

OWNED BY THOSE WE SERVE

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CEO'S CORNER



Here to serve you

Michael S. McWaters
Executive V.P./CEO

Spring is often thought of as a season for beginnings. Longer days gradually lead to summer while plants and animals that retreated during the winter start to reappear.

For students in our area, this can also be a time for endings. The school year is coming to a close, and high school seniors may be getting ready to say their good-byes as they prepare to head off to college or to enter the workforce.

As a community-owned cooperative, SVEC is dedicated to preparing the next generation of leaders to take that critical step in life. One way we help is by sponsoring students in our area for the annual Florida Electric Cooperative Association Youth Tour in Tallahassee.

The Youth Tour is an exceptional opportunity for young people. They learn about cooperatives and state government. The students also learn ways they can make a difference in our society.

Of course, SVEC is committed to providing exceptional service for every member throughout the year. In fact, we have an entire department dedicated to answering questions and solving problems for you.

In this month's newsletter, we take a closer look at the hard work these cooperative employees put in every day to make sure our members are well-served. I hope you'll take some time to read about what it takes to do that job. And if you know one of these people, please join me in thanking them for their dedication. ■

Suwannee Valley CURRENTS

April 2018



Hunter McCulley, left, Daniel Hendrick, Hanna McCray, Sarah-Beth Lee, Sara McWaters, Destiny Fennell, Grace Jackson, Dawson Hall and Christian Rodriguez visit the Florida State Capitol.

Florida Youth Tour inspires local students

When Lafayette High School junior Grace Jackson sat on the floor of the Florida House of Representatives for a mock debate, appreciation for the Youth Tour experience sank in. As she took in the room from the perspective of a state lawmaker, she realized what a unique opportunity she had been given.

"That was probably my favorite part because we got to see what it's like to be a representative," she says. "You'll never get to do that again. I would definitely recommend it to any student who is interested."

Jackson was one of 10 local high school students who attended the Florida Electric Cooperatives 2018 Tallahassee Youth Tour in February, courtesy of Suwannee Valley Electric Cooperative. Each student applied and was chosen based on their GPA and a written essay.

Students toured the Governor's Mansion, held a mock bill debate on the floor of the House of Representatives, and visited the state Supreme Court and the Museum of Florida History.

For Christian Rodriguez, a homeschool junior, the sites weren't necessarily new. As vice president of the Florida 4-H State Council, he planned and attended trips to Tallahassee before, but the opportunity to meet students from throughout the state was something unique.

"I'd done most of the stuff on that trip before, but getting to do it with this

group of people I hadn't spent much time with is what made the tour so fun," he says.

Rodriguez also feels that the experience will serve him well as he begins working toward his goal of a career in Christian radio.

"We're talking to not only young people from around the state but also to senators and representatives," he says. "It really helps me learn how to talk on the fly in a way that I will need to do on radio."

The experience was similarly formative for Jackson, who had already been thinking about pursuing a law career and was particularly impacted by her visit to the Supreme Court.

"That really solidified what I want to do as a lawyer," she says. "I want to work with justices and with representatives to help them make our state a better place."

Both Jackson and Rodriguez will represent SVEC at the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Youth Tour in Washington, D.C., this June. While Rodriguez is looking forward to the chance to meet new people from different cultures, Jackson is eager to see students like her take their first steps toward national leadership.

"I believe that it's very important for students like us to be involved in politics and our government," she says. "I think that's going to be beyond amazing." ■

THE FACE OF THE COOPERATIVE

SVEC member services makes your experience better

As a cashier, Debbie Edwards is always aware that she might be the only person a visitor to the cooperative meets.

They might never need to speak to an engineer. They may never have to call in about an issue. But they will come to her to pay their bill.

“We’re right there in the front, and they see us before they see anyone else,” Edwards says. “So we smile and try to present ourselves well for the co-op. We’re like the face of SVEC, all of us in member services.”

With nearly 20 years of experience, Edwards is well-equipped to represent the cooperative. She has worked as an engineering service representative, a job in which she connected new members with SVEC engineers, and an accounting aid. Then, she found her niche out front.

From that vantage, she watched SVEC change over the years to serve members better. Perhaps the biggest change has been the installation of meters that can automatically send readings to the cooperative.

That particular advancement not only saves time and money for the cooperative but also gives members unprecedented control over their electric usage. With meters sending new readings daily, members can track their usage using SVEC’s online and mobile SmartHub app. Members can easily see how simple changes in energy use can impact their bill.

Now, approaching her retirement on May 18, Edwards looks forward to spending more time with her kids and grandkids, as

well as the opportunity to travel with her sister and to become more involved with outreach programs at church.

But she expects there will still be days when she misses her work family and the chance to be that important point of contact for members.

“I think I’m going to miss the members that I’ve been serving,” she says. “I enjoy meeting with the members. Some of them come in, and you get to talking to them. It’s a good feeling to be able to help them out.”

THE RIGHT CONNECTION

At any given time, Member Service Representative Christy Tuckey could be working through one of a dozen different issues for a cooperative member.

She could answer a question about a member’s bill or account one moment and troubleshoot an issue on SmartHub the next. If a member wants to add a new account, is having problems with their area light, or wants to report a tree that has fallen and taken some power lines with it, the process starts with a member service representative.

“Any of those things go through us first before we pass them along to the service department or engineering,” Tuckey says. “We’re kind of the middleman who gathers all the information and then figures out what needs to be done or who it needs to go to.”

As if that weren’t enough, Tuckey can walk members



Debbie Edwards has nearly 20 years of experience at SVEC.

through those solutions in two languages. Born in Puerto Rico, she’s one of two service representatives at SVEC who can answer questions for members in both English and Spanish.

