

# Currents

GRAHAM COUNTY

SEPTEMBER 2021

## Meet GCEC's New Linemen

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Graham County Electric  
welcomes two new linemen  
to the crew.

PHOTO BY DIANE JUNION

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FROM LEFT: Linemen Shane Howard and Preston Seale work together on a hot line. PHOTO BY DIANE JUNION

# Apprentices Advance in the Trade

Fernando Macario and Preston Seale recently completed the Linemen Apprenticeship Program

By Diane Junion

Two new linemen are among the crews at Graham County Electric Cooperative.

Throughout the past four years, Fernando Macario and Preston Seale have worked in the Linemen Apprenticeship Program. They completed intense studies and on-the-job training in March 2021.

Fernando—or Fernie, as crew members affectionately call him—began his career with GCEC in June 2006 as a groundman. Before joining GCEC, he worked at Freeport MacMoRan as a haul truck driver and in the leaching pad.

As he learned from GCEC crews while working as a groundman, Fernando eagerly watched how they performed routine maintenance and changed out poles.

He has responded to a few tough calls. One happened during a snowstorm. Fernando had to reach out quite a distance to fix the problem on the line, and everything was tough to get to due to the weather.

The bond and trust between the crew members are significant to maintain a safe environment.

“The guys are like a family, and I enjoy going to work because of them,” Fernando says.

Preston was also hired as a groundman in May 2006.

After talking to his dad about a career that would support his family, Preston applied and was hired for the position at GCEC.

“I went from a groundman and working as a Blue Stake line locator when the apprenticeship opportunity came up,” Preston says. “I could see a future, and I really stepped out of my comfort zone when I applied for the Lineman Apprenticeship Program.”

Both Fernando and Preston were determined to continue with



**LEFT: Fernando Maracio, above, and Preston Seale are presented with their Linemen Apprenticeship Program plaques by Graham County Electric Cooperative Board President Reuben McBride, left, and Graham County Utilities Board President Jeff Larson. PHOTOS BY KIM LARKEY ABOVE: Fernando reaches out to repair a power line. PHOTO COURTESY OF FERNANDO MARACIO**

the program, even though it was challenging and intense, with bookwork studies, tests and on-the-job training.

The two apprentices' histories and careers have mirrored each other. Both were raised in Safford and graduated from Safford High School. Before their careers at GCEC, they worked together as craftsmen at Bunker-Caldwell Funeral Chapel, now called McDougal's Caldwell Funeral Chapel. After six months together, Fernando pursued a job at the mine, while Preston went into management in the monument department at the funeral home.

Their career histories continued when they were hired within eight weeks of each other at GCEC. Family is important to both

linemen. Preston is married to Camille. They have two boys and one girl. Fernando is married to April. They have three girls.

Both linemen enjoy lifting weights during their free time. Fernando, a former second-degree black belt in taekwondo, also enjoys remodeling his home and spending time with his girls.

Besides working out, Preston enjoys flying drones and watching his children. You might see Preston dressed as superhero Thor during community fundraisers.

These two new linemen are now part of the heroes in the electric department, working tirelessly to ensure members have reliable power and service they can depend upon. ■



Lineman Fernando Maracio works on a Graham County Electric Cooperative power line at sunrise. PHOTO BY RYAN BOTKINS

# What to Do When There Is an Outage

Need to report an outage? Here's the steps all members can follow.

**By Diane Junion**

Storm season is here, and it can bring unexpected power or gas outages. At times, the water must be off for repairs, too.

Typically, Graham County Electric Cooperative and Graham County Utilities tries to schedule maintenance work on lines during nonpeak times. When there is a scheduled outage, GCEC/GCU posts the information on its Facebook page and website, [www.gce.coop](http://www.gce.coop) and view the calendar at the bottom.

When a nonscheduled outage occurs and dispatch is notified by a member, crews are sent to the trouble area. You can help.

If you know where or how an outage occurred, please contact dispatch at 928-485-2451. Dispatch is available 24/7.

If service has not been restored for a length of time, contact

928-485-2451 and listen to the recording. If GCEC/GCU is aware of the outage, it will be indicated in the recording. In that event, you do not need to talk to dispatch because crews have been notified and will be working to determine the problem and resolve the issue.

If the outage is more than an hour or has affected a large area, check for outage information on Facebook. Information is updated periodically.

Please **DO NOT** report outages via Facebook or GCEC's website. These channels are not regularly monitored.

In some cases, crews may temporarily fix a problem and restore service to most of an affected area but return later to permanently resolve the situation.

