

Students Tour D.C.

Visiting historic monuments gives delegates a deeper appreciation for their country



The National Cathedral was a highlight for student Adrienne Wakefield.

While many students enjoyed summer vacation, four local students had a special treat. They joined 38 other juniors from around Arizona and southeastern California to tour Washington, D.C., as part of the Arizona delegation for the Washington Youth Tour.

Representing Graham County Electric Cooperative on the trip to the nation's capital were Abigail Montierth of Safford High School, and Kevin Reed, Shane Skinner and Adrienne Wakefield, all of Thatcher High School.

They joined more than 1,500 students from rural and small towns across America.

The delegation gained insight into our country's history during visits to national monuments such as the Lincoln, Jefferson, Washington, World War II and Vietnam Veterans memorials; Arlington National Cemetery; the National Cathedral; The White House; and George Washington's Mount Vernon home.

"The trip showed us just how great America is and how lucky we honestly are to live in a nation with such rich culture and a defining past," said Kevin. "It's not always what you're looking at. It's how you feel when looking at it and who you're enjoying it with."

All of the students felt a love for Washington, D.C., and made new friends.

"My absolute favorite place

in the whole district was the National Air and Space Museum, with brilliant displays of airplanes, jets and my personal favorite, ballistic missiles," said Shane.

GCEC Chaperones Jacob and Gina Trujillo enjoyed the simulator ride at the museum. Flying and spinning while trying to shoot down planes, you get a glimpse of what it was like for military pilots.

There is a strong education component to the Washington Youth Tour program, which teaches the importance of being an active participant in our democracy.

A highlight of the trip is to meet and talk with representatives in the House and Senate, including Congresswoman Ann Kirkpatrick. Meeting with those in Congress who represent their constituents keeps the importance of rural electricity fresh in their minds.

"The trip taught me so much, not only the importance of co-ops, but also the need for strong leaders and communities that work together," said Abigail.

Before visiting Arlington National Cemetery, it was just words in a textbook for Adrienne. But seeing row after row of white headstones, it hit her that so many had given their lives so she could enjoy freedom today.

The National Cathedral was Adrienne's favorite stop.

"Like Arlington Cemetery,



Kevin Reed, right, and Charity May from Sulphur Springs Valley Electric at Arlington National Cemetery.

as soon as we walked into the cathedral, overwhelming peace washed over me," she said. "I know that it wasn't just because of the magnificent architecture of the ceilings,



Graham County Electric Cooperative's delegation in front of the White House. From left, chaperones Jacob and Gina Trujillo, and delegates Shane Skinner, Adrienne Wakefield, Abigail Montierth and Kevin Reed.



Shane and Adrienne in the cockpit of their plane on a layover in Houston.

or the breathtaking windows as the sun was setting behind them. It is a place to feel closer to heaven, to become a better person and to show my gratitude for what He had done for

me and this country.”

Each person on the trip came home tired, but with a greater appreciation for our nation and a willingness to advocate for electric co-ops. ■

Mark Claridge Joins the Board

Mark Claridge has accepted an appointment to replace retiring Graham County Electric Cooperative Director Jerry Kempton.

Claridge has served as a member on numerous county and state boards, including Graham County Farm Bureau (immediate past president), Arizona Farm Bureau, Graham County Planning and Zoning Commission, the Governor's County Fair Committee and Gila Valley Institute for Technology school board. In 2014, he completed the leadership program for the Center for Rural Leadership—Project CENTRL—and attended Eastern Arizona College.

Claridge is a fifth-generation Gila Valley resident and fourth-generation family farmer. He and his wife, Debra, have been married 29 years. They have five children and two grandchildren. Claridge has been a member of GCEC since 1985.

He thanks the board for giving him this opportunity. Claridge fills Kempton's remaining term.

GCEC Director Gerald Schmidt replaces Kempton on the Graham County Utilities board.

Kempton resigned from both the GCEC and GCU boards. The directors and management thank him for his 22 years of service on the GCEC board and more than 16 years of service on the GCU board.



Mark Claridge



Gerald Schmidt



Jerry Kempton

GCEC Awards Scholarships

Each high school was given \$500 to distribute to graduating students

Each year, Graham County Electric Cooperative provides a scholarship to each of the five local high schools, under the direction of the board of directors. The following students were recipients of awards for the 2014-2015 school year:

► **Chris Moore.** The son of Ronald Dean and Lori Moore, Chris ranked eighth in a class of 172 at Safford High School and received numerous honors and awards. He was involved in the marching, concert and jazz bands. He earned a 4.1667 weighted GPA and was a member of the National Honor Society. Chris also earned 38 credits from Eastern Arizona College during high school. He learned to speak Spanish and participated in Spanish Club activities. He loves chess and finished in the Chess Club's Elite 4. Chris also loves serving others and will serve a two-year mission for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Ohio Columbus Mission. He has been accepted into the chemical engineering program at the Ira A. Fulton School of Chemical Engineering at Arizona State University.

