

Help Keep
America Beautiful

Posting Signs on
Utility Poles is
Dangerous and
Illegal!

With thousands of volts of electricity above and unforgiving ground below, linemen have plenty of safety concerns to consider when they start climbing a utility pole. Illegally posted signs and flyers make their lives that much more difficult.

Volunteer Energy Cooperative asks that you stop to consider the potential hazards and then refrain from posting signs and/or flyers on utility poles.

"It's not just a matter of distracting drivers and creating an eyesore," said VEC Superintendent of Construction and Maintenance John Selvidge. "These can pose a real safety threat – especially at night. We've had some pretty serious injuries at VEC due to these. Across the nation there have even been some lineman fatalities that are directly attributable to signs and flyers."

Selvidge said linemen have been injured when they snagged staples and nails used to mount signs on utility poles. Even more serious injuries result when linemen's climbing spikes hit a nail or staple preventing them from digging in as they need to. This has resulted in falls.

Selvidge said most people have the misconception that the vast majority of work linemen do is performed out of a bucket truck. "I think people would be surprised to find out how much linemen still climb, especially when the ground is wet and we want to avoid damaging people's yards," he added.

Not only are these 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.

NOTICE OF ELECTION

In compliance with the bylaws of Volunteer Energy Cooperative, Article IV, Directors; Section 4.05, Notice of Directors to be Elected, I hereby give written notice that the following Directors' terms will expire this year:

District No. 1 – Polk County

District No. 5 – Meigs County

District No. 9 – Cumberland County (east of Highway 127)

As set for the in Article IV, Section 4.06, in order for a member to become a qualified candidate for Director, he/she shall file a written petition with the Secretary of the Cooperative or with his/her duly appointed representative, signed by him/her and not less than fifty other members in good standing whose premises served by the Cooperative are located in the directorate district of the candidate.

Qualifying petitions and other information pertaining to the elections can be obtained on or after June 5, 2006 by contacting Patty Hurley, Vice President of Marketing and Economic Development, P.O. Box 277, Decatur, TN 37322, or by calling 423-334-7050.

Qualifying petitions must be filed with the Secretary of the Cooperative or his designee by 5 p.m. EDT, June 30, 2006.

Kenneth Vaden
Secretary-Treasurer

www.vec.org

VEC
VOLUNTEER ENERGY COOPERATIVE

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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.

May 2006

POWERLINES

Newsletter of Volunteer Energy Cooperative

*Communicating
Leadership in America*

Young Leaders Attend Conference in Jackson

Brandon and Rebekah Masiongale of Byrdstown participated in the 2006 Young Leaders Conference Feb. 10-11 at the Double Tree Hotel in Jackson. The Masiongales joined more than 200 others from across the state for the annual conference.

Designed to bring young leaders together, the conference focused on "Communicating Leadership in America" and offered a variety of topics affecting rural Tennesseans.

"This is an educational experience these young leaders can take home with them," said Jeff Griggs, director of training for Tennessee Farmers Cooperative and president of the Tennessee Council of Cooperatives (TCC). "Our mission is to perpetuate the cooperative way of doing business and to educate communities about the benefits of cooperatives. We feel one of the best ways to do that is by reaching out to young community members who show leadership potential."

TCC, which co-sponsors the conference with the Tennessee Farm Bureau Young Farmers and Ranchers, is comprised of a variety of cooperatives across the state, including dairy cooperatives, farm credit banks, farm supply cooperatives, telephone and electric cooperatives, tobacco cooperatives, and the Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation (TFBF).

The Young Farmers and Ranchers is an organization within the TFBF for men and women ages 18 to 35 with an interest in agriculture. The purpose of the group is to develop future agricultural leaders and to generate new ideas to help Farm Bureau keep up with the constantly changing world of agriculture.

"Young leaders are vital to our communities and the lifeline of our agricultural industry," said Eric Maupin, chairman of the Young Farmers and Ranchers. "If we don't keep young people involved, we'll all suffer in the long run. This Young Leaders Conference is meant to give us a renewed enthusiasm and confidence in our leadership abilities."

The Masiongales were selected and sponsored by Volunteer Energy Cooperative to attend the motivational, recreational and educational weekend.

"Me and my wife enjoyed it quite a bit," Brandon Masiongale said. "We made a lot of good contacts and we really enjoyed the camaraderie."

He said they also picked up some very good points from the workshops.

The conference gave the Masiongales the opportunity to learn more about areas of interest to young farmers and cooperative members. They participated in "Cooperative and Agriculture," a fun and educational Jeopardy-style game. In addition, a trade show gave the participants a chance to learn more about the sponsoring organizations.

