

## VEC Sponsors Students at 4H Electric Camp

Enthusiastic 4-H'ers from the Volunteer Energy Cooperative (VEC) service area traveled to the University of Tennessee June 29-July 2 to attend the 2010 4-H Electric Camp, an annual event bringing hundreds of seventh- and eighth-grade students from across Tennessee to the Knoxville campus each summer to learn about electricity.

VEC offered camp scholarships to 34 campers – two from each county VEC serves. These 4-H'ers were among 300 rising seventh- and eighth-graders representing counties across the state who explored energy, electricity and the basic sciences through fun-filled, hands-on learning centers led by electric cooperative employees and representatives from other utility companies. This year's camp, themed "Learning Tomorrow's Technology Today," featured six interactive learning centers:

**Electronic Battery Tester** — Students completed their own electronic projects in this learning center by soldering resistors, light-emitting diodes (LEDs) and integrated circuit chips to printed circuit boards to make battery testers that actually measured the amount of charge a used battery still held.

**"Hands-On" Energy Conservation** — In this activity, campers learned how conserving electricity in their homes not only helps lower electric bills but also helps protect and conserve our environmental resources.

**Electronic Scavenger Hunt** — Driven by their hunger for adventure, campers used Global Positioning System (GPS) devices and sets of coordinates in this high-tech learning center to find hidden treasure.

**Electric Lamp** — Electric lamps are used daily to give us light, and students learned how to build their own lamps using a lamp kit and electric insulators.

**Electric Vehicles** — The 4-H'ers learned about batteries, direct current and how it is used to propel electric vehicles and demonstrated their driving skills by maneuvering an electric golf cart through an obstacle course.

**Electrical Safety** — Electric power does a tremendous amount of work for us, but because it is such a powerful force, we must be careful around it. This learning center taught campers how to play it safe around high-voltage power lines.

In addition to the learning centers, the camp featured other entertaining activities such as pool parties and a fun-filled afternoon at Dollywood theme park in nearby Pigeon Forge.

4-H Electric Camp is made possible through a unique partnership of UT Extension, the Tennessee Electric Cooperative Association, and its member cooperatives like VEC, the systems of the Tennessee Municipal Electric Power Association, the Tennessee Valley Authority, and other industry donors.

"The focus of the 4-H Electric Camp is to teach our youth about electricity, conservation, alternative energy sources, electronics, and safety," said VEC Member Services Specialist Tracey Allen, who served as a learning center leader during the event. "Campers develop a better understanding of the important role electricity plays in their lives — plus they have a lot of fun and get to make many new friends from across the state. We're proud of our partnership with utilities across Tennessee to offer this valuable learning opportunity."



VEC Member Services Specialist Tracey Allen, far right, poses with students from VEC's service area at 4-H Electric Camp.

## Then and Now: Electric Rates are Among the Most Stable Costs We Have

When Volunteer Energy Cooperative was formed in 1935, the average price of a new home was \$6,300. A new car was \$580; a loaf of bread cost 8 cents; a gallon of gasoline was 11 cents; a postage stamp was 3 cents; and the average annual salary in the U.S. was \$1,500.

In VEC's first month of actually delivering electricity, a kilowatt hour of electricity cost an average of 3.6 cents.

Today, the average cost of a new home in the U.S. is about \$270,000. A new car - \$28,400; a loaf of bread - \$2.49; a gallon of gas - \$2.73; a postage stamp - 44 cents; and the average annual salary in the U.S. is \$39,423. Today VEC has a residential base charge of 8.613 cents for a kilowatt hour of electricity.

While the prices of these other common items has increased an average of about 3,000% over the past 75 years, the price VEC charges for a kilowatt of electricity has increased by about 1/20<sup>th</sup> of that pace.

If these other items had increased in price at the same percentage as VEC's rates, then today you'd be able to buy a new home for \$15,000; a new car for \$1,400; a loaf of bread for 19 cents; a gallon of gas for 26 cents; and a postage stamp for 7 cents.

If the price of electricity had increased at the same average rate as these other staples, the average residential electric bill in VEC's service area would be about \$1,472 per month today.

Instead, today you can buy a kilowatt hour of electricity for close to the same price you would have paid for a loaf of bread in 1935.

And while VEC customers pay a base rate of 8.613, not every consumer across the nation is seeing the same results.

According to Department of Energy statistics through May of 2010 only three states (Idaho - 8.03; Washington - 8.15; and North Dakota - 8.49) have average rates that are lower than VEC's. On the high end of the scale the average rate in Hawaii is 28.25 cents per kilowatt hour and Connecticut has an average rate of 20.08 cents per kilowatt hour. A total of 12 states have average rates higher than 15 cents per kilowatt hour.

