Responding to new realities at PG&E

Why we engage in “Transformation”

By Perry Zimmerman, Business Manager

PG&E initiated its Business Transformation process in large part because of its belief that radical change was necessary to position the company favorably in the new world of the electric and gas utility industry, in which mergers and acquisitions are likely to concentrate control of the industry in the hands of fewer and fewer corporations. They point to recent acquisitions of Constellation (Baltimore Gas and Electric) by Florida Power and Light and of Keyspan (Brooklyn Gas) by National Grid as evidence of the accelerating pace of utility acquisitions.

Whether we agree with the company’s analysis or not, and whether we like it not, it is here. In fact, we agree in large part with their analysis of the business world in which utilities operate and we agree with the general notion that things could be done better than they are today. Several “bench-marked” companies were held up as examples of excellence, including Hydro One in Canada, National Grid in Boston, and Florida Power and Light.

To the extent that Florida Power and Light is held up as a model of the utility of the future we dissent because we don’t like the barebones approach to customer service and infrastructure that we see at FP&L. Site visits have been held at Hydro One, and we intend to visit National Grid this spring to study their consolidated design processes.

Business Transformation Before Employee Engagement

For more than a year, PG&E worked on its Business Transformation plans without input from either its unions or its unionized workforce. Instead, hundreds of consultants from Accenture were brought on to advise the company.

For more on page 2...

Concern over out-sourcing at Sierra Pacific Power

Standing room only at the March unit meeting in Reno

Local 1245 members at Sierra Pacific Power are turning out in record numbers at unit meetings this spring as the union enters its sixth month of contract negotiations with the Reno-based utility.

There was standing room only at the Reno unit meeting in March as members sought more information on company proposals. Among the top concerns: language in proposals put forward by the company that would allow outsourcing of members’ jobs.

Another big concern are company proposals for huge medical cost-shifting to employees and retirees.

Recently-released executive compensation figures show a 29% increase in compensation for the top five executives of the company.

Members can find out the latest information on negotiations by attending their unit meetings. The unit meeting schedule can be accessed on-line at www.ibew1245.com/unitmeetings.html.
Company on how to improve its operations. The Accenture recommendations were based on Accenture’s “play book”: 1. Upgrade and improve technology; 2. Centralize work; 3. Standardize work; 4. Consolidate work; 5. Outsource work (including offshore contractors).

Again, whether we agree with the first four principles or not is not especially relevant; they are clearly management rights. We do have contract language in both the Clerical and Physical agreements that limit the company’s ability to outsource work, and so this principle is one where we have an opinion and voice.

**Employee Engagement**

Late in 2005, management asked Local 1245 to identify bargaining unit members who would be willing to participate in the Business Transformation process. While we were aware of the political dangers of asking union members to participate (the perception that they were joining in management decisions that might adversely affect other union members), we felt for two reasons that engagement was a good idea for our members.

First, we believed that by giving our members a voice, limited as it might be, at the management table, we might be able to have an impact, however slight, on management decisions.

Second, we believed that the more we knew about management’s thinking and plans, the better off we would be in any negotiations over implementation of the transformation initiatives.

Further, we believe that our members are smart enough to know that we are not participating in transformation as a business partner with PG&E, but that we are simply fulfilling our historic approach of labor-management cooperation.

When our members joined the Business Transformation process, they found that many initiatives were nearly completed, without bargaining unit input. They found that the contractually permitted management principles (standardization, consolidation, centralization, and improved technology) all could result in the loss of hundreds of bargaining unit jobs. If the technology claims hold up, the company will simply be able to do more work, more quickly, and with fewer people. Lastly, they found that Accenture was a fierce advocate for outsourcing work that it considered “non-core” and that Accenture considered most work “non-core.”

For approximately two months, our members worked on recommendations to management, some joint and some separate. Ultimately management made and will make Business Transformation decisions. We saw several decisions evolve considerably during the employee engagement process. For example, the company’s plans for materials moved from complete outsourcing, to a new warehouse in Tracy with no other warehouses, to the current plan that keeps all three warehouses embracing new technology and systems.

A second example of the effect of our members in the engagement process is with the RMCs. Accenture had advocated one or a maximum of two RMCs, but the company ultimately decided on seven after considerable pressure from our members and ESC members.

**The Transformation Negotiations**

In February, the company presented Local 1245 with approximately 25 proposals to implement Business Transformation initiatives. Copies of all the company proposals may be found on our website (see box).

