



# ANNUAL REPORT 2014-2015







**Rody Blevins**  
President/CEO  
Volunteer Energy Cooperative

# 80 YEARS

## A Lifetime in Human Years

In 1935, the U.S. was in the midst of a depression with unemployment running north of 20%. That translates to 2 out of every 10 people without a job. War clouds were gathering overseas in Germany and Italy. It was a time of extreme uncertainty.

Into this world of economic hardship and political upheaval arrived the Meigs County Membership Corporation, a small group of determined individuals who saw the benefits of electrification for rural residents. They had a vision that the organization would be owned by the customers it served, would be not-for-profit, and would be actively involved in the communities that it served.

Today, we know that organization as Volunteer Energy Cooperative.

Eight decades later Volunteer Energy holds tight to its original mission. And the employees, management, and Board of Directors are all proud to present this annual report to our members and friends.

We celebrate eighty years and look forward to the next eighty with excitement and anticipation.

On a personal note, I would like to commend all VEC personnel who worked tirelessly during the ice storms in February. This was the most devastating weather event in decades and everyone was so dedicated to restoring power to our members. To the member-owners of VEC, I want to thank you on behalf of the VEC employees. The support you demonstrated during this time touched us more than you can ever know. You can read more about the ice storms in the pages of this annual report.

Rody Blevins  
President/CEO





# SEVEN COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLES

## 1) Open and Voluntary

**Membership:** VEC is a voluntary organization open to all people able to use its services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership without gender, social, racial, political, or religious discrimination.

## 2) Democratic Member Control:

VEC is a democratic organization controlled by its members – those who buy the goods or use the services of the cooperative – who actively participate in setting policies and making decisions. A member-elected board of directors set the policy and procedures that govern the cooperative.

## 3) Members' Economic

**Participation:** Members contribute equally to, and democratically control, the capital of the cooperative.

## 4) Autonomy and Independence:

VEC is an autonomous, self-help organization controlled by its members. If VEC enters into agreements with other organizations or raises capital from external sources, it is done based on terms that ensure democratic control by the members and maintains the cooperative's autonomy.

## 5) Education, Training, and

**Information:** VEC provides education and training for members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of the cooperative.

## 6) Cooperation Among

**Cooperatives:** VEC serves its members most effectively by working together through local, national, regional, and international structures.

## 7) Concern for Community:

While focusing on members' needs, VEC works for the sustainable development of communities through policies and programs accepted by the members.

# Volunteer Energy Cooperative Board of Directors



**Laney Colvard**

Chairman  
Cumberland  
County - West



**Mike Frazier**  
McMinn County



**Larry Storie**

Vice Chairman  
Pickett County



**Tim Handler**  
Roane & Loudon  
Counties



**Sammy Norton**

Secretary/Treasurer  
Meigs County



**Jerry Henley**  
Rhea & Bledsoe  
Counties



**Aubie Smith**

Assistant  
Secretary/Treasurer  
Hamilton County



**Scott Humberd**  
Bradley County



**Randy Bond**

Cumberland  
County - East



**David J. Milen**  
Polk County



**William J. Campbell**

Fentress, Morgan,  
& Scott Counties



**Keith Phillips**  
Putnam, White,  
& Overton Counties



# 80 YEARS YOUNG!

## Volunteer Energy Cooperative celebrates it's 80th Anniversary This Year

It was in 1935 that the company was formed and organized as an electric cooperative with members rather than customers and owners instead of shareholders.

Eighty years ago, electric power was a luxury enjoyed by large cities and areas of dense population. As these areas received electric service, the economic gap between cities and rural areas threatened to grow wider.

In 1933, Willis A. Shadow, University of Tennessee Agriculture Extension Agent for Meigs County, saw new hope for the residents along the Tennessee River with the enactment by Congress of the Tennessee Valley Authority Act. Mr. Shadow began talking "electricity" throughout the county. County Attorney J. W. Lillard joined the ranks, agreeing to furnish Mr. Shadow with legal advice without fee. Enthusiasm gained momentum until a mass meeting of 500 citizens at the Meigs County Courthouse resulted in the May 29, 1935 formation of the Meigs County Power Association, Incorporated, which later became the Meigs County Electric Membership Corporation and today is known as Volunteer Energy Cooperative. The organization was the first to take advantage of the availability of federal dollars through the Rural Electrification Act.

