

LABOR of LOVE

Bluebonnet's line workers showcase their skills and devotion to safety at event

Photos by Sarah Beal

It was a good day to beat the heat. That's why line workers from across the state started their competition in the annual Texas Lineman's Rodeo at 6:45 a.m. on July 20 at Nolte Island Park near Seguin. By the time the strenuous events that required rapid work atop unelectrified poles were finished around 11 a.m., temperatures were creeping into the mid-90s.

Competitors confronted the additional challenge of facing off in several "mystery events," in which the nature of the challenge is kept secret until moments before the timer starts.

Founded in 1996 and hosted by the Texas Lineman's Rodeo Association, the Texas Lineman's Rodeo is a labor of love for the line-worker trade that is now in its 23rd year. The events are designed to mirror challenges encountered daily by utility crews who work, sometimes in dangerous conditions, to ensure reliable power to more than 28 million Texas residents. Participating utilities, the majority of which are cooperatives, also supplied event judges, volunteers and barbecue teams.

Sixteen competitors from Bluebonnet participated this year. Apprentice Michael Guajardo was Bluebonnet's most successful team member, taking 5th place in the overall appren-

tice category. Out of 122 apprentices, Taylor Rutledge finished 8th, Drew Brownwood finished 10th and Ty Kasper finished 12th. The journeyman team of Jeffrey Bolding, Chris Rivera and Danny Bolding finished 18th out of 52 journeyman teams.

A three-member Bluebonnet barbecue team competed at the rodeo, serving up its best brisket, ribs and dessert.

"We did very well. Bluebonnet made a heck of a showing," said Randall Bownds, coach of Bluebonnet's team and an assistant superintendent of co-op field operations in Giddings. "As always, I'm very appreciative and proud of our guys for the dedication they put into the rodeo every year. It tells me that we not only have a great bunch of linemen now, but we will in the future — not just in the rodeo, but in how we serve our members." ■



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1) Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative sent two journeyman teams and 10 apprentices to the Texas Lineman's Rodeo. The 2019 rodeo team members are, back row, from left: Jeffrey Bolding, Danny Bolding, Chris Rivera, Troy Moore, Jeremy Lynch, Kendal Fiebrich, apprentice coach Daniel Fritsche, Michael Guajardo, Drew Brownwood, Tra Muston, Dylan Dussetschleger and Taylor Rutledge. Front row, from left: Ty Duesterheft, James Flores, Ty Kasper, Brooks Kasper and Stephen LaFrance.



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2) Apprentice Ty Duesterheft works his way through the 'hurtman rescue' event, which requires competitors to quickly and safely lower a heavy dummy to the ground.

3) Daniel Fritsche, left, the apprentices' coach, congratulates Michael Guajardo for bringing home a fifth place finish out of all 122 apprentices competing at the rodeo.

4) Matt Hollingsworth, holding up some ribs, was one of the grill-masters from Bluebonnet competing for barbecue honors.

5) Journeyman linemen Chris Rivera, left, and Jeffrey Bolding team up for a 'mystery' event, working on a pole crossarm on the unelectrified lines set up for the competition.



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Move-over law now protects utility workers on roadside

Texas lawmakers passed an important bill in the 2019 legislative session that will protect utility workers. Motorists in Texas must now move over or slow down when passing stationary utility vehicles with flashing amber or blue lights.

The state's Move Over/Slow Down law was expanded to include utility vehicles — including those of electric cooperatives. The law already protects police, fire, medical emergency, Texas Department of Transportation vehicles and tow trucks.

Starting Sept. 1, drivers must, if possible, get out of the lane nearest any parked vehicle with

amber or blue lights flashing, or slow down to 20 mph below the posted speed limit.

"We greatly appreciate the Texas Legislature and Gov. Greg Abbott passing and signing into law this bill that will do much to protect the safety of not only our servicemen and women, but motorists as well," said Matt Bentke, general manager of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative. "Safety is paramount to Bluebonnet. This is an important measure that will help protect our employees and the public while our crews are working along the numerous, well-traveled roads in our service area."



The Texas Legislature expanded the 'Move Over' law to include utility workers flashing blue or amber lights. Motorists must change lanes or slow down near them, starting Sept. 1. Sarah Beal photo

Bluebonnet goes gold, then pink to support fight against cancer

Bluebonnet's buildings, vehicles and employees are going gold in September to put the spotlight on Childhood Cancer Awareness Month. In October, gold will give way to pink for National Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

This is the second year Bluebonnet has marked Childhood Cancer Awareness Month by illuminating its buildings in gold light, decorating its vehicles with gold decals and handing out gold bracelets, pins or temporary tattoos to members. Member service representatives will wear special gold angel-wing pins to commemorate the month. Employees will wear gold rub-

ber bracelets that say "No One Fights Alone."

For the seventh year, in October, Bluebonnet will bathe its member service centers in pink light, add pink ribbon decals to its trucks, hand out pink ribbon pins in the communities it serves and replace its blue-and-white hard hats with pink ones. Employees will wear pink T-shirts to remind everyone of the ongoing effort to raise funds to support prevention and treatment of breast cancer.

Check Bluebonnet's Facebook and Twitter pages for information about these awareness campaigns during September and October.