



SALUTE to  
Unsung  
Heroes

# Electrical Workers

Watch the evening news, and you might assume that the most dangerous career in America is being a first responder — those brave men and women who serve as firefighters and police officers.

An informal poll of your friends and neighbors would likely get the same answer. All of those assumptions are incorrect, relatively speaking. In fact, more electrical workers died in 2019 than firefighters and police officers combined. Yet, the people who help ensure that we're all warm and fed often remain faceless, unthanked figures.

## WHAT THEY DO

Without these critical workers, the U.S. would struggle to avoid food shortages, to educate its children, to continue as a leader in manufacturing, or even to simply live comfortably in the midst of seasonal temperature fluctuations. They make life as we know it possible, from critical areas like refrigeration to ensuring that fun pastimes like surfing the web are possible. For decades, electrical workers were so anonymous that many worked without guiding safety regulations. Thankfully, these needed protocols began to become more widely institut-



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ed, and that's helped limit injury and death in this critical profession.

## DANGEROUS WORKPLACE

Even in an age of laws and stricter oversight, inherent risks remain in working with electricity, which often happens at great heights. According to statistics from

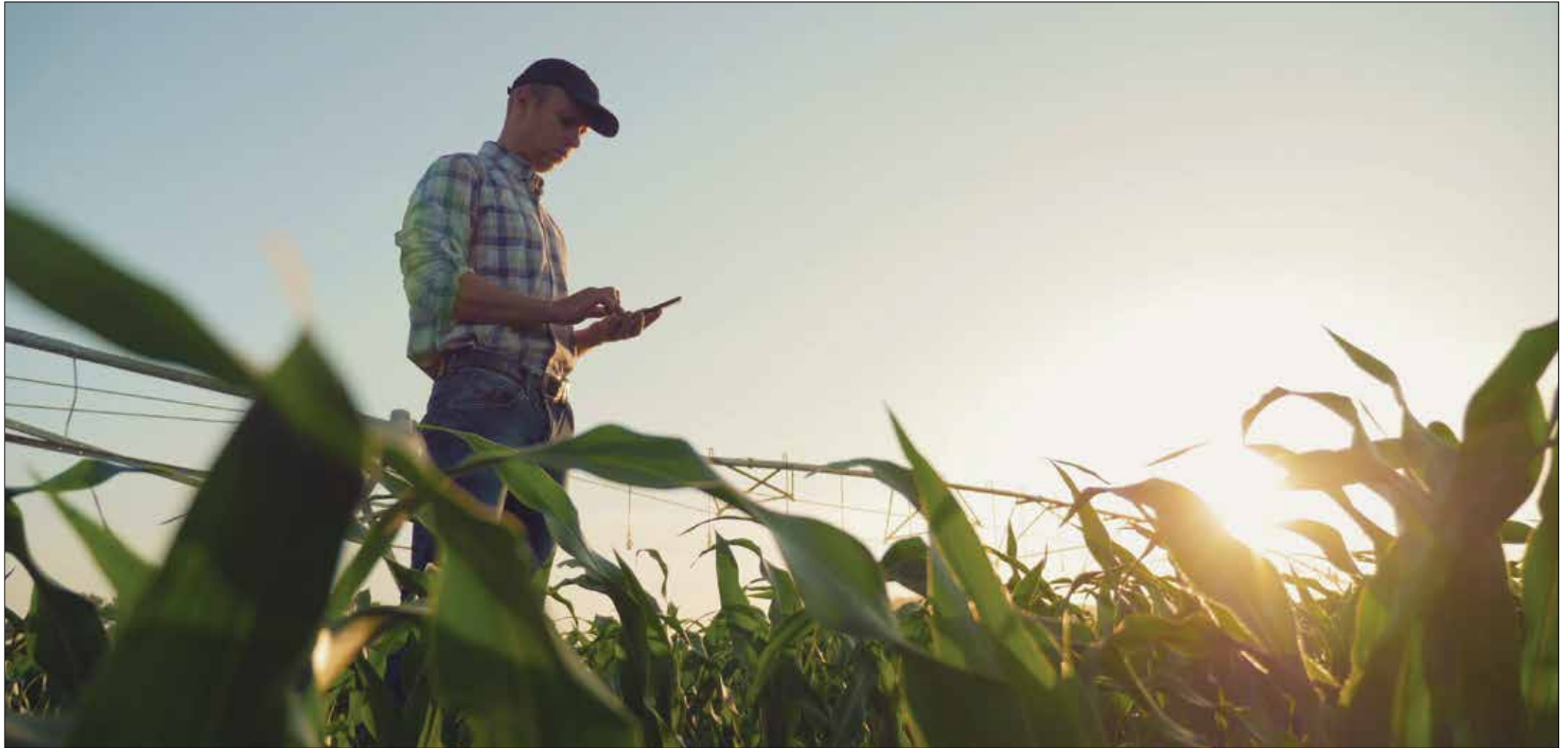
U.S. Bureau of Labor and the Electrical Safety Foundation, 166 electrical workers died in 2019, while nine firefighters and 86 police officers were killed. Working to keep our power grid up and running is typically almost four times more likely to result in a fatality at work than trying to stop fires. The 2019 figures represented a nearly 4% year-over-

