

**New Operations Manager Rusty Sherman, left, is learning the ropes from outgoing Operations Manager Dennis Kouts.**



## Staff Changes Mean Many Promotions

*Retirements of key employees sets off a chain reaction of job changes*

Ring in the New Year usually brings change, and Graham County Electric Cooperative is no exception. Since the retirement of Dick Berryhill in 2015, and Jason Hughes, Debbie Farrington

and Steve Lines in 2016, there have been changes in staff positions and duties.

Now, after 40 years of service, Operations Manager Dennis Kouts retires this month.

For the past few months, Dennis has been training Line Superintendent Rusty Sherman in various job duties as the new operations manager. There are many facets of the job, such as planning, training and supervision of the operations of Graham

County Electric and Graham County Utilities.

Taking Rusty's position is Line Foreman Trent Bingham. Trent will direct and review the construction and maintenance of the electric department, and to meet with members concerning new service



**Mitch Brown is the new line foreman at Graham County Electric Cooperative.**



**Trent Bingham becomes the new line superintendent.**

# College Scholarships Available

Graham County Electric and Graham County Utilities are providing scholarships to each of the local high schools.

Seniors from Ft. Thomas, Pima, Safford, Thatcher and Mt. Graham high schools may apply at their counselor's office. Recipients are chosen by faculty committees at each school.

To qualify for co-op scholarships, students must reside in households where parents or guardians are co-op members.

Guidelines specify students selected will have a financial need and not necessarily be receiving other scholarships. They are not required to be in the top percentile, but must have applied themselves in the classroom and have a strong desire to continue their education. ■



**Based on financial need, students from area high schools are eligible for scholarships as long as a parent or guardian is a member of Graham County Electric or Graham County Utilities.**

## Youth Tour Winners

The 2017 Washington Youth Tour participants have been selected and are listed below. More information on our winners will be in the March Currents?

- Dillion Jones—  
Pima High School
- Leisel Griffin—  
Thatcher High School
- Kayla West—  
Thatcher High School
- Alyson Wakefield—  
Thatcher High School

estimates and many other duties related to maintaining the power system.

Lineman Mitch Brown replaces Trent as line foreman. Mitch will be responsible for the safety and production of assigned crew members. As line foremen, Mitch and Myles Ray work together on all installations, maintenance and repair of underground and overhead electric distribution, transmission and service lines, transformers, substations, meters and any related line issues, in providing GCEC members with power.

Change is inevitable. What we do with the change makes new opportunities for growth. Please congratulate these gentlemen for the fine work they have provided in the past and their new assignments. ■



## Annual Meeting in February

Please mark your calendars for the upcoming Graham County Electric Cooperative 72nd Annual Membership Meeting on February 11 at 10 a.m. in the Pima School cafeteria. Come see what exciting changes have taken place during the past year and what is on the horizon in 2017.

***Mark your calendar for February 11***



The utility's entry in the Safford Light Parade was decorated by employees, and was awarded Most Effective Use of Lights.

## Parade Lights Up Safford

For the first time, Graham County Electric Cooperative and Graham County Utilities entered a lighted float in the 2016 Safford Downtown Light Parade on December 3.

With the theme of "Christmas Wishes," the cooperatives displayed "The Power of Believing." Flying along the boom of the digger truck and over a lighted house, was Santa and his reindeer, which were led by Rudolph. Candy canes surrounded the display, and net lighting adorned the side of the 13-foot-high truck. Merry Christmas and a bright star were on the front with Happy Holidays at the rear of the truck.

As paradegoers listened, the

announcer was heard to say, "Have you ever thought you heard Santa and his reindeer above your house on Christmas Eve? It is all in the power of believing. Santa and his reindeer will be flying over your house soon, if you just believe."

Several employees took time to build the float, which won Most Effective Use of Lights. Judges awarded \$200. It was donated to the Graham County Electric/Graham County Utilities Christmas toy drive.

This year, directors, staff and members donated more than \$1,500 in cash and toys, which went to make a brighter Christmas for selected GCEC/GCU families. ■



From left, Lorin Householder, Maddie Kay and Blake Householder occupy the house on the truck.



