

# Now is the Perfect Time to Stay in Touch

The holiday season is a fading memory. Summer vacations are still a distant dream. But with Volunteer Energy Cooperative's low cost long-distance telephone service, now is the perfect time to stay in touch with loved ones, wherever they are.

With a 24-hour a day / seven days a week rate of just 5.9 cents a minute, no monthly fee, and no lengthy dialing requirements, VEC's long-distance service is a quick and easy way to start saving money right now.

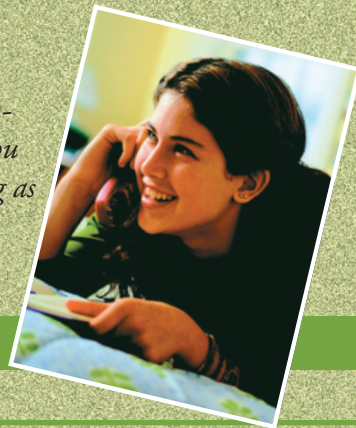
There is no long-term commitment required and even people who are not VEC customers can get in on the savings. Anyone in the continental United States can join.

With VEC long-distance you can even get a toll-free number without any fee. You'll only be billed for the calls to that number.

Switching to VEC long distance is free and it is as easy as making a single phone call.

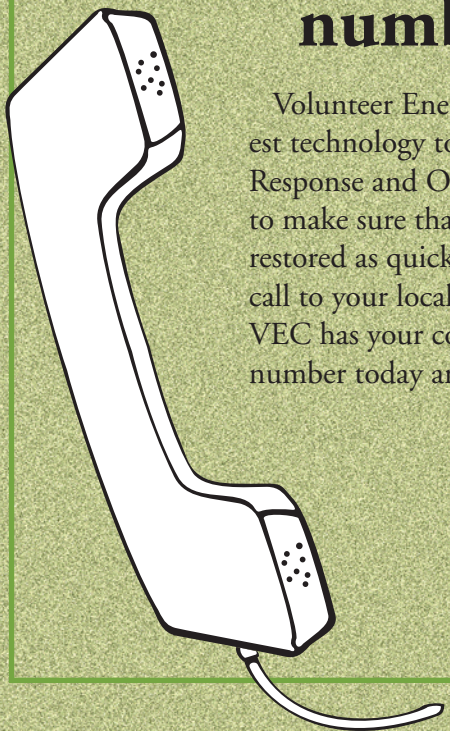
To start saving on long-distance telephone calls right now, call 1-866-240-2158. For more information, call your local VEC Customer Service Center.

*Talk as long as you want. With Volunteer Energy Cooperative's 5.9 cents a minute rate, you can afford to talk when you want, for as long as you want.*



## Make sure your telephone number is Up-to-Date

Volunteer Energy Cooperative (VEC) is putting the latest technology to work for you. VEC's new Interactive Voice Response and Outage Management systems are being merged to make sure that in the event of a power outage, electricity is restored as quickly as possible. You can help by making a quick call to your local VEC customer service center to verify that VEC has your correct phone number on file. Verify your phone number today and reporting an outage will be fast and easy.



## Surge Sentry Helps Provide Peace of Mind

These days, the typical American home contains thousands and thousands of dollars worth of electronic devices and appliances. With thunderstorm season approaching in the Tennessee Valley, all of those products could suffer extensive damage from surges of electricity.

That's why Volunteer Energy Cooperative offers affordable surge protection products backed by a replace or repair warranty and by VEC's commitment to customer service.

Surges in electricity can happen at any time, but they are more prevalent during stormy weather. Lightning strikes and tree limbs falling on electrical lines are two of the most common causes. They can cause sudden, powerful increases in voltage. They may last only a millisecond, but they can damage or destroy household appliances and electronic equipment.

The first line of defense in VEC's Surge Sentry protection system is a Meter Socket Adapter (MSA). The MSA is installed between the electric meter and the electric meter base. It protects the service line entering the home from major high-voltage spikes coming from the power line.

