

# FROM THE LANES TO THE LINES – Guindon reflects on career as retirement approaches

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Central Electric Cooperative's Plankinton Area Foreman Curt Guindon, who has dedicated most of his life to serving cooperative members, plans to retire in May after an impressive and memorable career that began in 1976.

Guindon grew up in the Plankinton area where his family owned and operated the local bowling alley, Harbor Lanes, for more than 25 years. His parents, Don and Ruth Guindon, farmed outside of town, but they moved into Plankinton when Curt was about 11 years old.

He fondly recalls working for the family business. "It was a bowling alley and café. All the kids worked there," Guindon explained. He has three brothers and a sister.

Later on, his parents would eventually become city employees. Don worked in the maintenance department and Ruth was the

assistant to the finance officer, who coincidentally was Curt's wife Kathy's mother.

Guindon still remembers the day he happened upon a career opportunity with what was then known as Tri-County Electric. At the time, he couldn't have envisioned how this opportunity would shape his entire future.

"I was 18 years old, and I just graduated high school. I had to go to the lumberyard to get materials for the bowling alley. While I was there, Mike (Myron) Mebius, who was the line superintendent, asked me if I wanted a job. He told me to show up on Monday, so I did," Guindon said. "I never thought I'd be doing this for 46 years. I didn't have any idea what kind of work I would be doing, but I just stuck with it."

Guindon laughs about his first day on the job. "I walked into the office and the sign on the door said 'High Voltage. Do Not Enter.' So, I sat there and waited. Red Hoffman (then Tri-County Foreman) came out and said, 'That sign is just a joke, come on in.'"

And the rest is history. Guindon worked his way up the ranks, eventually earning his journeyman certificate and being promoted to foreman at the Plankinton outpost in 2010.

Guindon has seen a great deal of change since his early days on the job. One of those changes included Tri-County Electric joining forces with InterCounty Electric to form Central Electric Cooperative in 2000.

When he reflects on how the

industry has evolved, Guindon said technology is much different than it was decades ago. "We didn't have cell phones, so it wasn't as easy to get in contact with somebody. The foreman had a 2-way radio at home."

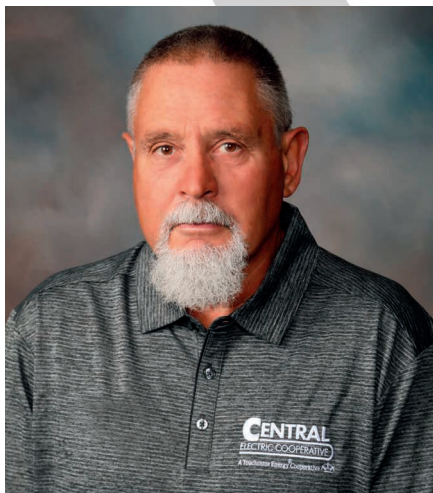
Guindon has weathered countless storms over the years, but he vividly remembers a major ice storm that hit the area in 2005. "There was thick ice hanging on the lines, some lines were buried in snow. We had to beat down the ice, try to get the wires back on and keep on trucking." He said it was cold and windy, and the repair work continued for another two to three weeks after the storm passed.

He also helped with power restoration efforts after Hurricane Katrina in 2005. "Jesse Baker (now the Kimball foreman) and I went to DeRidder, Louisiana. There was bad wind damage and a lot of trees down. We stayed in tents on an old air force strip." The heat was different than South Dakota heat, he said. "It didn't matter what time of day it was; it was constantly hot and humid."

Guindon said all the storm jobs were worth the effort, because he knows he was making a difference in peoples' lives by making sure they had power.

He didn't take this 46-year journey on his own. Curt married Kathy (Vlasman) on June 2, 1979, and she has been by his side for all the ups and downs.

"I grew up with my father in the electrical field, so I learned at an early age to trust in your loved one's coworkers to keep him safe when they were out," Kathy shared.