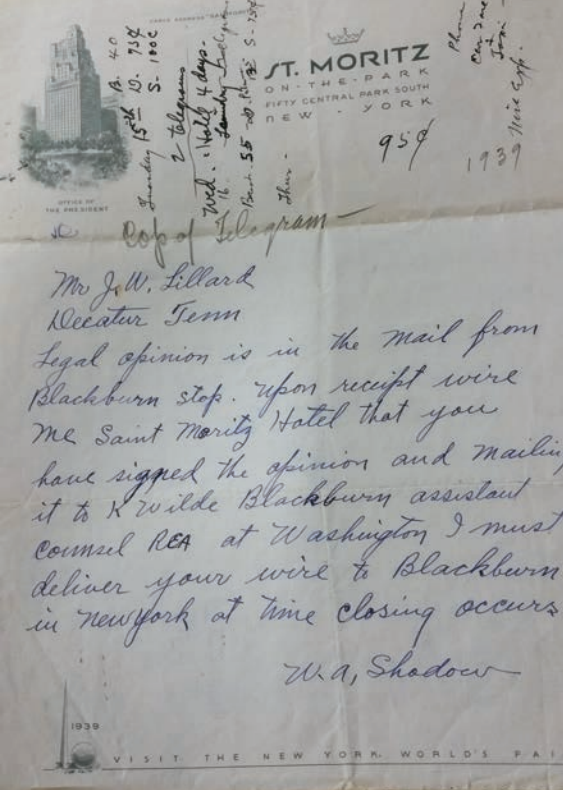
The first lines erected in Meigs County were energized August 6, 1936.

In 1939, just seven years after the Tennessee Electric Power Company refused to provide electric service to Meigs County, the rural cooperative entered into a contract with TVA to purchase the power company's distribution properties in McMinn, Bradley, Meigs, Polk, Roane, Rhea, Cumberland, Putnam, and Fentress Counties for \$276,700. Recognizing it would soon be serving an area far larger than Meigs County, the corporation changed its name to Volunteer Electric Cooperative. As the organization grew and expanded its services, the name was changed again in the early twentieth century to Volunteer Energy Cooperative. The Cooperative was poised to remain strong and viable for many years to come.

Today, eighty years later, VEC remains a member-owned, not-for-profit organization that is committed to its customers who are also its owners. It is one of the largest rural electric cooperatives in the nation in terms of the area we serve. VEC delivers electricity to nearly 114,000 members in all or part of 17 Tennessee counties with more than 9,000 miles of power lines strung from the Georgia to Kentucky borders. The affairs of the Cooperative are governed by a board of directors consisting of 12 members representing the 17 counties served. The Board of Directors is responsible to the members for the policy making function of the Cooperative.







# FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 2015

## Volunteer Energy Cooperative Balance Sheet as of June 30, 2015

### Assets

Electric plant in service	\$ 417,944,487
Less depreciation	186,001,917
Total	231,942,570

Other property and investments 5,474,810

### Current and accrued assets

Cash and temporary cash investments	29,832,083
Accounts receivable	22,236,382
Materials and supplies	2,924,669
Prepayments	-0-
Other current assets	1,388,145
Total	56,381,279

### Deferred debits

Receivables-conservation	5,870,857
Other deferred debits	1,012,060
Total	6,882,917

Total assets \$ 300,681,577

### Capital and Liabilities

#### Capital

Membership certificates	\$434,580
Earnings reinvested in system assets	226,926,116

Total 227,360,696

Long term debt 27,030,686

Other noncurrent liabilities 9,135,205

### Current and accrued liabilities

Other notes payable	-0-
Accounts payable	18,202,393
Customer deposits	4,718,855
Taxes and interest	1,160,615
Other current liabilities	805,358

Total 24,887,221

Deferred credits 12,267,769

Total capital and liabilities \$300,681,577

## Volunteer Energy Cooperative Statements of Income and Earnings Reinvested in System Assets Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 2015

### Operating Revenue

Sale of electric energy	
Residential	\$150,342,751
Commercial	23,232,676
Industrial	58,383,387
Street and other lighting	4,085,196

