

VEC GETS HIGH MARKS FOR SAFETY

We've all heard the old adage, "Safety First." At Volunteer Energy Cooperative (VEC), it's not just an adage – it's a way of life. Recently the cooperative received outstanding scores during Rural Electric Safety Accreditation Program (RESAP) audits at every VEC facility. The audits were facilitated by the Tennessee Job Training Safety (JT&S) organization.

The four-day process that was completed in October saw a three-member team of inspectors examining 150 points at each VEC facility that includes everything from emergency lighting, fire extinguisher placement, and first aid preparation to procedures, crew interviews, and vehicle inspections. The second half of the safety audit consists of a review of all the cooperative's safety records and documentation.

One of the criteria under review, and one which VEC takes very seriously, is the effort that the cooperative exerts in providing electrical safety to its customers and its efforts in educating the public concerning safety issues. During the review period, VEC met objectives in this area by conducting pole inspections, delivering electrical safety demonstrations to school-aged children and the general public, providing free safety publications, and publishing articles in VEC *Powerlines* customer newsletter.

"This is an exhaustive safety review conducted every three years by RESAP," said VEC safety director John Selvidge. "We're very pleased with the results and proud to be an industry leader in providing the safest possible workplace for our employees and customers."

VEC achieved an overall score of 90.5 with 70 representing a passing score. VEC has shown consistent improvement throughout the nine-year period of the program. In 1994, VEC was one of only five electric cooperatives in the state to achieve accreditation by posting a score of 73. In 1997 VEC improved that score to a 78 and in 2000 improved again to a score of 84. The 90.5 posted in 2003 is one of the highest scores in Tennessee among electric cooperatives.

Selvidge said the scores represent the results of a tremendous amount of work among VEC employees, but he said all the effort is worth it.

"What's even more important that our numerical score on this inspection is the dedication to safety it represents," Selvidge said. "We want to be sure we're doing everything possible to help our employees work safely. This score helps us evaluate how well we are doing that."



Powerlines is produced by the Volunteer Energy Cooperative's Member Services Department as a service to customers. Comments and suggestions can be e-mailed to vec@vec.org or mailed to VEC Member Services Department, P.O. Box 277, Decatur, TN 37322.

Sandhill Cranes

to Take Center Stage at Birchwood, Tennessee Festival



Photo by Dan Hicks, TWRA

Bluebirds may do their flying somewhere over the rainbow, but in February sandhill cranes make a beeline to Meigs County and the Hiwassee Refuge.

Tennessee Wildlife Resource Agency officials expect thousands of sandhill cranes to make their annual migratory pit stop at the confluence of the Tennessee and Hiwassee rivers near Hiwassee Island (commonly referred to as Jolley's Island after John Jolley, a wealthy Cherokee merchant and planter who lived on the island prior to the forced removal of the Cherokees in 1818).

To mark the occasion, the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) will host sandhill crane Cherokee Days on February 7th and 8th at Birchwood Elementary School and at the Hiwassee Refuge.

The stars of the show will be the 50,000 sandhill cranes that annually make a stopover at the refuge, and plenty of other attractions are scheduled for the event.

"We get groups from all over," said Shirley Lawrence, one of the event's organizers. "We get tour buses and church buses and visitors from as far away as Europe and Japan. That's one of the great things about it."

Events kick off Saturday, February 7th at Birchwood Elementary School with a breakfast hosted by the Birchwood Elementary School PTO. The PTO will also be serving lunch at the school. Both meals come at a modest price that benefits the school.

Speakers on Native American culture, wildlife restoration project, bird watching, history, and other topics will be featured in the school's auditorium. Crafts, displays, and demonstrations will also be featured at the school on Saturday. Shuttle buses will provide free rides from the school to the refuge where experts will be on hand with binoculars set up and a wealth of information to share.

On Sunday, events will all be taking place at the refuge where, again, experts with binoculars and wisdom will be on hand.