year increase, marking the highest number of fatalities since 2011.

## SAYING THANK YOU

Linemen do more than keep local lights on through the installation and repair of underground and overhead lines. They also traditionally band together to aid others after natural disasters, cara-

vaning to faraway places to help those in need. Even a hometown electrician, however, assumes serious risk when working with the electricity needed to power our homes. Take a moment the next time you see one of these important workers, and say thanks. Without them, this world would — quite literally — be a much darker place.



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# Farmers: Feeding America

Food is often in such abundance at our supermarkets, even in the dead of winter, that it's easy to take for granted all of the work that goes into feeding us.

Farmers endure often harsh conditions while doing back-breaking work to make plate after plate of healthy proteins and fresh produce possible. Yet they often remain unsung heroes as we pass the fruits of their labor under a scanner at the local store.

## **THEIR HUGE ECONOMIC ROLE**

Every individual farmer's actual impact on our economic output is sweeping. Agriculture, food and other related industries added a whopping \$1.1 trillion to the U.S. gross domestic product in 2019, according to the USDA. That's more than 5% of our

entire economy. Farms themselves produced more than \$126 billion of that total. But then their output courses through a series of related sectors, including food and beverage production and sales; food services, restaurants and bars; and apparel, textiles and leather products, among many others. Forestry and fishing industries are also intertwined with farming, as are numerous private and public research efforts.

## **RISKS BOTH PERSONAL AND FINANCIAL**

Farming remains one of our most

dangerous professions, according to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. These critical workers are subject to accidents involving machinery and equipment, exposure to agriculture-related chemicals, handling livestock and, of course, sun and heat. The most common cause of death for a farmer is transportation related, as they employ huge tractors, balers and combines to sow and reap their crops. It's no exaggeration to say that farmers risk their lives every day to power the economy while feeding all of us. At the same time, they must contend with unpredictable fluctuations in weather, natural

disasters and an ever-changing business climate. Even with the best off-season planning and timely execution, there are still no guarantees.

## **A FOUNDATION FOR US ALL**

Undernutrition and hunger remain huge concerns as the world's population grows. Farmers are helping to meet that need by roughly doubling their output over the last half century. But their impact isn't limited to getting food from farm to table. More than 10% of total U.S. employment stemmed from the work farmers did in 2020, according to the USDA. That includes a raft of related jobs in the agriculture and food industries, from scientists developing pest-resistant seeds to your local restaurant worker. We all can thank a farmer.

# School Counselors

School counselors have long played an undervalued role in helping students get through school and into early adulthood.

Their steady presence, however, has become even more important amid a worldwide health crisis, as shifting schedules, teacher shortages and worries about their well-being added to the everyday stresses that young people endure. Today, they might spend as much time discussing these kind of external issues as they do college pathways or the difficulty in finding a date for the prom. That's why counselors have never been more important as a school resource.

## A GROWING NEED

School counselor jobs are expected to expand 11% through 2030, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. That's faster than the average for all occupations. In some ways, the job has remained unchanged since its beginnings: Counselors help students develop both academic and social skills, while guiding them on a path toward employment by analyzing individual class schedules, grades and attendance. They may create comprehensive counseling programs focusing on education and intervention, as needed. Increasingly, however, they are called upon



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to do more, providing emotional support for kids who are trying to find a sense of purpose during one of the most difficult times of their lives.