Rather than tackle all the proposals at once, we grouped them by subject and agreed to start with three basic subjects: RMCs and dispatching, emergency response, and materials. Dorothy Porter is leading the RMC negotiations. Sam Glero is leading the dispatching negotiations. Howard Stiefer is leading the emergency response negotiations, and Larry Pierce is leading the Materials negotiations. Rank and file members are part of every committee.

Progress is mixed for the three committees. The company’s materials department proposal is the least controversial, and the basic terms of a letter agreement were agreed upon at the first meeting of that committee.

The emergency response negotiations have focused on the company’s desire to reduce the average outage duration. Local 1245’s counter-proposal may be found on our website.

The most difficult negotiations have been over staffing of the RMCs. The company and union proposals and counter-proposals, once again, may be found on our website.

As negotiations progress, we will be posting further status reports on the IBEW Local 1245 websites on the Internet and on PG&E’s Intranet.

**Support for ESC’s Ben Hudnall**

IBEW Local 1245 sends its support and deepest sympathy to union activist and leader Ben Hudnall, who has been diagnosed with a serious illness.

As a long-time business manager for the Engineers and Scientists of California, IFPTE Local 20, Hudnall has stood alongside Local 1245 in various campaigns to improve the lives and working conditions of employees at Pacific Gas & Electric. Most recently, Hudnall and ESC have worked closely with Local 1245 in efforts to protect the jobs of union members during PG&E’s transformation process.

Our thoughts are with our friend and ally, Ben Hudnall, as he faces this new challenge.

**Correction**

A photo of the alternate representative for General Construction at the February meeting of the Local 1245 Advisory Council was misidentified on Page 5 of the March issue of Utility Reporter. The person in the photo representing GC was Brian Kapaun. Our sincere apologies.
Journeyman raise

To the Editor:

Thank you for the fine job that is done by you and your staff of the Utility Reporter. As a Local 1245 member, the publication is vital to me and many others as a reliable source of information.

With that said, I would like to ask that a correction be made to the article titled “Journeyman wage bump” that appeared on page 2 of the Jan/Feb 2006 issue. The article states that “Local 1245 has negotiated a 1% wage increase for all bargaining unit members working in journey-level classifications at Pacific Gas & Electric.”

This, in fact, is not the case. The union did not negotiate the 1% raise for journey level workers in the Building Services lines of progression. It is interesting that the job descriptions for these classifications specifically states that they are “employees who are Journeyman.”

It would be appreciated if the Utility Reporter could report on any progress related to resolving this issue. At the very least a correction related to the earlier article should be forthcoming.

William Ross
Templeton, CA

Respect retirees

Editor’s note: The following letter to PG&E President Tom King by Richard Perez was forwarded to the Utility Reporter by the author:

Mr. King:

I was employed by PG&E in 1969 and retired in 2004. My reason for writing this letter is to express my concern regarding the erosion of pension dollars and escalating medical expenses. I have been retired for two years and already I have had an increase in my medical plan premium. It worries me that I will have to pay more for medical care costs in the future which, in effect, will reduce the amount of pension dollars which would ordinarily be used to cover ongoing living expenses. You can understand how this situation is troubling for myself as well as for my fellow retirees who find themselves in a similar situation.

For many of us who worked in the Gas Service Department, we incurred injuries while on the job due to the physical demands of work we performed. These injuries follow us into our retirement years and compromise our health. Therefore, affordable medical coverage becomes critical.

As do most retirees, I look back on my years of employment with PG&E with a sense of pride and satisfaction on having performed my job to the best of my ability. It is this level of commitment and dedication to PG&E and its customers that has driven the success that PG&E experiences today. As employees, we strived to deliver a level of quality of service which helped create an optimal level of customer satisfaction. This has translated into a public image of PG&E as a company which is not only dependable, but responsive to the needs of the community.

As an employee who worked directly with both residential and commercial customers, I made it my duty to treat each customer with the utmost respect and courtesy while providing the expertise required to solve the customers respective problems. Is it then too much to ask that PG&E treat its retirees with the same level of respect and courtesy? PG&E needs to reward retirees for their years of loyalty and commitment to the company and its customers. Retirees should be compensated with optimal retirement and benefit packages.

It is upsetting when we retirees learn that PG&E executives receive millions of dollars in retirement packages while retirees like ourselves are not given adequate pension benefit plans. This does not demonstrate good faith or fair play. What will it require to receive adequate retirement compensation? I hope our letters will collectively make a difference when the time comes for future contract negotiations. We will look for positive outcomes.

