

# currents



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Grand Canyon State  
Electric Cooperative  
Association, Inc.



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# The Success of Cooperative Advocacy



David Lock, GCSECA CEO

I had been given 15 minutes to address the recent annual meeting of Arizona G&T Cooperatives. In preparation, I made some notes about our rather remarkable legislative accomplishments this year and dropped in a few nods to the importance of working together. But when I saw my topic listed on the agenda — cooperative advocacy — I knew I had to rewrite my speech.

For some reason, these two words and their implication struck a deep chord within me. They motivated me to completely change my remarks — to reflect on this notion of cooperative advocacy. This is what I came up with — and delivered, lightly edited for this column:

Think about that term for a minute: cooperative advocacy, or advocating cooperatively — or together. That's a very cool concept, one that we in the co-op family feel deep in our bones. It's in our DNA. It's the secret sauce of why we're successful.

We advocate in different ways. We advocate for our members. We advocate for each other. We advocate for rural Arizona. We advocate for what's fair.

We isn't Grand Canyon State Electric Cooperative Association. We is all of us. We are directors, CEOs, executives, employees, members, and, oftentimes, policymakers.

I would be an idiot to think that the successes we've had as co-ops — banded together through Grand Canyon — were the results of the brilliant work of the five of us who comprise the staff. We're a reflection of you: of your values, your priorities, your uniqueness, your framework. It's a huge responsibility — and quite humbling.

We earn this responsibility by listening intently to you, by striving to understand who you are — how you're different, how we're the same. Think about it — we're co-dependents, in the best possible sense of the word!

We have great tools at our disposal to be cooperative advocates. Great people. A mission that's unimpeachable. Invested members. Our mutual commitment.

After we passed two consequential bills in the state legislature this year, I jokingly asked staff what they are going to do for an encore. But it's really not a joke, if you think about it. There always will be encores. At the legislature. At the Arizona Corporation Commission. In Congress.

I challenge my team to never stop thinking about how we can provide value to our members. We want to be the place where we can convene, coalesce, collaborate, coordinate, and continue to enjoy success. But that takes all of us working in concert as we have been. We have been successful because we've stood united — representing a large part of the state. It's important that we continue to do so to meet the challenges ahead.

I feel really good about our chances to continue to succeed. We have the right story. We have the right people. We have the right motivation. We have the resources. We embody cooperative advocacy that permeates through our actions.

Let's go forth and conquer!

Dave Lock

# Trico Electric Cooperative's Chirreon Solar and Battery Facility is on track

The Trico Electric Cooperative Chirreon Solar and Battery Facility is on schedule to be in service by this summer. Installation of the solar panels has begun.

The 10-megawatt photovoltaic solar generating facility and 15-megawatt battery storage system is in Pinal County. The solar panels have single-axis tracking devices that automatically track the sun throughout the day to maximize power generation. The battery storage will help Trico delay the cost of transmission and distribution upgrades and manage area load in a more efficient and cost-effective manner.

Once operational, the Chirreon facility will produce more than 30,000 megawatt-hours of energy each year, or enough to power about 3,000 average residential homes in the Trico service territory.



A crane moves the Tesla batteries at the Chirreon Solar and Battery Facility to prepare for the installation of solar panels.

# Thompson, McCarthy Elected to Trico Electric Cooperative Board

More than 500 members and their family and friends attended the Trico Electric Cooperative annual meeting on April 9 at Casino del Sol Resort, and many others watched the meeting live on Facebook.

Two director seats were up for election this year. Marsha Thompson ran unopposed in District 4 (Sahuarita, Green Valley) and was re-elected for a three-year term. In District 7 (SaddleBrooke, Mt. Lemmon), Kevin McCarthy was elected to replace Jim Pyers, who is retiring after nine years.

Kevin McCarthy  
District 7  
(SaddleBrooke, Mt. Lemmon)



Marsha Thompson  
District 4  
(Sahuarita, Green Valley)

# CO-OP Careers

Young Arizonans flourish and find more than just a job at their local electric co-ops

The secret is out — electric cooperatives are the new hot place to work for Arizonans under 30.

While it's true that rural communities have been losing their young residents to bigger, hipper locales, some people want to stick close to their hometown or simply enjoy a small-town or rural lifestyle. And those who do find electric cooperatives to be the perfect place to start and grow a career.

Electric co-ops offer experience in every facet of business: customer service — or, in our case, member service, operations, technology, building science, finance, communications, marketing, even economic development and government affairs. Small, flat organizations mean each employee has more opportunity to make a big difference.

And not-for-profit, locally owned and operated, democratically controlled co-ops have a mission baked right in that resonates with their younger employees: improve the quality of life in the communities they serve. Not to mention the great benefits and on-the-job training opportunities.

Read on for the stories of seven young people who made electric cooperatives their launching pad and found a place to call home.



## Chris Owens

Apprentice Lineman  
Graham County  
Electric Cooperative,  
Safford

### Why did you want to work at the co-op?

I had always wanted to be a lineman, and when I saw the spot open up at my local utility, I jumped on the

opportunity to stay close and work in the field that I wanted.

