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**Andrew York Lineman Rodeo  
challenges linemen while  
helping community**



# Cover Story

by Kimberlee Craig



## Andrew York Lineman Rodeo challenges linemen while helping the community

**S**tanding in a forest of 45-foot wood poles in Walla Walla Point Park along the Columbia River, second-year apprentice Gary Wood from Okanogan County PUD was eager for the competition to start at the sixth annual Andrew York Lineman Rodeo held last month in Wenatchee, Wash.

“It’s a good time — the camaraderie. You’re testing your skills against all the other guys,” said Wood, who was making his second trip to the only lineman rodeo held in Washington State. “It’s good practice, even though some things like hurt-man rescue you hope you never have to do. It’s a pressure situation and comparable to the field.”

Wood was one of 30 apprentices and 16 teams who competed in the 2010 event hosted by employees and volunteers from Chelan, Douglas, and Okanogan PUDs, and IBEW Local 77.

The lineman rodeo is held to honor Andrew York, a Chelan PUD journeyman lineman who died in 2000 after being struck by a drunken driver while on the job. Proceeds from the rodeo support the Andrew York Memorial Scholarship, which has awarded more than \$14,000 to high school seniors active in preventing teen drug and alcohol abuse.

### Competing for a cause

The support for scholarships is what caught the interest of the team from Kansas City, Mo., home of the International Lineman’s Rodeo — the “Super Bowl” of competitive events for power linemen. For winning the hometown event, the team from Kansas City Power and Light got to choose one regional competition to attend, explained Martin Putnam, a former lineman and now a supervisor, who traveled with the team.

“After reading the story of Andrew York, they decided they wanted to come,” said Putnam, adding that he’d never seen a rodeo site as beautiful as Walla Walla Point Park, built along the shores of the Columbia River with the Cascade foothills as a backdrop.

Comments like that mean a lot to the volunteer organizers of the event, who meet at least monthly all through the year to make sure each rodeo is a success for spectators, competitors, and the scholarship fund.

“This event is a tribute to the camaraderie of all those in the line trade and our commitment to improve skills and increase safety awareness,” said Daryn Klinginsmith of Wenatchee, a former lineman and a founding member of the Andrew York Lineman Rodeo. “Many

of the competitors said they chose this event to attend because it supports scholarships. So many people volunteer so many hours to make it happen and it is exciting to see it keep growing every year.”

### Support for a fallen brother

Andy York was everyone’s idea of a lineman. He was tall, strong, and devoted to his family, his work at Chelan County PUD, and his union brothers and sisters. The circumstances of York’s death in July 2000 while on the job made the loss even harder. He was struck by a drunken driver and died a few days later.

Almost immediately, co-workers began talking about how to honor York and what they could do to help prevent other families from having to face the grief of a death caused by drunken driving.

In August 2000, PUD commissioners named the District’s newest switchyard for York. Community safety events were organized in 2003 and 2004 in his memory to raise scholarship funds for local high school graduates active in preventing teen drug and alcohol abuse.

While meaningful, those events didn’t reflect York’s zeal for line work. He was hired as a Chelan County PUD



Above: Lewis PUD journeymen Damian Hernandez, left, and Jason Speck compete in the insulator change-out event. Right: Jack Brundage, retired Chelan PUD lineman, celebrates with Chelan PUD line foreman Ryan McGregor, left, and Kyle Pennington, Douglas PUD journeyman, right, after finishing the spectator pole climb. All photos courtesy of Chelan PUD.

## 2010 Andrew York Lineman Rodeo results

Journeymen linemen from PGE in Portland, Ore., took top overall honors at the sixth annual Andrew York Lineman Rodeo on Saturday, June 19, 2010.

Luis Ochoa, Joel Wallace, and Ron Rodgers finished the four team events with 700 points and the lowest cumulative time of 1,606.65 seconds. The top apprentice was Brent Mann (third-year) from Central Lincoln PUD in Oregon, finishing the series of four events plus a written test with an overall score of 484 points and a cumulative time of 2,483.06 seconds.

Other top finishers in the team events were the IBEW Local 77 team of Kevin Cromer (Lewiston, Idaho), Ryan Cromer (Spokane, Wash.), and Dusty Slag (Rockford, Wash.) who all took second place; and the Kansas City Power and Light team of Steve McCauley, Paul White, and Daryl Foster who came in third. The Okanogan PUD team of Rod Little, Micah Somes, and Brian Chamberlin were sixth overall.

The second- and third-place finishers in the apprentice competition were first-year Adam Brinkman (Lacey, Wash.) and first-year Tyler Fotheringham (Seattle City Light). Douglas PUD second-year apprentice Joe Baker placed fifth. **NWPPA**



apprentice in 1996 after working in construction and was a journeyman lineman when he died at the age of 33.

Chelan PUD linemen and supervisors who were involved in pole-top rescue competitions had seen other lineman rodeos and wanted to bring the excitement and safety message of that kind of event to North Central Washington.

As planning started in 2005 for a memorial event to raise scholarship money, organizers and PUD linemen came together, and the Andrew York Memorial Lineman Rodeo was launched.

"There were people involved in doing a fundraiser. Andy was a lineman and it seemed like a natural fit," said Steve Hendrickson, IBEW Local 77 business agent and member of the rodeo planning committee. A former Chelan PUD foreman, Hendrickson was on the job with York the day of the accident.

