

AUGUST–SEPTEMBER 2022

SAVE THE DATE

Aug. 9

**The Do's and Don'ts of
Easement Acquisition**
Webinar

Aug. 15–19

**30-Hour OSHA
Compliance Course**

San Angelo, Concho Valley EC

Aug. 17–19

**NRECA Safety
Leadership Summit**

Austin, JW Marriott

Sept. 13

**Stray Voltage and
Swimming Pools**

Webinar

Sept. 19–23

**Underground
Installation School**

McGregor, Heart of Texas EC

Sept. 20–23

Transformer School

Robstown, Nueces EC

Oct. 3–7

**Workshop: Staking Technician
Training Seminar—Phase III**

Georgetown, TEC
Training Facility

Oct. 11

Understanding Microgrids

Webinar

ALWAYS THINK SAFETY

Gloves | Grounds | Cover Up

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Use the [TEC Safety and Loss Control discussion list](#) on the TEC member website to share and gather information.



**Texas Electric
Cooperatives**

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

A BIMONTHLY PUBLICATION
FROM TEC LOSS CONTROL

He Kept on Truckin'

Scholarship fund reaps rewards of J.R. Rusch's craftsmanship

J.R. Rusch was supposed to be a farmer in Kansas.

"When I grew up, I knew that I was going to be a farmer because my dad said I'm going to be a farmer," Rusch says. His dad was a farmer. And *his* dad was a farmer.

So at age 7, Dad sent him out into a field by himself on a tractor. The front wheels hit a plow furrow, which sent the steering wheel spinning. Rusch lost his grip and broke three fingers.

Dad didn't say it would be easy.

Rusch (pronounced roosh) later left the farm behind and had a fulfilling 32-year career in construction at South Texas EC, but a firm work ethic learned from his parents served him well on his meandering career path and fueled a passion for other kinds of vehicles that he got his hands on.

Rusch's meticulously crafted wooden model trucks have been a huge success for years at the scholarship auction at TEC's Loss Control Conference. The auction comprises items donated to Loss Control by co-op friends.

"I have fun doing these things," says Rusch, who turns 72 this month. "My objective for doing this is for the kids, for the scholarships."

Rusch announced at the Loss Control Conference in March that the handcrafted mesquite model Peterbilt pole-hauling truck that he contributed to this year's auction would be his last. Painful arthritis in his hands prevents him from performing the intricate work the models require. His final donation, which took about 26 hours to make, sold for \$5,250.

But those hands served him well for decades. Rusch took a woodworking class in high school. Then, while studying at what is now Fort Hays State University in Hays, Kansas, he took a job in the school's maintenance department, where he picked up plumbing, painting, refrigeration and additional carpentry skills.

He also got involved in homebuilding and might have made a career of that if a high school principal hadn't learned of his skills and lured him into becoming a woodworking teacher. Soon he was coaching three sports and driving a school bus, too.

He ended up teaching half-days and working con-



J.R. Rusch holds the intricately detailed pole-hauling truck he donated for the 2022 TEC Loss Control Scholarship auction.

struction in the afternoons. But when the bottom dropped out of homebuilding in 1979, Rusch and his wife, also a teacher, began considering a move to Texas.

The Rusches ended up in Victoria, and in 1981, STEC called him and made him a job offer he couldn't turn down. He stayed there until he retired in 2014, helping the generation and transmission co-op build 30 substations across STEC's far-reaching territory.

He remembers seeing handicrafts and art projects in the auction at safety conferences and wondering if he could create a model utility vehicle to contribute.

That was 23 years ago, and in that time he has produced three pole-hauling trucks, three service trucks, a digger derrick, four bucket trucks and a late 1920s model pickup truck. He found contributing to the TEC Loss Control scholarship auction rewarding.

"The co-op [world] is a fraternity. Always has been, and I hope it always will be," says Rusch, who also has crafted a humpback trunk, fishing rod holders and jewelry boxes for the auction.

Rusch's tinkering doesn't stop with miniature vehicles. Another passion is restoring antique cars and trucks—bodies, engines, the whole vehicle.