The second line of defense is plug-in suppressors. These come in a variety of sizes and contain outlets and ports for plugging in a variety of appliances and electronic equipment. Plug-in suppressors are available with ports for power outlets, coaxial connections, and telephone connections.

The final line of defense is having your home properly grounded. When VEC technicians install Surge Sentry equipment, they check to make sure the home is properly grounded. The purpose of "grounding" the home is to prevent shock, fires, damage to appliances and electronic equipment, and to minimize damage from lightning.

When all three of these lines of defense are in place, yet another line of defense is automatically installed. And that is warranties that will repair or replace your appliances and/or electronic equipment. The warranties vary depending on which Surge Sentry product(s) are in use, so check with a customer service representative at your local VEC service center for all the details.



*Having VEC install a Meter Socket Adaptor (MSA) is your first line of defense against electrical spikes.*



## The Process of meter reading and billing

by Bill Buchanan, President/CEO

Volunteer Energy Cooperative communicates with our customers monthly in the form of statements... and, of course, this newsletter Powerlines. It takes a well-oiled machine to deliver statements to customers each month. Collecting meter readings, entering the information, and sending customer statements is a continuous activity at VEC, as we have 8 billing cycles every 30 days.

A large part of our activities revolves around securing correct meter readings. Our meter readers work hard (sometimes enduring very adverse circumstances) to collect and deliver correct and complete information so that we can mail statements in a timely manner. In a perfect world, all meters would be read each month.

Unfortunately, we do not live in a perfect world and on rare occasions it is necessary to estimate bills. This usually occurs when constraints such as weather, holidays, or short billing months do not allow us time to personally read each meter. We may also run into problems reading a meter that is behind a locked gate or fence or one that is guarded by a cantankerous canine.

When it is necessary to estimate a bill, our computer system uses a formula to calculate the charges. This estimate is typically a very accurate reflection of the customer's actual electric usage. The computer estimates the bill based on an average of the previous 3 months of usage and usage from the same month the previous year.

Even though less than 1% of VEC bills are estimated in an average month, we are researching ways to reduce the number of bills that we estimate even further. Our efforts include relatively low-tech improvements such as monitoring manpower needs, to high-tech solutions such as automatic meter reading technologies.

As I have explained in past columns, July will mark the beginning of Levelized Billing at VEC. This equalized payment option will also help to minimize the effects of bills that are estimated as well as those which reflect seasonable spikes in usage. Along with our other efforts, Levelized Billing will soften the blow of high bills, no matter what the reason for the spike.

If there is a need to estimate your bill sometime in the future, I ask your patience and understanding. Please remember that, with estimated bills – as with all we do – VEC is working to improve the system for you, our member/customers.

