

Changing of the Guard

Steve Lines gives way to Kirk Gray as manager of Graham County cooperatives

After 14 years at the helm of Graham County Electric Cooperative and Graham County Utilities, General Manager Steve Lines retires in February and passes the leadership torch to Assistant General Manager Kirk Gray.

Steve—who replaced retiring Manager Nelson Peck in 2001—has focused on providing safe, reliable and affordable energy and utilities to members of GCEC and GCU.

Part of his legacy is building the Talley Substation by using GCEC employees rather than hiring a contractor, saving \$350,000 in labor.

“Steve Lines is, without a doubt, one of the top managers,” says GCEC Board President Reuben McBride, who has known and worked with co-op managers across the nation. “His level of concern for employees and members is utmost in his day-to-day decisions. It is with regret that we see him retire. However, the board of directors felt like they struck

gold when Kirk Gray was hired several years ago as finance manager.”

GCU Board President Jeff Larson says that Steve’s leadership and vision “put GCU in a good position where we have plenty of water to sell. The planning for future gas prices with half on a fixed price and half on the index price positions GCU to sell an economical commodity.”

Both Reuben and Jeff expect a smooth transition. Jeff notes that Steve has mentored Kirk so well there will be little visible change in leadership.

“Change is always somewhat difficult, but Kirk will handle any situation with honesty and concern,” Reuben adds.

Kirk served as financial manager for 5½ years. He earned his certified public accountant license in 1988 and owned his own practice for 17 years before being hired at GCEC.

Among Kirk’s priorities will be dealing with significant challenges from upcoming federal and state energy policies.

“To continue providing safe, reliable electricity at the most affordable cost, we can’t run the co-op like we have in the past, as we need to be even more efficient, minimizing loss and increasing efficiency in processes began 23 years ago under the direction of Nelson Peck and continued with Steve Lines and the board of directors,” Kirk says. “Compared to co-ops of our size nationwide, electrical line loss for GCEC has saved our members over \$7 million due to the past management of the utilities.

“Our water system is in good shape and has fared well during the current drought. We will continue to improve infrastructure, work on the distribution grid to increase reliability and minimize line loss. We will concentrate our efforts on modernizing technology, including software and other resources.”

Married to his high school sweetheart for more than 40 years, Cathy and Kirk have two sons and five grandchildren. ■

The Many Faces of Retiring General Manager Steve Lines



Steve at the base of a transmission pole during construction of the Talley Substation.

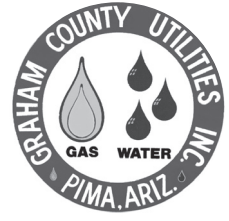
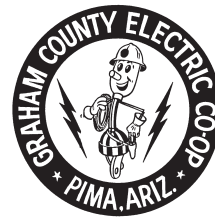


Steve marks a power pole with a red ribbon to signify that it needs repair.

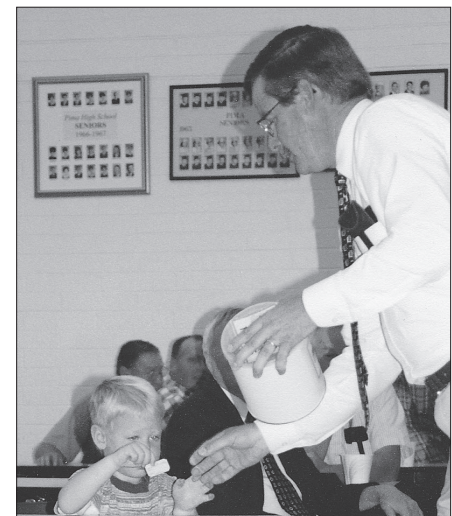
CO-OP HISTORY



At the end of February, Kirk Gray, left, succeeds Steve Lines, right, as general manager of Graham County Electric Cooperative and Graham County Utilities.



From left, Dennis Kouts, Russ Barney and Steve at the new well fields for Graham County Utilities.



Steve gets a raffle ticket during an annual meeting.

End of an Era for GCEC Line Supervisor

Dick Berryhill retires after 40 years of service

Ending his 40-year career with Graham County Electric, Line Supervisor Dick Berryhill says it is time to relax and enjoy doing things with his kids.

Dick started his career January 2, 1975, reading meters seven days out of the month and working as a ground man the other 20 days. Soon after he started the lineman apprenticeship program, completing it in three years. Dick became a journeyman lineman, then line foreman. The past 17 years he has been line supervisor.

