

Mitch DeJarnette is proud to be the first graduate of the associate degree program offered through a partnership with The Virginia, Maryland, Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives (VMDAED) and Southside Virginia Community College (SVCC). This program was developed so apprentice linemen could gain a degree in Industrial Technology while working.

The VMDAEC represents 15 co-ops in the Mid-Atlantic region and trains over 100 apprentices per year. VMDAEC apprentice linemen will receive up to 35 hours of college credit for on-the-job training. These credits, when combined with SVCC online coursework, will lead directly to an Associate Degree.

DeJarnette is a lineman technician with Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative. Prior to the opening of SVCC's Power Line Worker (PLW) program, interested individuals had to travel great distances for training. DeJarnette trained in Georgia at the Southeast Lineman Training Center

After completion, he worked for a Cooperative in North Carolina in the Edgecombe-Martin area then returned to Virginia working for Central Virginia Electric Cooperative in Appomattox for four and a half years. It was during this time that he began looking into starting classes through SVCC.

When he began working for Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative two years ago, he decided he wanted to advance himself in the organization through further education.

"I feel a degree offers me more value and more opportunities," he said.

"And, I was like the Guinea pig being the first in the program, too," he noted.

Through the SVCC program, he was able to take all the classes needed in an online setting. This arrangement worked best for him since part of his job requires him to be on 'call duty.' He noted that sitting in a class in Alberta or Keysville would have put him too far removed from his duty station in Chase City. He also noted that his professors were understanding of times when he was a bit backed up with completing assignments.

"All I had to do was explain the situation to them, the key is communication," he said.

The degree is available through all VMDECs in the state of Virginia as well as Maryland and Delaware. The online component makes this program a possibility.

About this new opportunity, Richard Johnstone, President and CEO of VMDAEC, said, “Helping students meet their educational goals is core to our mission and we hope this partnership will encourage all of the graduates of our program to enroll, and, also those of other programs as well. Creating this career pathway will allow students to progress from industry-recognized credentials to an Associate Degree and hopefully on to a Bachelor’s Degree.”

A native of Red Oak, Virginia, DeJarnette is a graduate of Fuqua School. He plans to continue working, take a break from classes, and maybe pursue further educational opportunities down the road.

Financial assistance and scholarships may be available for students, Matt Dunn can help create a customized program and can be contacted at matt.dunn@southside.edu