“It helps us be more available for our members. I speak with

a Spanish-speaking member more or less on a daily basis, so it’s good to have that skill and that ability to help them,” she says.

Answering such a wide variety of questions requires SVEC representatives to be knowl-

edgeable about everything happening at the cooperative. The Member Service Department also regularly sends employees to conferences so they can bring back updates on the latest trends and new practices that can make them more efficient.

“It can be challenging because there is so much info out there and projects happening in other departments,” Tuckey says. “We want to do our best to stay in the loop because by doing that, we keep our members in the loop.”

While finding time to both problem-solve and build personal relationships can sometimes be tricky, it’s a challenge that Tuckey finds exciting.

“You form relationships with people you’ve helped in your time here,” she says. “I like the behind-the-scenes work that goes on, but I get as much enjoyment out of the connections we make with our members.”

A BETTER EXPERIENCE FOR YOU

With so much of members’ personal information at their fingertips, employees in the Member Service Department place a high priority on security. That means members should always be prepared to verify

information like their address, account number and phone number when visiting the cooperative or calling a member service representative.

“We must keep personal information safe,” says Tuckey. “Therefore, we ask questions to verify the identity of the person we are speaking with.”

Without such verification, representatives may only be able to help the member in a limited capacity.

In addition to making visits to the cooperative and phone calls easier, providing up-to-date information can also help the cooperative provide better customer service in other ways.

Up-to-date information in the outage reporting system ensures that the next time a member reports a service problem, the co-op can respond more efficiently. That information also allows members to pay their bill through the automated payment system, get account notifications from the cooperative, and link up everything in their online account so that it works smoothly when they want to check their balance.

At the same time, SVEC is constantly looking for new ways to make it easier for members to do business with the cooperative. Sometimes that involves



Member Service Representative Christy Tuckey is bilingual, giving her the capability to communicate with both English- and Spanish-speaking members.

changing how automated systems work, so members should always pay attention to menu prompts when calling on the phone.

The cooperative also knows that it’s not always feasible to call or make a trip to the office. That’s why SVEC also offers live chat service on its website, as well as the ability to make inquiries through SmartHub.

But even as SVEC contin-

ues to adopt new technology to better communicate with members, the cooperative will always be dedicated to providing a truly personal experience.

“We want to strike a balance between moving forward with these technology advances and being there for that human connection with our members as well,” says Tuckey. “If someone want to talk to another person, we’ll always be here for them.” ■

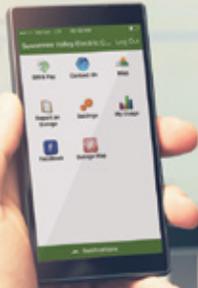


You're invited

IDENTITY PROTECTION 101

Stop by the Suwannee Valley Regional Library in Live Oak at 6 p.m. **Thursday, April 26**, to learn how to protect your identity. Find out about debit and credit card fraud and wireless pickpocketing and learn how to acquire a free copy of your credit report.

Sign up for SmartHub today!



SmartHub is a web and mobile app that lets you conveniently manage your SVEC account. Anytime. Anywhere.

Monitor your electricity use | View and pay your bill | Report service issues | And more!

You can track your payment history, view your current and past bills and pay your bill securely with just a few clicks. Save time and avoid late fees or service disruptions by signing up for automatic recurring payments. You can also set up your preferred payment method and take care of your bills quickly and conveniently.

Through SmartHub's detailed graphs and integrated weather data, monitor your electricity use and find ways to reduce it. SmartHub users have lowered their bills by discovering issues and practices that lead to high energy consumption.

Outages and other service issues can be reported from your SmartHub account. You can also view an outage map and receive notifications when your power is restored.

SmartHub can also send you customizable account notifications. Tell SmartHub when and how to contact you, and you can receive emails or texts with important information about your account.

Common notifications include:

Bill is available | Payment is due | Payment has been received | Credit card on file has expired

With SmartHub, you never have to search for SVEC's phone number or email address. Just touch a button in the mobile app to call us, inquire about a bill, order an area light or initiate a variety of other service requests.



To access the SmartHub app on an iPhone or iPad, simply scan this QR code with your device.



To access the SmartHub app on an Android device, simply scan this QR code with your device.

Register with county emergency management

Hurricane season begins June 1, so make sure some of the most vulnerable are protected.

The Florida Division of Emergency Management allows citizens with special needs to register with their county emergency management agency.

Information submitted to the registry will only be used to plan and, if necessary, to provide emergency or disaster services.

Residents of all Florida counties can register using the online Florida Special Needs Registry: snr.floridadisaster.org.

Residents of Columbia, Hamilton, Lafayette and Suwannee counties can also request a special needs registration form by visiting or calling their county's emergency management office:

Columbia County:

263 NW Lake City Ave., Lake City, FL 32055, 386-758-1383.

Hamilton County:

1133 US Hwy 41 NW, Suite 1, Jasper, FL 32052, 386-792-6647.

Lafayette County:

194 SW Virginia Circle, Mayo, FL 32066, 386-294-1950.

Suwannee County:

617 Ontario Ave. SW, Live Oak, FL 32064, 386-364-3405.



Have you been saving **Box Tops for Education** without a plan on where to send them?

SVEC is here to help. Just drop off, or mail, your stash to the SVEC office.

We will make sure they are delivered to local school districts.



Mail:

P.O. Box 160
Live Oak, FL 32064

Drop-off:

11340 100th St.,
Live Oak, Florida

SVEC is an equal opportunity provider and employer.