Total sale of electric energy 236,044,010

Other revenue 5,619,838

Total operating revenue 241,663,848

### Operating Expenses

Cost of power purchased from TVA	\$191,441,614
Distribution and transmission expense	16,076,513
Customer accounts expense	3,882,303
Customer service, sales and information expense	488,824
Administrative and general expense	7,901,892
Depreciation	14,401,800
Taxes	2,916,013
Interest expense	1,646,546

Total operating expense and interest 234,988,020

Operating Income 6,675,828

Other income 1,135,754

Net Income \$7,811,582

### Earnings Reinvested in System Assets

Beginning of fiscal year	\$219,114,534
End of fiscal year	\$226,926,116

## VOLUNTEER ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE Decatur, Tennessee

KWH Used	Energy Charge*	Amortization Charge	Total
25	\$ 0.75	\$ 0.25	\$ 1.00
30	0.90	0.30	1.20
40	1.20	0.40	1.60
50	1.50	0.50	2.00
60	1.70	0.60	2.30
70	1.90	0.70	2.60
80	2.10	0.80	2.90
90	2.30	0.90	3.20
100	2.50	1.00	3.50
200	4.50	1.00	5.50
300	5.50	1.00	6.50
400	6.50	1.00	7.50
600	7.30	1.00	8.30
800	8.10	1.00	9.10
1000	8.90	1.00	9.90
1400	10.50	1.00	11.50

### \*TVA Residential Rate B-1

First 50 KWH at ...	3c
Next 150 KWH at ...	2c
Next 200 KWH at ...	1c
Next 1000 KWH at ...	0.4c
All Over 1400 KWH at ...	0.75c

Subject to Amortization charge of 1c per KWH for the first 100 KWH, such charge to be a minimum of \$0.25, and a maximum of \$1.00 per customer per month.







# TWO WEEKS IN FEBRUARY

By far the biggest news story of the year for Volunteer Energy Cooperative was the historic ice storm that crippled much of the service area. VEC members and workers endured ice, snow, and record cold temperatures for two weeks.

Despite enduring many days without power, the communities that were affected by these weather events supported VEC workers in many ways, offering food, encouragement, dry clothing, and other necessities.

This is a synopsis of the timeline of events during this extraordinary period.

## Round 1

**February 15, 2015**

Ice, snow, and wind result in approximately **15,000 power outages in Rhea, Roane, Meigs, Cumberland, and McMinn counties.**

Weather forecasts predict some of the coldest temperatures in the last 30 years.

15,000 customers out of power

## Round 2

**February 21, 2015**

Worst ice storm in VEC history.

Heavy ice and high winds cause about **40,000 power outages in Cumberland, Fentress, Putnam, Overton, White, and Bledsoe counties.**

TVA and 3 VEC transmission line outages cause power to be lost to **five VEC substations**; breakers are tripped open at **three** others.

In four VEC counties, power is out to **all customers.**

**60 line crews** and **35 right-of-way crews** are mobilized from across the VEC service area and work **16-hour shifts** throughout the restoration.

A total of approximately **650 workers** are on the scene to assist. VEC advises customers that power restoration is expected to take several days.

40,000 customers out of power





## February 26, 2015

A heavy snowfall in the southern portion of the VEC service area overnight results in additional outages; however, the overall number of customers without power continues to decline.



## March 3, 2015

Power is restored to essentially all VEC customers.

Community support has been overwhelming.

Icy weather predicted this week for affected areas.



## Total cost estimate

\$9.5 million

## Manpower Deployed

- 95 crews deployed
- 650 workers on the ground + support personnel
- 5 substations without transmission service including 161 kV TVA line and VEC 69 kV lines
- 3 VEC substations with breakers out
- 4 counties totally without power
- 850+ broken poles