Richard Perez, Member
Local 1245 Retirees Club
Sacramento, CA

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Sacramento, CA

Look what’s on the IBEW 1245 website.

Internet: www.ibew1245.com

At PG&E: Go to "My Stuff," select "IBEW"

Key contacts
Photos galore!
New member information
Union library
Benefits for you
Union shopper
More benefits
Focus on medical costs, pensions

Retiree Club members urge fellow retirees to get involved

As Local 1245 retirees continue to organize in greater numbers, they have a message for retirees still sitting at home: it’s time to get involved.

A schedule of Retiree Club meetings appears on this page. At the North Bay Chapter meeting in Santa Rosa, retirees proposed sending a letter to invite fellow retirees living in the area to attend the next Chapter meeting.

Their letter, mailed March 20, begins like this:

“Are you disenchanted with escalating medical costs and the declining value of your PG&E pension income? Many of us are, and now we’ve banded together to do something about it.”

The letter, by Chapter Recording Secretary Ken Rawles, notes that the Retirement Premium Offset Accounts negotiated by the union are beginning to run out of money. “In some cases, monthly premium costs for retirees will soon exceed their entire monthly pension. The time has come for us to do something about this unacceptable situation,” the letter says.

Stirrings in Merced

A similar letter from retiree Gordon Borges urges members in Merced County to attend the kick-off meeting of the Retiree Club’s newest chapter on April 5 in Merced.

Noting that his own pension has increased very little over the past two decades, Borges said that thousands of retirees “who gave the company decades of loyal service, have endured a similar hardship.”

The solution, Borges says in his letter, is to organize.

“First and foremost, let’s remember that our Local Union 1245 is the only way we have to influence future pension and health benefits at PG&E. But the union’s ability to negotiate better benefits for retirees depends on the willingness of retirees to stand up and make some noise,” says Borges. “The squeaky wheel gets the grease.”

(The April 5 meeting to launch the Merced Chapter is to be held at Carrows Restaurant, 720 Motel Drive. The location and dates of subsequent meetings will be announced shortly. Watch the Utility Reporter or go to www.ibew1245.com for further developments.)

Discontent in North Bay

Pension benefits were also on the minds of retirees meeting in Santa Rosa, where a chapter was organized in December.

While the cost of living continues to rise, notes Mike Fontana, a Cloverdale...
Extend Medicare drug help

California officials are being urged by advocacy groups to provide a permanent safety net for senior and disabled Californians who have trouble with Medicare’s new drug plan.

Low-income and chronically ill people still have trouble getting needed medications through the plan, according to advocates for seniors.

The groups want Medi-Cal to provide ongoing coverage of last resort for new enrollees who run into problems and to cover the co-payments that beneficiaries now pay under the new federal drug coverage, according to the Sacramento Bee.

Nearly 1 million Californians were automatically switched from Medi-Cal to Medicare’s new drug plan on Jan. 1. An estimated 180,000 of those people have depended on Medi-Cal’s emergency provision of prescription drugs. That emergency coverage was scheduled to expire March 17.

So far, Medi-Cal has filled 567,682 prescriptions at a cost of $38 million, which state officials have asked to be paid back by Medicare.

At the end of March, the drug plans will end transition coverage, which allowed people to get automatic refills of drugs they had previously taken even if those drugs weren’t covered by their new plan.

Advocates worry that unless permanent backup is provided, there will be a repeat of the problems in January that left people without lifesaving drugs. Every month, 10,000 people enroll or switch plans and may run into the same problems, they said.

People who used to get drugs from Medi-Cal are worse off under Medicare, according to advocates for seniors. They were forced into private drug plans that cover only approved drugs, may require prior authorization or step therapy to get some drugs they used to take, may limit quantities and may charge them co-payments of $1 to $5 per prescription that they didn’t pay under Medi-Cal.

Democrats have pushed for an extension of the May 15 deadline for all Medicare beneficiaries to sign up for the voluntary coverage or face lifelong penalties. President Bush opposes an extension.

The North Bay Chapter is the most recent to haul itself into action. After two initial organizing meetings, the chapter elected officers in February: Larry Mead, president; Dave Santori, vice president; and Ken Rawles, recording secretary.

East Bay, Vacaville, San Jose Lay Plans

In the East Bay, the group’s oldest chapter discussed how to make the voices of retirees heard at the corporate level of PG&E. Among the options discussed: making an appearance at the annual shareholders meeting, which is being held this year on April 19 in San Ramon.