Curt Guindon of Plankinton served cooperative members from 1976 to 2022.

“Curt missed many events as the kids grew up, even going on an outage the day our daughter got married. He changed clothes, went to work, and came back during the reception,” she said. “We all knew he was helping others and that if we were in their shoes, we’d want him to be there too. I know it’ll be hard for him that first time the weather gets bad and he’ll be home in the warmth thinking about his coworkers out in the storm.”

Kathy is retiring from Aurora Plains Academy after 6.5 years at the end of April. She previously worked for

the Plankinton School District for 35 years. The Guindons plan to travel and enjoy quality time with family during their upcoming free time.

The couple has two children and four grandchildren. Their son, Derek Guindon, lives in Sioux Falls. Their daughter, Kyanna Huff, and her husband Ryan, live near Plankinton on the home place where Curt grew up. The Guindon’s grandchildren are Kristofer Guindon and Jena, Lily and Tyson Huff of Plankinton.

Guindon leaves his colleagues with these words of wisdom: “Work safely,

look out for each other, don’t get in a hurry and I hope you don’t have any big storms.”

Guindon’s last day at work will be May 13. He will be missed greatly by the employee group, board of directors and management. We trust he will enjoy his days fishing, hunting, golfing and gardening.

Hard work pays off, and now it’s time to have some fun. We wish Curt and Kathy a happy, healthy and prosperous retirement!

### Local linemen return from helping restore power to hurricane-ravaged areas

By ROSS DOLAN  
The Daily Republic

One of the first jobs facing journeymen linemen Curt Guindon and Jesse Baker today will be scraping the Louisiana mud from their eight-ton “digger” truck. Guindon, 47, of Plankinton and Baker, 24, of Kimball, returned Thursday to Central Electric Cooperative’s Mitchell office after more than two weeks of travel and hard work. The men joined a contingent of South Dakota linemen who helped restore power to Louisiana homeowners hammered by hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Ken Schillingen, Central Electric’s director of member services, said South Dakota’s statewide

Rural Electric Association forwarded Louisiana’s request for volunteers and equipment to its membership. About 12 cooperatives and 21 volunteers responded. “The line superintendent asked who would be interested,” said Baker, a Central Electric employee for three years, “and we volunteered.” On the nearly 1,300-mile trip south, the huge truck sucked up nearly 300 gallons of diesel fuel. The South Dakota convoy left Sept. 28 and arrived on Oct. 1 in DeRidder, La., home base of the Beauregard Electric Cooperative. The electric co-op serves nearly 40,000 people in seven parishes. Two 250-man tents were set up

on a decommissioned airport runway to accommodate volunteers. “We were sleeping shoulder to shoulder,” said Baker, who was thankful the tents were air-conditioned. The first three days they were in Louisiana, temperatures surpassed 100 degrees. The workers’ base camp also featured catered meals and hot showers. While the food was good, both men agreed the lunches needed some variety. For some reason, they drew ham sandwiches every day. “We heard some had roast beef or turkey,” said Guindon, “but we never found the right box.”



CURT GUINDON, LEFT, and Jesse Baker, linemen for the Central Electric Cooperative, are shown with the eight-ton, digger-derrick truck they took to Louisiana. The pair joined forces with other line crews to restore power to areas struck by hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

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Ross Dolan/Republic

Curt Guindon and Jesse Baker were featured by The Daily Republic in 2005 after they returned from Louisiana following Hurricane Katrina power restoration efforts.



In 2005, Guindon was recognized by Governor Mike Rounds following Hurricane Katrina.



↑  
Curt Guindon

The Operations crew will wish Guindon farewell in May following 46 years of dedicated service.



Guindon (left) started his career at Tri-County Electric, which would eventually join forces with InterCounty Electric to form Central Electric Cooperative.



Curt and Kathy Guindon plan to spend more time with family when they retire this year.