

Problem Prevention Part of Servicemen's Job

By Barbara Patterson

If you notice strange-looking red spray paint marks along the roadside, Mike Courtney or Bob Fitzsimmons likely have been there.

Mike and Bob are Klickitat PUD (KPUD) servicemen with many years of experience in electric utility work. One of their jobs is to locate underground power lines when someone is putting in a fence or sewer, planting trees or planning to put in a new house.

"People don't realize how dangerous digging along easements can be," Mike says. "Underground power lines are high voltage—7,200 to 12,500 volts—usually buried three feet deep."

"That's why it's important to call for a locate before you dig," says Bob. "Let us check it out first."

Mike's service territory includes Lyle, Dallesport and all of Klickitat County west of the Klickitat River. He works out of the White Salmon KPUD office.

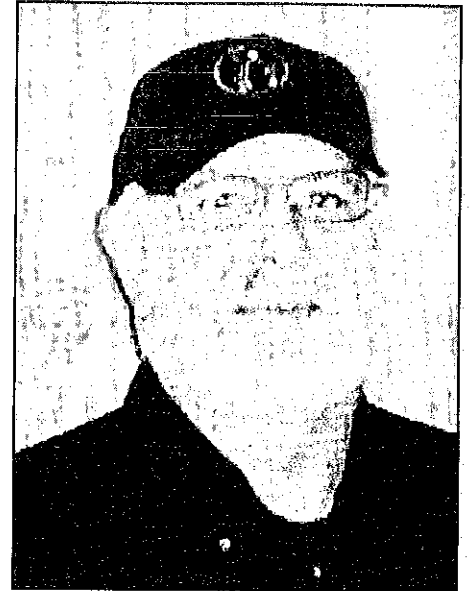
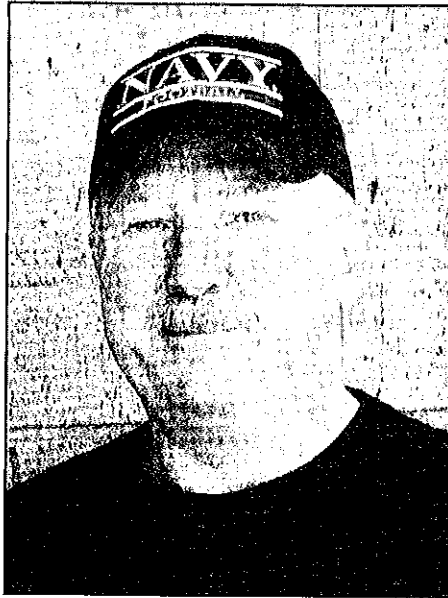
Bob covers the east county and is based at the Goldendale warehouse.

Both men were journeyman linemen before leaving the line crews for the serviceman positions. Occasionally, they are called on to work as linemen when the crews are short-handed.

Mike and Bob usually are the first to be sent on reported power outages. Often, they can fix small outages—such as replacing a fuse in a transformer—without calling in the full line crews.

"I have noticed fewer unplanned outages in the past several years, due to KPUD's preventive maintenance policy," Mike says.

Examples of this policy are tree-trimming, pole inspections and developing public awareness of the



KPUD servicemen Bob Fitzsimmons, left, and Mike Courtney play key and varied roles in the utility's operation.

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—Mike Courtney

danger of digging.

The servicemen look for potential tree problems. Dead trees and trees growing into power lines can spell trouble and outages. Often, the men fell or trim the offending trees. At times, they work with a professional tree-trimming and removal contractor.

"There is a bad bug problem with trees, particularly the pine bark beetle," Bob says.

Power connects and disconnects are a daily occurrence.

"It seems like people are always moving in or moving out," Bob

says. "And we're there to turn the meters on or off."

When street lights flicker and go out, the servicemen do the necessary inspections and repairs.

At the White Salmon warehouse, Mike sees to it that the line crews have everything they need before going on a job. He also orders equipment and takes inventory, at times working closely with Julius Robison, KPUD's Goldendale warehouseman.

Mike joined KPUD in 1978. That year, he also signed up as a fireman for the White Salmon Volunteer Fire Department. Twenty-six years later, he is still on call for emergencies and provides training for new volunteers.

Bob spent the first 31 years of his career working for Columbia Basin Electric Cooperative. In 2001, he moved from Condon, Oregon, to Goldendale, working as a journeyman lineman on KPUD's Goldendale line crew before taking the serviceman job last October. ■