

# Business Today

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■ **TODAY'S TOPIC:**  
**EDUCATION**

## Towing the line

NMU's Electrical Technician Program hits high numbers

■ **TODAY'S COUNTY:**  
**MARQUETTE**

## Think BIG:

Superior Business Inc. plans to expand on its K.J. Sawyer property



**COMPANY PROFILE** Lolita's Bridal Boutique **7**



**8** Downtown Escanaba's historic Delta Building will undergo a transformation that will include loft-style apartments and retail space.

**11** Cleveland-Cliff's Inc., has announced a plan to increase pellet productions at Michigan operations by investing \$500 million in capital.

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### Why NMU's Electrical Line Technician Program is...

# WIRED

**By Christopher Diem**  
*Upper Peninsula Business Today*

MARQUETTE — About 35 people are enrolled in Northern Michigan University's Electrical Line Technician Program for the 2008-09 school year, one of the highest enrollments in the six-year history of the program.

About half of the two-semester diploma program is spent in the classroom, according to Jerry LePage, one of the teachers in the program. The rest is hands-on training when students learn to repair and maintain power lines.

"Generally our students, when they graduate, will seek employment with utilities or with contractors and union apprenticeships," said LePage, an employee of the Upper Peninsula Power Co. who works for

are not yet fully qualified to do the work, LePage said. That only happens after they've entered an apprenticeship.

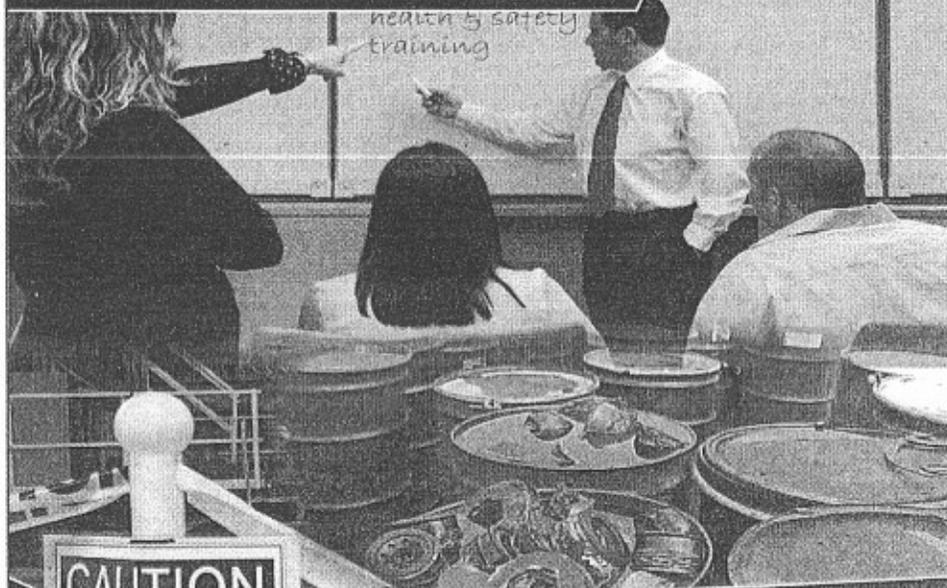
"We will certainly teach the kids how to climb wooden poles, teach them how to operate bucket trucks, install and remove electrical distribution lines," he said.

Classroom work includes safety, electrical theory and mathematical skills to help analyze electrical circuits, LePage said.

"We also try to cover a broad array of equipment that they'll find out on the distribution system — regulators, transformers. We try to give a little experience on those," he said.

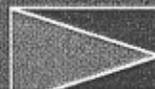
The number of students vary from year to year, LePage said. In 2004, its first year, the program graduated 28 students. In 2005, 37 students graduated. Last semester, 21 students got their diplomas.

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# down to the WIRE

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LePage said there is a high demand for the kind of work these students will eventually be doing.

"All over the country people are looking for journeymen linemen. Some of the students will gain employment right here in the U.P. but some through their apprenticeships will find jobs downstate or in Wisconsin," LePage said. "I've had students employed as far away as Nevada, Utah, Georgia, Alabama, Florida."

Travis Niemi, who is close to being an electrical journeyman lineman with the Marquette Board of Light and Power, is a graduate of the program. He said it was extremely helpful for his career.

"It pretty much gave me the basic necessities ... the foundation to get started," he said about the program. "And then there's 7,000 on-the-job training hours."

Matt Berg, a journeyman lineman with the BLP, is another graduate of the program. His father and brother are both linemen so he said he knew what he was getting into.

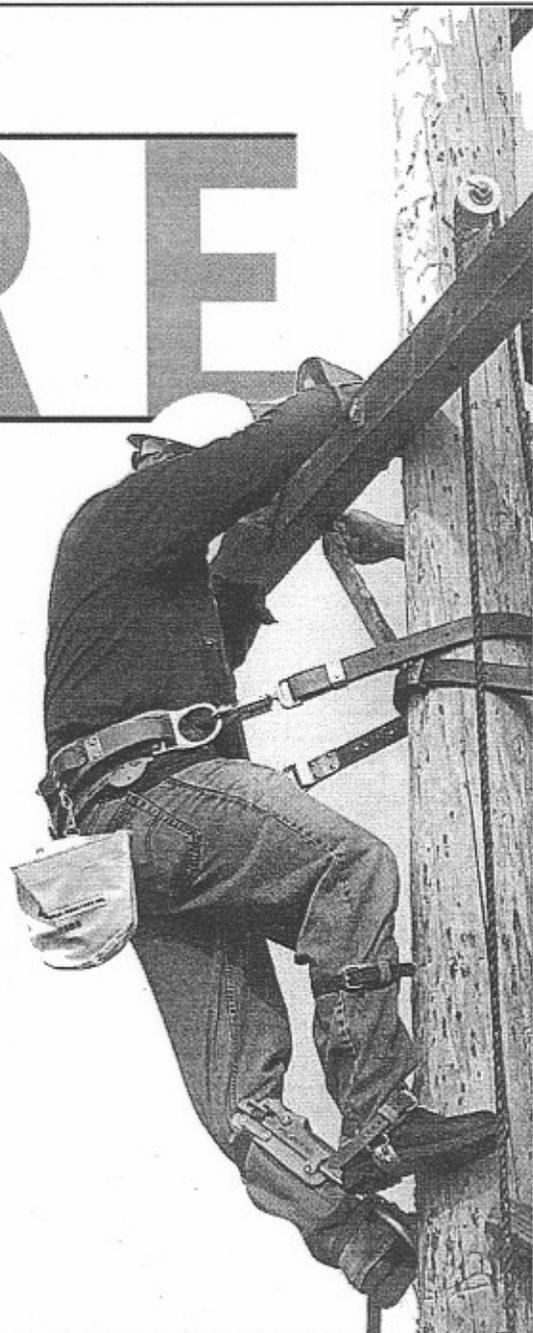
"For me it's outside work, physical work, just the type of thing I like to do. I'm not an office person," he said.

LePage said NMU's program is the largest in the Upper Peninsula. There are lineman programs offered in Gogebic County and Alpena, he said.

The class is held from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday. The program costs \$3,354 per semester, NMU's standard tuition rate.

The program is a partnership among NMU, the Midwest Skills Development Center and the Lake Superior Community Partnership.

The LSCP initially developed the program and formed a partnership with NMU to get it accredited, LePage said.



(Photos courtesy of Northern Michigan University) Top photo: students from Northern Michigan University practice scaling a power line, Below, taken. The 2008-09 school had one of the highest total of 35 students.

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