### Did you know what an electric co-op was?

I grew up and still live in the Safford area, so I was familiar with Graham County as the local utility provider. I knew that they gave us our electricity, water, and gas (at the time), but I didn't know much else about co-ops before working here.

### When did you start?

I joined the training program in 2018, and I have now worked my way up as an apprentice lineman.

### What do you like about working for your electric co-op? What have you learned there?

I didn't know much of anything about being a lineman before applying for the job, but I've learned a lot of new skills along the way. I'm at an educational training in Texas now, but I've definitely learned a lot since working at the co-op.

### What do you want your community to know about working for your local co-op?

The guys that I work with every day are great guys, and they work hard. I feel like linemen sometimes are underappreciated because we're so used to having power available. These guys are out there in the middle of monsoons and extreme weather making sure our community has power. They are some of the best people I've ever worked with, and they deserve to be recognized for all the hard work that they continuously put back into making sure our community is safe and has reliable power.



## Shana Gall

Engineering Service  
Representative/  
Right-Of-Way  
Technician  
Sulphur Springs Valley  
Electric Cooperative,  
Willcox

### Why did you want to work at the co-op?

I moved back to the area after college to

be close to my family and grandparents and help them with the family business. I took a couple of years to help them with the business, and when I started to look for a career-worthy position, I saw a field service representative (FSR) job open at the co-op. I knew the co-op could offer opportunities for advancement and living in such a rural area, and

they are one of the best and stable jobs around. Knowing that, I applied and was offered the FSR position.

### Did you know what an electric co-op was?

I did not have any familiarity with what a co-op was. I went to college for electrical engineering and graduated in 2017 with my bachelor's degree with a focus on power. When I applied for the FSR job, I had no experience in the field at all, but I was optimistic about the opportunities that could arise once I got my "foot in the door."

### When did you start?

I have been with the co-op for 2.5 years and have recently been promoted to my current position, engineer service representative (ESR) and right of way (ROW) technician.

### What do you like about working for your electric co-op? What have you learned there?

It is like a big family. Everyone enjoys working here and is willing to lend a hand to get a project done or find a resolution. The benefits are amazing, and opportunities are always there for advancement. They take the time to train you and show that they are making an investment into you.

I have acquired many new skills. Being an FSR, I was taught a lot about metering and the infrastructure to our new radio frequency (RF) meters, along with how the distribution system of an electric company works. With the change to RF meters, the FSR job changed in what we did day-to-day, requiring our department to work closely with tech services and take some of their regular tasks.

Now as the ESR and ROW technician, I am learning more about ROW items, such as easements, permitting and GIS mapping. I also get to cross train with our field engineers and our operations and construction department. I have also been able to take a supervisory leadership course through the co-op, and I will also be doing ROW, geographic information system, and AutoCad courses with my current position.

### What do you want your community to know about working for your local co-op?

They do amazing work for every community we serve. I am personally involved with two nonprofits for my local town, and every time I ask the co-op for a donation to support an event, they are always willing to help. It is amazing to know that my place of work supports its employees and all the nonprofits that the employees are involved in. When any big event is happening in our area, SSVEC is usually there helping in some way, shape, or form.



## Summer Austin

Lead Warehouseperson  
Trico Electric  
Cooperative, Marana

### Why did you want to work at the co-op?

When I applied to work at Trico, I was in high school, and I applied for a summer internship in the warehouse.

I thought it would be a good learning opportunity to have a better understanding of what Trico did.

### Did you know what an electric co-op was?

The only thing I knew about a co-op was that we were considered members if we had them as our provider for electricity. Other than that, I didn't know much.

### When did you start?

I have been working at Trico since 2015. My current position is lead warehouseperson.

### What do you like about working for your electric co-op? What have you learned there?

I like working at Trico because of the family atmosphere; I feel more than just a number here. I am constantly learning new skills to broaden my knowledge in my department and with Trico in general.

### What do you want your community to know about working for your local co-op?

It's a pleasure working for a company that takes great care of their members.

Story continued on page 6





**Hannah Capozzi**  
Member & Public Relations Manager  
Grand Canyon State Electric Cooperative Association, Tempe

**Why did you want to work at the statewide association?**

I grew up on local co-op lines in rural Texas, and I was

somewhat familiar with co-ops. I moved from Texas to Arizona for college and needed a part-time job. I applied to work at the statewide office as a part-time receptionist and thought it would be good, dependable work to get me through college.

**Did you know what an electric co-op was?**

My familiarity with co-ops was very minimal. I had only thought of them as the local electricity provider, but I didn't fully understand the co-op model and culture until I started working at the statewide. I graduated from Arizona State University with a degree in health education and health promotion, and as a Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES), but I decided to stay at the statewide and continue my career in the co-op world.

**When did you start?**

I started in August 2016 as the front desk receptionist and worked my way up to communications and wellness coordinator, and now I am the member and public relations manager and the statewide Washington Youth Tour Director at GCSECA. I am excited to celebrate my six-year work anniversary with the statewide office this August!