# VECcustomers *Share*

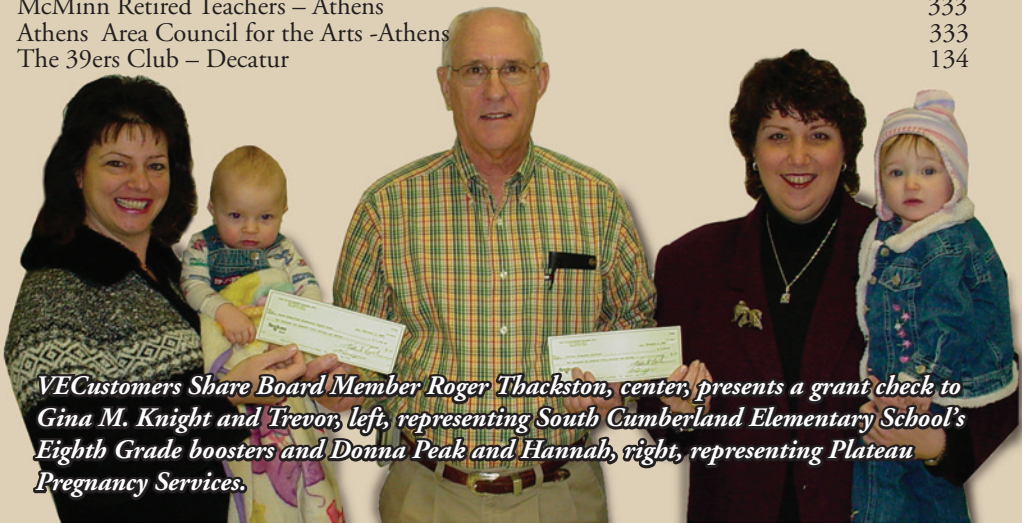
Your Change Changes Things

Family services, educational and recreational supplies for young people, and funding for the arts were among the causes assisted by Volunteer Energy Cooperative customers who pooled their pennies through the VECcustomers Share program in January. The VECcustomers Share board of directors funded grants totaling \$33,099 in January. Since the inception of the program in October 2001, a total of \$913,604.25 in grants has been awarded. VECcustomers 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 VECcustomers 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. Applications on the VEC web site: [www.vec.org](http://www.vec.org)

**Organizations receiving grants in January include:**

South Cumberland Elementary – Eighth Grade Boosters – Crossville	\$2,250
Plateau Pregnancy Services – Crossville	2,250
Fentress County Food Bank - Allardt	2,000
Pickett County Horseman's Association – Byrdstown	2,000
Helping Hands Ministry – Ooltewah	2,000
Riceville Volunteer Fire Department – Riceville	2,000
Meigs County High School Lady Tigers Booster Club – Decatur	2,000
Community Foundation of Roane County – Kingston	1,500
Midway Quarterback Club – Ten Mile	1,500
Monterey Branch Library – Monterey	1,500
Valley View StoreHouse – Cleveland	1,300
Chilhowee Middle School PTO – Benton	1,150
Camp Agape – Benton	1,150
Bradley Central High Boys Soccer Boosters – Cleveland	1,125
Camp Lookout – Holston Conference	1,000
Decatur Cemetery Corporation – Decatur	867
Tennessee Blitz Softball Boosters – Cleveland	800
Polk County High Women's Softball Boosters – Benton	800
Ocoee Middle School Athletic Booster Club – Cleveland	775
Spring City Middle Beta Club – Spring City	600
Child Advocacy Center – Lenoir City	500
Meigs County Lions Club – Decatur	500
Dixie Youth Baseball – Benton	500
Upper Cumberland Senior Ladies Softball – Fairfield Glade	500
Chilhowee Youth Softball – Benton	400
McMinn – Meigs Association of Baptists – Athens	333
Mountain View PTO – Etowah	333
Niota Youth Association - Niota	333
Etowah Arts Commission – Etowah	333
McMinn Retired Teachers – Athens	333
Athens Area Council for the Arts -Athens	333
The 39ers Club – Decatur	134



*VECcustomers Share Board Member Roger Thackston, center, presents a grant check to Gina M. Knight and Trevor, left, representing South Cumberland Elementary School's Eighth Grade boosters and Donna Peak and Hannah, right, representing Plateau Pregnancy Services.*

# "Pole Patrol" Plans second tour of duty

Last year Volunteer Energy Cooperative's "Pole Patrol," in conjunction with "Great American Clean Up, Fix Up," removed more than a ton of advertising flyers, posters, signs, and even a basketball goal from utility poles across VEC's 17-county service area.

But with one-quarter of a million utility poles supporting 9,000 miles of wire, it seems the Pole Patrol's work is never done. That's why VEC employees will be back out in force during the month of April removing illegal signs from utility poles. Throughout the month, the Pole Patrol will be removing signs during the course of performing their regular duties. Supervisors also plan to dedicate time for their crews to work exclusively on removing signs.

Not only are the signs a distraction and a safety concern, they are also illegal. State law (TCA 2-19-144) prohibits anyone from placing signs on utility poles unless they have been legally authorized to do so.

