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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



## Substations vital to quality service

**AS I'M PREPARING** this monthly report, we're just a few days away from the one-year anniversary of the

2022 Christmas Eve arctic blast. Many readers will likely recall that morning when the local outside temperature dropped to about seven degrees.

An unfortunate circumstance on that particular date was that there were some area baseload generating facilities off line. Consequently, they weren't available when they were desperately needed to help confront the heavy electrical load that peaked around 7 a.m. on that frosty morning. There was concern that large portions of the region's power-delivery system could fail as a consequence. In fact, a few utilities did have to resort to rolling blackouts to protect the electrical grid's integrity.

### New substation provides cushion

Fortunately, Blue Ridge and our members were spared the inconvenience of any planned service interruptions. It so happened that a few months earlier, in August, the cooperative had energized its new Dr. Johns substation in western Oconee County. That substation's capacity provided the margin or "cushion" that essentially enabled us to keep the power on for all our members.

At present, Blue Ridge has 40 substations that are in operation at electrical-load centers located across our service territory. These stations are vital to the co-op's efforts to deliver quality service to our membership.

### Responding to growth

As rapidly as the Upstate is now growing, system planning ranks high among our responsibilities. At this

moment, a rebuild is under way on our existing substation in Oconee's Fair Play community. Once that work is completed sometime in 2024, we'll have added two more major three-phase circuits to that station, which significantly increases our ability to serve our ever-growing communities. Also, the voltage feeding into the Fair Play facility will have been upped from 44 kW to 100 kW.

The completion of the upgrade to the Fair Play substation will put Blue Ridge in a stronger position to meet the growing demand for electricity that's developing along Oconee County's Interstate 85 corridor.

About 25 miles up I-85 from Fair Play sits the cooperative's new Exit 27 industrial substation. This unit is dedicated to serving the large power load companies that are choosing to locate at this busy highway intersection.

The next several years are expected to see three more new substations brought on line at strategic locations. Plans also entail the rebuild of our existing Coneross station in a fashion like that of the Fair Play facility.

These growth opportunities bring with them the resulting reality of ever-improving service for our members, that is at the forefront of our decision making. We at Blue Ridge pride ourselves in providing exceptional service to our members and ensuring that power is always readily available. We remain committed to providing services to our members that are relevant and transformative in an ever-changing world.

**JIM LOVINGGOOD**  
President and CEO

## A partnership that's flourishing

OF THE 850 electric distribution cooperatives in America today, more than 200 have entered the broadband business. The majority of these transitions have involved cooperatives partnering with a consulting firm to help guide the process. Initially, Blue Ridge conferred with consultants about its broadband plans, but those discussions didn't quite meet our satisfaction level.

During this time, Blue Ridge President Jim Lovinggood became aware of West Carolina Telephone Co-op in Abbeville, which has a reputation for delivering quality services. West Carolina's president and CEO, Jeff Wilson, is recognized as a strong leader. After preliminary contacts, the two CEOs agreed to meet.

It soon became apparent that Blue Ridge and West Carolina have very similar cultures. They both operate in conformity to the cooperative business model. Their respective staffs and board members share a like-mindedness.

In addition, each of the co-ops brought a key ingredient to the table. For West Carolina, it is the cooperative's expertise. Blue Ridge has an 1,800-square-mile territory populated with tens of thousands of members who needed internet service. That territory also included more than 7,000 miles of Blue

CHAD DALTON



Blue Ridge CEO Jim Lovinggood (center) and West Carolina CEO Jeff Wilson (right) recently shared their business model at the National Rural Electric Development Association. They are pictured with a representative from Nex-Tech, a telephone/fiber cooperative in Kansas.

Ridge power-line infrastructure that could support the fiber-optic cable that would deliver broadband to members.

Out of that combination, Upcountry Fiber was born. By the end of 2023, more than 17,000 newly served customers were receiving Upcountry Fiber's high-quality service.

The partnership between Blue Ridge and West Carolina is a unique success story that has drawn attention nationwide. In February 2022, officials at the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) invited Lovinggood and Wilson to present at the association's annual meeting. Since then, they have discussed the partnership's success at three other business meetings and are scheduled to address another such session.

Both the business community's reaction and the project's progress provide impressive evidence that the Upcountry Fiber partnership has proven to be a winning combination.

## Ready for an experience you won't forget?

Your co-op has two amazing trips planned this summer. Juniors: Apply for the Washington Youth Tour. Sophomores: Apply for the Cooperative Youth Summit.

**Juniors:** Experience Washington, D.C., with hundreds of students from across South Carolina and the country, meeting lawmakers and touring all the sights. Your electric co-op will cover your round-trip plane ticket, tours and meals. In other words, it's all free!

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