**What do you like about working for electric co-ops? What have you learned?**

Co-ops' commitment to their employees and communities is unrivaled. I've never felt so heard, respected, or valued in an industry, and I love the transparency at every level. I started out only knowing the basics about corporate communication and public relations, but each co-op shares such a desire to see each person succeed that I've been blessed with countless amazing resources, mentors, and comrades in the co-op world who have exponentially helped me develop as both a professional and an individual.

**What do you want your community to know about working for your local co-op?**

Co-ops are founded on seven principles that I highly resonate with, and I love their commitment to excellence, integrity, and representation. Get

to know more about your local co-op! I guarantee that they want to get to know you more as well. We're here to advocate for, represent, educate, promote safety, and provide reliable energy to YOU – the member-owner! I love that we all have a voice in how our side of the energy industry is run and maintained and that each voice is valued. Together, we can use our co-op voice for the greater good of the future of energy reliability, safety, and representation.



**Grace Garcia**  
Member Service Representative  
Mohave Electric Cooperative, Bullhead City

**Why did you want to work at the co-op?**

I wanted to start working with Mohave Electric because jobs like these don't come often and this is more of a career

Photo courtesy of Mike Teegarden/  
Pioneer Utility Resources

to me rather than a "job." Most companies don't give young adults a chance and time to figure out what works best for them, so Mohave Electric giving me a chance meant everything to me, and now I absolutely love working here.

**Did you know what an electric co-op was?**

I did not have industry experience or a college degree, but I had customer service skills and I wanted to learn my new role. I honestly had no idea of what went on while working for Mohave electric — it's something I never thought I'd be able to do or get the chance to at least try.

**When did you start?**

I started in June 2021.

**What do you like about working for your electric co-op? What have you learned?**

I didn't necessarily know this job, but they took the time to train me. If I'd had to go to college for five years, I wouldn't be here at this age. I think it's nice they gave me a chance; I cross trained with the billing department — I like the math and different work you put into figuring out different members' usage, running reports, and doing all types of service orders. I have learned more about solar accounts and dealing with demand and usage. There are quite a few steps that go into billing.

**What do you want your community to know about working for your local co-op?**

This is more of a job rather than a career. Don't be

afraid to try for something new even if you thought you couldn't do it because you can — this is an amazing job to get started on a career, and there's always room to improve and move up in the co-op.



**Bernie Oviatt**  
Computer Technician  
Mohave Electric Cooperative, Bullhead City

**Why did you want to work at the co-op?**

Co-ops are to benefit the public. Personally, the reason I joined a cooperative is the amazing benefits they offer and the extensive skills I have been

Photo courtesy of Mohave Electric Cooperative

taught here.

**Did you know what an electric co-op was?**

I was attending Mohave Community College for my associate's degree in information technology, and one of my instructors was Heath Barker, MEC's chief information officer.

**When did you start?**

I was hired as a computer technician in December 2019.

**What do you like about working for your electric co-op? What have you learned?**

I've gotten a lot of my job training from Heath. I've enjoyed learning about the industry and the duties of the other departments.

**What do you want your community to know about working for your local co-op?**

Everyone works together. Everyone helps each other out — even if we aren't in the same field.



**Julia Garringer**  
Energy Management Specialist  
Mohave Electric Cooperative, Bullhead City

**Why did you want to work at the co-op?**

**Did you know what an electric co-op was?**

I earned a bachelor's degree in creative media and film, with

Photo courtesy of Mike Teegarden/  
Pioneer Utility Resources

a screenwriting emphasis, from Northern Arizona University. After graduating, I was a production assistant on the show Sister Wives for a year before moving back to Bullhead City, my hometown. I started an online master's degree at Arizona State University for technical communication and started job hunting.

MEC was a name I had grown up with, but I didn't know what a cooperative was and what it stood for. I started researching and found out it is one of the most stable and interesting jobs in this area.

**When did you start?**

I started in May 2021 as a public affairs coordinator, but within six months I knew I wanted to move into energy services. In January, I was hired as energy management specialist, and I was able to train with my predecessor, Steve Bouman, before he retired from MEC after 21 years.

I think that's what is so great about Mohave Electric in general. They always put their best foot forward training people. Being able to train with someone with so many years in the field was a phenomenal opportunity for me.

**What do you like about working for your electric co-op? What have you learned?**

I love to interact with the community and connect with members. Some people I've known since childhood. One of my favorite things is the problem-solving every day — we're working to solve the members' energy problems together to assist them, which is basically the cooperative model. We're here to serve them.


**What do you want your community to know about working for your local co-op?**

It's a member-owned utility, so everything that the cooperative does is to the benefit of its members. And MEC supports us, the employees, in our health, our career, and our family life. That's a huge difference than any other job I've had. That's something you typically don't find anymore.

—Reporting from Mohave Electric Cooperative courtesy of Victoria Hampton/Pioneer Utility Resources



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