► **Hailey Rios.** The daughter of Ruben and Kay Rios, Hailey ranked 33rd in her class at Thatcher High School. She served as president for the Family Community and Career Leaders of America Club and vice president for Drama Club. Hailey earned the Spirit of Thatcher High School award and the Eugene and Annice Cope Scholarship. She loves acting, cooking, 3-D rendering, writing, reading, science, astronomy and learning new things. She will attend EAC and then plans to study astronomy at the University of

Arizona. Hailey hopes to return to the area and work at the observatory on Mt. Graham.

► **Kenny Boswell.** The son of Brad Lee and Cheryl Lee Boswell graduated from Pima High School. He enjoyed show choir for two years. Kenny plans to earn his associate degree from EAC and ultimately pursue a master's degree in fine arts.

► **Alexis Benally.** The daughter of Alejandro and Nanla Benally graduated from Fort Thomas High School. Alexis hopes to become a nurse. She plans to attend EAC. She says the GCEC scholarship gives her the opportunity to concentrate on her academics rather than worry about finances.

► **Jordan Kitcheyan.** The son of Jonathan and Melvalena Kitcheyan, Jordan graduated from Fort Thomas High School. He received awards in math, welding, football and basketball. He was a member of student council and Athletic Club. Jordan plans to pursue an associate degree in criminal justice from EAC, then transfer to a university to complete his bachelor's and perhaps master's degrees.

► **Destiny Ruiz.** The daughter of Tanya Ruiz, Destiny was one of 55 graduates from Mount Graham High School. She won the GIFT award for culinary arts. Her teacher, Billie Huff, awarded Destiny a chef coat. She was secretary of The Green Iguanas (the school's culinary arts club). Destiny plans to attend EAC before going to culinary school. ■

Also receiving scholarships from GCEC were Destiny L'Italien of Pima High School and Ana Padilla of Mount Graham High School. Neither submitted biographies nor photos for this article. Chris Moore photo by Adam Rossow Photography.



Chris Moore



Hailey Rios



Alexis Benally



Jordan Kitcheyan



Destiny Ruiz

Employee Spotlight

Merino Keeps Meters Calibrated

Bob Merino has always been fascinated by electrical theory. He says that is why he has worked his entire life in the electricity industry.

Born in Safford, but spending most of his life in Morenci, Bob was hired by Phelps Dodge (now Freeport McMoRan) right out of high school in the summer of 1973.

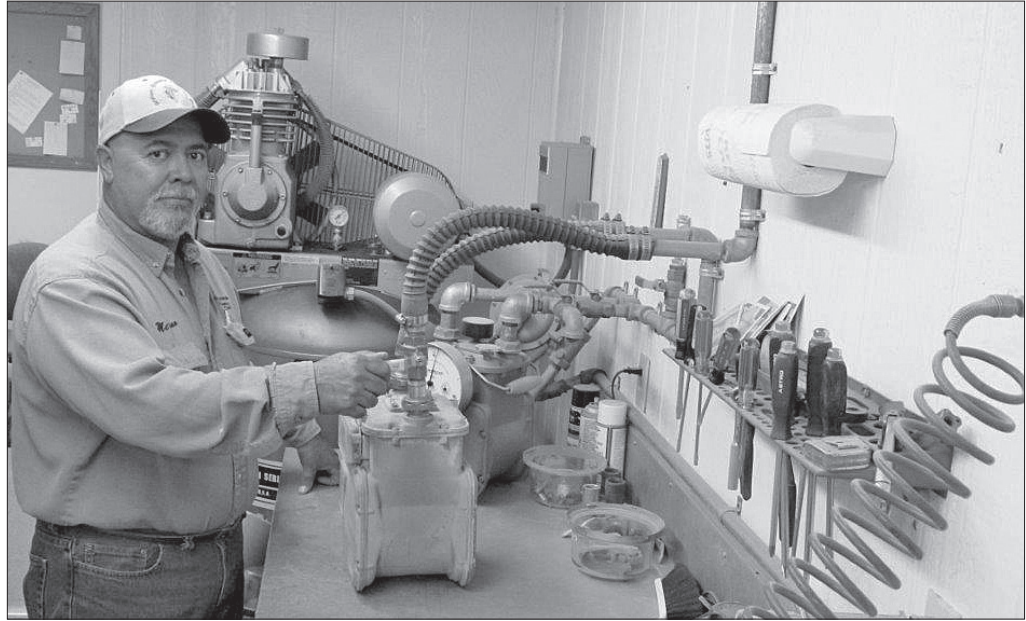
In 1980, he enrolled in the Field Electrician Apprenticeship Program with Phelps Dodge. In the middle of the four-year program, the mine shut down. All Bob lacked was on-the-job training.

He worked for various electrical contractors from 1982 to 1984, then landed the lineman apprenticeship job for the city of Safford in 1984.

When GCEC was looking for a trained and experienced lineman, Bob joined the team.

“The work environment, benefits, pay and a better opportunity for my family attracted me to Graham County Electric,” Bob says.

