

## Monthly Co-op Progress Report - January 2020



## Co-ops – Just People Being Neighbors

By Julie Jones

In my role as communications and public relations coordinator, my days are varied. On some days, I speak with future student leaders. On other days, I am helping community members be more energy-efficient, and on rare days I talk to frustrated consumer members. Recently though, I had the privilege of speaking with our consumer member, Mr. Bill Culwell of Crossville.

Mr. Culwell called in the hopes of acknowledging two Volunteer Energy employees, Kevin Hembree and Brad Daugherty. Kevin is an engineer, and Brad is a lineman in our Crossville service area.

A Navy veteran, Mr. Culwell, became a contractor in 1977 after leaving the service. At that time, Culwell lived in Nashville, where he had Nashville Electric Service (NES) as a power provider. He owned a business working as a contractor for the next 20 years, which he sold in 1997.

Mr. Culwell and his wife visited Cumberland County, and when the opportunity came, they bought property and moved from Nashville. The purchase required updating, including remodeling a cabin and building a home. Each update required VEC support. That is where our guys entered the picture. Kevin Hembree has worked for VEC since 1998. "Mr. Culwell," he said, "has been building a house since the end of the '90s. I've done several staking jobs



Kevin Hembree and Brad Daugherty of the Crossville service area

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for him. Brad and I helped when there was a problem with a broken service line. He's a nice man."

In our conversation, Mr. Culwell emphasized the availability of Hembree and Daugherty for questions. "I have called them often, and they both are so helpful." He went on to say, "Kevin is sharp as a tack, but he is also kind and considerate." Culwell stated, "All my dealings with Kevin and Brad have been outstanding. I am a big fan of the cooperative model because it is everyday people being neighbors and helping each other out."

Kevin and Brad are a prime example of what our cooperative, VEC, stands for - neighbors helping neighbors.

## Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Placing hot food in the refrigerator makes the appliance work harder than necessary, using more energy. Allow food to cool down before you place it in the fridge.



### UPDATE YOUR PHONE NUMBER TODAY

When you update your phone number(s) you will become eligible for a prize drawing.

You can update your information by calling your service center, using SmartHub, or by logging into your account at [vec.org](http://vec.org). You can also use the form on the back of your bill.



### Tennessee Valley Authority

Residential & Outdoor Lighting

**Fuel Cost Adjustment**  
Effective **March 1, 2020**

**1.763¢**

For the most current FCA information, visit [www.vec.org](http://www.vec.org)

Volunteer Energy Cooperative is an Equal Opportunity provider and employer.

## Broadband Update

In 2017, Governor Bill Haslam introduced legislation that would allow Tennessee Electric Cooperatives to provide retail broadband service to their members. After a number of amendments to the bill, the state senate and house voted to pass the bill, both with overwhelming support.

Volunteer Energy Cooperative (VEC) actually started working on a business model a number of months in advance of the legislation becoming law, anticipating the change. VEC is committed to serving our rural communities with high-speed internet, the same communities that other local providers have overlooked.

In 2018, VEC partnered with Twin Lakes Telephone Cooperative to initiate a broadband pilot in the Hopewell community of Bradley County. Residents were contacted via direct mail notifying them they were eligible for the pilot program. Members called in to indicate their interest and construction began.

At the completion of the pilot, 616 homes in north Bradley County gained access to gig-speed internet. Since then, VEC has been actively applying for numerous state and federal grants to aid in the cost of additional broadband construction. In 2018, VEC was awarded a \$1 million matching grant to install fiber in the Birchwood community of Hamilton and Meigs counties. In 2019, VEC was awarded a \$1.3 million matching grant to install fiber in the Spring Creek community of McMinn County.

Both of the grant projects are currently underway, and VEC expects construction to be completed by the end of 2020. Once finished, 730 homes in Birchwood will have access to gig-speed internet, and another 867 homes in Spring Creek will have access to gig-speed internet.

VEC has also applied for two grants from the state in late 2019, one for the Ten Mile community in North Meigs and South Roane counties, and another for the Cumberland Cove community in Putnam County. While the state is offering \$20 million in grants for the current round of funding, each grant can only receive a maximum of \$2 million and



Rody Blevins  
President/CEO  
Volunteer Energy Cooperative

VEC is committed to serving our rural communities with high speed internet ... communities that other local providers have overlooked.

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VECcustomers Shares is a grant program that is funded through the rounding up of member's bills to the nearest dollar. The most an individual member would pay within a year is \$11.88, and our members usually average \$5.50 each for a year.

In return for the rounded up change from our members, we contribute to organizations across our 17 county service area. Each month the VECcustomers Share Board meets and distributes the funds collected in the previous month. Every service area is represented by a board member and the funding is split according to the numbers of members in that area. In January, VECcustomers Share Grants totaled \$27,300. Since 2001 more than 6.7 million has been granted.

Homestead Elementary Coordinated School Health Team is a grant recipient. Using this grant, Homestead Elementary will gain access to the Power-Up Your School exercise program. Power Up Your School is evidence-based physical activity aligned with academic standards. Students build upon reading and math skills through exercises, activities, and games.

"We're excited for the opportunity to start PowerUp Your School at Homestead Elementary," said PE Teacher, Lauren Mathews. "Our students will benefit from the PowerUp resources that make fitness enjoyable for their age, while also having a positive impact on their academic achievement."

