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**Mission Statement**  
Blue Ridge will be a competitive, quality provider of energy and other services, maintaining its history of integrity and adapting to the challenges of a changing world. While exercising leadership in the community, the organization's focus will be on exceeding customer expectations.

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A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

## A yearlong celebration

**TWO YEARS AGO**, those of us in the Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative organization started directing our focus toward August of 2015. We knew that on the 14th of this month, Blue Ridge would arrive at the 75th year since its founding. It was our intent not to allow that milestone to go by without paying proper recognition to its importance.



Members of my employee team and I hadn't advanced too far in our celebratory plans before we reached a conclusion: a single-day observance simply wouldn't be adequate for spotlighting this notable event. In my opinion, that turned out to be an insightful decision. In order to do justice to the cooperative's history, we believed we should take a multifaceted approach that would expose as many persons as possible to the Blue Ridge story. It was also our desire to establish some markers that would serve to inform future generations about the cooperative and its many accomplishments.

As this endeavor truly began to take shape last year, we settled on some specifics we thought would fulfill those aims. One idea was to seek a resolution of the S.C. General Assembly that would call attention to this anniversary. With the enthusiastic support of their fellow area lawmakers, Senators Thomas Alexander (Oconee) and Larry Martin (Pickens) took this project in hand. Ultimately, they garnered unanimous votes for the resolution in both houses of the legislature.

Another thought was to produce an appropriate video. The result was an 11-minute film that skillfully mixed individual recollections with photographic and other images from the co-op era. That video was

premiered before the thousands who attended April's Blue Ridge annual meeting, and it received a truly warm reception there.

"Bolts of Brightness" is an additional anniversary feature that was conceived and then launched. This activity is designed to recognize 75 local Blue Ridge members who embody the spirit of the cooperative program. There will be more-extensive coverage of the recipients of this award in the magazine's October edition.

I'd also mention that we've published a coffee-table book that highlights the cooperative's 75 years of progress. That volume is hot off the press, and believe me, it's a quality piece of work.

As we draw near to our anniversary date, we have the honor of hosting the Statewide Board meeting. Board members and cooperative leaders from across the state will convene on Thursday, Aug. 13, at our Pickens facility to conduct their regular agenda, and hear the story of Blue Ridge as they share in our celebration of 75 years of service to the Upstate.

In reality, we're using all of 2015 to commemorate this anniversary. There will be an opportunity for you to join the celebration by dropping by any of our Blue Ridge offices on Friday, Aug. 14, from 1 until 5 p.m. Refreshments will be served in the lobby, and the aforementioned book will be on sale for just \$10 a copy. You have a cordial invitation to come!

**Charles E. Dalton**  
*President and CEO*

## We're going to have a party!

**THAT'S RIGHT...** complete with cake and punch and party favors. On Aug. 14, Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative will be 75 years old, and we want to share our birthday cake with each of you. So, stop by any of our offices after 1 p.m. for cake, punch and a time of celebration. As with all birthday parties, we hope you'll bring your family and friends to help us celebrate.



As a special party favor, there will be copies of the 75th Anniversary video available. Premiered at the Blue Ridge Annual Meeting, this 11-minute video tells not only the history of our co-op, but also the impact that the Rural Electrification Act had on the development and economy of our state and our local counties. The story is told through historical documents, photos, and drama along with interviews from people who lived during that time.

We look forward to sharing this special day with our members and friends. After all, being 75 is quite an accomplishment!

## Has my co-op moved?

**YOU MAY HAVE** noticed that the payment stub with your bill has a new mailing address. While you are still mailing the payment to Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative, the post office box is in Atlanta, Ga. We are in all the same locations, and this is simply a new service we're using with the company that has managed our billing and payment system for more than 30 years.

There are several advantages to this process. The mail will be collected several times throughout the day, allowing payments to be credited to members' accounts quicker. Any mailed-in payments that require additional information will be sent to the cooperative by email early in the day, so they can be corrected and posted. Blue Ridge will no longer have the maintenance and replacement costs of the hardware and software needed to process payments. Manager of Member Services Denise McCormick believes the change is a good one. "We have investigated this service several times and talked with other cooperatives that handle their mail payments this way. By reducing costs and assuring that our members' mail payments will be credited correctly and on time, we believe that we have come up with a good, money-saving solution for our members."

