

## Home Grown Help at the Glennallen Diesel Plant

“When I grow up, I want to work at my local electric cooperative.” That isn’t a common phrase uttered by young people in the Copper Basin or anywhere else; it’s more commonly, “I want to be an astronaut, or a football player.” This was the case for Alex Gearheart and Mike Rego, two young, local boys, from Glennallen.

Now that they’re all grown up, however, working for Copper Valley Electric Association and keeping the lights on is exactly what they’re doing.

Alex and Mike are Power Plant Operators at the CVEA Diesel Plant in Glennallen. Ironically, they were interviewed on the same day and both were hired in August 2009. While they are both life-long Alaskans and now hold the same title, the paths that lead them to CVEA are quite different.

Mike Rego was born in Anchorage on St. Patrick’s Day in 1982. He moved to the Copper River Valley with his family when he was five and attended K-12 in the Copper River School District. Mike said he remembers taking a lot of shop in high school and started working at Kunik Machine Works, in

Glennallen, when he was just 15. He continued there off and on for eight years, gaining experience with welding, fabricating, machining, and mechanics.

After high school graduation, Mike attended the University of Wyoming for three years studying Mechanical Engineering while spending his summers fighting wildland fires throughout Alaska and the Northwest.

Mike joined the Millwright Local 1501 Apprenticeship program and traveled between California, Washington and Alaska on jobs through the union until he got his journeyman card in 2007.

Between jobs Mike became very interested in bow hunting and went to New Zealand and Africa on safari.

Mike is continuing his education through an online accredited college for an AAS in Mechanical Engineering Tech. He has two semesters left until he graduates. In addition to work and school, Mike hopes to finish construction on his property, get involved in state politics, own a vineyard in South America and be an active husband and parent to wife Victoria and their year and a half old daughter, Nuala.

Alex Gearhart was born in Valdez, where he lived until his family headed north to Copper Center, when he was nine.

Alex said he’s always been a hands-on kind of person and enjoyed shop classes at GHS; including wood shop, welding and auto shop. He picked up welding and was good enough to achieve two certifications while still in high school.

Alex was also awarded a CVEA educational scholarship his senior year. At that time, CVEA didn’t know that Alex would be back in the Basin working for the Cooperative, but the committee definitely recognized him as a worthwhile investment. Today, Alex proves that to be true.

After graduation, Alex attended the University of Alaska in Soldotna for Process Technology, or ‘Operator School’; a two-year Associate Degree pro-



**Left: Alex and Mike take time out to pose for a group photo.**

Photo by Rachel Radford



gram that he began with the hopes of getting a good job. Alex believes he did just that and plans on staying in the Copper Basin for a long time. He would also like to have a family.

Both Mike and Alex say that their duties as Operators are dynamic and vary widely, with one primary responsibility; maintaining reliable power to the members.

General duties include operation and maintenance of the systems and equipment in the facility and coordinating with CVEA dispatch, in Valdez, if there is an outage. According to Alex, “being able to work on diesel engines that produce 3000-4000 horsepower is awesome.”

When asked what their favorite thing about working at CVEA is, they both replied, “the people we work with.”

CVEA believes it says something good about our community and our cooperative that these young people grew up in the Copper Basin, graduated from the Copper River School District, gained life experience and education, and came back to the area to set down roots and contribute. CVEA is pleased that these two home grown employees have joined the rest of the team, working hard to keep the lights on for their friends and neighbors in this place they call home. ■



**Left: Mike taking an hourly log on Unit 8, one of the older Caterpillar engines. Top: Mike and Alex inspecting an Enterprise piston that came out of one of the engines. Above: Alex taking an hourly log.**

Photos by Rachel Radford