## HISTORY OF SCHOOL COUNSELING

The first legislation to provide funding for guidance programs arrived in the early 20th century. New York became the initial state to develop certifi-

cation requirements a few years later, and the focus remained on the academic side for some 50 years. Into the 1970s, however, schools began broadening the goals for counselors, asking them to take on social and personal issues, as well. The No Child Left Behind Act of the 1990s then codified the role. That put counselors in a unique position to help when schools were disrupted

by a global pandemic. Students who had already built trusting relationships while discussing issues associated with adolescence had a safe space to talk about the era's incredible new challenges.

## FROM CRISIS TO COMFORT

Working one-to-one with young people, counselors discuss a child's widescreen expe-

rience in school — everything from the classes they'll need to follow a degree path to the issues they may be having with friends, dating partners, parents or remote learning. They are the school's first line of support when students experience trauma, whether on campus or at home. They're also available to parents if there's a sensitive topic that's been difficult to discuss with a child.

# Nurses: On the Front Lines

Nurses continue to provide foundational care at hospitals, urgent-care centers, rehabilitation centers and other facilities.

As the U.S. population ages, they've become even more critical to our shared well-being. At the same time, however, they're being asked to do more than ever before, as an evolving industry turns to specialization while relying less and less on every day interactions with doctors.

## A CHANGING ROLE

It's not enough just to have a winning bedside manner. These front-line heroes are taking on an ever-increasing number of roles that have nothing to do with the old "nurse maid" stereotype. Today, nurses are typically involved with triage in emergency departments, employing expert assessments to stabilize patients. They serve as a nexus point for a network of doctors, physical therapists, pharmacists and social workers that grows around the ill. Today, multiple specialists tend to serve a single patient. A nurse smooths the way by utilizing the profession's vaunted skills as big-picture coordinators. For less pressing health-care concerns, patients might not see a doctor at all; instead, they deal exclusively with a trusted nurse.



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## A LIFETIME OF LEARNING

Nurses must be licensed, and often emerge from a variety of degree paths. But their professional development doesn't end at the college's commencement exercise — and their work days don't always end when their shift does. Continuing education is a key element, ensuring that nurses are up to date on the latest medical advances while

also adding new knowledge and skills as their job description evolves. They may also produce research for respected medical journals, contributing to the incredible advancements in medicine that are redefining our health goals.

## LEADERS IN THE COMMUNITY

With a deep well of empa-

thy, a fast-paced job with huge responsibilities and vast wealth of knowledge, it's no surprise that nurses are also a force in the community. Clara Barton, a Civil War-era hero, started the American Red Cross. Hazel Johnson-Brown founded the Center for Health Policy. Eddie Bernice Johnson of Texas was the first nurse elected to the U.S. Congress; two more now

serve with her. Diane Carlson Evans, a former Army nurse, founded the Vietnam Women's Memorial Foundation. Nationwide, countless nurses have established and now operate local health-care facilities aimed at underserved communities, whether they suffer from domestic violence, are battling substance abuse, or simply need prenatal care.

# Grocery Workers

As quarantines went into effect in response to a global pandemic, the definition of “front-line workers” began to quickly expand.

Most people traditionally thought the role belonged only to firemen, police officers and hospital personnel, but it quickly became clear that others were also shouldering a huge level of responsibility and risk in service of the wider community. Grocery workers were the immediate beneficiary, as they were suddenly being celebrated for keeping stores open in such difficult times. Once the lockdowns ended, however, we may have forgotten the effort, tenacity and bravery still involved with this often-overlooked job.

## QUIET CONTRIBUTORS

We expect store shelves to be stocked with just what we’re looking for, and for there to be plenty of choices. A high-tech, previously smooth-running supply chain brought a seemingly endless bounty of goods, and they magically appeared at the local grocery store. But there’s always been a small, usually unseen army of people doing the work to make that happen. At the same time, we might have paid for it all without even acknowledging the



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cashier, or thoughtlessly driven away without acknowledging the stock boy’s help transferring our groceries into the car. This passive relationship continued for years, until a coronavirus swept across the planet.

## SUDDEN HEALTH CONCERNS

As governments responded to the looming health threats with quarantines, many people were able to switch to

remote work and continue forward. That wasn’t an option for grocery workers, whose vital job became making sure that our nations remained fed despite the risk of exposure to a virus that wasn’t yet widely understood. They became everyday heroes in a process that also included fellow food supply-chain workers in processing, packaging trucking and delivery, among others. More than 2 million people continued to

go to work in American grocery stores, ignoring the obvious worries about face-to-face interactions with customers and co-workers in the close proximity of a supermarket.