Wally Akins, of TWRA and director of the Hiwassee Refuge, said this will be the 12th year for the event and this year's edition is shaping up as another good one.

"We're still getting commitments firmed up for some of the speakers and entertainers," Akins said. But he said Dr. Fred Alsop, an author, a professor at East Tennessee State University, and a noted bird expert will be on hand, as well as Mike Abram, an expert on Cherokee Indian heritage.

All demonstrations, displays, music, and presentations will be offered free of charge.



Photo by Dan Hicks, TWRA

How to Get There:

Birchwood is located on Tennessee Highway 60, midway between Dayton and Cleveland, Tennessee. Interstate 75 runs between Knoxville and Chattanooga, Tennessee. From exit 25 (Cleveland) on I-75, take Tennessee Hwy. 60 north to Birchwood. For more information call: 423-334-5850.



Improvements will mark progress for VEC in 2004

by Bill Buchanan, President/CEO

As hard as it is to believe, the calendar has again turned over another year. Even though the weather is cold and dreary, I enjoy each new year because it gives me an opportunity to reflect on continuing activities and upcoming innovations at Volunteer Energy Cooperative (VEC) that help us to serve you better. Below are just a few of the things we look forward to this year:

Implementation of our Outage Management System

Employees have been trained on the first segment of our outage management system that will allow us to better pinpoint trouble on our distribution grid. When fully operational, this system will show operators the area affected by an outage and give them information on crews that have been dispatched to the area. Based on trouble calls received, the system can actually predict the number of customers that will be affected by an outage.

Enhancement of the Interactive Voice Response (IVR)

Customers can already call in to the new IVR and receive automated information about their accounts. In the coming months, we will be enhancing the IVR and adding more automated features that our members have requested.

New Delivery Points and System Improvements

Plans are in the works for new substations in Hamilton County, Hopewell, and Fairfield Glade. 12KV-to-25KV upgrades to the system are underway in the Ten Mile area, south Bradley County, and in Polk County. These additions will help improve reliability and assist us in managing our growth.

Credit/Debit Card Payments (see article elsewhere in this issue)

Very soon VEC offices will be able to accept MasterCard, VISA, and Discover card payments for electric service. Our plan is to phase in this service, beginning with the Decatur service center in December. This is a convenience that customers have been requesting for some time and we are happy to be able to offer this service.

Levelized Billing

This spring we plan to introduce levelized billing to our customers. This option bases the customer's monthly bill on a moving average of the immediately preceding 12 months of usage. Customer bills will fluctuate slightly from month to month, but there will be no "true-up" month as long as the service continues. Watch Powerlines for more information in the coming months.

Milestone for the VECustomers Share Program

I anticipate that sometime early this spring, we will distribute our 1,000,000th dollar through the VECustomers Share program. This program has assisted community groups all over our service region with projects to benefit their residents. Your generosity has made this program a huge success.

Legislative Activities

One of the most important – and certainly one of the most difficult – jobs that we have is to keep our finger on the pulse of legislative activity. As this issue of Powerlines goes to press, the VEC Board of Directors, staff, and management are planning a meeting with state senators and representatives. This is one of several legislative activities that we undertake each year on behalf of our member-owners. We will keep in touch with both state and national representatives all year to ensure that they are well informed on the issues that affect you.

On behalf of the Board and employees of VEC, I wish the best year ever for you and your family. It certainly looks as though it will be a busy year for us!

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VEC Customers *Share*

Your Change Changes Things

Library books, Neighborhood Watch, child abuse prevention, art classes, and several programs to help the needy were among the causes assisted by Volunteer Energy Cooperative customers who pooled their pennies through the VECustomers Share program in October. The VECustomers Share board of directors funded grants totaling \$29,550 in October. Since the inception of the program two years ago in October of 2001, a total of \$817,645.25 in grants has been awarded. VECustomers Share is a non-profit, tax exempt charitable organization covering VEC's 17-county service area. The foundation's funds are derived from Volunteer Energy Cooperative members who allow their electric bills to be rounded up to the nearest \$1. The additional amount goes into the VECustomers Share fund, which is administered by the foundation's board of directors whose 12 members serve as volunteers.

