

VEC Website Gets New Look, New Content

It's bigger. It's better. It has a wealth of new content. It's the new, improved Volunteer Energy Cooperative website at www.vec.org.

If you are looking for information on how to cut costs on your energy bill, if you'd like to know more about how your electric cooperative operates, if you'd like to pay your bill online, if you want to make sure you are using electricity in the safest and most efficient ways, or if you just want to know about community events in your neck of the woods, you can get it all at the new VEC website.

"We've been working on making our website more useful for our customers," said VEC Vice President of Marketing and Economic Development Patty Hurley. "We think our customers are really going to appreciate the new site. It has a much more user-friendly layout, it's easier to navigate, and it's packed with all types of information and links that I think our customers will find extremely useful."

Some of the new features include a community calendar where you can post local civic, educational, or community events; current news and archived news articles about VEC and the communities it serves; and a wealth of resources for VEC customers and non-customers alike.

Whether you are just looking for the phone number or address for your local VEC Customer Service Center, or whether you need more detailed information for a school paper, about industrial sites available in the VEC service area, news about VEC products and services, or outage and safety information, the VEC website is a great place to start.

"There is just no way to quickly relate what a wealth of information is available on the site," Hurley said. "I would just encourage our customers to access the site and see for themselves. We've put a tremendous amount of work in on updating and improving the site. We'll also be updating it regularly to make sure the latest information is available."

Scholarship Deadline is Fast Approaching

Volunteer Energy Cooperative wants to reward students who have used their time and talents to benefit their local communities. VEC's Lillard-Shadow scholarship program rewards academic and community service achievements by awarding four \$2,000 scholarships to students who will graduate from high schools in VEC's service area in the spring of 2006.

The scholarships honor J.W. Lillard and Willis A Shadow, two community leaders who spearheaded efforts to bring electric power to Decatur and Meigs County in the 1930s, forming the organization that would become Volunteer Energy Cooperative.

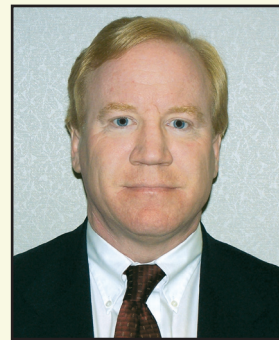
Four awards of \$500 per semester each (renewable for up to four semesters) will be presented to spring 2006 high school graduates whose parents our guardians are VEC electric customers. Applications will be judged by an independent panel based on student's community service activities and citizenship - 40%; written communication skills - 20 %; financial need - 25%; and academic achievement - 15%.

Scholarship applications are available at any VEC Customer Service Center or from high school counselors in the VEC service area. Applications are also available online at www.vec.org.

All application materials must be completed and delivered to VEC's Cooperate Office in Decatur no later than 5 p.m. on Friday, March 3, 2006.



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



To Err is Human; to Fix the Problem is Good Business

Automated Meter Reading Will Help VEC Eliminate Mistakes and Hardships While Keeping Costs Down

By Rody Blevins President/CEO

I learned a long time ago that every individual and every organization makes mistakes. The real judge of character is how that individual or business responds to a mistake. Good people and good businesses don't ignore their mistakes; they do their best

to make it right and to correct the problem.

That's exactly how we work to do business at Volunteer Energy Cooperative.

One area in which a mistake can cause a particular hardship for one of our customers is when a meter reader makes a mistake. Even hard-working, conscientious employees and contractors can make a mistake from time to time. But when a customer's meter is misread the mistake may mean that customer receives an unusually high or low bill. Somewhere down the road the correct reading will result in another bill that is unusually high or low.

Contrary to what many may think, receiving an unusually low bill initially often causes the biggest problem. Most people are just glad to receive a bill that is lower than expected but when the problem is corrected with a future reading, the new bill is so high that some customers may have difficulty paying it.

In an instance like this we are not able to cast aside the charges for energy that has been used because we have to pay TVA for the energy and, ultimately, the rest of our customers would just wind up paying for it.

Since VEC is a not-for-profit cooperative, we don't have an individual owner or shareholders whose profits we can cut into to pay the loss. Our owners are our customers and losses like this would drive up rates for everyone.

But when a mistake like this happens we will work diligently with that customer in any way we can to make things as easy as possible.

But that's only half of the solution. Ideally, we'd like to eliminate mistakes like this. We believe that using technology will help us prevent errors like this and the hardships they can cause.

In March of 2006 VEC will begin a 4-year, \$9.2 million project to automate our meter-reading process. The desire to eliminate the problem of misread meters is not the only reason VEC is embarking on this project. Yes, doing away with the hardship an individual customer may face due to an incorrectly read meter is a big incentive. But streamlining our procedures, monitoring demand and load more accurately, and keeping costs down are also big factors that went into the decision.

Another big reason to switch to automated meter reading at this time is the development of dependable, cost-effective technology that is proving its value and reliability in the field.