Bob was on the line crew for 21 years, and worked on installation and calibration of electric, gas and water meters. He also did solar inspections for the cooperative.



Bob Merino prepares a gas meter for calibration. He says he loves the challenge of dissecting the problem, then solving it.

General Manager Steve Lines was part of the management team that hired Bob in 1993.

“This has turned out to be a very good decision for the co-op,” Steve says. “Bob was a very good field lineman who was always willing to come out during storms, after hours, and get the power back on to our members. Now, Bob is our meter-man technician. His knowledge and skills acquired as a lineman have helped him do a great job for us in that position.”

With five “Bobs” on staff when he was hired, “Merino” was stitched on his shirts. To this day, he continues with that moniker.

“I appreciate Bob—or Merino, as his shirt says—for his great attitude and desire to be the best at whatever the co-op has asked him to do,” Steve says.

Of his work with GCEC,



Bob works on both gas and electric meters as GCEC’s meter-man technician.

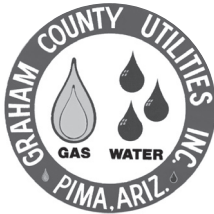
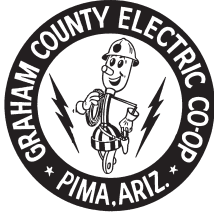
Bob says, “It’s a great opportunity to dissect problems and use my curiosity of why the problem exists. I figure it out and find a solution. I think back to being a lineman and being on call. I would watch a storm roll in and know I would be headed out. I’ll admit, sometimes I think this is a young man’s game.”

Bob stays young by staying busy with his hobbies: working on classic cars, riding his

Harley-Davidson motorcycle and playing guitar with the Crossroads Band for nearly 25 years.

He married Evie more than 32 years ago and has three children, two grandkids and a third due in February.

Bob loves jamming at his house with family. He enjoys all types of music and hopes his legacy lives on—both in music and the business of electricity. ■



P.O. Drawer B
Pima, AZ 85543

(928) 485-2451
Toll free: (800) 577-9266
Fax: (928) 485-9491
www.gce.coop

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Manager's Message

Impact of the Clean Power Plan

As detailed in the Arizona Republic, the affordability and reliability of your electricity has been threatened by federal regulations. "The federal Environmental Protection Agency is expected to march the nation's energy consumers into new territory on the frontier of controlling carbon emissions," the editorial board wrote in a July 26 article. "Representatives of the big power companies are flooding Washington, D.C., in a desperate effort to mitigate the impact of the EPA's venture, known as the Clean Power Plan."

You acted along with nearly 40,000 Arizonans by sending messages to EPA about the proposed plan. It is clear your engagement made a difference. In reaction to concerns of Arizonans statewide, EPA took your comments to heart and made changes in its final rule proposal released August 4.

Under the draft plan, Arizona faced the most ambitious goal to reduce carbon. Debates between environmental activists and politicians about its implications heated up. But few looked at the EPA's new carbon plan with quite the riveted sense of alarm as small utility companies that serve rural customers. "The people throughout rural Arizona that we serve will be screwed more than anybody else in the country," Patrick Ledger, CEO of the Arizona Generation and Transmission Cooperatives, told the Environment and Energy news service.

AEPCO, serving some 500,000 rural customers, operates one natural gas-fired and two coal-fired units at the Apache Generating Station in southeastern Arizona. One of the coal-fired units is scheduled to convert to gas in 2018 to accommodate recent EPA rules governing haze. But under the draft plan, the co-op would have been forced to shutter its coal-fired unit altogether, stranding around \$230 million in recent upgrades and investment. In addition, the co-op would have to take on between \$450 million and \$600 million in additional debt to rebuild capacity to serve its customers. All told, that would push the price of the energy Ledger's cooperative sells to distribution cooperatives to 38 percent above market rates. That, said Ledger, would spell the end.

"We will be put out of business," he told the editorial board. "We go into bankruptcy."

Ledger and his colleagues understand coal's future is limited, so they lobbied EPA to give the nation's 100 smallest utilities more flexibility in meeting carbon goals.

We are thankful for the support we received from our national, state and local elected officials, as well as individuals concerned about the effect these rules will have on rural Arizona. We specifically would like to thank Arizona Sens. John McCain and Jeff Flake. On July 8, they stated the facts and asked the hard questions about the proposed Clean Power Plan in a letter to Gina McCarthy, EPA administrator; Tom Vilsack, U.S. Department of Agriculture secretary; and Shaun Donovan, director of the Office of Management and Budget.

Although EPA has made some changes with the August 4 ruling, we still have a lot of work to do to ensure Arizonans are protected. Our concerns about the federal overreach embodied in the EPA approach and the effect on the reliability and affordability of electricity for co-op members remains at the forefront of our minds as we continue to analyze the more than 4,000 pages accompanying the final rule. We shall see how the new ruling affects G&Ts. Look for more information in the coming months. Thanks again for your continued support!



Steve Lines