

## The power of serving

### Lineman leaves comfort zone to empower a community

Kevin Bay had never left U.S. soil. There wasn't necessarily a particular reason why. The opportunity just hadn't arisen. That all changed this Spring as the JCREMC Journeyman Lineman headed to San Jacinto, Guatemala with Indiana Electric Cooperatives' Project Indiana.

Bay, alongside 13 other line workers representing various Indiana electric cooperatives, traveled to the Central American nation for 16 days to power the community and afford the residents life-changing opportunities. Sharing resources to help improve lives – especially the lives of the children – motivated him to step out of his comfort zone.

"That's what it was about for me," he said. "The kids."

#### emPOWERING A COMMUNITY

San Jacinto is a rural community in east central Guatemala where the residents speak a Mayan dialect called K'iche'. The terrain is

hilly and unforgiving, the weather hot and humid, and the local water source a creek at the edge of the village.

The region has a hydroelectric power plant and three-phase lines but much like the founders of the rural electric movement in the U.S. in the 1930s, the rural communities of Guatemala aren't automatically served by the country's electric utilities. In the case of San Jacinto and countless similar Guatemalan villages, the means and expertise to tie into the power system simply don't exist.

With no previous access to electricity, the people of San Jacinto had relied on a diesel engine to pump water from the nearby creek to their homes. At some point, vandals had stolen parts of the engine and it no longer ran. Without it, women had to daily hike rough terrain to the creek, their heads adorned with large buckets and jugs, to retrieve water for their families. No electricity also meant the only way to power lights, sewing machines, or corn grinders ▶



Indiana Electric Cooperatives photo/Richard Biever



Kevin Bay shares photos and videos of his family with children in San Jacinto, Guatemala. (Indiana Electric Cooperatives photo/Richard Biever)

Each day, a group of community men worked on construction alongside the line crews, making the entire project collaborative.

Project Indiana had one additional requirement for any community residents who wanted their homes to have power. Those who received indoor wiring committed to purchasing a small wood stove with a chimney to properly vent smoke. Prior to the project, women would cook over open flames on large stones inside their dirt-floor kitchens. According to Bay, the constant smoke inhalation had started

to take its toll on their health. Diverting the smoke outside of their homes will improve both.

was with small generators.

## COMMUNITY INVESTMENT

Funding for the community's electric infrastructure came through Project Indiana and the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association; however, the residents were required to take ownership in the project, make some investments – predominantly in the form of sweat equity – and be part of the long-term plan to maintain it.

One way the residents invested was by setting all the electric poles throughout the community prior to the Project Indiana team's arrival. They dug holes 5-feet deep and set the 35-foot poles manually, including tying ropes around the tops of the poles to pull them into place. When each one was set, one of the men had to climb to the top – sans climbing gear – to remove the rope.

In addition to setting poles, the people of San Jacinto built a shed that served as the line crew's warehouse. The locked and guarded facility allowed the team to safely store their equipment (all of which was sourced locally) and gear for the entirety of the mission.

## BEYOND POWER

Project Indiana helped San Jacinto form an electric cooperative to oversee the new infrastructure, power distribution, and long-term sustainability of the system. Maintenance and repairs will be handled by line workers from Guatemala's power plant.

But the Project Indiana team's impact in San Jacinto expands beyond electricity.

They completed their line and wiring work ahead of schedule, giving the crew time to repair the non-functioning diesel pump engine so the villagers again had easier access to water. They also powered the pump house, so the community can convert to an electric water pump in the future.

The team decided together that they wanted to do something special for the kids. They pooled together their own donations and combined the funds with contributions from one of the sponsoring cooperatives and a team member's church to purchase 200 pairs

of Frogs, versatile shoes similar to Crocs. They also bought piñatas and candy and threw a little celebration before they left.

They put the remaining funds toward offsetting the costs of San Jacinto's new properly vented stoves.

### NEW PERSPECTIVES

Seeing Guatemala firsthand was more than Bay could have imagined prior to the trip. He tried new foods, experienced a new culture, saw new places, and worked in different conditions.

Every morning, he and his fellow Project Indiana linemen made the 30-minute commute from their hotel to San Jacinto. Without bucket trucks to get them to the top, Bay said they climbed each of the electric poles at least three times. Combine that with the rough terrain they hiked around the community and "every day is leg day in Guatemala," he said.

It made for tired and sore muscles but Bay said the views from the top were breathtaking.

"One of the things that really exceeded my expectations was the view and just how beautiful Guatemala is," he said. "I had no idea."

Even though Bay had reservations about leaving the United States and his family for 16 days, he went in with an open mind and a goal to serve others. He left with a whole new perspective.

"I really hope more people want to do this and I hope to see other people get involved with Project Indiana," he said. "It's changing people's lives tremendously. We take for granted what we have. To share our resources is a great thing." ■

## Project:

### SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

Project Indiana is a non-profit philanthropic organization committed to serving the people of Guatemala. It is administered by Indiana Electric Cooperatives and governed by a board of directors representing some of the state's REMCs, as well as law, construction, and communications firms.

The organization's mission centers around creating sustainable change. That means that they're not only powering Guatemala's rural communities but also helping them form cooperatives and improve education, nutrition, water, and healthcare.

The 16-day line-crew trips currently happen every two years but board members travel back and forth more frequently and the work in Guatemala never stops.

Learn more about Project Indiana, including ways to support the mission, at [projectindiana.org](http://projectindiana.org).



## Bonus content

See photos and videos from the trip at [jcremc.com/san-jacinto](http://jcremc.com/san-jacinto).

# Annual Meeting 2020

The Annual Meeting of the JCREMC membership will be Saturday, April 4, 2020 at Franklin Community High School's Performing Arts Center. The meeting will include the traditional complimentary breakfast 8-10 a.m. with the business meeting to follow. Board of Director elections will run congruent with breakfast. Entertainment will be provided by country artists Cody Ikerd and the Sidewinders.

## Statement of Non-Discrimination

JCREMC is an equal opportunity provider and employer. If you wish to file a Civil Rights program complaint of discrimination, complete the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Program Discrimination Complaint Form, found online at [http://www.asc.usda.gov/complaint\\_filing\\_cust.html](http://www.asc.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html), or at any USDA office, or call 866-632-9992 to request the form. You may also write a letter containing all the information requested in the form. Send your completed complaint form or letter by mail to U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Avenue S.W., Washington D.C. 20250-9410, by fax to 202-690-7442 or by email to [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

## Nominating Committee

The Nominating Committee for Johnson County Rural Electric Membership Corporation has been appointed for the 2020 Annual Meeting. The committee members are listed below by district. In accordance with the bylaws, the Nominating Committee will meet on September 17, 2019 to consider and nominate the director candidates to be on the ballot at the 2020 Annual Meeting.

**District 1\*** (Current director: Glenn McAlpin)  
Zach Dougherty

**District 2** (Current director: Seth Brown)  
Clay Fulkerson

**District 3** (Current director: Steve Shaul)  
Michele Graves

**District 4\*** (Current director: James Meredith)  
Ken Bradley

**District 5** (Current director: Lee Ann Wilbur)  
Lynn Gray

**District 6** (Current director: Stephen Watson)  
Conrad Wong

**District 7** (Current director: Ron Barnett)  
Linda Haggard

**\*denotes district up for election April 2020.**

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