## Communications Feb 15 - March 2

### Facebook

44 updates/posts  
342,402 views

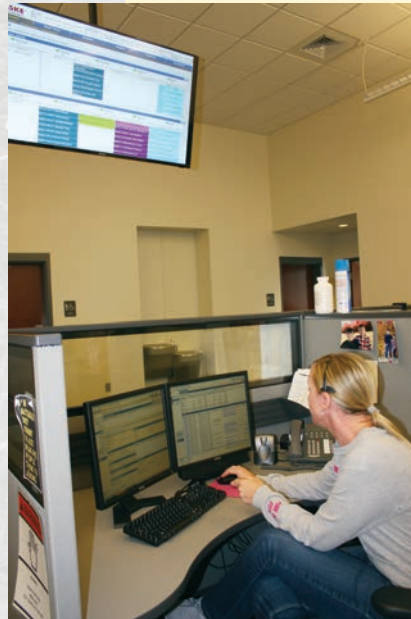
### SmartHub Mobile App

949 users  
9,063 sessions  
55,956 screen views

### VEC Web Site

56,864 sessions  
29,639 users  
168,105 page views

162 News Releases Sent



## Storm Assistance

- Appalachian Electric Cooperative
- Athens (TN) Utility Board
- Caney Fork Electric Cooperative
- Cumberland Electric Membership Corporation
- Davis Elliott
- Ft. Loudoun Electric Cooperative
- Galloway
- Holston Electric Cooperative
- Middle TN Electric Membership Corporation
- MPS
- Plateau Electric Cooperative
- Rockwood Electric Utilities
- Seelbach
- Sequachee Valley Electric Cooperative
- Service Electric
- Upper Cumberland Electric Membership Corporation



# MEMBER COMMENTS

Words can not express the thanks you all deserve for all the hard work you have done in restoring Ten Mile. We are truly blessed to have people like you all to help us in a time of such a disaster.

Thank you for all the difficult work your men have done over the past week! We appreciate you!

Thank you for all your work to get our power back!

THANK you VEC Employees for All the WORK and Long hours during the Recent ICE/SNOW events! You truly stand behind the word "Volunteer".

JUST GOT HOME TO A HEATED HOUSE!

Roger, please thank your wonderful linemen who worked through a cold and icy night to restore our power in Ten Mile. We are blessed with VEC!! Please do pass on our thanks to everyone involved.

Dear Sirs/Madams:  
I am writing to let you know what a fabulous job your employees did restoring power to my home. The ice storm the morning of 2/21 caused the power to stop. Our power was restored the evening of 2/22.  
Please thank those workers who worked so hard to restore power.

Thank you to all the men & women who worked so hard to RESTORE Electric to our homes!!!

I know many of the workers also had power outages - I hope all their families & homes have been restored & ALL IS WELL!

Again  
THANKS!  
A NEW RESIDENT

Our power was just recently restored after a long day without it. I just wanted to say thank you for doing it so quickly. I had to go out today so I saw how bad conditions are. Thanks to all of you who are working so hard to bring back something that is so easily taken for granted until it's not available anymore. May God bless you and keep you safe as you help others.

Great, Fantastic job to restore power. Impossible conditions to overcome, Great Work! Hardest working people on earth. Long hours, nasty weather, dangerous conditions. You all performed a fantastic job. THANK YOU FROM ALL IN SUNSET RIDGE.

Thank You!!  
You guys were great!  
We are so lucky to have had you guys after the storm. You all worked so hard!

I wish to thank all of you for the wonderful work you did to return our electric power to keep us warm!!!! The night and day in the freezing cold!!! Thank you again and again!!

February 24, 2015

Please express our most sincere gratitude to all the crews who have worked so hard to restore power to the area. This is difficult and dangerous work under extremely cold and uncomfortable conditions. Again, our heartfelt thanks to all responsible.

Please give all those involved in getting our Electric Back on a BIG Hug! all the hard work!

A Special "Thank You" to Volunteer Energy employees who kept my power on during our recent snow falls. If you hadn't kept our lines and right of ways in good shape we probably wouldn't have been that lucky. Keep up the good work and God Bless you for all the hard work you had to do to restore other people's power.  
Thank Again,

I Would like to Thank Each one for your Hard Work During The Last Ice storm- know they were lots of things to do Everywhere, Thanks Again for your Hard Work and Time here on Whaley Rd.

Thank you for the incredible job you have done and are doing to recover from this disaster! You are the best! The system would not let me submit this without checking the contact box, but there is no need to respond, just know you are valued.

I just wanted to thank your dedicated crews for the great job they did in the last ice storm. We were without power for several days in the Lake Tansi area but went to our daughter's home in Pleasant Hill and did well. The amount of work that your crews did was phenomenal. Once again thank you for a job well done.

