



Contact:

Name

Phone:

E-mail:

NEWS RELEASE

October 1, 2022

**Lighting a New Path:
White River Electric Lineman Brings First-time Electricity to Guatemalan Village**

For the first time, the lights are on in La Montanita de la Virgen, Guatemala. Colorado's electric cooperatives – in partnership with Oklahoma's electric cooperatives and the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's philanthropic arm, NRECA International – brought first-time electricity to the isolated village in the region of Jalapa, east of Guatemala City.

Sixteen volunteer linemen, including WREA's Clayton Shonk, spent three weeks at the project site building powerlines and wiring 84 structures, including one elementary school and two churches. The project consisted of 77 poles in approximately 5.5 miles of line and six transformers installed by the linemen. Each home received four lightbulbs, two light switches and two electrical outlets.

The local partner for this project is the Empresa Eléctrica Municipal de San Pedro Pinula, a municipal utility, now responsible for the maintenance of the newly built infrastructure. The predominant fuel source in Guatemala is hydro generation.

The locals live in extreme poverty conditions without running water, plumbing and food refrigeration. The villagers depend on farming operations for economic sustenance; they produce corn, beans, rice, coffee, potatoes, pepper, tomatoes and onions.

Clayton Shonk says he was positively impacted by this mission and came home with a changed outlook on life.

"This was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and it truly humbled me," says Shonk. "It was a privilege to use the linework trade to make a positive difference in the lives of the people of La Montanita. Their simplicity, joy, and friendship were truly a gift." The staff and board of directors at WREA supported participation in the project.

“We are proud of Clayton Shonk for giving of his time for an extended period of time to help our neighbors in Central America,” says Alan Michalewicz WREA’s general manager. “This is a powerful way to display one of the cooperatives’ core principles, ‘Concern for Community,’ at home and across the borders.”

Electric cooperatives have a long-standing tradition of bringing lights where there are none. More than eighty years ago, cooperatives brought power to rural America and its countryside; given its origins, electric co-ops are willing and well positioned to help other areas that do not have access to electric power. This is WREA’s second lineman to volunteer his time. Several years ago, WREA’s Chris Stanworth helped electrify a neighboring village in Guatemala.

“Bringing electricity to remote areas in developing countries takes electric cooperatives back to their roots,” says Kent Singer, executive director of the Colorado Rural Electric Association. “It reinforces our commitment to improve the quality of life for local communities at home and abroad. Access to electricity will bring economic empowerment, better access to health care and education and enhanced safety for these villagers. It’s a life-changing gift.”

Collectively, Colorado’s electric cooperatives have made possible nearly 300 first-time electric connections in four villages in Central America.

Colorado’s electric cooperatives have established a 501(c)3 not-for-profit, Colorado Electric Educational Institute, to support this cause; three projects have been sponsored since 2018. All contributions to CEEI are tax-deductible. Learn more at <https://crea.coop/community-outreach/current-causes/>.

###