The Vacaville/Sacramento Chapter also focused on mobilization, putting out a call for a special meeting to be held April 5, a week earlier than the normal meeting date. Two activists from the San Jose chapter, Jack Hill and Watie Anthney, attended the Vacaville meeting to help coordinate strategy.

A schedule of Retiree Club meetings appears on this page. Remember, all former members of IBEW Local 1245 are eligible to join the club, and spouses are welcome to participate in meetings.

Isn’t it time you got involved? For more information, attend the next Retiree Club chapter meeting in your area. If you’d like to help start a chapter closer to your home, please contact Local 1245 Office Manager Tonya Alston-Maxwell at 707-452-2718.

Retiree Club Meeting Schedule

East Bay Chapter: 2nd Thursday each month, 10 a.m., IBEW Local 332, 2125 Canoas Garden, San Jose, CA.

San Jose Chapter: 1st Thursday each month, 10 a.m., at IBEW Local 551, 2525 Cleveland Ave., Suite B, Santa Rosa.

Vacaville/Sacramento Chapter: 2nd Wednesday each month, 10 a.m., at IBEW Local 1245, 30 Orange Tree Circle, Vacaville, CA. (Special meeting: April 5, 10 a.m.)

Santa Rosa Chapter: 1st Tuesday each month, 10 a.m., at IBEW Local 551, 2525 Cleveland Ave., Suite B, Santa Rosa.

Merced Chapter meeting information will be available on-line at www.ibew1245.com and in the next Utility Reporter.

Congratulations newly-retired members

The Local 1245 Retirees Club congratulates these recently-retired members of the union. We invite you to participate in a Retiree Club chapter in the East Bay, San Jose, Sacramento/Vacaville, or Santa Rosa. If you don’t have a chapter nearby, call the union at 707-452-2718 and find out how you can help start one!

Anthony Argumedo 22 years Woodland, CA
Alfred Bailey 35 years Dunnigan, CA
Helen Bankston 15 years San Luis Obispo, CA
Eugene Bartucco 30 years Fair Oaks, CA
Reginald Bezerra 32 years Grover Beach, CA
Roger Bolstad 21 years Paradise, CA
Keith Burkhardt 27 years Honolulu, HI
John Burnett 25 years Big Bend, CA
Wayne Capps 40 years San Jose, CA
John Cardinale Jr 32 years Sacramento, CA
Andrew Casazza 36 years Hollister, CA
Daniel Cervantes 32 years Sacramento, CA
Marvin Clark 41 years Meadow Vista, CA
Carolyn Condren 2 years Pioneer, CA
Lyle Davis 40 years Newman, CA
Roger Delgado 32 years Rodeo, CA
Thomas Deyoung 31 years Paradise, CA
John Donker 35 years Woodland, CA
Dennis Duffy 27 years Jacksonville, OR
Kenneth Evans 22 years Fresno, CA
Stephen Fain 33 years Pacifica, CA
Irene Garcia 14 years Paso Robles, CA
Gary Griffith 25 years Burney, CA
James Guiles 32 years Woodland, CA
Terry Hansen 40 years Forest Ranch, CA
Arthur Haskins 18 years Fresno, CA
George Hawkins 35 years Petaluma, CA
James Hayes 32 years Oroville, CA
Raymond Hicks 39 years Elk Grove, CA
Thomas Hughes 34 years Sun City West, AZ
Brian Kerchenko 39 years Guerneville, CA
George Laner 26 years Auburn, CA
Arthur Lawson 35 years Oakley, CA
Robert Layne 40 years Shasta Lake, CA
Landers Ligon 39 years Brentwood, CA
Gilbert Llacuna 33 years Martinez, CA
John Loades Jr 29 years Modesto, CA
Jeffrey Ludvigson 14 years Quincy, CA
Linda Mastro 9 years Fresno, CA
Gary Mikaelson 35 years Sacramento, CA
Philip Moulder 32 years Marysville, CA
Daniel Muir 37 years Oakley, CA
Bruce Muller 36 years Santa Rosa, CA
Daniel Nielsen 37 years Petaluma, CA
Eugene Bartucco 33 years Martinez, CA
Robert Paxton 29 years Eureka, CA
Craig Phillips 33 years Ben Lomond, CA
Dennis E Plattner 20 years Citrus Heights, CA
Ronnie Red 31 years Fresno, CA
Duane Ricks 39 years Salinas, CA
Georgia Rios 26 years West Windsor, NV

