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WAPA Linemen in St. Thomas Begin Training Program, Similar Effort to Commence on St. Croix in October

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WAPA linemen participate in training sessions on the grounds of the Reichhold Center Monday. By. WAPA

WAPA said Tuesday afternoon that linemen on Monday began an intense training regimen aimed at sharpening the skills required for the performance of daily assignments associated with electrical grid maintenance and upkeep.

The training sessions, which run through early 2022, are staged on the grounds of the Reichhold Center on St. Thomas, WAPA said. A similar training program for linemen on St. Croix will be held on the Agriculture Fair Grounds in Lower Love beginning October 18.

Interim Executive Director Noel Hodge said training is mandatory to meet regulatory standards of operations and ensure high levels of safety for personnel working in the field. “WAPA is partnering with Electric Cities of Georgia (ECG) to provide the training. We began the training back in 2019 originally to secure certification of our line personnel for energized line or hot work, however, the program was not completed because of the global COVID-19 pandemic which took hold last year,” he said.

Hodge said the training sessions that got underway Monday focuses on the outstanding training courses to secure certification. “We have thoroughly vetted the training program with our Safety Department. The scope of the training was met with approval by the safety management team and completion of the program is absolutely vital to the safety of our employees and their success at the Authority as it pertains to upward mobility,” he added.

According to WAPA, as with any electrical utility, the role of the employees in electrical distribution is vital to the success of the company’s efforts to provide customers with reliable and sustainable electrical service. The work that is executed on the electric grid involves extensive skills associated with compliance of safety protocols, a thorough understanding of the fundamentals of electrical operations, environmental training, and constant reinforcement of the skillsets.

Classes previously completed were safety meetings, groundman school and Lab A of the three-part Department of Labor Certified Apprentice Program, said the authority. The overall training program will cover disciplines including groundman program for new employees, apprentice program, hot-line or energized training, advance lineman training, line-clearance tree trimming certification, confined space training, trenching and shoring, pole top and bucket truck rescue, meterman certification and training and safety meetings.

Like WAPA, Electric Cities of Georgia is a member of the American Public Power Association (APPA). ECG is also a non-profit organization which provides strategic and technical services to some 52 public power communities with utility operations. Hodge thanked both the University of the Virgin Islands and the Department of Agriculture for their generosity in facilitating the training on the grounds of the Reichhold Center and at the site of the annual St. Croix Agriculture and Food Fair.

Partial funding for the training was provided by a \$215,000 Department of Interior grant with WAPA funding the remaining \$301,550. with monies realized from costs savings through overtime reduction. The reduced overtime costs resulted from a reorganization of the electric division.

“We are pleased to have secured both federal funding and cost savings from overtime reduction to reinvest in our employees. The employees of the Authority, especially those on the front lines, are WAPA’s single greatest assets, and where possible, we will secure every opportunity to provide training and certification that can lead to their advancement,” Hodge said.