

Wind Farmer

FOR TOM WILBERT,
WORK IS A BREEZE

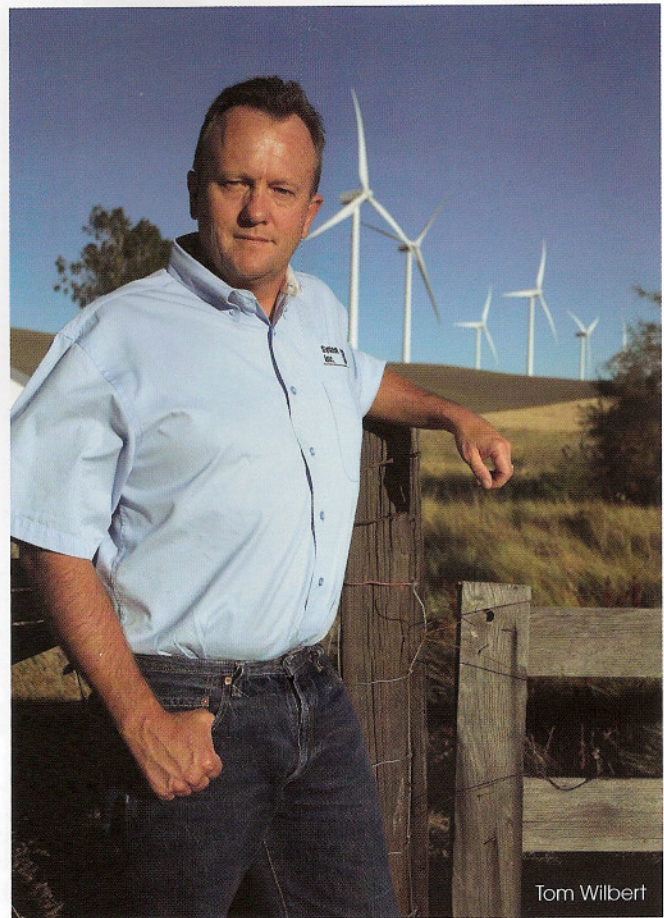
by Patricia Kutza

On any given day, Tom Wilbert's team can be found installing transformers, grounding systems and communication links. Sometimes, these electrical contractors are bussing and cabling in wind conditions that can exceed 40 mph.

Capturing energy produced by the wind is no easy task. But neither is installing the electrical infrastructure for these wind farms. No one knows this better than Wilbert, president of Carmichael-based System 3 Inc., a commercial electrical contractor who services the utility and other sectors. His company specializes in the construction of wind energy towers and rehabilitated substations, but that hasn't always been the case.

In 2001, he started his company to service the high-voltage industry. Now 100 employees strong and licensed to work in seven states covering the West and Southwest, System 3 is privately held and bids on both public and private projects. With as much as a dozen or so projects running simultaneously, Wilbert splits his time between managing these projects and finding where the market is heading next.

"When I first launched Systems 3, my projects were predominantly for electrical substations. Now wind energy has come to the forefront. I continually try to measure the pulse on where the industry is going so I can meet my customers' needs," Wilbert says. System 3 has broadened its profile as a sustainable-energy provider by installing solar



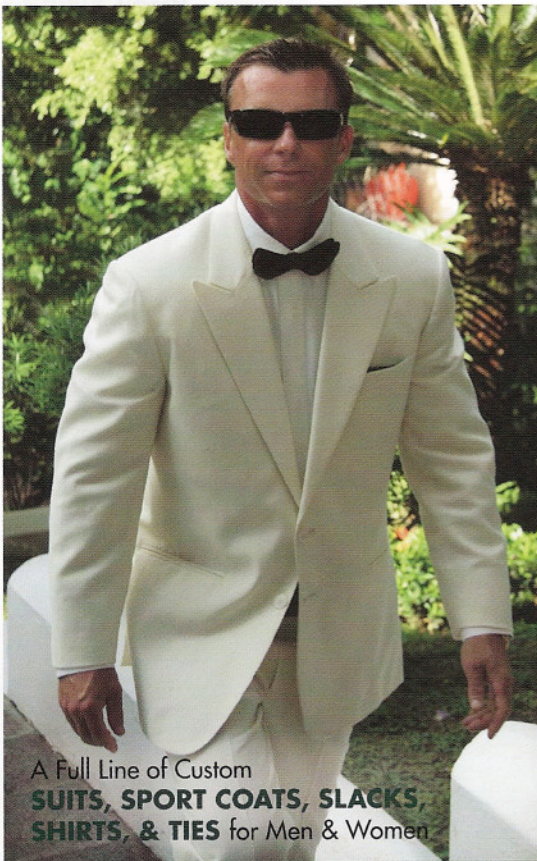
farms, such as the large grid operation for the El Dorado Irrigation District, as well as contracting with Sacramento Municipal Utility District to service existing residential solar collectors.

With projects running in such places as the Mojave Desert; Nolan, Texas; Sleeping Bear, Okla.; and San Diego, Wilbert and his employees are exposed to a large range of often-temperamental climates.

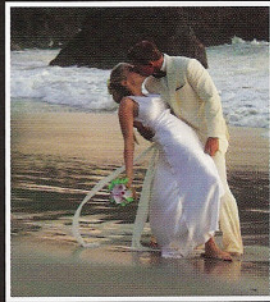
"One of our biggest challenges is the weather itself," Wilbert says. "The rain and high winds prevent our work from moving forward and can stall our progress. Our reels of cable weigh about 10,000 pounds and are very large, so it would take a tornado to move them an inch. But the contractor who installs the wind turbines has to secure the blades or the wind will move them."

Wilbert says 20 to 25 mph winds make for perfect working conditions. Once the winds rev up over 40 mph, the units have to be locked off so that they don't run out of control and burn up.





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Another recent hurdle to the wind industry was Hurricane Katrina. It sent ripples through an industry that was just coming into its own at that time, he says. "Some large copper processing plants were destroyed. The manufacturers of high voltage electrical equipment got backlogged in response to Katrina's aftermath, creating long lead times for the deliverance of transformers and electrical equipment needed for the construction of wind farms."

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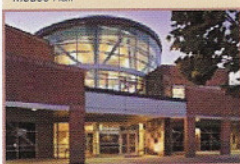
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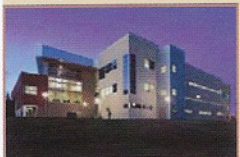
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Regulatory issues can also wreak havoc on a project's timeline. But with so many different projects at various stages of completion, says Wilbert, there's plenty of work to go around.

The work has reinforced Wilbert's desire to build and maintain a huge presence in the world of renewable energy projects. All this is done without ignoring his other goal as a businessman: to give back to his community. "My company's increasing success has allowed me to donate in larger proportions," he says.

Many of System 3's donations and fundraising efforts, such as Team Donate Life and the Race Across America, reflect Wilbert's personal passion for cycling. A self-professed type-A personality, Wilbert likes nothing better than hopping on his cycle after a long day at work and putting in the hours that make him competitive for events such as the Ironman triathlon he completed last year.