A big difference is that VEC customers are served by a not-for-profit electricity distribution cooperative that purchases electricity from another not-for-profit electricity generation company - the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA).

While everyone would enjoy lower monthly electric bills, the fact that no one is trying to make a profit from selling electricity to VEC customers helps keep our rates among the lowest in the nation.

Many assume that TVA and VEC achieve these low rates because they are subsidized by taxpayer money. That is not the case. TVA did benefit from government programs that built dams and other equipment but each year TVA sends money to the U.S. treasury to repay the government for that early debt. TVA estimates that debt will be paid off within the next three to four years.

In looking across the country we see electricity consumers are paying two and sometimes three times more than VEC customers. And we also see how the price of other staples has grown over the past 75 years.

It seems pretty clear that when it comes to electric rates, the grass is NOT greener on the other side of the fence.



## Secretary's VEC Career Spanned a Half-Century

The five men who preceded Rody Blevins as head of Volunteer Energy Cooperative's (VEC) day-to-day operations were a diverse group. Each brought their own distinctive collection of skills and talents to the position.

In fact, they didn't even share the same title because prior to 2003 the position was called general manager and now the title is president/CEO.

But one thing that the first five general managers all had in common was that they were all assisted by Mary Sue Lillard who served the cooperative from 1946 until her retirement in 1997.

Lillard graduated from Draughn's Business College in Knoxville in May of 1944 and worked in Knoxville for a time before coming to work at VEC's corporate offices in Decatur as secretary under the cooperative's first general manager, W.S. Bates in 1946.

Things were quite a bit different when she started work at VEC.

"The telephone lines were not good at all," Lillard recalls of her first years on the job. "We would have to call the Decatur operator to make a call out."

Communications were so difficult in those early years that Lillard recalls some customers would write letters to VEC in order to report power outages. Internal communications were also difficult.

"We'd use two-way radios and when we had problems with them, the radio company would send a man out to climb the tower and make repairs," she said. "We'd use a mimeograph machine to make copies and sometimes it wouldn't work right. We'd have to paint the drum with ink and many days we'd have that ink all over us."

Lillard also said that she often had to use a manual typewriter and carbon

paper to make more than one copy.

"It was so difficult to make corrections. I was so thankful when we finally got computers," she said.

Lillard also said that because of the communications and travel difficulties, people who worked in VEC's different offices didn't know each other very well.

She says one of her most pleasant memories of her tenure at VEC was when she traveled to fill in at VEC's



Mary Sue Lillard served VEC for more than 50 years.

Crossville office.

"Everyone there was so kind to me," she remembered. "I didn't know anything at all about Crossville. They had to show me where the post office was. But they treated me so well."

Even the VEC newsletters like the one you are reading now were much more labor-intensive.

"Each address had to be individually printed on each newsletter and we'd have to sort them by town, by hand," she said. "It would take two days just to prepare them for mailing."

During Lillard's tenure at VEC many things changed. The tools of her trade, the people she worked with, and even the expectations of customers changed dramatically. But throughout this period of growth and change one thing remained the same. No matter what challenges came, no matter who assumed the top spot, and no matter how technology progressed, Mary Sue Lillard was on hand to assist in the transitions.



# VEC Customers *Share*

## VEC Members Make a Difference in their Communities

The VECustomers Share program funded \$34,700 in community service grants in July. Since the inception of the program in October 2001, more than \$3.4 million 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](http://www.vec.org).

Organizations receiving grants in July include: Monterey Lions Club - \$3,000; Pickett County Rescue Squad - \$2,500; Riceville Parent/Teacher Organization - \$1,500; Calhoun Elementary School Booster Club - \$1,500; Luminary School Backpack Committee, Ten Mile - \$1,500; Ooltewah High School Band Boosters - \$1,000; Senior Lighthouse Center, Spring City - \$1,000; Ooltewah High School Touchdown Club - \$1,000; Peavine Care Center, Crossville - \$1,000; Ocoee Outreach, Cleveland - \$1,000; Fentress County Amateur Radio Club - \$1,000; Cumberland County Imagination Library - \$1,000; Avalon Center: Domestic Violence and Sexual