I just wanted to personally say THANK YOU for all you guys have done to restore our power. You are amazing. Words do not describe how much you are a blessing.



# A Note to Our Communities . . .

The winter weather during February 2015 caused damage of historic proportions to the Volunteer Energy Cooperative electric grid. At the height of the storms more than 40,000 VEC customers were without power, five electric substations had lost TVA electric transmission, over 850 power poles were destroyed, and thousands of miles of line lay on the icy ground. The temperature was cold and the wind was blowing. The outlook was as bleak and frigid as the night air.

**Then something amazing happened...**

**When the going got tough - - - the tough got going...**

VEC employees left their homes and families, mobilized service vehicles, and braved the elements to travel to the hardest hit areas. Crews from electric utilities across Tennessee arrived to lend assistance. TVA assisted with repairs to the transmission lines. Contract workers answered the call for help. Teams scoured the area, many on foot, to survey and report the damage. Support staff and supervisors worked for many hours with little sleep to coordinate the recovery effort. Local emergency personnel grabbed chain saws and began to clear the path so that utility workers could reach their destinations.

At the height of the restoration effort there were over 650 contract and VEC personnel working in affected counties.

**And that was just the beginning...**

Local individuals and businesses realized that all this manpower and volunteers, and the victims, would need subsistence and support. Meals and food items were donated and delivered to crews and workers. Emergency management personnel and the media worked hard to keep residents informed about restoration efforts. Shelters and community kitchens sprang up, neighbors helping neighbors, strangers helping strangers.

**These storms, as horrific as they were, served as a reminder, once again, of the reason we are proud to call these communities our home.**

Although no words seem sufficient at a time like this, these are offered in the most sincere and heartfelt way...



# Thank You!



# VISION 2020



Vision 2020 is Volunteer Energy Cooperative's strategic plan for system and technology upgrades. It includes equipment and technology improvements to keep the electric system strong. The goals are to improve power reliability, develop better communication with our members, and develop better training tools for employees.

Components of the Vision 2020 plan include power system technology upgrades, expansion of the VEC fiber system, completion of the Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) system, communications and network server upgrades, and installation of SmartHub and meter data management technologies.

## Substation Upgrades

As part of this plan, substation control panels will be upgraded from electro-mechanical panels to solid state panels in order to improve voltage control and communications. Work is complete at the Crossville substation and is under way in Lantana. Next year control panel work is scheduled at Sugar Grove and Fredonia with Ten Mile, Harrison Bay, and McDonald on tap for subsequent years.

Solid state regulator controls scheduled to be upgraded in all Volunteer Energy substations will improve communications. Regulators will also allow us to monitor peak electrical demand and manage it to keep power costs lower for our members. Recloser controls will also be upgraded in VEC substations as part of Vision 2020.

Substation breakers, a major component of the electric system, have been upgraded in the Lantana and Ten Mile stations. Additional work is planned for Ravenscroft, Fredonia, Crossville, Harrison Bay, and McDonald as part of the plan.







## Using Technology to Connect with Customers



Volunteer Energy Cooperative launched Facebook and a new SmartHub mobile app this year to connect with customers.



### Fiber Expansion

Information is carried over fiber optic lines and allows VEC to communicate quickly and efficiently with offices and substations. Fiber supports the VEC network and phone systems. Leasing unused fiber capacity provides a revenue stream and reduces the cost of operation of the fiber system. Vision 2020 calls for adding over 60 miles of fiber to our existing network. This will provide us with redundancy in case the fiber network is disabled by a storm or accident. The plan also calls for the fiber network to be expanded 23 miles to the Byrdstown substation, which is the last and longest link in the VEC fiber connection.

### SCADA Enhancements

SCADA is the technology that allows VEC to monitor activity on the electric system and remotely control equipment. It is, as they say, the “eye in the sky” for our dispatchers. Major software enhancements were completed this year that increased the capacity and usability of this important tool. All substations are now being monitored by the valuable SCADA system.

### Communications

Since we are taking hourly meter readings for most of our 114,000 members, Vision 2020 calls for upgrades to the automated meter reading servers that accommodates this massive amount of data. This expansion was completed in 2015, as were improvements to our email system. The plan includes phone system upgrades and improvements to two-way radio communications in the next few years.