VECcustomers Share contributions average 50 cents per month or \$6 per year for each participating residential customer. Approximately 80 percent of VEC's customers are donating to the program. The deadline for grant applications is the last day of each month. For additional information, contact Patty Hurley, manager of member services, at 423-334-7050.

Organizations receiving grants in October include:

Retired/ Senior Volunteer Program of Southeast Tennessee	\$200.00
Child Advocacy Center	550.00
Meigs County 4-H Volunteer Leaders Organization	400.00
Tri-State Resource and Advocacy Corp., Inc.	400.00
39ers Club	1,000.00
Claxton Community Volunteer Emergency Services	637.50
Etowah Senior Center	637.50
Calhoun Elementary School PTO	637.50
Signal Centers, Inc.	637.50
Rhea County Rescue Squad, Inc.	200.00
Tennessee Valley Theatre	500.00
Spring City Middle School Volleyball Boosters	200.00
Luminary Children's Fund	1,000.00
Circle of Friends	150.00
Rhea County Volunteer Support Council	500.00
Dill Cemetery Fund	1,500.00
Chestuee United Methodist Youth Group	400.00
Hiwassee Chapter American Red Cross	400.00
Bradley Initiative for Church and Community	400.00
Youth/Adult Group Black Fox United Methodist Church	1,000.00
Helping Hands Ministry	350.00
Sammy Sedman Chess Clubs	525.00
McDonald Cemetery Association	1,500.00
Student Council of Polk County High School	525.00
Chilhowee Basketball Booster Club	525.00
Midway Quarterback Club	1,000.00
Midway Athletic Club (MAC)	1,000.00
South Cumberland Elementary School Chess Club	500.00
Plateau Pregnancy Services	1,500.00
Hospice of Cumberland County	525.00
Lake Tansi Neighborhood Watch	1,500.00
The Art Guild at Fairfield Glade	500.00
Girl Scout Troop 187	575.00
Career Awareness Club	350.00
Fentress County Ministerial Association	1,100.00
Fentress County Public Library	1,100.00
Uffelman Elementary School PTO	1,025.00
Ladies Fellowship	1,000.00
Lady Bobcat Boosters	1,013.00
Pickett County High School Boys Basketball Boosters	1,012.00
Kidney Foundation of Greater Chattanooga Area	525.00
Camp Lookout - Holston Conference	550.00

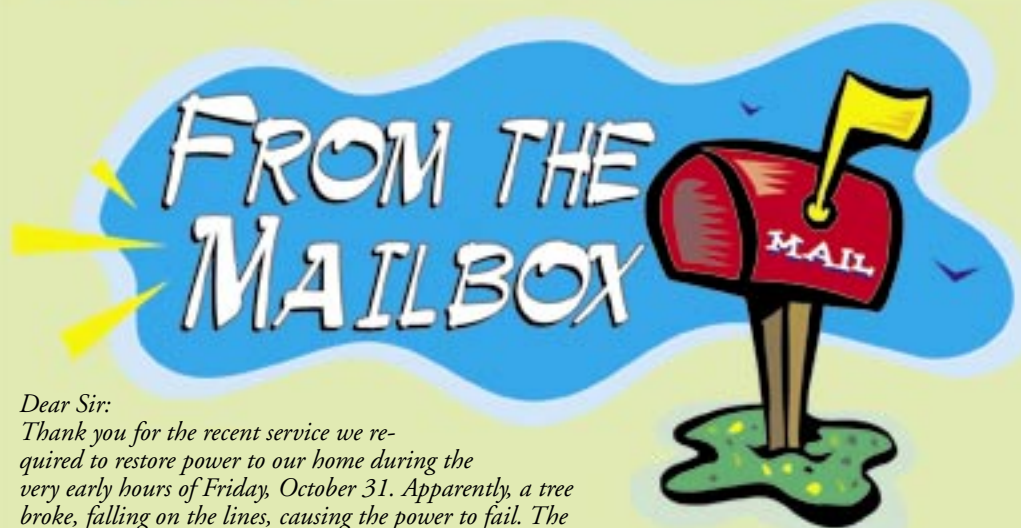


VECcustomers Share Board member Max Ross, right, presents a grant check to Mary Taylor, treasurer of the 39ers Club.

