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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

Broadband service is one step closer



IN SEPTEMBER, BLUE Ridge Electric Cooperative and West Carolina Telephone Cooperative, headquartered in Abbeville, entered into a partnership. On the adjoining page, you can read the press release announcing this agreement. However, I want to go beyond just facts and

share with you our process in choosing this path to bring broadband to our membership.

Most importantly, I'm impressed with the West Carolina folks. Through their WCFIBER subsidiary, they're delivering quality high-speed internet to a number of large geographic locations in both South Carolina and Georgia. The WCFIBER employee team enjoys a reputation for reliability and impeccable customer service. This group also meets another important qualification. Their operation was organized in 1952 under the cooperative business model. As a cooperative, their focus mirrors ours. I'm confident our two organizations, with our dedication to service and decades of experience in our respective fields, can excel in this area where others have struggled.

It's a little difficult to keep my excitement in check, knowing what this project will mean for our area. However, the reality is that it won't be a quick process. We'll begin with several pilot projects and extend service into those areas. These areas will be chosen primarily because there's already access to fiber that can be connected to additional homes or businesses. Other locations are being targeted to test levels of customer saturation. These pilot locations will allow us to evaluate all the many pieces that will go into making this a successful venture.

A complete buildout of the Blue Ridge system will have a price tag in excess of \$100 million. We have a strong conviction that our electric members shouldn't be burdened with subsidizing the implementation of broadband. Consequently, we're trying to strike a balance between supplying this service as quickly as possible, while also making sure it pays its own way. We believe that approach will enable us to serve our members and, at the same time, bring a much-needed convenience into their homes. Our solemn commitment is that we will accomplish these goals without losing sight of our primary mission of supplying reliable electric service. In reality, broadband possesses the potential of bringing added improvements to the cooperative's operation as well.

We all have much to learn as this process unfolds. I can tell you that the service we'll offer our members will qualify as the gold standard—fiber that connects directly to the home. That standard means that Blue Ridge will provide the very best in internet service. If you're interested in WCFIBER and their offerings, please visit gigupblueridge.com. I believe you'll like what you see.

This issue of *South Carolina Living* is the final one for this year. While 2020 has brought uncertainty to our lives in many ways, we still have so much for which to be thankful. I bring you wishes for peace during these Thanksgiving and Christmas seasons and look forward to what the New Year holds.

JIM LOVINGGOOD
 President and CEO



Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative and WCFIBER are partnering to bring broadband to the rural areas of Upstate South Carolina. Pictured from left are Zach Hinton, BREC vice president of support services, Jeff Wilson, WCFIBER CEO, Jim Lovinggood, BREC president and CEO and Russell Clark, WCFIBER director of business development.

Broadband project to begin

BLUE RIDGE ELECTRIC Cooperative will soon take its first steps toward supplying high-speed internet across its five-county service territory. Blue Ridge President and CEO Jim Lovinggood announced in September that the cooperative had entered into a partnership with WCFIBER to proceed with this project.

“WCFIBER is a subsidiary of West Carolina Telephone Cooperative, headquartered in Abbeville. This co-op is already a well-established provider of broadband. We believe our core values and service-oriented cultures are closely aligned and will make for a sound partnership,” Lovinggood says.

Blue Ridge has been involved in a two-year study

focused on the feasibility of delivering broadband to its membership. That study ultimately revealed that there was an obvious need for high-speed internet across large portions of the cooperative’s 1,800-square-mile service area.

From the outset, the co-op’s management and board have stipulated that entering the broadband business wouldn’t create costs that would be borne by the utility’s electric ratepayers.

“We definitely want to avoid any member subsidies being utilized to underwrite this project, and so our plan is to go down this path gradually,” Lovinggood notes.

Blue Ridge officials expect that broadband will result in added improvements to

the cooperative’s operation. Future applications of the technology should bring enhancements in electric-service dependability, power-cost efficiencies and creative rate design.

Over time, by employing a conservative approach, the cooperative expects to reach all unserved or underserved communities with quality high-speed internet service. “The bottom line is that without access to federal or state grants, it could be a number of years before every corner of the Blue Ridge region would have broadband,” Lovinggood says. “Be that as it may, we plan to keep chipping away until the time that everyone who wants high-speed internet will have it.”

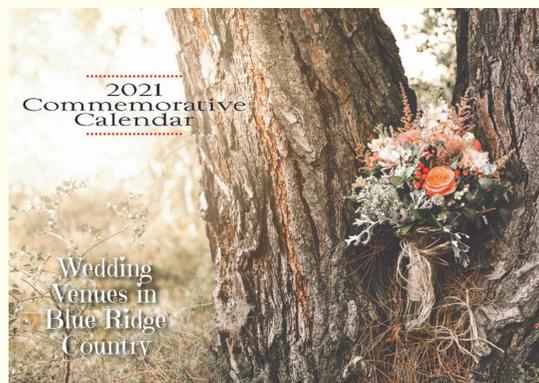
Recently, the S.C. General Assembly approved legislation that signaled its support for improving access to broadband. One provision of that bill would allow electricity suppliers like Blue Ridge to use existing power lines and easements to accommodate the extensions of the fiber cable. That provision would help to hold down expenses and also facilitate the delivery of fiber directly to every home or other account served by the cooperative.

“We appreciate these actions taken by our state legislators, and we’re excited about the prospect of making this additional service available to our members,” Lovinggood says.

Calendar theme celebrates weddings

Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative is privileged to serve a number of farms that have taken their beautiful views and peaceful lands and transformed them into wedding venues and event centers.

Visit 12 of these local spots in the 2021 Blue Ridge Commemorative Calendar, Weddings in Blue Ridge Country. While our lobbies remain closed, calendars can be picked up at the drive-through window at both locations beginning Dec 1.



Holiday closings

Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative will be closed Nov. 26-27, Dec. 24-25 and Jan. 1 for the holidays. We will have dispatchers in the office and crews on call for emergencies during these times. Happy holidays!