And he notes that his dad wasn't totally wrong

Co-op Newcomers Rule Lineman's Rodeo

Co-op lineworkers made sparkling debuts July 16 at the Texas Lineman's Rodeo, which returned to Nolte Island Park in Seguin for the first time in three years after the competition was scuttled in 2020 and 2021 because of COVID-19.

Pedernales EC's Phillip Stapp finished first among 96 apprentices, continuing his co-op's dominance among beginning lineworkers. Stapp was the fourth consecutive apprentice to claim that title for PEC; the co-op took second place in 2016.

Stapp had plenty of company in the spotlight. PEC's Crispin Davis was third among apprentices, and Cole Compton was fifth. The PEC team of Caleb Brodock, Garrit Afman and Thomas Logan took first place in the journeyman category. PEC claimed three of the top seven spots among the 42 journeyman teams.



The Bartlett EC team of, from left, Chris Allen, Bryan Lightfoot and Rudy Gonzales took second place in the Texas Lineman's Rodeo senior division.

Bryan Lightfoot's debut was notable because he serves as Bartlett EC's general manager and CEO. He teamed with BEC lineworkers Chris Allen and Rudy Gonzales to finish second in the senior division, for employees 45 years and older.

"It was obviously very physically taxing but rewarding," said Lightfoot, who is no stranger to line-work. He joined BEC crews providing mutual aid during

hurricanes Ike, Harvey and Laura, and he attended a TEC pole climbing school to become certified to climb.

Garrett Beckham took second place in apprentice pole climbing in Bowie-Cass EC's first time participating in the rodeo. "We'll be back better and hopefully win more trophies and just get better every year," he said.

Bluebonnet EC apprentice Andrew Murphy said training for the rodeo—once a week for two months and then for a full week right before the competition—leaves him with more than his fourth-place overall finish. "The rodeo made me a better climber," Murphy said. [Click here](#) to see the full results.

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about him becoming a farmer. He still owns about 3,000 acres of Kansas farmland on which others grow soybeans, corn, milo, wheat, grain sorghum and alfalfa.

Rusch ponders his past and the many paths he took as he looks at his hands, stiff and aching with arthritis. He realizes his last stop, STEC and the safety community at TEC Loss Control Conferences—the co-op world—was where he belonged.

"It didn't grow on me. It grew around me," Rusch says. "It took me in."

TEC UPDATE

2023 TEC Loss Control Scholarship Applications

The TEC Loss Control Scholarship program supports students in the cooperative and electric utility industry family. High school seniors in the class of 2023 are eligible to apply if they are children of electric cooperative, electric municipal or contractor employees who participate in TEC's Loss Control program, such as organizational safety meetings, schools or the Loss Control Conference. Scholarship applications will be available this fall on TEC's website. For more information, email [Tami Knipstein](mailto:Tami.Knipstein@tec.org).

2023 TEC Loss Control School Registration

Registration opens Sept. 1 for 2023 TEC Loss Control schools. The 2023 school calendar will be available mid-August on the [Event Calendar](#) page of the TEC website.

Staff Changes

Curtis Whitt has been promoted to Loss Control assistant manager. Wesley Caldwell has been promoted to Loss Control regional supervisor. And Jay Esquivel has been hired as a Loss Control specialist.

Hurricane Season

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration forecast the 2022 hurricane season, which runs June 1–November 30, would produce 14–21 named storms, including three to six major hurricanes. If the forecast holds true, 2022 would be the seventh consecutive above-average hurricane season. Last year marked the first time on record that two consecutive hurricane seasons exhausted the list of 21 storm names.

Four major hurricanes developed in 2021. Two of those that struck late in the summer forced Texas electric co-op crews into action to repair damage.

Seven Texas co-ops sent some 100 lineworkers to Louisiana as part of a massive two-week recovery effort after Hurricane Ida made landfall Aug. 29, 2021.

Hurricane Nicholas made landfall Sept. 14, 2021, near Sargent Beach. The storm dumped upward of 8 inches of rain and brought 75 mph winds, cutting power to 11,500 of Jackson EC's 16,500 meters.

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