## Celebrating 75 Years of Making Connections That Succeed...

From that first light bulb glowing brightly in 1940, to powering more than 64,000 households and businesses today, Blue Ridge Electric Co-op remains dedicated to improving the quality of life of its members and their Upstate communities.



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## News EXTRA

# Yes, I remember

AS WE BEGAN to plan for the co-op's 75th anniversary, we asked members to send us their memories of life without electricity or early memories of this wonderful new addition to their lives. Some of these responses are shared in the publication *A History of Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative*, while others are committed to these pages.

For Jack Spearman from Fair Play, it was a day he will not forget. He tells, "Around 1940 or 1941, I was about 11 years old. I remember the men coming to put in a pole, so we could get electricity. They dug most of the day with hand hole-diggers, because that was all they had. They told me they would have to do something different the next morning and would be back then. When they came the next day, they told me to stay on the other side of the house until they came for me.

"All of a sudden I heard an explosion bigger than ever and small pieces of rock were flying through the air. I had dirt all in my hair and saw rocks on the roof of our house. The workers soon came around the house for me and told me they had to blast through rock to go deep enough to set the pole for our electricity. I was one happy boy. I could now see better at night to do my schoolwork. We had one drop in the center of each room with a chain and string attached to pull the light on and turn it off. It really changed our lives."

Furman Youngblood remembers one of the "big things" that electricity brought. "It was very nice when we got it. I remember it well. I was almost 8 years old, and I remember everybody was waiting. We had a big radio. We were waiting for the power to come on, and when that light snapped on, we turned on the music, and it was The Grand Ole Opry, WSM. There wasn't but two or three stations to even get then. That's one of the big things that was really good."

Mr. Youngblood also saw a big change in the way they lived. "If I remember right, I think the power

bill was only \$11 or \$12 a month when we first had it. At that time we only had the pull-chain lights and the receptacles. We only had two in our house, and one was for the radio and one was for the refrigerator, about a year later. That's all we had, but that pull-chain light was mighty good! One good thing about Blue Ridge Electric ... hadn't been for them, we wouldn't have had power for years, because Duke Power stayed out on the main roads ... we lived in the country. They came through the woods and everywhere else. So, thanks to Blue Ridge Electric."

Visiting the childhood home of William Elrod, one can really get a feel for life without power. Built beside a



WILLIAM ELROD

**This Wizard refrigerator has been powered for more than 70 years and is still in working condition. The refrigerator was purchased in 1941, by Dora Edens, for \$99 at the Western Auto Store in Pickens County. For five generations, this refrigerator has been passed down among the Edens and Elrod families.**

stream and surrounded by fields, Mr. Elrod remembers well the early days of electricity. "We moved in 1935 and got power in 1941. The men came and cut the right-of-way to bring the line through the woods. They dug holes for the poles by hand and brought horses to pull the poles upright. Back then, they wouldn't put in power if you didn't have some sort of appliance to hook up. We were too poor to buy anything, so the day before they were

coming, Dad took the back seat out of our '37 Chevrolet,

and we borrowed my grandmother's twin sister's washing machine and brought it to our house. After the power was in, we took it back." His granddaddy kept every light bill he ever got. As a young boy, Mr. Elrod read the meter each morning. "That was my job. My granddaddy wouldn't let the bill get above \$1.50 so I read it daily to make sure we weren't using too much." The Frigidaire that was bought for that house is now 70+ years old and is still being used by Mr. Elrod's granddaughter.

