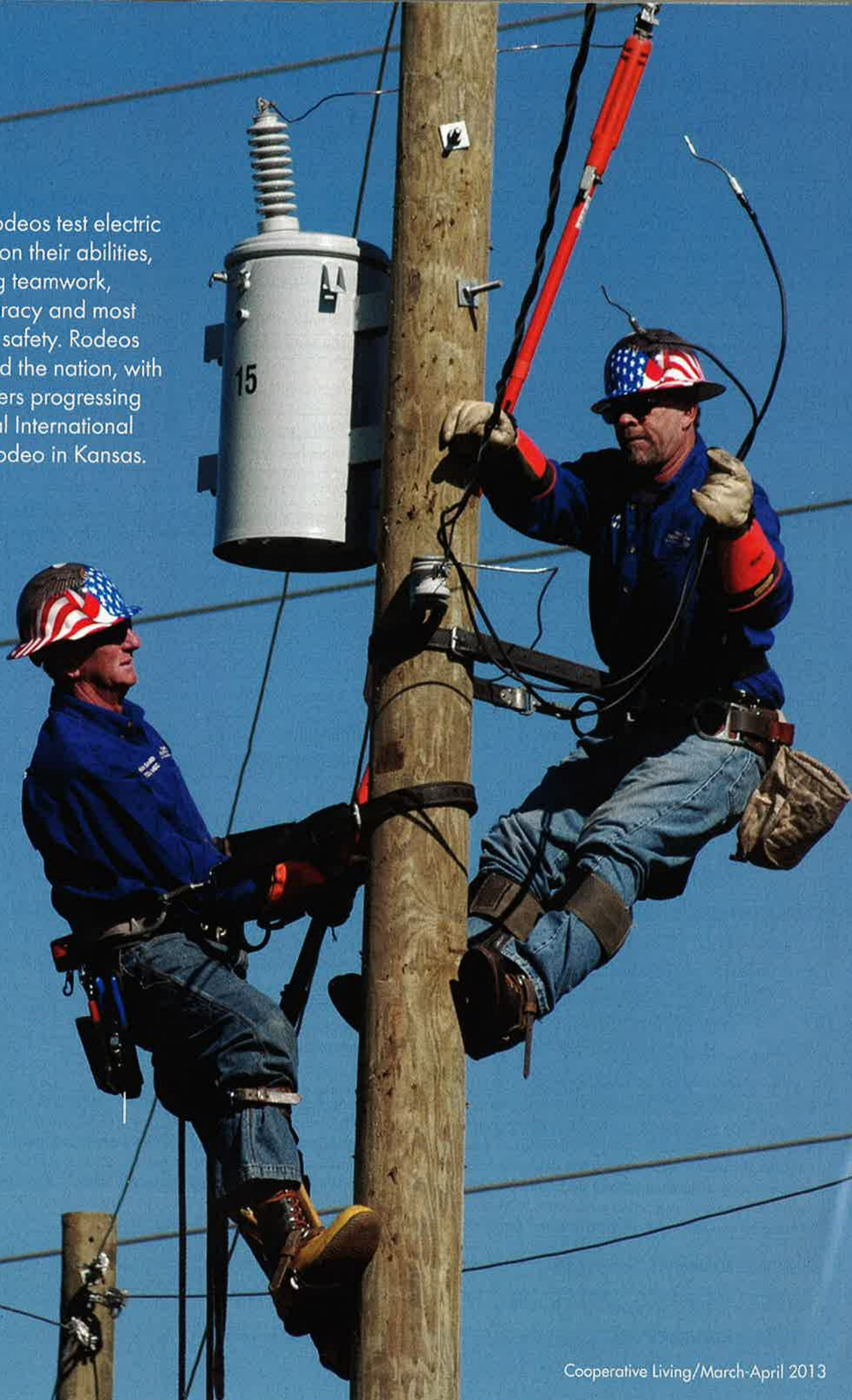


Lineman's rodeos test electric lineworkers on their abilities, emphasizing teamwork, speed, accuracy and most importantly, safety. Rodeos occur around the nation, with top performers progressing to the annual International Lineman's Rodeo in Kansas.



PLAYING IT SAFE



Co-op lineworkers participate in 'rodeos' to hone safety skills.

Practice makes perfect — and when working with electricity, perfection means the difference between life and a flash burn, electrocution, and possible death. To keep lineworkers' skills honed, competitions dubbed "lineman's rodeos" have sprung up around the country.

Rodeos involve bucking power transformers, not broncos. Lineworkers from electric cooperatives, investor-owned utilities, and municipal electric systems tackle complex speed- and safety-based challenges while hundreds of family, friends, and co-workers cheer them on.

"We're making good linemen better," notes Maxie Rozell, director of safety & security at Fredericksburg, Va.-based Rappahannock Electric Cooperative and chairman of the staff work group that plans the Gaff-n-Go Lineman's Rodeo & Expo, an annual spring event that's sponsored by the Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives (VMDAEC). "Education and training are critical; we use the program to sharpen skills."

Rodeo competitions typically take place atop 40-ft.-tall utility poles. For safety reasons, power lines do not carry an electrical charge, but competitors are judged as if every aspect is real. Lineworkers perform a variety of tasks scored by a team of judges.

Attention to detail remains key. Each team or apprentice is judged not only on the time it takes to perform an event but, more importantly, on the safe and efficient methods with which the job is accomplished.

INTENSE TRAINING

Participating rodeo-ers train for months, often on their own time. The payoff's not only seen in the results, though — many electric co-op chief executives credit rodeos for keeping lineworkers on their toes in what can be a dangerous profession.

"Our line crews are among the best trained, most dedicated, and hardest working folks you will ever meet," says Ron Campbell, vice president of Safety & Training Services at VMDAEC. "They must work in and around high-voltage power lines in the toughest weather conditions and often in the dark to restore power to their neighbors' homes. The rodeo gives them the chance to pit their skills against their peers."

More than a dozen states host state or regional rodeos. Men and women from around the world congregate each fall at the International Lineman's Rodeo in Bonner Springs, Kan. To learn more about this event and the challenges linemen face, visit www.linemansrodeok.com. ■



THE GAFF-N-GO RODEO is free and open to the public and is scheduled for Sat., April 6, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Caroline County Fairgrounds, off U.S. Route 1 near Ruther Glen. Young and old alike enjoy the festivities, which include activities for children. The Terex Equipment Operator's Rodeo, also free and open to the public, is scheduled for Friday, April 5, at the Caroline County Fairgrounds, from 11 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.