The problem goes beyond distracting drivers and contributing to litter problems. "It's not just an eyesore," said Bill Buchanan, VEC president and CEO, "It's a real safety concern."

These signs are a real problem for linemen, who in the course of performing their jobs, must climb these cluttered poles. Trying to maneuver around these signs with climbing gear is tough. Linemen also have to worry about protruding nails and staples that people use to attach their signs to the poles.

Linemen have snagged themselves on these nails and staples and received cuts serious enough to require medical attention. Some of these cuts have required stitches. The potential for even more serious injuries is certainly there.

Linemen are trained to spot hazards, so they have a tremendous interest in getting these poles cleaned up.

Supervisors say they are focusing VEC's effort on urban areas and high-traffic intersections because these are the places where the signs seem to be most prevalent.

But signs won't be the only target.

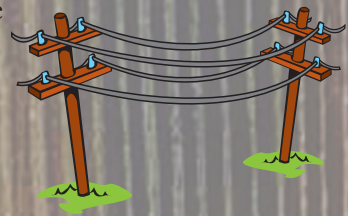
"We've seen people mounting birdfeeders, birdhouses and even basketball goals on utility poles," said Steve Harmon, VEC's Decatur area manager. "I've even seen folks use them as fence posts."

**TENNESSEE CODE ANNOTATED**

*2-19-144. Advertising material; public utility property. It is unlawful for any person to place or attach any type of show-card, poster, or advertising material or device, including election campaign literature, on any kind of poles, towers, or fixtures of any public utility company, whether privately or publicly owned or as defined in 65-4-101, unless legally authorized to do so.*



*VEC lineman Andy Edgemon removes signs from a utility pole during last year's Pole Patrol.*



# Ad Valorem Taxes

These taxes are assessed based upon an appraisal of the assets owned by Volunteer Energy Cooperative in each of the counties served by the cooperative. The table below lists the ad valorem taxes paid to counties for the taxable year 2003.

	AD VALOREM TAX 2003			
COUNTIES	TAX RATE	ASSESSMENT	TOTAL DUE	
BLED SOE	2.08	657,217	\$ 13,670.00	
BRADLEY	2.3868577	10,918,942	\$ 260,619.61	
CUMBERLAND	1.44	20,017,018	\$ 288,245.00	
FENTRESS	1.88	6,931,620	\$ 130,314.00	
HAMILTON	3.061	4,185,894	\$ 128,130.22	
MCMINN	1.90	5,240,752	\$ 99,575.00	
MEIGS	1.83	7,891,080	\$ 144,407.00	
OVERTON	1.97	604,268	\$ 11,904.08	
PICKETT	2.12	2,486,877	\$ 52,721.79	
POLK	2.07	4,653,929	\$ 96,336.33	
PUTNAM	2.480	2,399,895	\$ 59,517.00	
RHEA	2.10	4,077,604	\$ 85,630.00	
ROANE	2.905	1,993,231	\$ 57,903.00	
SCOTT	2.40	20,131	\$ 483.14	
WHITE	2.24	1,013,179	\$ 22,695.00	
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>1,452,151.17</b>	
CITIES	TAX RATE	ASSESSMENT	TOTAL DUE	
ATHENS	1.29	15,723	\$ 203.00	
BENTON	0.81	1,106,271	\$ 8,961.00	
BYRDSTOWN	0.66	498,677	\$ 3,291.00	
CALHOUN	0.53	161,185	\$ 854.00	
CHARLESTON	0.57	179,713	\$ 1,024.36	
CLEVELAND	1.65	164,939	\$ 2,721.00	
CROSSVILLE	0.70	4,591,436	\$ 32,140.05	
DECATUR	0.46	3,660,754	\$ 16,839.00	
JAMESTOWN	0.65	557,163	\$ 3,621.56	
MONTEREY	1.02	913,716	\$ 9,320.00	
SPRING CITY	1.33	649,802	\$ 8,642.00	
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>\$ 87,616.97</b>	
		<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$ 1,539,768.14</b>