# Be Safe Around Natural Gas

*Call 811 before you begin any kind of digging*

If you have a natural gas line running underground from the gas meter to a structure or a gas-burning appliance, please take note: In accordance with federal regulations, Graham County Utilities offers recommendations regarding your underground gas pipeline.

GCU operates the gas system with an emphasis on safety. The co-op is required to design, operate and maintain the underground natural gas pipeline system in accordance with prescribed federal safety standards.

GCU does not maintain the gas pipeline downstream of the gas meter. That is the responsibility of the customer who owns that pipeline.

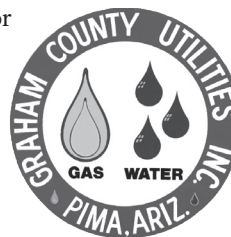
If the buried pipe is not properly maintained, it may be subject to corrosion, if the pipeline is metallic, and/or leakage.

To ensure the continued safe and reliable operation of these lines, the buried pipe should be checked periodically.

You or the building owner are advised

to contact a licensed plumber or heating contractor to help you locate and inspect your buried gas line.

Natural gas appliances such as furnaces, water heaters and stoves should be serviced by a licensed contractor, as noted in operating manuals.



## General Safety Rules

By itself, natural gas will not burn, but combustion can occur when a mixture of natural gas (5 to 15 percent) and air (85 to 95 percent) are combined.

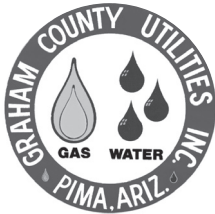
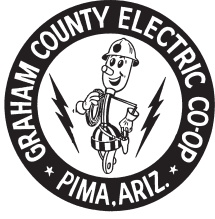
Because natural gas is odorless, the gas supplier adds a chemical called mercaptan, which smells like rotten eggs. If the odor is strong in your home or business:

- Do not light matches.
- Do not turn lights on or off.
- Do not use the telephone.
- Notify everyone in the home or building to vacate the premises.
- Call the gas company or dial 911 from a nearby home or building.
- Do not re-enter your home until the gas company has informed you it is safe.

## Observe These Guidelines

Take note of these additional safety tips:

- Follow manufacturer instructions for the use and care of gas appliances.
- Make sure appliances are properly vented.
- Keep combustibles—paper, rags, fluids, paints and curtains—away from your gas furnace, water heater, stove and dryer.
- Keep a fire extinguisher near gas appliances at all times.
- Keep appliances clean of debris, dust, grease and other materials.
- Install smoke detectors, and test and properly maintain them.
- Keep flues and chimneys clear of all debris.
- Make sure your heating system is inspected annually by a professional.
- If the pilot light or main burner does not ignite or stay lit, call a professional.
- Before digging around or starting any digging project around a buried gas line, call the one-call center at 811. ■



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**Manager's Message**

# Concern for Community

In keeping with the seventh Cooperative Principle, "Concern for Community," Graham County Electric and Graham County Utilities are rolling out the second phase of programs designed to help members.

Graham County Electric has formed a nonprofit corporation to facilitate the programs. Graham County Electric Foundation has been formed in accordance with Internal Revenue Code 501(c)(3). The stated mission of GCEF will be twofold. First, the foundation will use unclaimed patronage capital retirements to fund youth scholarships, the Washington Youth Tour program and other future programs to assist our youth.

The second purpose is to help low-income members with utility assistance payments. Operation Roundup will allow members



to round up their utility bills to the next whole dollar, \$5 or \$10. GCEF will accept donations of any amount to assist with this program. Any contribution to GCEF will qualify as a charitable contribution under the IRS code. Members can select the amount to round their bill on their February utility bill. Look for information on how to participate in these

programs on [www.gce.coop](http://www.gce.coop). The programs will be publicized on our Facebook page and information will be available at our main office in Pima.

The board of directors and staff of Graham County Electric and Graham County Utilities wish you, our members, a happy and prosperous new year.

—Kirk Gray



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