Felix Rosario 29 years Las Cruces, NM
Ruben Sala 32 years Petaluma, CA
Agueda Sarmiento 32 years Daly City, CA
Bobby Sledge 15 years Sonora, CA
Norbert Stankie 39 years San Jose, CA
Ronald Tomasini 38 years Salinas, CA
Wilfred Valtakis 33 years Vacaville, CA
Larry Vander Bruggen 20 years Brownsville, CA
Wayne Wells 35 years Wilseyville, CA
Michael Willbur 30 years Auburn, CA
Guy Williams 35 years Fresno, CA
Charles Wimborough 39 years Livermore, CA
Marilyn Wright 25 years Windsor, CA

Congratulations Retirees! We want you to stay connected to IBEW 1245.
Local Talent

Stories and photos by Eric Wolfe

Besides tending to water treatment and distribution services for South Feather Water and Power, members of IBEW Local 1245 are putting a new roof over the agency’s head.

Formerly known as the Oroville-Wyandotte Irrigation District, South Feather Water & Power adopted its new name in 2003 to better reflect the agency’s purpose and service area. Now it’s getting a new look to go along with its new name.

And what a look. The interior is a comfortable marriage of curves and light that is bound to soothe even the most curmudgeonly customer, while the rock-faced exterior calls to mind the stream beds of the northern Sierra Nevada where the South Feather River originates.

For talent, the agency had to look no farther than its own employee ranks: Utility Worker William Eddie Paul, Laborer Tyler Fuller, Equipment Operator Jeff Fridrich, and Carpenter Bob Cherry, shown here from left to right. Beginning with the pouring of the slab in February 2005, these four IBEW members have done the lion’s share of the construction: framing, plumbing, roofing, electrical, all the underground, and irrigation—everything but the asphalt, stucco, cabinets and tape and texture.

On Feb. 22, 2006, one day before the Utility Reporter visited, they were treated to breakfast by an appreciative management.

“Management did the cooking and the employees just ate,” noted Fridrich.

Then it was back to work. They laid down sod, busted up some more pavement, and began work on bringing the entrance into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Paul says he’s looking forward to getting back into the field after the remodeling job is finished. But it might not be as soon as the crew would like.

The other wing of the agency’s headquarters is still waiting to be remodeled. And the agency has a pretty good idea where it can find experienced hands to get the job done just right.

Electrical Machinist Apprentice Dorinda Matney, left, and Electrician Marty Costa set up testing procedures.
Regulating the flow

Regulating the flow of water in the irrigation ditches is key to providing good service to the customers of South Feather Water & Power, which include commercial olive groves, vineyards, orange groves, pastureland and a few hundred residences.

Getting it right is important. Too little water, you don’t have a crop. Too much water, you could flood nearby homes.

“We’re putting a new pipe in this spill. A spill is when you get too much water in a ditch and you get rid of it,” explains Maintenance Tech Tom Veurink.

He points out a pipe running at right angles to the irrigation ditch. The pipe is used to divert excess water to a drainage that eventually finds its way to the Feather River. The problem is, the pipe is too high. Water can’t be spilled through it unless the ditch is running very full.

Veurink and fellow Local 1245 member

Training on the TIG weld

Repairing the Turbine

Here’s the fact about turbines: in the process of spinning so that you can enjoy electricity, they get beat up.

The water that passes through their blades is a powerful force, and the pressure it exerts may not always be evenly distributed. The result is cavitation, small rough patches or cavities that can ultimately degrade performance.

Repairing cavitation on a Francis turbine is the subject of a February training session on TIG welding conducted by PG&E Senior Engineer Tech Paul Rodrigues at the South Feather Water & Power Forbestown headquarters.

Paul Rodrigues, left, discusses the TIG weld with Henry Reeson, right, and Hydro Electrical Machinist Jerry Littleton.
Winning agency shop

South Feather Water & Power became an agency shop last fall after employees decided everyone ought to be paying their fair share toward union representation. “Guys who’d been in the union a long time thought it ought to be a union shop,” says Maintenance Foreman Rick McCullough, who is a union steward and member of the bargaining committee. “It’s not right for some people to ride on our shoestrings—not paying for what we’ve got here.” McCullough says you only have to look around and see the wages and benefits elsewhere in the area to appreciate what the union has accomplished.

Last fall, McCullough and others decided to take action. “We were talking to a lot of people. We circulated a petition for people to show their support and a mediator conducted an election.”

For a union that has represented employees here since the mid 1960s, it was an important milestone. Congratulations to those who made it possible.

Ron Reynolds remembers

Unions don’t just happen. They get organized. Former Local 1245 Business Rep. Charles “Ron” Reynolds recently shared these thoughts about organizing South Feather Water and Power back when it was still known as Oroville-Wyandotte Irrigation District.