Our goal is that Vision 2020 will make Volunteer Energy Cooperative positioned well for the next 80 years and beyond.

## Substations Improvements

<u>Year</u>	<u>Location/Improvement</u>
2000	Sanford (McMinn): New 42 MVA Station
2001	Campbell Junction (Cumberland): New 45 MVA Station
2002	Benton (Polk): New 42 MVA Station
2003	West Crossville: New 42 MVA Station
2004	Wolftever (Hamilton): New 42 MVA Station
2005	Hopewell (Bradley): New 63 MVA Station
2007	South Bradley: New 20 MVA Station Fairfield Glade: New 63 MVA Station
2008	Monterey (Putnam): New Low Side on 42 MVA Station Crab Orchard (Crossville): New 20 MVA Station
2009	Tasso (Bradley): New Low Side on 20 MVA Station Hiwassee (Bradley): New 42 MVA Station North Ooltewah (Hamilton): New 42 MVA Station
2010	Ocoee (Polk): New 42 MVA Station
2011	Ravenscroft (Cumberland): New High Side Breaker/ 15 MVA Transformer Spring City (Rhea): New Low Side on 60 MVA Station
2012	Riceville (McMinn): New 20 MVA Station Spring Creek (Bradley): New Low Side Breaker/ 20 MVA Transformer Byrdstown (Pickett): New 42 MVA Station
2013	Lantana (Crossville): New 50 MVA Transformers Athens (McMinn): New 13kV Breaker/ 69kV Breaker/ Relay Panel
2014	Georgetown (Bradley): New 42 MVA Station Grimsley (Fentress): New 20 MVA Station



# YOUTH & COMMUNITIES

## VEC Supports Our Youth & Communities

Each year Volunteer Energy provides scholarships to 4-H Electric Camp held at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. The 2015 recipients and VEC's Kristy Kelly are pictured at right.



*Paula Haslam*



*Chai Park*



*Jerrica Hale*



*Bethany Young*

(Left) 2015 Lillard-Shadow Scholarship recipients (l to r): Paula Haslam (McMinn County High School); Chai Park (Ooltewah High School); Jerrica Hale (Stone Memorial High School); and Bethany Young (Pickett County High School). This scholarship program began in 2003 as a way to honor Willis A. Shadow and J. W. Lillard, founders of the Meigs County Power Association which would ultimately become Volunteer Energy Cooperative. Four \$2,000 scholarships are awarded to high school seniors each year by VEC using an independent panel of judges.

Volunteer Energy provides the trip of a lifetime to four high school juniors each year to Washington, D.C. The Washington Youth Tour is sponsored by electric cooperatives nationwide and showcases important sights and sounds of our nation's capital, including meetings with the students' legislative representatives. This year was the 50th anniversary of the trip; about 1,700 students participated from cooperatives across the U.S. 2015 VEC participants are pictured below (l to r): Hannah Holley (Bradley Central High School); Brett Morgan (Clarkrange High School); and Thomas Bradley (Monterey High School); Jonathan Purda (Midway High School) were rewarded with spots on the tour of D.C. for writing winning short stories titled "Electric Cooperatives: Powering Potential."



VEC sponsors two attendees each year at the TECA Youth Leadership Conference (YLC) in Nashville. These young leaders learn team building skills and cooperative operations and meet with Tennessee legislators. The 2015 YLC participants were Cainan Howard and Amberly Burtz from Meigs County High School (pictured above).





# Your Change Changes Things



The VECustomers Share program, begun in 2001, has surpassed \$5.3 million in grants to community organizations. The following is just a sample of the groups that received grant funding in 2014-15.