Climbing poles was his love. Dick never worked in a bucket, but had climbing gaffs and a body belt to climb poles in the wind, rain, snow, heat of the day or cold of the night.

“The best climbs were Steve Lines and I together,” says Dick. “The pole buddy system was the best with us. We were in sync and could go up and down a pole in the exact time together. It just isn’t the same when you work out of a bucket.”

General Manager Steve Lines agrees with Dick.

“I really enjoyed the years working with Dick as a lineman in the field,” he says. “We were always the first ones on the poles because we loved climbing, and we worked well together. When working near high-voltage power lines, line work is very dangerous. You have to trust your fellow lineman, communicate well together and look out for each other.”

As line supervisor, Dick was eager to meet with consumers to provide estimates and design lines for

them. He also loved using his skills in pouring concrete and building some of GCEC’s buildings.

Rusty Sherman—who succeeded Dick as line superintendent at the first of the year—says he remembers Dick for his dedication to GCEC, line-work, family and friends.

“Dick had a passion for line work and it showed in many different ways throughout his career,” Rusty says. “He was always willing to take on whatever duty was necessary to provide service to GCEC and its members. It never mattered what hour of the day or night it may have been, or what the weather conditions were, Dick was always quick to respond to any major outage. With 40-plus years of experience on the system, Dick knew the system like the back of his hand, which proved to be instrumental as he supervised us on many occasions to restore power in a safe and timely manner, as well operate and maintain the entire electrical system.”

His legacy is being foreman on construction of the Freeman Substation. He enjoyed figuring out how to use parts the co-op already had on hand.

Dick started at GCEC under General Manager Jack Prince. He has worked with five managers.

In 2001, Dick received his supervisors certificate through the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. He completed numerous other training workshops during his tenure.

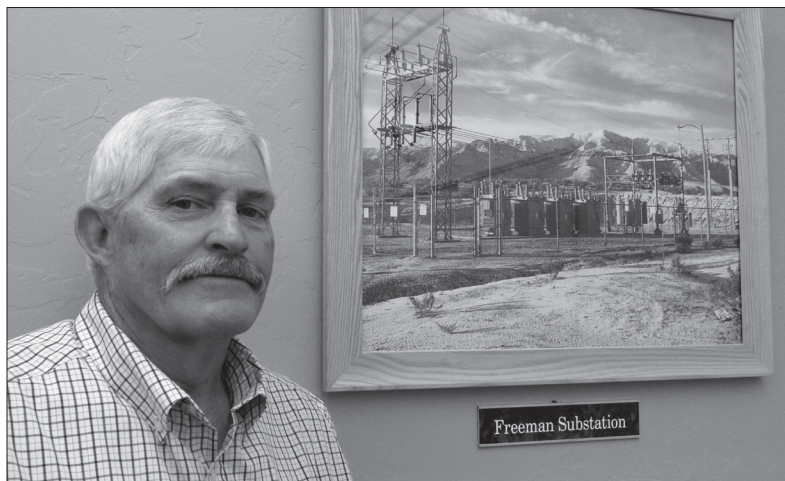
“He will be remembered for his many accomplishments at the co-op, but what I will always remember most about Dick was his dedication to family and friends,” Rusty says. “Just like outages, he was always quick to respond anytime someone needed help. He spent many weekends in the service of others.”

Dick says the co-op has been good to him and his family.

“When my daughter was sick, the co-op staff rallied around and supported me,” he says. “They are just like family to me.”

Born in Safford, Dick graduated from Safford High School and has lived in the Gila Valley his entire life. He and his wife, Marietta, have been married more than 43 years. They have five children, 13 grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

Dick loves hunting, woodworking, camping and fishing, and plans to enjoy his hobbies alongside his kids during retirement. ■



Retired Line Supervisor Dick Berryhill oversaw construction of the Freeman Substation using Graham County Electric crews and materials, saving the cooperative money.

GCU Foreman Rides Off Into Retirement

After working 39 years in the gas and water business—the past 26 for Graham County Utilities—Jason Hughes has a new job: retirement.

As the first of the year approached, Jason said “being retired” is what he most looked forward to in retirement.

While he says he will not miss worrying about public and employee safety—which always was on his mind—Jason says he will miss hearing older folks talk about the Gila Valley’s rich history when he met to discuss designing new gas or water services.

Jason’s career started in 1976 with General Utilities—a gas and water utility privately owned by the Fredrickson Family—and included stints as a welder, meter reader and backhoe operator. He did just about every outside job.

When GCU bought General Utilities in 1989, Jason became construction foreman, replacing Keith McBride.