Homestead Elementary is the first Cumberland County School to implement PowerUp Your School and will serve as a pilot site for the district. As a result of participating in the exercises and games, students will be more focused and engaged when they re-enter the classroom.

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there is strong competition for the money, yet we have high hopes at least one of the two projects will be awarded.

As we move forward on the broadband buildout, please remember a few things. One, the VEC service area is vast. To execute a new business plan and to bring the service to fruition will take several years. Also, the installation of fiber optic cable is a costly and lengthy undertaking. We will work as quickly as possible, utilizing all available resources to expedite our projects, but the timing of the roll out will be limited by the scope of each individual project.

## 5 STEPS FOR SAFE DIGGING

Working on an outdoor project? Always call VEC and 8-1-1 first, because you never know what's below. Here are five easy steps for safe digging:

|   |   |  |   |  |
|---|---|--|---|--|
| <p><b>1. NOTIFY</b></p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Call VEC and 8-1-1 two to three days before you start.</p>  | <p><b>2. WAIT</b></p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Wait two to three days for a response to your request. Affected utilities will send a locator to mark any underground utility lines.</p>  | <p><b>3. CONFIRM</b></p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Confirm that all affected utilities have responded by comparing the markers to the list of utilities the 8-1-1 call center notified.</p>  | <p><b>4. RESPECT</b></p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Respect the markers provided by the affected utilities. They are your guide for the duration of your project.</p>  | <p><b>5. DIG CAREFULLY</b></p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">If you can't avoid digging near the markers (within 18-24 inches on all sides, depending on state laws), consider moving your project.</p>  |
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### Organizations receiving grants in January

|  |         |   |       |
|--|---------|---|-------|
| Polk County High School Civics Club                | \$2,000 | Keep McMinn Beautiful                     | \$500 |
| York Institute Scholars Bowl Club                  | \$1,450 | Monterey Baseball Boosters                | \$500 |
| Spring City Chamber of Commerce                    | \$1,250 | Friends of Monterey VFW Post 6277         | \$500 |
| STARTS (Support The ARTS)                          | \$1,250 | Kidney Foundation of Chattanooga          | \$500 |
| Lake Tansi Security Police Department              | \$1,250 | North Lee Elementary PTO                  | \$500 |
| Pickett County High School Baseball                | \$1,010 | York Institute Track Program              | \$500 |
| Pickett County Rescue Squad                        | \$1,010 | Highway 58 Volunteer Fire Department      | \$500 |
| Midway FFA   | \$1,000 | CASA of Bradley and Polk Counties         | \$500 |
| Cumberland County Imagination Library              | \$1,000 | The American Legion, Post 257             | \$500 |
| Monterey High School Cheerleaders                  | \$852   | Tri-State Therapeutic Riding Center       | \$500 |
| Meigs Middle School Archery Club                   | \$850   | Pickett Historical & Genealogical Society | \$480 |
| W4RGT - Communications Support                     | \$800   | My Brother's Keeper of SE TN, Inc.        | \$450 |
| Rogers Creek PTO                                   | \$750   | Midway Youth Development                  | \$350 |
| Rhea County High Men's Soccer Team                 | \$750   | Roane County Lady Knights Lacrosse        | \$300 |
| National Honor Society of Meigs County High School | \$750   | Monterey Senior Citizens Center           | \$248 |
| Midway High Clay Target Program                    | \$700   | Meigs County Historical Society           | \$200 |
| Stone Memorial                                     | \$500   | Quarter Back Club of Meigs County         | \$200 |
| Cumberland Christian Counseling Center             | \$500   | Cookeville Housing Services               | \$200 |
| Kids on the Rise                                   | \$500   | Meigs County High Football Boosters       | \$200 |
| Rip City Basketball Club                           | \$500   | Mended Hearts, Chapter 127                | \$200 |
| Central High School Ruriteen Club                  | \$500   | Meigs County Crush 8U Baseball            | \$200 |
|  |         | Meigs Fury 12U Softball                   | \$200 |



## Less Than One Month Until U.S. Households Receive 2020 Census Invitations

Between March 12 and March 20, invitations to participate in the 2020 Census will arrive in households across the country.

"The Census Bureau is ready for the nation to respond," said Census Bureau Director Dr. Steven Dillingham. "Millions of Americans are applying for 2020 Census jobs, more than 270,000 local and national organizations are engaged, and in less than 30 days the majority of U.S. households will receive an invitation to respond to help ensure that every person in the U.S. is counted."

"The 2020 Census is on mission, on schedule, and on budget to promote an accurate count," Dillingham continued. "Response is important because statistics from the census are used in distributing hundreds of billions in funding for school lunches, hospitals, roads and much more. The invitations will remind respondents to include everyone living in the household, whether they are related or not. This includes young children. Your response will impact communities for the next decade."

This invitation will include instructions on how to respond to the 2020 Census online or by phone. By April 1, most households will have received an invitation delivered either by mail or by a census taker. In areas of the country that are less likely to respond online, a paper questionnaire will be included in the initial mailing to households. Reminder mailings will be sent to households that do not respond, and in the fourth mailing, every household that has not yet responded will receive a paper questionnaire.