

Company Profile: Sunbelt Electric

Katie Mayer
Electric Times

For Frank Santella, president of Sunbelt Electric in Phoenix, there's something uniquely rewarding about responding to service calls from homeowners and communities in need.

"Sometimes you drive around and feel like a hero," Santella said. "There is fun in service because you go into a home and you don't know what to expect."

Residential and commercial service calls are Sunbelt Electric's specialty. And today, the company is responsible for more than half of one of the largest home warranty company's local calls for service. It is also the key vendor for several large property management companies.

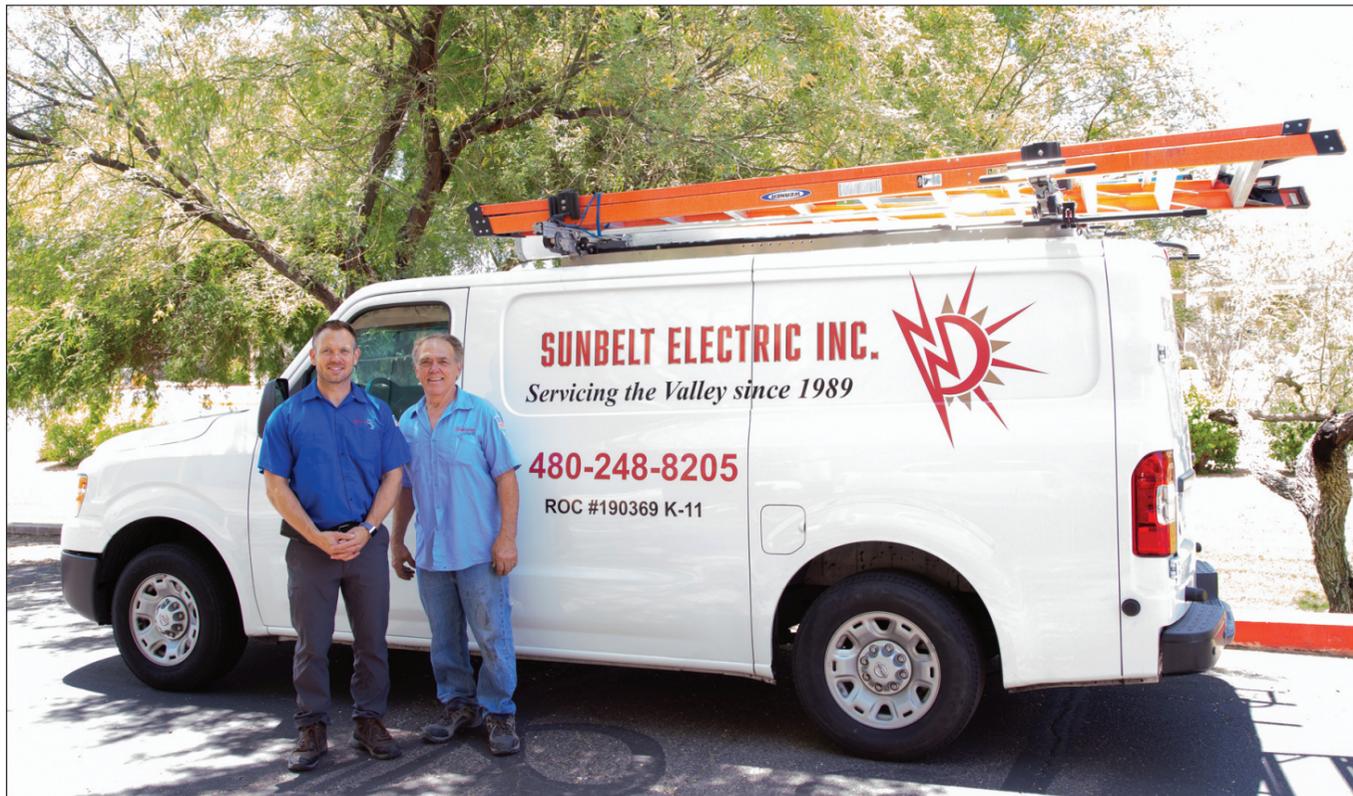
"We consider every service call we go to our most important project of the day," Santella said.

But swooping in like superheroes wasn't always Sunbelt Electric's niche. In fact, at one time, the company was SBE-certified (Small Business Enterprise) with the City of Phoenix, had 32 employees and was working with some of the Valley's largest general contractors on new construction projects downtown.