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Dear Sir:
Thank you for the recent service we required to restore power to our home during the very early hours of Friday, October 31. Apparently, a tree broke, falling on the lines, causing the power to fail. The event awoke us, after which we called to report the outage.

We were pleasantly surprised by the successful attempt within about two hours to remedy the situation. As we were headed out of town by 6:30 that morning, we were particularly pleased to have the problem fixed prior to our departure, as well as the fact that lights made the business of getting up and out much easier.

You have been there on repeated occasions to provide service, quickly and efficiently. For that, we cannot thank you enough.

Sincerely,
Bob and Joyce Lantz
Georgetown, TN

Gentlemen:
I would like to thank those that assisted in this year's annual Volunteer Energy meeting.

The breakfast seemed to be enjoyed by all. James Rogers' performance was superb. The gifts given out were great, and, I, for one, want to thank you for my certificate for \$50.00 off my utility bill. It was greatly appreciated. I also want to thank you for the gift bags given to each person upon leaving.

Again, thanks to each of you at Volunteer Energy.

Pauline (Mrs. John) Faulkner

Credit Card Payments Add Convenience

As of December 15 Volunteer Energy Cooperative (VEC) is accepting credit card and debit card payments on electric accounts at the Decatur Service Center. VEC will be phasing in the program to other service centers.

Duel Grubb, manager of VEC's Information Technology Department, says that all service centers should be capable of accepting credit card and debit card payments by the end of February.

"We're getting the pilot program up and running in Decatur and when we're confident we've got it all going smoothly, we'll expand to our other service centers," Grubb said. The service centers will be able to accept Visa, Mastercard, and Discover credit and debit cards. There will be a three-tier convenience charge assessed to credit card payments to offset the charge imposed by the credit card companies. For payments of \$150 or less the convenience charge is \$3. A \$5 convenience charge will be in place for payments of up to \$300 and for payments up to \$500 the charge is \$7. Service centers will not be able to accept credit or debit card payments in excess of \$500.

There is no convenience charge for debit card payments. Customers making debit card payments will come into the service center and key in their PIN numbers to make the payment.

"We're very pleased to be able to offer this convenience to our customers," Grubb said. "Paying bills is never really fun, but we are continually looking for ways to provide as much flexibility and convenience to our customers as possible."

Grubb said VEC is still working toward making online bill payments possible, but there is still no definite timeline on this project.

"We still have some procedural and security hurdles to clear before we'll be able to accept online payments on electric accounts," Grubb said.

VEC Brings Home energy right® Awards



Volunteer Energy Cooperative (VEC) garnered two awards at TVA's Southeast District energy right® awards dinner November 14th in Cleveland, Tennessee.

VEC won a first place in the manufactured homes division and second place in the residential heat pump division. The energy right® program, administered through TVA and TVA distributors like VEC, is designed to help customers save money and gain efficiency in home energy usage. The program offers assistance with new home construction, heat pumps, water heaters, the Energy Library, and other tools and information to help consumers conserve energy and save money.

VEC has partnered with TVA in the energy right® program and has garnered awards for the past three years. In 2001 VEC took first place in the residential division and 2nd place in the manufactured homes division. In 2002 VEC placed first in the manufactured homes division and second in the residential division. The awards are based on the number of heat pumps installed per total number of customers in the VEC service area.

VEC Member Services manager Patty Hurley, who supervises the cooperative's participation in the program, said she is pleased so many VEC customers are using the program.

"It is encouraging to see our customers are taking advantage of this opportunity to increase the value of their homes while saving on energy costs," Hurley said.

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