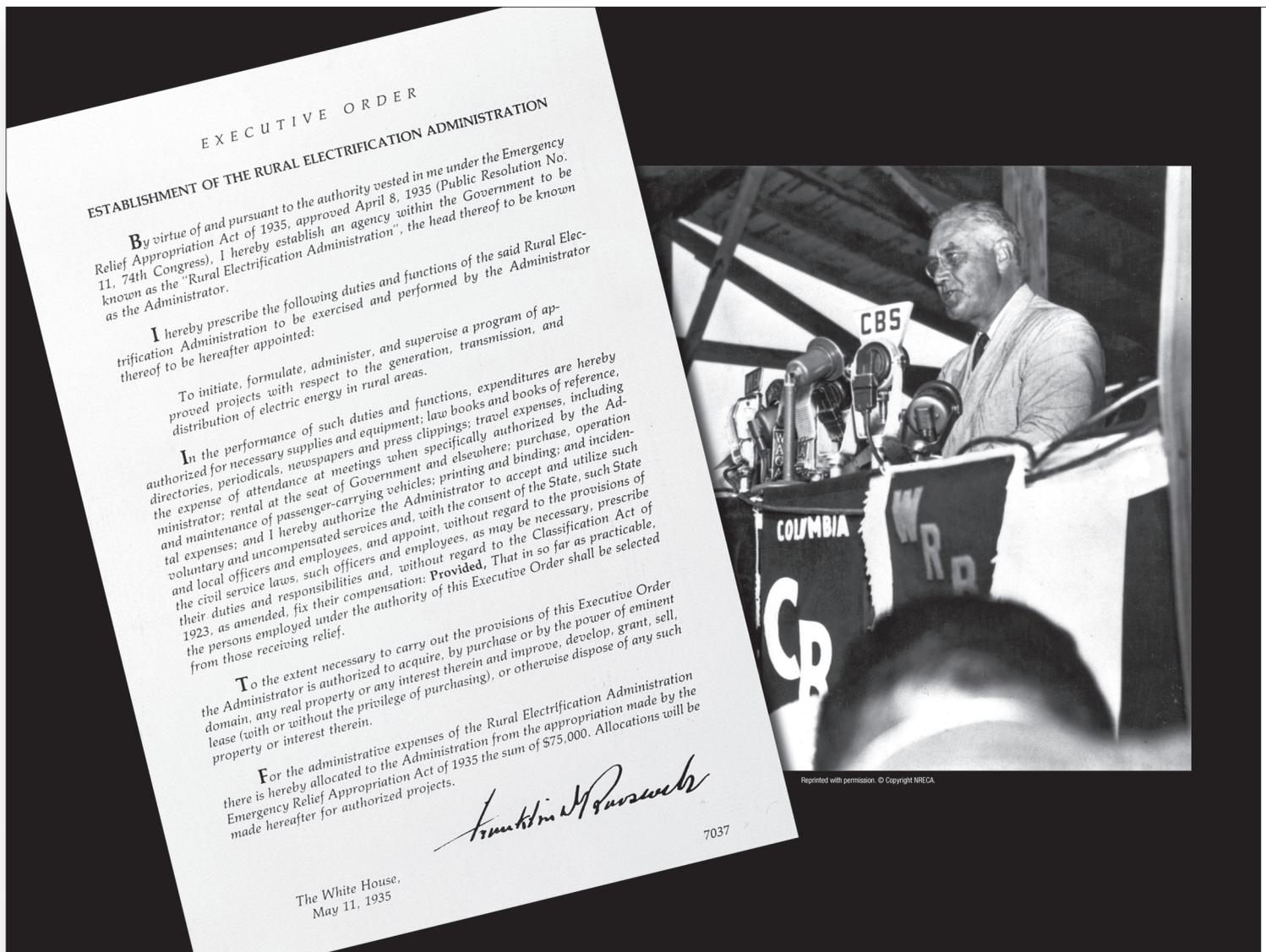
Jimmy Lee Dodgens remembers the excitement that the announcement of REA bringing power to his childhood home brought. "It was one of the greatest moments in my life. At that time, it cost \$48 to wire our little one-bedroom house. One evening about 4 p.m., an old Ford truck came up the drive with two men in it. After looking at the house, they told my father that it had not been wired properly, and they could not hook us up. But feeling sorry for a 6-year-old child with tears and a handicapped man, one said to the other, 'Look on the truck and get some wire and let's help this family.' Thanks to them, we had electricity that night. I still appreciate those men, because we had a bright light in our house that night instead of a kerosene lamp."