The organizing started before I was hired on July 6, 1965. The primary field Rep until then was Hank Lucas. (Former Assistant Business Manager) Mert Walters helped me start the bargaining by providing a draft MOU. He also attended one or two bargaining sessions in order to introduce me.

The bargaining went on for a couple of years before it was completed with the first agreement. We only started to make progress on the negotiations after I took a Board member to lunch at the Prospectors Village and forewarned him that we were finished being patient and the hardball game would begin.

We then appeared before the full Board in a public session with all of the employees, the Board’s lawyers, the management staff and the news media. It was all tape recorded.

We achieved major benefits that night. The Board just could not tell the employees “No” in a face to face public meeting. I sat in the front row and in the middle with all our members behind me. I did the talking and the members followed my lead with appropriate support and gestures as needed. The meeting lasted for about four hours. It was the largest settlement I had ever received.

PG&E Senior Engineer Tech Paul Rodrigues, left demonstrates welding technique to SFW&P Electric Machinist Henry Reeson.

Repairing the Turbine

continued from previous page

In TIG welding, also known as Gas Tungsten Arc Welding, an arc is formed between a non-consumable tungsten electrode and the metal being welded. Gas is fed through the torch to shield the electrode and molten weld pool. If filler wire is used, it is added to the weld pool separately, according to www.welding-engineer.com. The process is used when high quality, precision welding is required.

After the cavities are “welded up,” Rodrigues explains, they are ground back down to restore the proper contour of the blade. “We have some new welders coming up and we want to make sure we’re all on the same page on how to weld on stainless steel,” says SFW&P Hydro Maintenance Foreman John Davis. “You can crack it real easy.”
I

BEW crews from PAR Electric have been helping Pacific Gas & Electric build the utility’s Automated Metering Infrastructure pilot project in Vacaville. PG&E hopes that the automated metering technology, by allowing hourly remote meter reads, will enable the utility to track energy usage more closely, as well as help pinpoint outages more quickly. The CPUC approved the Vacaville pilot program, which PG&E eventually wants to deploy systemwide.

Since last month’s report, we’ve had 50 calls for Journeyman Lineman; 3 calls for Equipment Specialist; 34 calls for Groundman; 3 calls for Cable Splicers; 1 call for UG Techs; and 8 calls for Apprentices, for a total of 99 calls.

The books, as of March 8:
Journey Lineman, Book 1: 8
Journey Lineman, Book 2: 1
Lineman, Book 3: 0
Lineman, Book 4: 17
Equipment Specialist, Book 1: 2
Equipment Specialist, Book 2: 5
Equipment Specialist, Book 3: 2
Groundman, Book 1: 2
Groundman, Book 2: 6
Groundman, Book 3: 9
Groundman, Book 4: 89
Cable Splicer, Book 1: 1
Cable Splicer, Book 2: 0
Cable Splicer, Book 3: 0

Total crews working on:
Outside Agreement: 67
U.G. Agreement: 10 crews
Pole and Test Agreement: 10 crews
Teledata Agreement: 10 crews
Total crews working: 97

Currently we have 308 apprentices: 3 are traveling working in our jurisdiction, 45 are working out of Local 1245; 227 are working out of Local 47; 22 are working out of Local 396 and 14 are laid off due to various reasons. We graduated a total of 6 apprentices to Journeyman Lineman so far in 2006. We have indentured 29 apprentices into the program so far this year.

Sierra Pacific is putting out small projects. PAR has been working on the Tracy to Silver Lake 120 KV, Phase 1 Transmission Line Project. Sturgeon has picked up 20 miles of 120 KV line from Winnemucca, Nev. toward Battle Mountain.

PG&E is putting out small packages. Also the 230 KV Underground Project in San Francisco is on target to do a soak test later this month.

SMUD is putting out small projects. San Francisco Light Rail: Railway Electric is starting a 2-year project on the light rail.

NEGOTIATIONS
- We are negotiating with San Francisco NECA on the Light Rail Agreement, which is coming along very well and we should have an agreement to ratify.
- We are in negotiations with Canus Corp.
- We are in negotiations with NECA and Henkels and McCoy on the Teledata Agreement. However, with NECA Teledata we are still open at this time and we are getting closer to a table settlement with Henkels & McCoy on the Teledata Agreement.
- We have sent opening letters to Western Line Contractors NECA on the Outside Line Agreement, and to Henkels & McCoy on the Outside Line Construction Agreement.
- We have re-opened the Republic Electric Agreement for Street Light and Signal Light Maintenance Agreement.