We will be phasing in the automated meter-reading technology throughout our service area over the next four years. The new meters will transmit readings to the local substation. The data will then be transferred on our SCADA (Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition) fiber optic lines to a central location for processing.

The new technology allows for real-time monitoring for not only substations, but also for individual meters. It's a big step forward in our ability to monitor demand and manage load.

Of course, being fiscally responsible, we can't tackle every challenge with a project of this magnitude. Our goal is to be prudent stewards of your cooperative and that demands a careful cost-benefit analysis of all our projects and procedures. But this is a good example of how we can address several issues and eliminate some thorny problems for customers in a cost efficient way.

In other cases, we will continue to work with customers in every way that we can to try to mitigate any hardships a mistake may cause and work diligently to find the most cost effective method to fix the problem.

In my opinion, that's just a good way to do business.

February 2006

POWERLINES

Newsletter of Volunter Energy Cooperative

You Asked We Listened

VEC Adding Internet Bill Presentment, Bill Payment to Web Services



Volunteer Energy Cooperative Customers can now access account information and pay their electricity bill online.

"We've had an increasing number of customers request this service over the last year or two," said VEC Vice President of Information Technology Duell Grubb. "There is an ever-growing number of people who are taking advantage of internet technology to pay their bills quickly and easily without a lot of the trouble of more traditional methods."

Grubb said VEC has been moving toward this fast, convenient payment method for some time, but cooperative officials wanted to be sure a secure, reliable system was in place before rushing into offering the service.

VEC customers can access their account through the Volunteer Energy Cooperative website at www.vec.org. Customers who wish to take advantage of this service will be asked to provide verifying information and set up a password to access account information and/or pay their bill online.

"Customers have been asking us about offering this service for quite some time now, and we've been working toward it," Grubb said. "I'm sure some customers who have been eager to take advantage of this service have felt we might have not been moving quickly enough. But we had to feel confident with the safety and security of the system before putting this in place."

Grubb said in setting up the system, VEC had to balance making the procedure relatively easy and user friendly with the need for security.

"The technology involved is not all that new, but it is relatively new to us," Grubb said. "Our primary concern was that we had to feel very confident that the proper safety measures and accounting procedures were in place."

VEC customers who want to take advantage of online bill payment can link to the service through Volunteer Energy Cooperative's website at www.vec.org. Customers will need a valid credit card and have verifying information available to access his or her account. Credit card processing fees may apply.

VEC Customers *Share*

Neighbors Helping Neighbors

By allowing their electric bills to be rounded up to the next dollar Volunteer Energy Cooperative (VEC) customers funded \$33,500 in community service grants in November. Since the inception of the program in October 2001, a total of \$1,635,601 in grants has been awarded. The deadline for grant applications is the last day of each month. For additional information, contact the office of Marketing and Economic Development, at 423-334-7051. Applications are also available online, at www.vec.org.

Organizations receiving grants in November include:

Disabled American Veterans #32 in Crossville - **\$4,000**; Bradley/Polk Foster Care Association - **\$2,235**; Eastland Fire Department - **\$2,000**; Byrdstown Coalition for Health Care - **\$2,000**; West Polk Empty Stocking Fund - **\$2,000**; McMinn County Foster Care Association - **\$2,000**; Putnam County Fire Department - **\$1,500**; Behavioral Research Institute, Inc., - **\$1,500**; Spring City Fire and Rescue - **\$1,500**; J.L. Cook Alumni Association in Etowah - **\$1,500**; Hallelujah Trails Christian Youth Camp in Allardt - **\$1,320**; Family and Community Education FCE Clubs in Kingston - **\$1,300**; Women’s Care Center in Dayton - **\$1,050**; Kingston Lions Club - **\$1,000**; Meigs County High School FCA - **\$1,000**; Fentress County Public Library - **\$680**; Valley View Storehouse in Cleveland - **\$600**; Fraternal Order of Police Auxiliary in Charleston - **\$600**; Polk County Education Foundation - **\$535**; Mineral Springs Hunger Relief Ministry in Monterey - **\$500**; Cumberland County School Supply Depot - **\$500**; McMinn County Living Heritage Museum - **\$500**; The Art Guild at Fairfield Glade - **\$500**; Central High School Cross Country Booster Club in Georgetown - **\$500**; Quilts for Kids in Decatur - **\$500**; The Women at the Well Ministries in Athens - **\$500**; Infusion Solutions in Crossville **\$480**; Half Moon Music Festival in Ten Mile - **\$400**; Keep Roane Beautiful, Inc., - **\$400**; and MAC Club in Kingston - **\$400**.



VECcustomers Share board member Don Padget, middle, presents a check to Kris Terry, Anthony Creselious, Brian Tompkins, and Jonathan Beaty of Hallelujah Trails Christian Youth Camp.