"(The rodeo) has been an incredible relationship builder, and it's an awesome

way to attract new workers," he said. "It's a great way for us to put our titles down and work together for a good cause."

The combination of competition and camaraderie has drawn employees together from across the District and from other PUDs.

"I worked with Andy his first day on the job," said Klinginsmith, now a system operator for Chelan PUD. "I knew him his whole career at the PUD and know he loved the line work trade, like many of us do! I've always loved lineman competitions, and being an instrumental part in building the York

Lineman Rodeo for both those reasons was just a real simple choice."

## Safety as important as speed

So what is a lineman rodeo? There aren't any bucking broncos or bulls, but it is a test of skill and there's a lot to watch as teams and apprentices scramble up and down poles, trying to beat the clock while meeting skill and safety requirements, under a judge's watchful eye.

This year journeyman teams and the apprentices tested their skills and knowl-

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edge in events including a pole-top rescue, speed climb, insulator change-out, and jumper (connector) installation. Organizers include a mystery event every year. This year teams found themselves ferrying a large stuffed animal and a rubber chicken between poles set several feet apart. The speed climb requires contestants to put a fresh egg in their mouths for the trip down the pole.

While the events are timed, veteran contestants said trying to go too fast hurts scores in the end.

"Everybody thinks it's about speed. It's not," said Steve McCauley from Kansas City Power and Light. "You want to go for smooth; don't worry about the speed. Matter of fact — they time us with a calendar."

Wes Peterson is a lineman for Seattle City Light, who has competed in Wenatchee several times, this year with Team Buckingham/Local 77. His advice: relax.

"You know that saying: 'Slow down, I'm in a hurry.' That's a good thing to remember," Peterson said.

Rodney Lewis, a general foreman with 28 years in the trade, came to the York rodeo with three teams from PGE, based in Portland, Ore. He had just one word of advice for novice competitors. "The key to all these rodeos is safety, safety, safety," said Lewis.

Chelan County PUD line foreman Kevin Medved agreed: "You want to get down to the ground safe and sound."

That seemed to be the fervent wish as well for about 100 adults and children who strapped on spikes and a



*These youngsters have other things on their minds while their dad listens to speakers at the opening ceremony.*

## Join the fun!

- What:** Andrew York Memorial Lineman Rodeo  
**When:** Every year, third Saturday in June  
**Where:** Walla Walla Point Park in Wenatchee, Wash.  
**Who:** Everyone is invited to watch for free; power linemen and apprentices from the Northwest and beyond are encouraged to register and compete.  
**Why:** Raise scholarship money for high school seniors involved in preventing teen drug and alcohol abuse.  
**Details:** [www.chelanpud.org](http://www.chelanpud.org) under "Lineman Rodeo"

safety harness to complete the spectator climb up a pole to ring a bell hanging about 20 feet above the ground. Among those were retired Chelan PUD lineman Jack Brundage, 81, from Wenatchee and retired Douglas PUD lineman Tim Webber, also 81, from Cashmere.

### A family feeling

Many competitors mentioned the friendships they've made at the lineman rodeo and the feeling of a family reunion. Wenatchee's central location and usually sunny weather prompted the IBEW to hold its annual members picnic nearby in Walla Walla Point Park.

"We've made a lot of friends here over the years," said journeyman Manny Cervantez, also a member of Team Buckingham/Local 77, who likes the small-town feel of the York Rodeo. "We make it a point to come to this one to support the York family."

Ganelle Graves-York, Andy's wife, who was at the rodeo with her daughter, Ellie, 12, and other family, is grateful for that support. It's been 10 years this month since the accident that took her husband's life.

"It's overwhelming when you look at all these people who come together for this cause," she said. "I'm humbled."

Her daughter was just two years old when the accident happened and remembers little about her dad, but loves coming to the rodeo. Ellie helps with kids' activities like rock and face painting. This year she wore a Chelan PUD hard hat with "York" on the back in faded lettering. It was her father's hat that she had found recently in a closet.

For the first time, she tried the kid's spectator climb this year, struggling a bit, but making it up to ring the bell, still wearing her dad's hard hat.

Graves-York said Ellie talks about winning the scholarship, "and I explain to her that there's a lot of competition and you'll have to work hard to earn it." She also appreciates the strong safety message and the focus on the dangers of drinking and driving.

"I'm just amazed every year," Graves-York added, looking across the rodeo grounds at the crowd of spectators and competitors. **NWPPA**

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## 2010 scholarship winners

- **Kate Duvall** (Hudson's Bay High School, Vancouver, Wash., served by Clark Public Utilities)  
Duvall plans to attend the University of Northern Colorado to major in biology in preparation for medical school. She has served as a student body officer each year in high school, ending as president in her senior year. In 2009, as part of her prom-planning duties, she organized a week-long anti-drunk driving campaign to promote a safe and alcohol-free event.
- **Julia Day** (Waterville High School, Waterville, Wash., served by Douglas PUD)  
Day is headed to the University of Washington for pre-law studies. At WHS, she helped found, and was president of, Students Against Drunk Driving, served as an officer in Teens Against Tobacco Use, and was captain of the girls' varsity basketball team. **NWPPA**