Santella said he learned a lot from those five years, but realized this business focus was ultimately not his company's passion or strength.

"It was very intense and competitive and very large to maintain," Santella said of those days. "Instead of pursuing these larger projects, we started focusing more on our retail and insurance and property management companies."

He added, "I kept two or three of our best guys from the big projects...and basically



President of Sunbelt Electric, Frank Santella, and his father and founder of the company, Jim Santella.

started back from the bottom really small."

It didn't take long for Santella and the Sunbelt Electric team to earn the trust of his new customers. In fact, one of those is City Property Management, Arizona's largest locally-owned HOA management company.

Kendra Gray manages eight communities for City Property Management and said she has been relying on Sunbelt Electric for all her communities for the past three years.

"He stands by his work, which is amazing quality, and his communication is phenomenal," Gray said of Santella. "It's tough

to find vendors that have that level of service."

Sunbelt Electric has done everything from large lighting projects for the communities to small calls for service for whatever is needed.

"Even all of our boards just adore working with Frank," she said.

Although Santella is the owner and face of Sunbelt Electric today, it was actually his father, Jim Santella, who founded the company 30 years ago out of his home. Frank Santella helped his father at work from the

time he was a child, but stepped full-time into the company 15 years ago, bringing a background in both the Arizona Builders Alliance apprenticeship program as a journeyman and a degree from Arizona State University. He found his passion in the business development side of the industry, which allowed Jim to focus on his own passion – the technical work.

The younger Santella eventually became president. And today, both men are part of the Sunbelt Electric team of techs, which

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Race

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who compete work with teachers and mentors, spending nine months preparing for race day, according to Tech Parks Arizona.

“Along the way, they apply physics, engineering and energy,” Tech Parks Arizona’s website says. “They solve real-world problems, using mathematical, analytical and critical thinking skills.”

Students work in teams and collaborate on ideas while challenging themselves to translate their ideas into a working prototype. In this year’s competition, newer student teams modified gasoline-powered karts to run on solar energy and batteries, while teams with more experience built their go-karts from scratch, with the exception of the motor.

“Racing the Sun is a rigorous and challenging program,” Tech Parks Arizona’s website says. “The student teams must

compete under a set of rules designed to promote competition fairness.”

Matt Massic, engineering instructor at Independence High School, said the program addresses a top concern facing many companies today—the lack of a skilled STEM-workforce.

“The program is designed to introduce students to career pathways in STEM-based industries,” he added. “We are grateful for the support that companies like Rosendin provide, including both supporting the program generally as well as helping one of our student teams learn from some of the best in the industry.”

Other event sponsors included Tucson Electric Power, Arizona STEM, APS, Diversified Print Solutions, Musselman Honda Circuit, P3Solar, Global Solar, Bay4 Energy Services, CAID Industries, Arizona Technology Council, Arizona Science Center and SciTech Institute.

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also includes Sam, Dave, Ken, Montana and Paul. Running the office is AJ, and human resources and other office duties are handled by Santella’s wife, Heather.

“We treat everyone in this company like they are part of our family,” Santella said. “I like to joke that we offer the same type of benefits as someone working for Google.”

The group also gets together quarterly for non-work-related activities. And Santella credits the team with ensuring customers are happy.

“If you read through our Google reviews, it’s a reflection on them,” he said. “And we couldn’t do it without AJ in our office.”

Santella credits his father with providing a great example of work ethic for both himself and his employees.

“My Dad has been a big influence on me,” Santella said. “He knows his trade and his work ethic is unmatched by anybody.”

He added, “He is important to everyone

here, and (so is) the influence he has had on me and my ability to run this company efficiently.”

Santella, like his father, works long hours to keep Sunbelt Electric running smoothly and servicing so many calls, but he still finds time to participate in CrossFit every morning before work. He and his wife Heather have three children, Scarlett, 12; Fiona, 6; and Sawyer, 4. The family enjoys spending time together swimming and taking short vacations.

Santella said his company supports local school athletic programs whenever possible.

And in business and in life, he believes in the Golden Rule.

“I treat people how I want to be treated,” Santella said, “and I think it reflects on our customer base retention and employee retention.”

He added, “We’re all important.”

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