Every Degree Counts When Cutting Energy Costs

Winter is here and lowering your thermostat by one or two degrees can mean savings on your heating bill.

For example, lowering your thermostat from 70 degrees to 68 degrees will save 6.2% on your heating bill. Lowering the thermostat just one degree will save you 3.1%.

However, let’s say you like to keep your home warmer in the winter; raising the thermostat to 76 degrees will increase your heating bill by 18.6%.

Each degree you raise or lower the thermostat from 70 degrees means you pay 3.1% more or less on your heating bill.

Here are some other quick, easy and FREE ways to cut winter energy costs:

- **Eliminate Wasted Energy** – Turn off lights in unoccupied rooms. Turn off bathroom and kitchen ventilation fans after they have done their job. These fans can blow out a house full of heated air if left on. Keep the fireplace damper closed unless a fire is burning to prevent up to 8% of your furnace-heated air from going up the chimney.
 - **Reduce Hot Water Temperature** – Set your water to the “normal” setting or 120 degrees, unless the owner’s manual for your dishwasher requires a higher setting. This can save 7 to 11 percent of water heating costs. Shorten your showers. Showers account for 2/3 of your water heating costs. Cutting your showers in half will reduce your water heating costs by 33%.
 - **Use Appliances Efficiently** – Do only full loads when using your dishwasher and clothes washer and dryer. Select the air-dry setting on your dishwasher and use the cold-water setting on your clothes washer whenever you can. Be sure to clean the lint trap on your clothes dryer after each use and use the moisture-sensing automatic drying setting if you have one.
 - **Put Your Computer and Monitor to Sleep** – Most computers come with the power management features turned off. On computers using Windows 98/ME/2000 open your power management software and set it so your computer goes to sleep if you are away from your machine from 5 to 15 minutes. Those who use Macintosh computers look for the setting in your control panels called “Energy Saver” and set it accordingly. When you are done using your computer turn it off (see next tip). Do not leave it in sleep mode overnight as it is still drawing a small amount of power.
 - **Plug “Leaking Energy” in Electronics** – Many new TVs, VCR, chargers, computer peripherals, and other electronic devices use electricity even when they are switched “off”. Although these “standby” losses are only a few watts each, they add up to more than 50 watts in a typical home. If possible, unplug electronic devices and chargers that have a block-shaped transformer on the plug when they are not in use. For computer scanners, printers, and other devices that are plugged into a power strip, simply switch off the power strip after shutting down your computer.
- In addition to these fast and free methods of saving energy, there are several INEXPENSIVE energy solutions that can help cut your winter electric bills:
- **Replace or Clean Furnace Filters Once a Month** – Dirty filters restrict airflow and increase energy use. Keeping your furnace clean, lubricated, and properly adjusted can save up to 5% on heating costs.
 - **Replace Bulbs Wisely** – Replace incandescent light bulbs with compact florescent light bulbs. Compact florescent lights use 75% less energy than incandescent lights.



Install, Use Emergency Generators Carefully

You can use a portable emergency generator to supply electricity to your appliances if an emergency exists during a power outage. But, if used improperly, they can kill you and the people who are working to restore power. They can also damage the appliances you connect.



Home emergency generators are usually powered by gasoline, which must be properly handled as well. Gasoline generators must also be operated in a properly ventilated area.

Connecting a generator to the main electrical supply for your house requires the services of a qualified, licensed electrician. Before connecting the generator to your household circuit, notify your local VEC Customer Service Center. That way, when VEC employees arrive to work on your lines, they can take the proper safety precautions.

If you connect an emergency generator to the main electrical supply coming into the house, the electrical generator could feed back into Volunteer Energy Cooperative’s system and electrocute workers who are repairing the electrical lines. VEC distributions lines carry 7,200 volts of electricity or more. Transformers step that power down to the 120 and 240 volts used in your home. An improperly installed generator can feed 120 volts back throw your VEC service lines to the transformer which will step the power back up to 7,200 volts or more. That’s enough to provide a potentially lethal shock to anyone who comes into contact with a downed power line.

A properly-sized double-throw disconnect is necessary to insulate your generator from the main power lines feeding your home.

Improper installation also risks damage to the generator when power is restored.

Determining Wattage Requirements

You must also never exceed the rated capacity of your generator. Overloading can cause serious damage to the generator or appliances. Before operating a generator, list all of the appliances that are going to operate at the same time. Then determine the starting wattage requirements and the running wattage requirements. The starting load lasts only a few seconds, but is very important when figuring your total wattage to be used. Your generator must be rated to handle the total wattage.

Extension Cords

When using an appliance or tool at a considerable distance from the generator, a 3-wire extension cord that has a 3-prong grounding plug and a 3-slot receptacle that accepts the tool’s plug should be used. A cord of adequate size must be used.

Under no circumstances should an extension cord be run from one house to another.