stages of progress who are expected to complete their apprenticeships in 2028.

The company plans to hire at least two entry-level tree trimmer positions and possibly a warehouse position in 2024. Interested candidates can view current job postings at [siea.com/careers](http://siea.com/careers). SIEA also posts available positions in local newspapers circulated across southern Colorado.