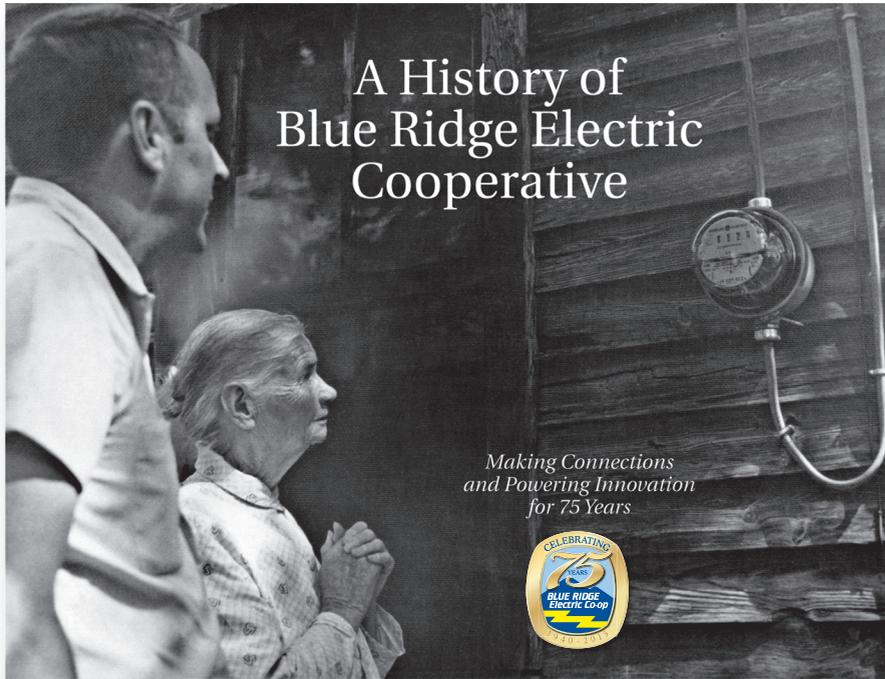
Charles Hamby, born in 1931 in Long Creek, remembers Dave (D.W.) Stribling going around the Long Creek community with a petition for residents to sign in order to get electricity. Many in that area were nervous and did not welcome the thought of electricity. His mother taught school at Long Creek Academy, and that was the first place in the area to have electricity. He also remembers a gentleman who was not in favor of electricity at all. A pole had been set for the lines to be run, and this gentleman took an ax and chopped down the pole. ☹️

# 75 years... a look at Blue Ridge, then and now

Throughout the year, we have had the opportunity to talk with people that remember when there was no power available for the vast majority of rural residents in upstate South Carolina. Whether in general conversation or formal interviews, it is touching to hear these folks tell the story of REA and the importance of electrification across our area. For those of us who don't remember that time, a book is available that follows Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative from 1940 until now. **A History of Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative** is anchored with a historical narrative researched and written by Terrel D. "Terry" Ballenger and illustrated with photos marking milestones in the co-op's 75-year history. Also included are actual accounts of those early days from members and grandchildren of members and former employees.

Produced as a coffee-table-style book, it will be available in all co-op offices for \$10. Please stop by and take a look at this volume that chronicles the first 75 years of your electric cooperative.





At left, pictured on the cover, Calvin Hudson, staker for Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative, and Mrs. Agnes Morgan view her new meter. Blue Ridge had recently connected electric service to Mrs. Morgan's home. In her evaluation of the new experience of having electric power at her disposal, Mrs. Morgan was quoted as saying it was "like a gift from Heaven."

Below: These two pages from *A History of Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative* are just the beginning of a story that continues today. As the book's epilogue reminds us, "The future for the north-western corner of our state holds forth both promises and challenges. True to its proud heritage, Blue Ridge will be there to meet them." We look forward to the next 75 years.

## Prologue

In 1935, fewer than three in 100 residents of rural South Carolina enjoyed the convenience of central-station electricity. Inhabitants of the state's towns and cities had received electric service 30 or more years earlier. The countryside, by contrast, featured unpaved roads and dark homes, and most people lived a pretty isolated existence.

Farm families had to perform all their chores without access to any modern appliances, machinery, or other conveniences. They faced a life of unrelenting drudgery.

About this time, stirrings in both Washington, D.C. and Columbia, S.C. heralded the dawning of a new era for rural dwellers. The state's General Assembly in 1935 approved legislation that established the South Carolina Rural Electrification Authority. Its mission was to take electric power to farmers and other rural residents who did not have access to the service.

Shortly after this bill was ratified by the General Assembly, President Franklin Roosevelt issued an executive order creating the Rural Electrification Administration. The REA was established as an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture with the authority to make loans to support the extension

of electric power lines into unserved areas. These two actions, one at the state level and the other originating in our nation's capital, set the stage for massive change that would reach into South Carolina's remotest corners.