During his tenure at GCU, Jason helped increase water

production by adding four new wells, giving GCU 15—especially important given growth the Thatcher native witnessed in the area.

He is certified in water, welding and corrosion engineering.

New GCU Foreman Wes Reidhead says he admires Jason for his service.

“Jason has always made a great effort to help our consumers enjoy safe, reliable gas and water,” Wes says. “He has been an example to everyone in his determination to make things work even when it seems near impossible.

Faced with these challenges, he would work hard to resolve them. His determination was proof he cared about the consumers as well as the co-op.

“I’m grateful to him and others for seeing something in me over the years, and I look forward to continuing the work he has been dedicated to for so many years. I wish him the best in his retirement, knowing he will continually



Jason Hughes helped Graham County Utilities add four wells during his career.

be working on something.”

Jason enjoys his horses and trail riding. He loves snowboarding, wake boarding, scuba diving, hunting and manages rental properties.

He and his wife, Jonell, have been married 40 years. They enjoy traveling by cruise ship to different destinations.

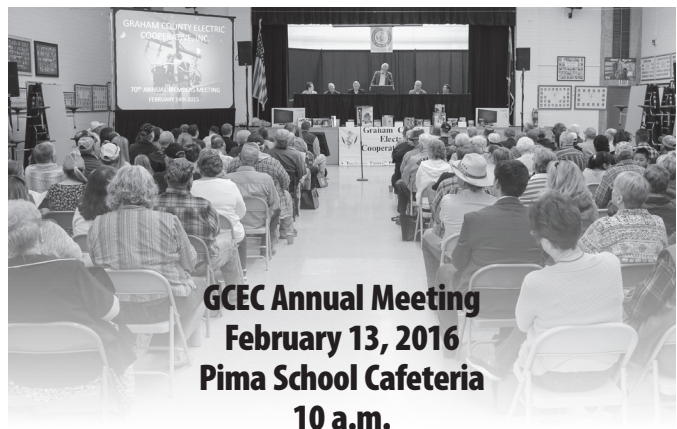
They have three children and nine grandchildren. ■

Students Earn Trip to Washington, D.C.

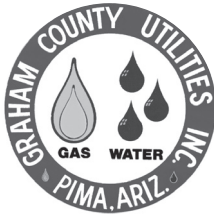
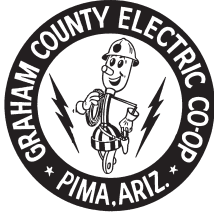
Graham County Electric Cooperative has selected the four students who will represent GCEC in the nation’s capital as part of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association’s Washington Youth Tour in June.

Winning all-expense-paid trips are Tevin Broadhead of Safford High School, Aleesha Clonts of Safford High School, Brianna McBride of Thatcher High School and Conner Palmer of Thatcher High School.

Read more about these students and their upcoming trip in the March edition of Currents magazine.



**GCEC Annual Meeting
February 13, 2016
Pima School Cafeteria
10 a.m.**



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Manager's Message

Thank You!

This month's message is hard for me to write because it is my last.

Next month, February 25, I will retire. In the March edition of Currents, this message will be written by my replacement, Kirk Gray. I have all the respect and confidence in Kirk and wish him well as the new manager.

I started this career some 37 years ago as a lineman, and have seen many changes through that time. Some of those changes or improvements include infrastructure rebuilds; new substations; an increase in growth; an increase in miles of power lines, gas lines and water lines; a decrease in line loss; and an increase in system reliability for both co-ops. I also have seen changes in employees, staff and directors.

The one thing that remains the same is the purpose for which this co-op was formed back in 1946: to serve the members.

I have so many thank yous I don't even know where to start. I'm very thankful for the opportunity I've had to work for these two great co-ops. Thank you to the board of directors, thank you to my co-workers and thank you to the members for your support. I'm also thankful for the



tender mercies God has shown me and my family through the years.

Now the reality is upon me: My work is coming to an end, and I will retire from a career I truly love. This decision can be a bit scary to commit to because it is a big change in a person's life. However, my staff has often heard me make this comment after coming to conclusions on discussions: It is what it is.

So now I'm going on to new adventures in my retirement life. I'm like an old horse being put out to pasture. I just hope that pasture has some hunting, fishing, golf and time with grandkids inside the fences.

Thanks again, Graham County Electric Cooperative and Graham County Utilities for letting me be a part of a great organization.

As Bob Hope used to say, "Thanks for the memories!"

—General Manager Steve Lines



Steve Lines does a school safety demonstration in his earlier days at the cooperative.