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MISSION STATEMENT

Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative will operate as a competitive provider of energy services and a partner with local communities, with a focus on safety, service and integrity.

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This organization is an equal-opportunity provider.



A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

Tangible benefits via our heat-pump loan program



THE MONTH OF May brings with it a promise of calm, pleasant days. We can take comfort that the cold snaps are behind us and that the thunderstorms won't crank up in earnest until we've truly entered the summer season.

May is a good time to

contemplate, to make plans. One subject that might be worth pondering would be the hot weather that will likely manifest itself in July, August, and September. Residing in the sunny South, we've come to anticipate those periods of prolonged heat.

America's highest electric bills?

Within the last few months, I've seen news reports suggesting that South Carolinians pay the highest electric bills in America. If such reporting is true, it's not because our electric rates are above and beyond those paid by consumers in the other 49 states. Actually, it's an indication that S.C. residents, on average, consume more power per month than our fellow citizens living elsewhere. A sampling of electricity charges in, for example, California, New York, or Vermont, would reveal those folks pay considerably more per kilowatt-hour than we do.

Here in the Upstate, we can experience a brutally cold winter, and just a few months later, we find ourselves enduring some scorching summer temperatures. The thermometer readings on both extremes of the seasonal spectrum are largely responsible for those above-average electric bills.

That's the reality. It's also true that Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative is intent on helping our members contend effectively with both the maximums and minimums Mother Nature sends your way. I'll single out just one among our several beneficial service choices for members.

7.5-percent interest rate

That would be our heat-pump loan program. The cooperative offers loans at a low 7.5-percent interest rate to finance the installation of a new, high-efficiency heat pump at a member's home. We can also refer you to any number of local, certified HVAC dealers to change out your system for you. In addition, we can include the monthly installment payments on your electric bill. Furthermore, Blue Ridge will schedule our energy conservation advisor to come to your house to conduct a free inspection of your new unit. We want to make certain the heat pump meets our standards and your expectations.

If you're in that contemplative mood this month—or any other month—I encourage you to be in touch with our Blue Ridge member service center. Now's an excellent time to take action and to have your home better equipped for those oppressively warm or bitterly cold days that await us. We're here to serve you!

JIM LOVINGGOOD
President and CEO

Memorial Day closing

All Blue Ridge offices will be closed on Monday, May 27, to celebrate Memorial Day. Emergency crews will be on standby, and dispatchers will be answering the telephones around the clock. Have a safe and happy holiday!

A bit of co-op history is found

THE HISTORY OF rural electrification in South Carolina had a starting point in 1935. That was the year the state's General Assembly approved legislation that led to the establishment of the South Carolina Rural Electrification Authority (SCREA). At that point in time, fewer than three percent of the state's farms were receiving central-station electric power. Almost immediately, the SCREA entered into a relationship with the newly formed Rural Electrification Administration (REA) in Washington.

With loan funds provided by the federal REA, the state authority soon began the process of extending power lines into the vast, unserved areas of the Palmetto State. Before long, however, it became apparent that the SCREA had grown too large and unwieldy to be administered from Columbia. Long story short, the General Assembly took action that divided the state's land area into separate districts. Ultimately, those districts were organized into the 20 locally owned electric-distribution cooperatives that, at present, serve around 1,600,000 S.C. citizens.

1,680 metered accounts inherited

Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative had its organizational beginning in 1940 and inherited 1,680 metered accounts from the SCREA. Building upon that base, the Blue Ridge membership has climbed beyond 66,000 today.

That brings us to a special story that unfolded in March of this year. It seems a Blue Ridge crew was at work on a line-conversion project in Oconee County's Oak Grove School community. When upgrading a single-phase line to three phase, most if not all of the existing poles would need to be changed out. Taller, heavier poles would be installed to support the added crossarms, hardware, and cables that constitute a three-phase line.

The Oak Grove School line had seen regular maintenance through the years. However, it had remained a single-phase

line for all that time. Finally, the area's electrical load had increased to the point that the co-op's Engineering Work Plan mandated this particular system-improvement project.

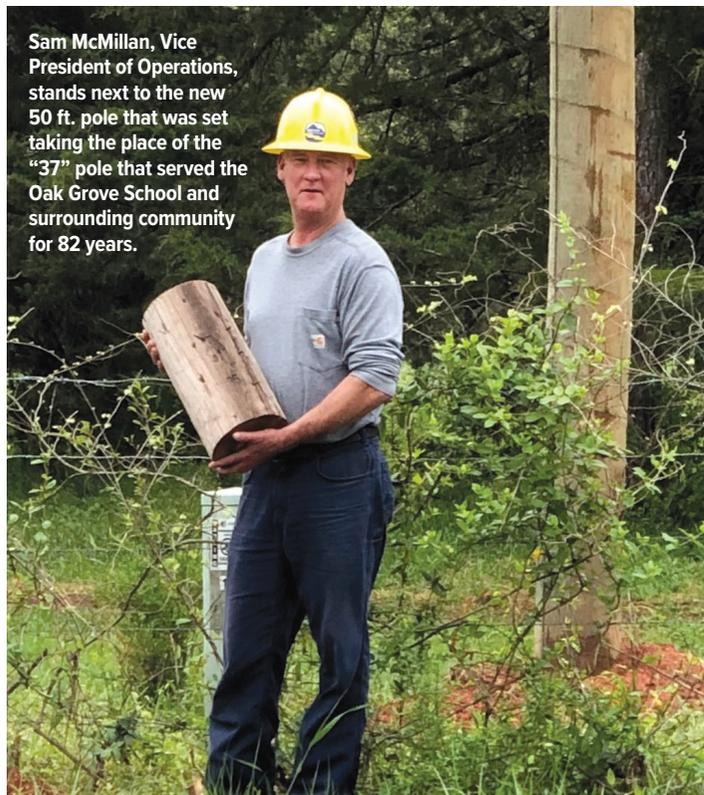
An old 35-foot wood pole

Long time Blue Ridge lineman, Richard Barnett, now retired, had grown up in this part of Oconee County, and his father had attended the Oak Grove School as a boy. He had been watching the work progress, telling the cooperative's vice president of operations, Sam McMillan, about some of the poles that were still in use. As the poles were being replaced, Sam was called to the scene of this line work. There he was confronted with an old 35-foot wood pole that had been branded with a surprising number: "37." That number, also known as a birthmark, identified the year in which the pole had been manufactured. That's right, 1937! This pole had held the transformer that served the Oak Grove School all those years ago. Less than a week later, this same crew ran across a second 1937-dated pole!

These poles had been set **82 years ago** by a crew employed by the old S.C.



DENISE MCCORMICK



Sam McMillan, Vice President of Operations, stands next to the new 50 ft. pole that was set taking the place of the "37" pole that served the Oak Grove School and surrounding community for 82 years.

Rural Electrification Authority; in other words, a full three years before Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative was chartered. In addition, the poles had been equipped with steel, as opposed to copper, ground wires. Furthermore, the two poles were in good enough condition to have remained in service. They were removed only because larger poles were necessary to take their place.

Blue Ridge President and CEO Jim Lovingsgood wondered aloud if there might be other such timbers among the more than 110,000 poles on the cooperative's system. "I find it simply remarkable that we've encountered these well-preserved specimens. We're going to have to consider ways to display these items as a means of adding more narrative to the telling of our co-op's story." Members of the cooperative's marketing group have already begun contemplating the possibilities.

Leaning on the pole it was cut from, this portion of the original bears the "37" birthmark. Sam McMillan points out that the tree has very tight rings and is probably about 175 years old. Amazingly, it was still doing its job.