## STILL MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The arrival of vaccines led to a broad reopening of the U.S. economy, and as people returned to work the risks associated with this profession seem to have been large-

ly forgotten. Yet grocery workers remain on the front lines, risking breakthrough infections because of constant exposure to possibly unvaccinated customers. Some employees are suffering understandable psychological distress. These seemingly simple jobs now require the same level of dedication in the face of illness that we associate with doctors and nurses, but with a much lower level of expressed appreciation.

# Small Business Owners

Small business owners are the engine that runs an economy.

These companies have accounted for more than 65% of new jobs since 2000, according to the U.S.

Small Business Administration.

More than that, they're a force multiplier for local economic activity: Research continues to show that a larger portion of locally spent money remains in the area compared to the typical big-box store. Then there's the pride in craft that simply can't be found when buying from a national conglomerate that relies on mass-production techniques.

## HOW ARE THEY DEFINED?

They don't have to meet the age-old definition of "mom and pop," but small businesses can't have too many employees either. They are typically defined by the Small Business Administration by the average number of workers employed over the course of a year. They're also evaluated based on average annual receipts with levels set according to the largest income a business may have, including any affiliates or subsidiaries. The levels vary by industry. But you don't



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have to be familiar with the federal standard to know a small business when you see it. These are your friends and neighbors, offering handmade, personal or home-grown goods and services.

## SMALL BUT WITH HUGE IMPACT

There are nearly 32 million small businesses in the U.S., according to the SBA, versus just over 20,000 large businesses. Small business creat-

ed some 11 million new jobs between 2000-19, while large business created about half that. As expected, the pandemic dealt a very big blow to these more modestly sized companies. Those with 20 to 49 employees had the largest decline in employment of any size business, the SBA noted. That makes supporting them all the more important as our economy continues to rebound. Starting your own business has always been a

difficult prospect, and that's even more so now. The 15-year survival rate for these hometown companies was just 26% — and that was before COVID changed everything.

## WHY SHOPPING LOCAL MATTERS

Finding success as a local start-up of any kind starts with being well funded and having a smart business plan. But no matter how great their

product is, these small businesses can't keep their dream alive if they don't garner committed support from the local community.

When you shop at a local business, you're doing more than supporting that dream. You're helping to create a stronger local economy, as your money filters directly back into other area businesses. A small business' success quickly becomes everyone else's, too.

# Caregivers: Lending a Hand

Caregivers don't have to have a health care-related degree. In fact, most don't.

Instead, they're everyday people helping family and friends through issues that may be sudden or chronic. They tend to have a certain profile, though both caregivers and those they're helping range across ages, relationships and genders. All of them helping out of love and compassion, often without the recognition that should be afforded to someone doing so much in service of others.

## WHO THEY ARE

Women are more likely to fill this role, according to the Family Caregiver Alliance. In fact, they number about three quarters of those providing informal care. Half are taking care of a parent or an in-law, some 15% for a neighbor or friend. Countless others are attending to a spouse, sometimes while they themselves are dealing with an assortment of health issues related to aging. Those who they are taking care of are on average about 70 years old, though about half of those between the ages of 18 and 45 are men.

## WHAT THEY DO

The Family Caregiver Alliance has estimated that an average of just over 24 hours per week is spent providing care. Almost 25% of caregivers spend 41 hours or more every



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week helping — the equivalent of another full-time job. This might mean taking care of everyday tasks such as food preparation, laundry, house-keeping and shopping. Others provide personal hygiene, or help with managing finances, scheduling doctors appointments and researching best practices to better help. These time commitments skyrocket

if the caregiver must help with more complex tasks for those who are briefly incapacitated or completely immobile. The average length of service is four years, according to the FCA. About 15% help for a decade or more.

## WHY THEY HELP

The goal is often to allow the patient to keep some

sense of independence by being able to remain in their own home. Most of these selfless volunteers say they arrived with no special skills as a caregiver, only with the knowledge that their friend, family member, co-worker or neighbor had no one else to help — or that insurance coverage had either been completed or refused.

Unfortunately, the number of people who this applies to continues to grow. Tens of millions of Americans have already served as a short- or long-term caregivers on an informal basis, according to the National Alliance for Caregiving. The value of these free services has been estimated to be in the \$500 billion range by the AARP.