

# NEWS



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## For Immediate Release:

## Firelands Electric Cooperative participates in humanitarian effort

**NEW LONDON, February 10, 2025** — Firelands Electric Cooperative’s Lead Lineman Robert Shepherd returned from Guatemala on January 24 after assisting the Ohio Electric Cooperatives’ Project Ohio team for eighteen days. Shepherd was one of fifteen co-op linemen from across the Buckeye State who constructed distribution lines, hung transformers, and installed electrical services, meters, and internal wiring for the village of Barejones in Guatemala.

This large group of Ohio electric co-op volunteers traveled to Guatemala as part of NRECA International, a rural electrification mission of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. Created in 1962, NRECA International has brought safe, reliable, and affordable electric power to more than 220 million people in 48 countries for more than six decades, many of which have been located in some of the world’s most isolated communities. The goal has been to share the information and know-how gained during the rural electrification of the U.S. with developing countries around the globe. NRECA International’s program staff and volunteers design and construct electric distribution systems to meet the individual needs of each community, and they train the local workforce on how to operate and maintain the system.

Through Project Ohio, the state’s 24 electric cooperatives combined resources to contribute towards the needs of the Guatemala village residents by providing supplies and workers. For more than two weeks in January, Shepherd joined other co-op linemen, NRECA organizers, and locals in bringing electricity to the mountaintop village of Barejones — providing electricity to roughly 90 homes that have never had it before.

Shepherd said his biggest challenge was the language barrier, especially during times when a translator was not present. Admittedly a flat lander his entire life, Shepherd found adjusting to the mountain terrains strenuous. He explained that walking up and down the hillsides, in addition to climbing poles, was very exhausting.

Most residents of the village live on just \$2 per day. During the trip, Project Ohio crews were able to install septic tanks and electricity in the village’s school, which will give the school children access to restrooms for the next 20-plus years. In addition to installing wiring and electrical services, Project Ohio provided ECO-Water filters to every home in the village, along with the school church, so that clean drinking water could be had by all. Cooperative donations were used to help with additional village needs. The team passed out over 120 pairs of shoes to the kids and provided toothpaste, toothbrushes, and Project Ohio t-shirts to everyone in the village.

The team provided electronic technology gifts to the school in Barejones as well, including two 50-inch classroom televisions with speaker systems and much-needed school supplies to help children with their studies. They also installed a wood fence to provide safety for the children playing in the school yard, along with a new gate at the entrance of the school to make it a more secure area.

“Appreciation from the village community and children was most rewarding,” said Shepherd. During the team’s final day in the village, Cristel, a girl about 10-years-old, handed Shepherd a special letter thanking him and all the linemen for bringing power and lights to her little village and for supporting all the boys and girls in her school. “I’m

beyond grateful for this opportunity to change lives and provide hope for the future,” Shepherd said. “What a life-changing experience — and I would do it all over again if given the opportunity.”

Founded in 1936, Firelands Electric, a Touchstone Energy Cooperative®, is a member-owned, not-for-profit electric utility serving more than 9,200 homes and businesses in rural areas of Ashland, Huron, Lorain and Richland counties. Firelands ranks among the highest energy utilities in the country for customer satisfaction. For more information, visit [www.firelandsec.com](http://www.firelandsec.com), or stay connected with the co-op through its Facebook page, [www.facebook.com/FirelandsElectric](https://www.facebook.com/FirelandsElectric), and Twitter feed, <https://twitter.com/Firelands>. Additional photos can be accessed from the cooperative’s Flickr page at [www.flickr.com/photos/firelandsec/albums](https://www.flickr.com/photos/firelandsec/albums).

**ATTACHED: PHOTO**



Photo Caption: Firelands Electric Cooperative’s Lead Lineman Robert Shepherd is pictured with children from the village of Barejones, Guatemala during a recent rural electrification mission by Project Ohio, which provided electricity to roughly 90 homes for the first time.

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