Assault Program, Crossville - \$1,000; Lake Forest Middle School Girls Softball Boosters, Cleveland - \$1,000; Clarkrange Volunteer Fire Department - \$1,000; Rhea County Health Council - \$900; Spring City Historical Museum and Depot Foundation - \$900; Handfuls of the Harvest, Jamestown - \$900; Big Lick Fire Station, Crossville - \$725; Welcome Valley Teen Group, Benton - \$650; Friends of Cherokee, Decatur - \$600; Brown Elementary School Cheerleaders Booster Club, Crossville - \$500; Dorton Family and Community Education, Crossville - \$500; Stone Memorial High School Baseball Booster Club - \$500; Crossville Lions Club - \$500; Meigs County Health Council - \$500; Gracemoor, Inc., Sparta - \$500; South Polk County PTO - \$500; Helping Hands Ministry, Crossville - \$500; Half Moon Music Festival, Ten Mile - \$500; Festival for Life, Decatur - \$500; Polk County High School Girls Volleyball Boosters - \$500; Decatur Civitan Club - \$500; Bradley County 4-H - \$500; Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Crossville - \$500; Polk County Youth Soccer Organization - \$500; Cleveland Predators Baseball - \$500; Polk County High School Technology Students Association - \$500; Happy Hearts Seniors, Benton - \$350; Meigs County Archery Booster Club - \$200; Meigs County Middle School Archery Booster Club - \$200; Meigs County Boys Basketball Booster Club - \$200; Meigs County Fair Board Association - \$200; Meigs County-Decatur Chamber of Commerce - \$100; and South Fentress Outdoor Sports, Inc., - \$100.



VECustomers Share Board Chairman Carlton Norris, right, presents a grant check to Dean Moorhouse of the Ooltewah High School Touchdown Club.



## October Is Cooperative Month In The United States

Rody Blevins is President/CEO of Volunteer Energy Cooperative

October is Cooperative Month in the United States. This designation helps cooperatives like Volunteer Energy Cooperative (VEC) build awareness and educate the public about the cooperative way of doing business.

Each year, during the month of October, the nation's 48,000 cooperatives celebrate Cooperative Month by working to educate people about the qualities that make cooperatives unique. Cooperatives are based on the principle of shared ownership by those who share a common need for a product or service. VEC, one of the oldest electric cooperatives in the nation, was formed by Meigs County citizens 75 years ago after investor-owned utilities refused to serve the area. VEC is one of the largest cooperatives – in terms of square miles served – in the nation and we are still owned by the customers we serve. And we are still a not-for-profit organization.

VEC is governed by a 12-member Board of Directors made up of customers just like you and elected by our customers. Besides fulfilling our mission of providing reliable electric service at the lowest possible price, we also offer programs and services to help people conserve energy and get the most from their energy dollar. We also offer programs to promote economic development, youth scholarships, leadership development, and to support

communities throughout our 17-county service area.

During Cooperative Month we want to remind you that we are a customer-owned utility that is managed and governed by citizens who live in the areas we serve. As a cooperative, quality service is our bottom line - we work for you.

In addition to electing directors to oversee our operations, our customers enjoy the benefit of some of the lowest electricity rates available. Since we are owned by our customers – and not a group of stockholders who expect to see their share of the profits – VEC can offer lower rates than investor-owned utilities.

We also operate VEC in accordance with the seven guiding principles of cooperatives:

- 1) Voluntary and open membership;
- 2) Democratic member control;
- 3) Members' economic participation;
- 4) Autonomy and independence;
- 5) Education, training, and information;
- 6) Cooperation among cooperatives;
- 7) Concern for community.

Being a member of a cooperative is different than just being the customer of an electric company. We work hard to make those differences as beneficial to our members as possible. And we hope our customers appreciate the difference.



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[www.vec.org](http://www.vec.org)

# Have a Safe and Happy Halloween



Help keep an accident from ruining this Halloween by considering these safety tips:

### For Trick-or-Treaters

- Stay on sidewalks wherever possible. If there are no sidewalks, walk on the left side of the road – facing traffic. Obey all traffic signals.
- Stay in familiar neighborhoods. Only approach houses that are lit. Stay away from animals you don't know.
- Select costumes that are made of flame-retardant materials and that have reflective markings or tape. Carry only flexible knives, swords, or other props. Carry a flashlight. Make sure costumes don't drag the ground and that shoes fit properly.
- Make-up provides better visibility than masks. But if you select a mask, make sure you can easily breathe and see. Don't wear your mask when walking from house to house.



### For Parents

- Young trick-or-treaters should be accompanied by an adult. Older children should know how to reach you and you should know where they are going.
- Although tampering is rare, tell children to bring their candy home to be inspected before eating any of it. Look at candy wrappers carefully and throw away anything that looks suspect.
- Make sure your yard is clear of ladders, hoses, tools, or anything that could trip young ones. Use battery powered lights for pumpkins and other decorations instead of candles.
- Pets are easily frightened on Halloween. Put them up to protect them from stress and cars and to make sure they won't bite a trick-or-treater.
- Consider giving out healthy snacks such as mini boxes of raisins, packaged fruit rolls, or single-serve packages of low-fat popcorn or cereal.



**Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA)**  
Residential & Outdoor Lighting Fuel Cost Adjustment  
Effective September, 2010

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For the most current FCA information, visit [www.vec.org](http://www.vec.org)