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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
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Digital dignity

LAST MONTH, while attending a rural broadband conference, I heard one of the presenters use the term “digital dignity.” That term had an immediate impact on me, and I began to think about how the concept of “dignity” could apply to rural broadband.

This past July, America celebrated its 246th birthday. Historians who have recorded that lengthy history could cite multitudes of milestones that have impacted our nation’s progress along the way. One such milestone is the rural electrification movement.

A dark, isolated existence

Beginning in 1935, about 1,000 member-owned electric cooperatives nationwide were established. Consequently, people living in rural areas, who had previously endured a dark, isolated existence of unending drudgery could now enjoy the same conveniences that had long been available in the cities. The co-ops were, in essence, creating “dignity” and “electrical equality” for their members.

A similarly proud story is now playing out within today’s utility landscape. The efforts of hundreds of electric cooperatives are presently concentrated on the task of taking broadband service to areas where it had been unavailable.

The digital divide: a big problem

It took the COVID pandemic to demonstrate what a big problem the digital divide had actually become. Life had to go on despite the quarantines and other actions taken to combat the virus. However, many students who might take classes remotely at home and adults who might want to work from home simply didn’t have that option. In some locations, the lack of high-speed internet was having negative impacts on real estate values and proposed economic development projects.

Moreover, broadband had assumed an importance that many viewed as critical as electricity or other utility services.

Acting with dignity means doing the right thing, even when it’s the difficult thing. Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative has taken on the difficult task of deploying broadband in some of the most rural, unserved areas in South Carolina. While others have waited for funding to build into these critical areas of need, Blue Ridge continues to do the right thing by constructing fiber into these areas as rapidly as possible with very little outside funding.

Here at Blue Ridge, we’ve had crews in the field since February of 2021, installing fiber optic cable in communities across our service territory. In two years, we’ve connected more than 9,000 customers to our broadband network. That’s truly a great start, and we’re going to press on until everyone within our five-county region who wants broadband will have it, thus, giving them “digital dignity” and “digital equality.”

As that process continues to unfold, we also expect our electric members to realize further benefits from our involvement in the internet business. With planned runs of fiber optic cable connected to our substations and other distribution equipment, we’ll be in a position to have access to “real-time” data and offer even more-dependable service to all those on our power grid.

The cooperative is poised to be the engine that keeps bringing “digital dignity” to so many who, up until now, have had to do without. That would seem to fit perfectly with what we see as our historic calling.

JIM LOVINGGOOD
President and CEO

Lee represents state on national council

BY JOSH P. CROTZER

AMONG OLIVIA LEE'S peers on the Youth Leadership Council, few are likely to have more experience in leadership roles.

The Walhalla High School senior represents South Carolina in the national cooperative program after she was elected by other outstanding South Carolina student delegates during last summer's Washington Youth Tour. It's a position that seems to fit Lee, who is her school's student body president and editor of the yearbook. A week before she attended the Blue Ridge Electric sponsored trip to the nation's capital in June, she participated in another prestigious leadership development program—Palmetto Girls State.

"I love to learn, and I think leading gives you the best opportunity to do

so," says Lee. "I like to lead from the front and the back. I lead from the front by directing and setting the example. Leading from the back is just as important. Good leadership is being in it with your peers, following up and being there for the final steps."

Since the summer, Lee's learning experience has continued with the Youth Leadership Council, an ambassador program that develops leadership, public speaking skills and enhances the youth delegates' knowledge of the energy industry and the cooperative form of business.

Lee has been collaborating with Blue Ridge Electric on a variety of assignments that have helped her connect with her cooperative. In December, she delivered a speech to the Blue Ridge Electric Board of Directors themed "Time to Lead." Lee



Olivia Lee

will be in Nashville this March with her fellow Youth Council members where she has the opportunity to become the Youth Leadership Council National Spokesperson.

"It has truly been an honor to serve as the Blue Ridge Electric representative," says Lee. "I feel I am representing the best corner of our country."

BREC website has new look

WE INVITE YOU to take a look at our new and improved Blue Ridge website. Co-op webmaster Amanda Machen has spent almost a year redesigning pages so that Blue Ridge members can more easily navigate the site to find what they need.

"Our marketing team looked at our pages, evaluated how often they were viewed and designed the new site to be user friendly and accessible," says Machen.

In addition to the redesigned website, our online member portal is a valuable tool for our Blue Ridge members. Once you log into the portal, you can pay your bill, view bill information, account history, sign up for alerts, report an outage and view the outage map. We have also added a Quick Pay option so members can make a payment without logging in.

Whatever questions you may have about Blue Ridge and your service, we hope you'll visit blueridge.coop. If there is something we've missed, call (800) 240-3400 and let us know what you need.

