



## 'We Take Pride In What We Do'

Ronnie Bailey Jr., lineman for Duke Energy

Lineman Ronnie Bailey Jr. received the all-clear to report to work on September 11 after Hurricane Irma drenched and devastated all 35 counties in Duke Energy's service territory in Florida.

Bailey's roof, carport, and garage doors sustained damage. He secured his house, checked on his 72-year-old grandmother,

and gave his family hugs and kisses before he headed out.

"My 8-year-old son even called me to tell me the power is out," Bailey says. "He automatically thinks Daddy can get it fixed right away."

Irma's punch knocked out power to more than 1.3 million of Duke Energy's 1.8 million Florida customers, downing nearly 2,000 power poles and damaging more than 1,100 transformers. Line crews inspected, repaired, or replaced more than 1,000 miles of wire.

For 19 days straight, Bailey worked 16-hour shifts and then some, logging 222 hours the first 12 days and seeing his family for about an hour each night.

Some 27 days after linemen started preparing for the most significant storm in Duke Energy's 118-year Florida history, their workday has started to return to normal.

But on any given day, their ordinary is anything but typical.

**5:45am:** The alarm clock sounds and lineman Ronnie Bailey Jr. heads to work, driving 38 miles from Sumter County to Duke Energy's Ocala Operations Center off Maricamp Road. More than 30 people work here. Their territory is vast—from Micanoopy to Weirsdale.

**8:13am:** Bailey receives training on new "rugged tablets" that adhere to his palm with adjustable Velcro. The new work management system will allow linemen to track work orders and materials in the field, improving efficiency and enhancing their ability to meet customers' needs.

**9:38am:** Bailey meets his supervisor, Ronnie Crile, for a safety briefing. "I know you're still hyped up from [Irma]," Crile

said, "but I want you to slow down. This is a marathon. We have the rest of the year [to get caught up], and you guys have the next 20 years."

**10:25am:** Bailey's apprentice, David Sakuta, scours about a half-dozen rows of tools and equipment to gather the day's materials. An apprentice works for a variety of linemen two to three months at a time for about four years, preparing them for high-pressure situations. Apprentices also complete a task book and undergo extensive performance reviews before earning the lineman title.

"You're working with something every day you can't see until you do something wrong," Bailey says. "If there's a downed wire on 441, everybody's looking at you waiting for you to make a decision."

And those decisions can mean the difference between life and death for themselves, their crew, and the public.

**11:55am:** Bailey and Sakuta arrive at a customer's home in Belleview to install a new LED streetlight, one of 483,000 streetlights Duke Energy maintains in Florida.

"That breeze feels good," Bailey exclaims in a singsong voice. He means it too. Linemen wear thick, long-sleeved fire-retar-

For 19 days straight, Bailey worked 16-hour shifts and then some

dant shirts and jeans as a protective barrier. Bailey starts with a safety briefing—a requirement before every job starts—identifying who’s in charge and who will call 911 in case of an emergency. About 30 minutes later, the job is done.

**1:18pm:** A pit bull and a chocolate Labrador retriever greet Bailey and Sakuta with jumps and licks at a small farm in Anthony that needs power connected to a barn. Bailey leads the work and asks Sakuta to dig a hole near the base of a light pole. Sakuta plants a heavy-duty plastic rectangular box, called a pedestal, that houses the underground wires and connects them to the above-ground power source.

“That’s the best pedestal made in Marion County,” Sakuta says with a grin.

“Ten, 15 years from now, it will still be built right,” Bailey adds. “That’s our craftsmanship.”

Bailey’s now in the bucket moving top to bottom using a waffle-head hammer to whack lag screws into a gray tube (conduit) to adhere it to the wooden pole. The tube will protect the wires.

“It’s crazy what those squirrels will do,” Bailey says with a chuckle. “A frog in the wrong spot, a snake on a transformer, even a dead fish dropped by a bird can knock out power to hundreds of people. We have to find the problem before we can fix it.”

Bailey runs cables through the tube from the ground up 25 feet and connects them.

“Sakuta, we’re hot,” Bailey says, meaning the barn now has power.

**2:50pm:** “Are you ready for lunch?” Bailey asks. Sakuta was ready hours ago, and the two banter like brothers about the differences between chili dogs at fast food restaurants and gas stations.

“Not today, Sakuta,” Bailey insists. “We just got an IPT [an immediate problem ticket],” a report of an arcing transformer in Belleview.

**3:44pm:** The report of an arcing transformer is actually a blown fuse. Sakuta grabs a 40-foot retractable tool he calls a pogo stick. The tool looks more like a jousting lance than a spring-loaded toy kids use to jump. With seemingly laser vision, Sakuta uses the end of the tool, called a DLJ or finger, to pull the fuse down. No power is out, so Bailey will replace the fuse later.

**4:26pm:** Bailey and Sakuta are back at the yard to pick up more wire for their next

job in Fruitland Park. Bailey’s friend texts him the track for then-Tropical Storm Nate. “I might not be off this weekend,” he says. “I get called out from my house 100 to 150 times a year.”

**5:32pm:** The two stop at Wendy’s and finally eat lunch. Neither orders chili.

**6:41pm:** In Fruitland Park, a meter post was broken and a home being remodeled needs 100 feet of new wire pulled from the meter pole to the service pole, the energy source. Bailey rattles off his observations: “This is a feeder out of Eagle’s Nest substation. Gonna need blankets.”

A feeder is the main line that distributes energy from a substation to a customer’s house. Half-inch-thick orange blankets about the size of a table placemat and rubber gloves help protect linemen when they’re working with energized lines.

**8:36pm:** The duo returns to the yard after picking up broken pole pieces and a damaged transformer at a job site in Ocala. They clean the bucket truck, put unused materials back in the warehouse, and call it a day.

**9:45pm:** Bailey arrives home to his favorite customers: his family. But in eight short hours, he’ll be “back at the office” with his second family.

“We want to get people’s power back on,” Bailey says. “We take pride in what we do, and I think it shows.” ❄️

*Heather Danenhowe is a nationally accredited public relations professional with nearly 20 years of communications experience.*



## AT A GLANCE:



- Owns and operates 15 coal, natural gas, and solar sites in the state, which generate more than 9,000 megawatts of energy.
- Serves about 1.8 million customers in a 13,000-square-mile service area spanning 35 counties, including 65,525 in Marion County.
- Employs 3,800 in Florida, including 550 line workers.
- Learn more at [duke-energy.com](http://duke-energy.com).

**Ronnie Bailey Jr.** started working for Duke Energy in January 2008. He is a native Floridian who grew up in Wildwood. His dad, Ronnie Bailey Sr., is a 36-year lineman. “I remember being five, 10 years old and my daddy being gone all week or getting called out,” the younger Bailey says. “I didn’t understand it at the time. Now I’m on the other side, seeing the same reactions my kids give me that I gave my daddy.”

## How Cool Is Your Job?

Send an email to [dean@ocalacep.com](mailto:dean@ocalacep.com) and you may be in the next issue! (Co-workers or friends count, too.)