OTHER NEWS

The next Joint Safety meeting is May 25.
First Aid & CPR is the third Saturday of every month in Sacramento.
Please see Brother Ebo’s letter of appreciation on Page 3 in this issue of the Utility Reporter.

David Crawford, Senior Outside Line Business Representative

Showed here with a DCU and its associated solar panel located on a lattice tower in Vacaville are, from left, Dave McMinn, Journeyman Lineman from IBEW Local 258; Kenny Reed, Apprentice Lineman from IBEW Local 1245; and Jack Ednie, Journeyman Wireman from IBEW Local 5.

Dave McMinn, Journeyman Lineman from IBEW Local 258, is shown here with the Hexagram Gas RF network collectors.

Work in the Vacaville substation installing DCSI electric powerline communications equipment.
More inspectors needed

California’s workplace-safety watchdog agency should get another $9 million in next year’s budget so it can hire 100 more inspectors, the California Association of Professional Scientists (CAPS) proposed last month.

The union’s proposal comes one month after the state auditor found the Occupational Safety and Health Administration failed to properly monitor and act upon injury reports and safety complaints on the $1.7 billion replacement of the Bay Bridge’s eastern span.

CAPS statewide representative Chris Voight acknowledged that additional inspectors would be “a significant cost item,” but told the Tri Valley Herald that “worker safety is pretty important in the grand scheme of things.”

Voight noted the already short-staffed Cal-OSHA will find itself even further pressed if the governor and the Legislature eventually succeed in hammering out an infrastructure bond plan leading to “massive new construction” all over the state.

February’s audit found Cal-OSHA “did not align with state law” regarding Bay Bridge worker complaints of potentially hazardous conditions and did not adequately probe three of six worker complaints. It also said Cal-OSHA did not discover potential underreporting of injuries on the project, adding the agency lacks procedures to ensure reasonable accuracy of the contractor’s annual injury reports.

Cal-OSHA officials, reacting in January to an early draft of the audit, had contended they do not have enough staff and money to handle monitoring such reports’ accuracy. But that is not a duty the agency should ignore, State Auditor Elaine Howle concluded: If money is a problem, Cal-OSHA should ask for more.

CAPS’s proposal would add about 10.3% to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger’s proposed $87.5 million Cal-OSHA allocation for 2006-07. It would hike the agency’s number of authorized workplace inspector positions from 200 — of which only 170 are currently filled — to 300, giving Cal-OSHA the same inspector-to-worker ratio that the federal OSHA has nationwide, according to the union.

Each of the current 170 inspectors is responsible for more than 100,000 workers and 6,800 work sites, the union noted. Neighboring states such as Oregon and Washington have an inspector-to-worker ratio about one-quarter of California’s, according to the Tri Valley Herald report.

Recognize a stroke, save a life

Editor’s note: The following e-mail has been widely circulated on the Internet. Doctors generally agree that early detection of a stroke can save lives.

One neurologist has said that if he can get to a stroke victim within 3 hours he can totally reverse the effects of a stroke. He said the trick was getting a stroke recognized, diagnosed and getting to the patient within 3 hours, which is tough. Sometimes symptoms of a stroke are difficult to identify. Unfortunately, the lack of awareness can spell disaster. The stroke victim may suffer brain damage when people nearby fail to recognize the symptoms of a stroke.

Now doctors say a bystander can often recognize a stroke by asking three simple questions:

1. Ask the individual to smile.
2. Ask him or her to raise both arms.
3. Ask the person to speak a simple sentence (coherently, such as “It is sunny out today.”)

If he or she has trouble with any of these tasks, call 911 immediately and describe the symptoms to the dispatcher.

After discovering that a group of non-medical volunteers could identify facial weakness, arm weakness and speech problems, researchers urged the general public to learn the three questions. They presented their conclusions at the American Stroke Association’s annual meeting. Widespread use of this test could result in prompt diagnosis and treatment of the stroke and reduce or prevent brain damage.

Line Clearance Tree Trimmers

Tree trimmer bargaining

Local 1245 is in ongoing negotiations with Davey Tree Surgery Co. over its Line Clearance contact with the City of Santa Clara. The current agreement expires April 1, 2006.

The union and company committee members met for bargaining on March 1, and were scheduled to meet again on March 29. The results of that meeting were not available at Utility Reporter press time.

Conducting negotiations for the union are Senior Business Representative Ray Thomas, along with Business Representative Junior Ornelas and employee representative Marcos Hernandez.