Robert Woodard of the Upper Cumberland Electric Membership Corporation, one of the conference sponsors, inspired the group as he discussed the importance of the cooperative way of doing business, saying that "co-ops provide valuable services to our communities."

Robert Smith of Bledsoe Telephone Cooperative echoed his sentiments.

"If not for cooperatives, many of the technologies we enjoy today might not even exist, especially in rural areas," said Smith. "Co-ops — agriculture, telephone, electric, and lending — are a vital part of rural America. It behooves us all to support them with our patronage, with our attendance at events like this, and by sharing our knowledge of cooperative benefits."

Bill Medley, vice president of Farm Credit Mid-American, gave an informative talk on cooperative incentives.

And Dr. Ron Hanson, a professor with the University of Nebraska, gave three lectures: "You Can Buy the Farm, But Remember That I Still Own It," "The Unspoken Words" and "My Fence Posts Talking to Each Other." With each, he held the audience spellbound and had everyone laughing one minute and crying the next as he told stories of rural couples he had counseled during more than 30 years of working with rural farm families in Nebraska. Hanson inspired the group to go home, discuss, make changes, and become leaders on their farms, in their communities, and in their states.



Sometimes Mother Nature Trumps Our Best Efforts

By Rody Blevins President/CEO

Thunderstorm season in the Tennessee Valley brings with it a humbling reminder that despite our technological advances, our best efforts sometimes are not enough.

At Volunteer Energy Cooperative we employ state-of-the-art technologies, we try to predict potential trouble before it happens, and we never stop trying to prevent power outages. But we often find that our best efforts pale in comparison to the powerful and often unpredictable forces of nature.

We recently had yet another reminder of that in Meigs County when a squirrel managed to short out one of our main breakers at the Goodfield Substation resulting in about 1,200 customers losing power for an hour.

This thunderstorm season will probably remind us again that is beyond our ability to prevent all power outages. That is not to say we won't continue our efforts to prevent power outages and to restore power as quickly as possible when an outages does occur.

Our Automated Meter Reading, Interactive Voice Response, and

Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition systems, as well as our non-stop right-of-way clearing operations and service upgrading efforts are methods we employ to offer better service and eliminate or shorten the duration of power outages.

We spend countless hours on these and other projects to make our electric service as reliable as humanly possible. We have thousands of miles of power lines in place. We have 32 operating substations and we have 200 employees dedicated to providing the best service possible. And yet there are still times when a squirrel or a falling tree can override all those efforts.

With all the high-tech equipment we have in place, it may come as a surprise but the overwhelming majority of power outages are caused by trees or tree branches falling into powerlines. In most cases the trees are brought down by heavy rains softening the ground, high winds, or limbs being weighted down with snow or ice.

When I relate this information to people, someone almost always asks, "Why don't you just put all the electric lines underground?"

That would eliminate the problems with falling trees. But with thousands of miles of electric lines in place, the cost to bury these lines would be astronomical. VEC member/owners couldn't afford to take on this added financial burden. And while we have far fewer problems with underground lines, even that doesn't completely eliminate outages.

We may never be able to completely eliminate outages. But we will continue to do everything within our power to provide the most reliable service possible at the most economical rates possible.



This squirrel caused extensive damage to a main substation breaker and created a power outage that affected about 1,200 VEC member/owners.



VEC Customers *Share*

A Little Change Goes a Long Way

By allowing their electric bills to be rounded up to the next dollar Volunteer Energy Cooperative (VEC) customers funded \$34,000 in community service grants in February. Since the inception of the program in October 2001, a total of \$1,736,601 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 February include:

Fentress County Friends of the Library - **\$3,000**; Star Point Fire Station - **\$2,503**; Pickett County Imagination Library - **\$1,889**; Cleveland/Bradley County Chamber Foundation - **\$1,550**; Cumberland County Teens Against Drugs Center - **\$1,500**; Crossville Skate Park Association - **\$1,500**; Boy Scout Troop 190 - **\$1,311**; Midway Athletic Club - **\$1,000**; Mountain Volunteer Fire & Rescue Service - **\$1,000**; Royal Family Kids' Camp - **\$1,000**; The Assistance Fund/ Community Unity Together - **\$1,000**; Meigs County Fair Association - **\$1,000**; Burks Middle School PTSO - **\$1,000**; Am Vets District #2 - **\$1,000**; Midway Quarterback Club - **\$1,000**; McDonald Cemetery Association - **\$1,000**; Ooltewah High School Soccer Booster Club - **\$1,000**; Pickett County K-8 Art/Technology Club - **\$897**; Friends of the Library of Spring City - **\$800**; Tennessee Valley Theatre - **\$700**; Rhea County Men's Tennis Booster Club - **\$700**; Church of the Harvest Food Bank - **\$600**; Centennial School Advisory Council - **\$511**; Delano Lions Club - **\$500**; Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 5146 - **\$500**; Chattanooga Central High School JROTC Booster Club - **\$500**; Lady Aces 7-8 Girls Softball Team - **\$500**; Calhoun Junior Beta Club - **\$500**; Whittaker Cemetery Perpetual Care Fund, Inc., - **\$500**; Pilot Club of Athens, Inc., - **\$489**; Mountain Springs Royal Ambassadors Youth Group - **\$450**; Cleveland Storytelling Guild - **\$450**; Parent Teacher Fellowship - **\$400**; Polk County AE Literacy Council - **\$350**; Polk County High School Gridiron Club - **\$350**; Polk County Education Foundation - **\$300**; Linsdale Community Services - **\$300**; Benton Antique Farm & Auto Show - **\$250**; and Lady Cherokee Basketball Boosters - **\$200**.