Thank you for your patience when your power, gas or water has a hiccup. GCEC employees work hard and are committed to providing safe, reliable and efficient resources to enhance the lives of members. ■



Karen Fox is a self-taught muralist who paints on buildings in Safford, including the Pollock's Hurricane Car Wash. PHOTO BY KIM LARKEY

# The Art of Family

Safford artist paints the town

By Diane Junion

Growing up, Karen Fox learned to paint by watching her artistic mother and uncle at her kitchen table. She was also self-taught by studying from books. Raised in Safford, Karen spent many years painting different murals and walls in the Gila Valley.

"It all started when one day, my sister asked me to paint a dinosaur on a bedroom wall for a friend's son," Karen says. "I told her I couldn't do it because I'd never done anything like that, but my sister really encouraged me to do it."

That was just the beginning. It took Karen a while to build up her confidence before she moved onto public murals. The mural on Pollock's Hurricane Car Wash along Highway 70 in

Safford took her a considerable amount of time. She would "dilly-dally" with the project and be too critical of her work.

"I received help from Charmaine Chidester from the Eastern Arizona College Small Business Development Center," Karen says. "She helped me navigate through communicating with my clients and formulating essential questions about their projects."

Karen has painted many walls since then. Quite a few are inside and outside Safford Unified School buildings, including the Norma Bellamy gym, the BB Andrews track and field, the weight room, the autos & agriculture program doors, the senior mural and the student parking lot.

"The most difficult painting I've completed would be the



PHOTO COURTESY OF KAREN FOX

Mount Carmel Missionary Baptist Church," Karen says. "They had a mural above their baptistry that someone else had painted. They wanted me to match the colors and continue the scene across the front of their chapel."

Karen's most extensive project was the wall inside the Avondale Public Library. She painted Jack and the Beanstalk, with the beanstalk going all the way down the wall and Jack coming down from the top.

She painted Señor Salsa on the Graham County Chamber of Commerce building. Her most fun project

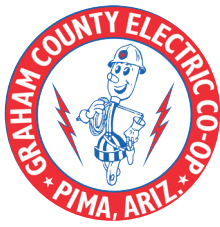
was a camping theme mural in a kindergarten teacher's classroom at Solomon Elementary School. She is currently painting the Cougar mascot at the elementary school.

In addition to the many murals, Karen has provided the photo stand-in boards for the Graham County Fairgrounds. Fairgoers can pose for pictures with their faces showing through the large imaged boards.

Karen's roots have always been in Safford. She married her high school sweetheart Mike Fox.

Making the murals has been a family affair as all eight of their children have helped with painting different projects while growing up.

"The best reason for learning to paint is being able to teach kids at school," Karen says. "I want to help others know how to paint and help them learn what they want to do." ■



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**Manager's Message**

# Member Participation

**2021 Annual Meeting**

Each year, your cooperatives Graham County Electric Cooperative and Graham County Utilities invite you to participate in their annual member meetings. In a typical year, GCEC hosts its annual meeting in February, and GCU conducts its annual meeting in June. This year, we are holding a combined annual meeting. You are invited to attend the 76th/32nd annual meeting Saturday, September 18, at 9 a.m. in the new gym at Pima High School.

The meeting gives you an opportunity to provide your input on how the cooperatives operate and to listen to what other members have to say. As member-owners, you can see several presentations on our operations, projects and many initiatives. It is always good to see our members in person and have an opportunity to discuss important topics.

There will be many raffle prizes and two scholarships in our drawing this year.

**Capital Credits**

We work hard to serve our members by providing safe, reliable and affordable services. Because our members are owners, when revenues exceed the cost of providing our services, a portion of the margins are returned to the members in the form of capital credits. The remaining capital is used for financing operations, providing system improvements, repaying long-term debt and providing a reserve for emergencies.

The GCEC Board of Directors has reviewed the past year's operations, including the financial condition of the co-op. The board approved returning \$404,826 of margins, or patronage capital, to our members. This patronage capital represents 100% of margins for 1974 and approximately 13% for 2020.

If you were a GCEC member in 1974 or 2020 and have an active account, you should have received a credit on your August electric bill. Inactive members should receive a check at their last known address.

For more information, go to our website or call our office 928-485-2451.

**Phil Cook**  
CEO and General Manager



**Annual Meeting:**  
**New Time and Location**  
GCEC/GCU Combined Annual Meeting  
September 18, 2021, at 9 a.m.  
Pima High School new gym  
38 E. 200 S.  
Pima, AZ 85543