# It's all about YOUth!

**WHAT HAPPENS WHEN** 1,700 of America's best and brightest students come together for one week in our nation's capital? The trip of a lifetime! In June, electric cooperatives across the U.S. sent groups of high school students to Washington, D.C., for the 2015 Washington Youth Tour. South Carolina sent 65 students, representing 20 electric co-ops. "We had a terrific group of young people on the trip," said Van O'Cain, director of the South Carolina Youth Tour. "And for many of them, this was their first opportunity to visit Washington. It always makes you feel good when you see how appreciative they are to be on the trip."

For Blue Ridge Co-op Youth Tour representative Anna White, this was the trip of a lifetime. "Visiting our nation's capital is one of the most awe-inspiring things I have ever been blessed to do. It was such an honor to be allowed to stand in rooms such as the Old Senate Chamber and the Old Supreme Court, where monumental decisions in history were made." Anna is applying for the Robert D. Bennett Community Service scholarship and for her project has formed a running club through Miracle Hill Children's Home. Working with girls ages 12-17, she is using the club to help the

girls gain self-confidence and let them know someone cares. Part of her project has included getting sponsorships to buy new athletic shoes and running apparel for the girls.

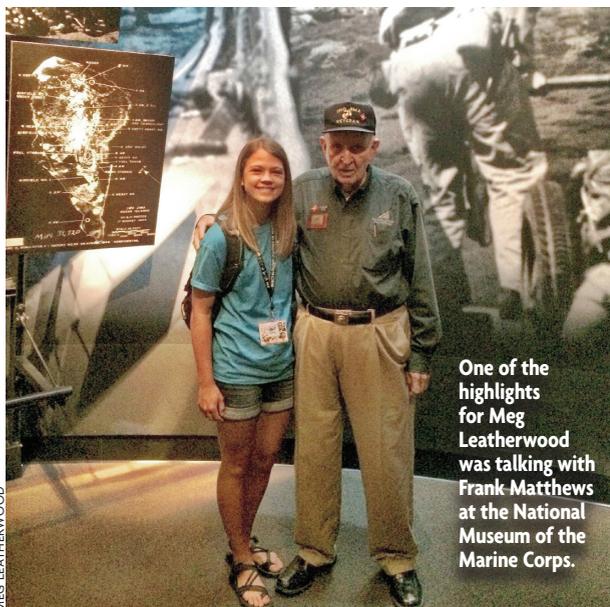
Delegate Aimee Rodriguez particularly enjoyed getting to meet other youth from all over the United States. "I really enjoyed the trip, especially the openness of the youth attendees. My favorite thing about the trip was getting to meet other youth from all over the United States. Everyone was so excited to be there, and that made it even more fun to interact with and meet new people."

A highlight for the third Blue Ridge delegate, Meg Leatherwood, was getting to meet with U.S. Sens. Tim Scott and Lindsey Graham, and another special individual. Meg writes, "When I visited the National Museum of the Marine Corps, I was given the chance to meet a member of the greatest generation. Frank Matthews was raised in Newberry, S.C., during the Depression. He was my age (17) when he enlisted in the Marine Corps, and one year later he fought at Iwo Jima. There were 36 men in his platoon on the first day of the battle. He was the only one to leave the island alive from his platoon after fighting for 28 days and being wounded three times. It was a great honor to meet this American hero



JAMIS MOYE OF BLACK RIVER ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

**Blue Ridge Youth Tour Delegates, Aimee Rodriguez, Anna White and Meg Leatherwood are pictured on the steps of the United States Capitol Building. This was one stop on the week-long trip that included visits to many national monuments and countless opportunities to learn more about cooperatives.**



MEG LEATHERWOOD

**One of the highlights for Meg Leatherwood was talking with Frank Matthews at the National Museum of the Marine Corps.**

and hear him tell his story at the age of 90. It reminded me that it's the land of the free because of the brave." As you can see, each of these three girls will forever be influenced by the friends they made and the experiences they had in Washington. Youth Tour is just one of the ways we're investing in our future leaders. South Carolina's electric co-ops do so much more than provide safe, reliable and affordable power—we are dedicated to improving the futures of students in our community, because we know they are next in line to lead the way. ☺

**To learn more about the Washington Youth Tour, visit [YouthTour.coop](http://YouthTour.coop).**