Veterans Home Council  
Basketball Club  
Health Council  
4-H  
American Legion Auxiliary  
Earth Awareness Club  
Fall Festival  
For the One Ministry  
Homeless Shelter  
Life Bridges, Inc.  
Museum Center at Five Points  
Optimist Club  
People Helping People  
Tennessee Shooting Stars  
The Art Guild  
The Compassionate Friends  
Theatre Guild  
Veterans Association  
Visually Impaired Support Group  
Volunteer Fire Department  
5th Grade Math Club  
Student Council  
Beta Club  
Children's Garden Path  
Choral Society  
Girl Scouts of America  
Historical Society  
Parent Teacher Organization  
Sundowners Club  
Tri-County Center  
Civitan Club  
Senior Center  
Master Gardeners  
Hospice  
Imagination Library  
Bookworm Club  
Future Business Leaders of America  
High School SkillsUSA  
11 and Under Stingers  
4-H  
Adult Reading Council  
Allardt Great Pumpkin Festival  
American Cancer Society  
Arts Commission  
Band Boosters  
BASIC of TN, Inc.  
Boys and Girls Clubs  
Bradley Initiative for Church  
and Community (BICC)  
Camp Agape  
Children's Advocacy Center  
Club 21  
Community Service Center  
DAV  
Distinguished Young Women  
Drama Club  
Education Foundation  
Education Foundation  
Emergency Services

Family Promise  
Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA)  
FFA  
Food Bank  
Food Fund  
Food Pantry  
Football and Cheerleading Association  
Friends of Harrison Bay State Park  
Fun Day Fun Run  
Harrison Recreation  
HOSA Club  
Junior Beta Club  
Love Memories Support Group  
Manna House  
Medical Ministry  
National Center for Youth Issues  
PTO  
Quest for Success  
Quilt of Valor Quilters  
RAM Committee  
Rescue Squad  
Rescue Squad Crewettes  
Senior Center  
Senior Olympics  
Sierra Hull Bluegrass Festival  
Soup Kitchen  
Volunteer Emergency Services  
Women's Auxiliary of Salvation Army  
Women's Outreach  
Y-Cap  
Yearbook Club  
Youth Achievement Foundation, Inc.  
Downtown Business Association  
Empty Stocking Fund  
Morgan Scott Project  
TAD Center  
Technology Students Association  
Toys for Santa  
Youth Leadership  
Kids on the Rise  
Amateur Radio Club, Inc.  
Chamber of Commerce  
Friends of the Library Association  
Jr. High Book Club  
Lions Club  
Scottish Rite Club  
Senior Neighbors  
Habitat for Humanity  
Angel Tree Project  
Cherokee Removal Memorial Park-  
Blythe Ferry  
Good Neighbors Theatre  
Helping Hands Ministry  
Mended Hearts  
Read to Succeed 2nd Grade  
Reading Group  
Volunteer Fire Department  
Dugout Club  
Helping Hands Mission

Lions Club  
Reading Club  
Living Heritage Museum  
Women at the Well  
Fair Association  
Agricultural Fair  
Alumni Association  
Amateur Radio Club, Inc.  
American Legion  
Avalon Center  
Chamber of Commerce  
Children's Center  
Children's Fun Day  
Christmas on the Mountain  
DECA Business Club  
Dragon Renaissance  
Fire and Rescue  
Genealogy and Historical Society  
Junior Achievement  
Longbeards  
Meigs County Rescue Squad  
Next Level Fastpitch  
Operation REACH  
Project Graduation  
Relay for Life  
Rescue Mission  
Science Club  
Senior Citizens  
SpiritHorse  
The Borderlands Foundation  
The Caring Place  
Veterans Service Office  
Women's Job Corps  
Women's Outreach  
House of Hope  
American Red Cross  
Miracle Lake  
The Refuge Community Centre  
United Way  
Give-A-Kid-A-Chance  
Soil Conservaton Club  
Accelerated Reader Support Team  
Adult and Family Education  
of McMinn County  
Adoptive Care Association  
Foster Care Association  
Happy Hearts Seniors  
Literacy Council  
Soccer Booster Club  
Fentress County Food Bank  
The Great Pumpkin Festival and Weigh Off  
Alumni Association  
Rescue Squad  
Rotary Club  
Youth Backpack Program  
Prevent Child Abuse Tennessee  
Good Samaritans  
Artisans for Creative Expression



by Connie Landrum

## VEC Retiree James B. "Dee" McKenzie Remembers When the Lights Came On

Born in 1920, 15 years before the Rural Electrification Administration was created by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, James B. "Dee" McKenzie had no idea his lifelong career would be dedicated to providing electricity to rural areas with Volunteer Energy Cooperative. At the time the Rural Electrification Act was passed in 1936, electricity was commonplace in cities but largely unavailable to farms, ranches, and other rural places.