Local 1245 is also in negotiations with Family Tree Service, Inc. To date, the union and company have met only once — on March 14. As of this first meeting, the company had neglected to forward requested bargaining information to the union. Subsequently, the union has received a majority of the requested information and is preparing to formulate comprehensive proposals.

Conducting the negotiations with Family Tree Service are Senior Business Representative Thomas, assisted by Shop Steward Carl Lamers.

Discusiones con los podadores de árboles

El Local 1245 está actualmente participando en negociaciones con Davey Tree Surgery Co. acerca de su contrato para la limpieza de líneas con la Ciudad de Santa Clara. El presente convenio expira el 1° de abril de este año 2006.

Los comités del Sindicato y de la Compañía se reunieron para negociar el 1° de marzo y acordaron volver a reunirse el 29 de marzo. Los resultados de esa reunión no eran conocidos al cierre de la edición de Utility Reporter.

Las negociaciones por el Sindicato están a cargo del Representante Principal de Negocios Ray Thomas, junto con el Representante de Negocios Junior Ornelas y el representante de los empleados Marcos Hernández.

El Local 1245 está también en negociaciones con Family Tree Service, Inc. Hasta ahora, el Sindicato y la Compañía sólo se han reunido una vez, el 14 de marzo. Hasta la fecha de esa primera reunión, la Compañía había fallado en enviar la información solicitada por el Sindicato para llevar a cabo las negociaciones. Desde entonces, el Sindicato ha recibido la mayoría de la información solicitada y se está preparando para formular proposiciones concretas.

A cargo de las negociaciones con Family Tree Service está el Representante Principal de Negocios Ray Thomas, asistido por el Delegado Sindical Carl Lamers.

Local 1245 Safety Committee

Current members of the Local 1245 Safety Committee are Keith Hopp, Pacific Gas & Electric; Al White, Pacific Gas & Electric; David Vipond, Citizens Communications; Kurt Celii, Modesto Irrigation District; Art Torres, Sacramento Municipal Utility District; Bob Burkley, City of Santa Clara; James Gorman, Davey Tree; and Assistant Business Manager Howard Stiefer.
Robert E. Kneppel, center, accepts 50-year award from Business Manager Perry Zimmerman, left, and Business Rep. Darryl Norris
Power System Operators
Keep Supply & Demand in Synch

Story & Photos by Eric Wolfe

SOMEBODY OUT THERE
generators are generating
electricity. And you’re using
it. But who makes sure that what they
generate matches what you use?

Welcome to the world of the Power
System Operator. At the Sacramento
Municipal Utility District, PSOs are the
people responsible for assuring that the
supply of electricity matches the demand
or “load.” Not enough generation and
you have outages. Too much generation
and you risk equipment failure and
outages. Electric reliability is one of the
great balancing acts of modern society.

The balance must be maintained
within an entire control area. While
PG&E and some other utilities belong
to a control area managed by the
Independent System Operator, SMUD
belongs to a separate control area
that includes the Western Area Power
Administration and the
Modesto Irrigation District. As the control area operator,
SMUD PSOs are responsible
for reliability for this control
area, in coordination with
operators at these other two
agencies.

Unlike the ISO, which uses a quasi
market to set prices, PSOs at SMUD move
power using an economic dispatch plan,
especially a price structure that is set
ahead of time to show which generators
are the most economical. In addition to
utilizing SMUD’s own power resources,
the PSOs can access the California–Oregon Transmission Project to import
power from the north.

When the Utility Reporter visited
the PSOs at their operations center in
Sacramento, PSO I Michael Flynt was
pre-approving energy purchases for the
next 48-hour period. “I review energy
purchases and check the path it’s going
to come through to get to here and
(check) that their totals add up to what
they say they’re going to add up to,” says
Flynt, a 15-year member of Local 1245.

The stakes in managing the power
supply are a little higher than, say,
managing the blueberry supply. If the
totals on the produce truck fall short
of what is promised, you might have to
skip the berries on your yogurt the next
morning. But if the proper amount of
power fails to arrive, you may not be
having any breakfast at all. If PSOs were
not around to deploy operating reserves
of power when plants shut down for
scheduled maintenance, or when demand spikes on an unusually hot day,
or when plants shut down unexpectedly
or when transmission problems occur,
the world would be significantly darker.

Don’t get the idea that PSOs look
forward to emergencies. “We always
hope that nothing happens,” is the way
Flynt puts it. But when something does
happen, it’s the PSOs who find a way to
restore the balance.