Burks Middle School

VEC Customers Share Board Member Joyce Callahan, right, presents a grant check to Marcy Hensley of the Burks Middle School PTSO.

Picket County High School Juniors

Attend Youth Leadership Summit

DeeDee Storie and Christopher Asberry of Pickett County High School were among 44 high school juniors from across the state who recently attended the Tennessee Electric Cooperative Association's annual Youth Leadership Summit held Feb. 27-March 1 in downtown Nashville.

"Local electric cooperatives chose these outstanding students based on their interest in government and their leadership abilities," said Joe Jackson, TECA director of youth and member relations.

"The annual summit gives students an opportunity to learn about electric cooperatives and how they affect their lives," Jackson said of the students representing 23 of Tennessee's electric cooperatives. "It also gives them an opportunity to see, in person, the legislative process in the Tennessee Capitol."



Christopher and DeeDee work on a project during creative problem solving exercises at Vanderbilt University.

Two days of activities began with an overview of the legislative process. In preparation for their visit to the Legislative Plaza, TECA Director of Government and Public Affairs David Callis discussed the legislative process with the students. They also heard an address by Rep. Chris Crider of Milan.

While in Nashville, the 11th-graders were able to sit in on Senate and House committee meetings at Legislative Plaza, affording them the opportunity to see state government in action. DeeDee and Christopher met with State Sen. Charlotte Burks in her office and they also had an opportunity to spend time with State Rep. Leslie Winningham.

Participants were treated to a tour of the historic Capitol and participated in team building and leadership activities at Vanderbilt University. The evening activities included dinner and a movie at Opry Mills shopping mall and was topped off with a night tour of Nashville.

In addition to those at Vanderbilt, students took part in leadership



Lawmakers took time out to meet with the students during the Youth Leadership Summit. (Pictured from left) VEC chaperone Robert McCarty, State Sen. Charlotte Burks, DeeDee Storie, Christopher Asberry, and State Rep. Leslie Winningham.

activities throughout the summit that were led by cooperative employees and special guests, including 2005 Miss Tennessee Tara Burnes and University of Tennessee Extension Specialist Amy Gallimore.

"It is encouraging to see this high caliber of future leaders in our service area," said VEC Communications Coordinator Robert McCarty who chaperoned Dee and Christopher during the trip. "I know we hear a lot in the news about young people who are making trouble, but this trip helped confirm my belief that there is an outstanding group of young people waiting for their opportunity to assume leadership roles in our communities. I think we are going to be in great shape when they do."

Students also had an opportunity to participate in an Energy Battle competition. Teams competed against each other by answering trivia questions about electric cooperatives and the state.

The summit was hosted by TECA and funded in part by the National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation, a not-for-profit cooperative financing institute that provides an independent source of financing to member cooperatives nationwide.

VEC President/CEO Roddy Blevins said the Youth Leadership Summit helps students to "learn by experience."

"We offer these educational experiences for our students — our future members — because we want them to understand what makes a cooperative special," Blevins said. "Their grandparents might remember what it was like to live without electricity. These young people have had modern conveniences all their lives.

"We want them to be able to appreciate their electric cooperative and understand why it was so important to form electric cooperatives in the first place," Blevins said.

"I would have liked to have gotten a little more sleep," DeeDee Storie joked at the end of the fast-paced trip. "But seriously, I wouldn't have changed anything. I really enjoyed getting to know the other students from around the state."

Christopher Asberry agreed that the pace was fast but the exercises and activities were a real benefit.

DeeDee is the daughter of Robert and Alice Storie of Byrdstown. And Christopher is the son of Michael and Tammy Asberry, also of Byrdstown.



Christopher Asberry dons a blindfold for a teambuilding exercise.



DeeDee Storie grades the performance of fellow students during an exercise.