At 20 years old, Dee was hired by the Meigs Electric Membership Corporation (located on the downtown square in Decatur, Tennessee) to work in the metering department. He and his supervisor, R. H. Franklin, would load the VEC truck with transformers, meter bases, cable, and all the equipment needed and head up the mountain to the Jamestown/Monterey area on Sunday afternoon about 4 p.m. They would not return until the following

*James B. "Dee" McKenzie about the time he began work for VEC.*

Saturday around noon. Dee was more involved with the area "on the mountain" because there were more industrial loads there at that time. It was his responsibility to ensure that the billing was accurate and that the information was delivered to the Cleveland office of the Central Service Association every week. He also performed maintenance on the meters.

"Bob Cate was the VEC area supervisor in Monterey where they had some big loads...back then we metered coal mines too. Bob worked under Lyle Williams, superintendent in the Crossville area. Lyle was something else, a good man and really smart and knew electricity from one end to the other," Dee said in a recent interview.

In 1942, Dee volunteered to serve in the US Navy and returned to work at VEC in 1945. "They were waiting on me. They were really nice to me," Dee said. During the time he was in service, he married his wife, Jimmie Lee, who is now deceased. He has two sons, Gary and Wayne. His sister, Willie Ashley, who is two years older, lives near Nashville.

Dee says he has seen a lot of things on the trips up and down the mountain. He says that he thinks every employee should go out in the field and see the work that has to be done, "including the ladies".



Then, as now, weather was always on the minds of the utility workers. “We used to laugh and say it got so bad in Crossville that the train came through with chains on.” He laughs. “No kidding, it was about that bad. I remember one morning, it (Crossville) was the coldest place in the nation.”

“Oh, it was a terrible time. I’d be up on the mountain during the day and it was just pouring snow, I couldn’t wait to get off that mountain and get headed to Decatur. One time I made it to Homestead and about 15 cars were stranded in a  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile stretch between Crossville and Homestead.”

One day Dee met three ladies who were “just a’spinning and carrying on and trying to get out of the ditch, and I thought, ‘oh no, you think it’s bad now, just wait until in the morning.’”

“You never know how long the snow is going to last,” he said.

The worst storm he ever worked, he said, was in the southeast Cleveland, Tennessee area where more than 200 homes were destroyed. “The storm kept raging all night long and came out in Monterey in the afternoon. Jamestown got hit pretty bad, too. The meter shop doesn’t usually work the storms, but in an emergency, everybody needs to pitch in,” he remembers.

He said, “There have been a lot of changes over the years, a lot of bad things and a lot of good things. We started out with 12, 13, 14 customers. The cost was  $\frac{3}{4}$  cent a kilowatt hour. I’ve seen almost a 10 cent increase over these years, and it won’t be long before it will be more than that.”

Dee is very appreciative of his job with VEC, which allowed him to live a good life. “I came up rough,” he said. “The seat was out of my britches and my knees were showing through my pants when I went to work for VEC.” He says he was so excited to get the job, “there’s no way to explain it”.

“Really and truly. I was so grateful... I had a regular job, go to work at 8 o’clock in the morning, get off work at 5 o’clock in the afternoon, get paid regular. Whew. And the only thing I knew about electricity was to respect it.”

Dee retired in 1982 at age 62 after 42 years of service. He was serving as Meter Superintendent when he retired, leaving the department in the capable hands of Russell Roberts. In the later years of employment he remembered that he was furnished a car and asked to wear a tie. He had wonderful crews through the years, he said.

Asked what he misses the most, and without hesitation he says, “the people.”

“Right now I wonder about my co-workers and their families. I wonder if some are still living or if their children are still in the area. I’d do anything in the world for them if I could.”

Dee said, “I don’t know of anybody... but I’m sure there were some... that could have enjoyed or appreciated their job more than I did.”

Dee just celebrated his 95th birthday on August 20th. As VEC celebrates its 80th birthday this year, dedicated employees such as Dee have made VEC one of the largest and most respected cooperatives in the nation.



*Dee McKenzie and article author Connie Landrum*





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