

Alabama Living

FEBRUARY 2012

A photograph showing a man in a light blue shirt and sunglasses sitting in the driver's seat of a white truck. Two young boys are standing on the back of the truck. One boy, wearing a red shirt and blue jeans, is looking down at something on the truck. The other boy, wearing a blue shirt and blue jeans, is leaning over the side of a large white metal container. The container is mounted on the truck and has a red logo on its side. The background shows a field of trees and a clear sky.

Agribusiness in Alabama

**Cattle farmers fight
effects of summer
drought well into winter**

Plus...

- **Avoid heat strips, save money**
- **Legislative involvement**
- **WEC has a new mobile app**

Your WEC TRUSTEES



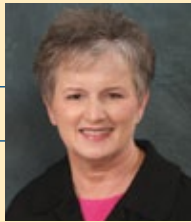
Donald Ray Wilks, District 7
PRESIDENT

Kip Justice, District 6
VICE PRESIDENT



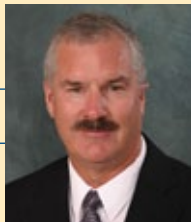
Debra E. Baxley, District 1
SECRETARY

Donna Parrish, District 2



John Clark Jr., District 3

Danny McNeil, District 4



Tracy Reeder, District 5

Greg McCullough, District 8



Nolan Laird, District 9

United Way proves people are still ready to lend a hand

by Michael S. McWaters, CEO



From Aug. 1, 2011 to January 7 of this year, people across the Wiregrass region gave their time and money to an important cause: helping their neighbors.

Wiregrass United Way set a goal of raising donations and pledges of \$2.35 million to benefit the people of Coffee, Dale, Geneva, Henry and Houston counties. The giving people of the Wiregrass region exceeded that goal, raising \$2.42 million and earning a \$400,000 challenge grant from the Wiregrass Foundation!

It's easy to think about United Way as simply helping those in dire need or crisis situations. But as the Geneva County Board Chair for United Way, I am proud of the fact that the organization touches many areas of our society. Wiregrass United Way has 38 partnering agencies that provide invaluable services to Wiregrass residents. Each agency falls into one of these focus areas:

- Helping youth succeed
- Meeting basic needs
- Serving people with special needs
- Strengthening families and individuals

Chances are, your family or someone you know has been directly impacted by one of these 38 agencies. They include: Boy Scouts of America, Boys & Girls Club, Enterprise YMCA, Girl Scouts of South Central Alabama, American Red Cross, Salvation Army, Wiregrass Area United Way Food Bank, Wiregrass Habitat for Humanity, Guide Dogs of America, Wiregrass Rehabilitation Center, Alfred Saliba Family Services Center, East Geneva Senior Citizens Center, V.O.C.A.L. - Wiregrass Angel House and The Exchange Center for Child Abuse Prevention.

Thank you to everyone who gave during the recent campaign. If you missed the opportunity, it is not too late. Visit the website at www.wuw.org to learn how to pledge and to read more about the great work your money is doing in this region. After all, when you give to United Way, you are giving to your neighbors and friends who are blessed by one of these 38 agencies.

I am proud of everyone involved, but I am particularly proud of the Geneva County chapter. In 2010, Geneva County raised more than \$90,000. For 2011, the goal was set at an ambitious \$150,000! Not only did we reach that goal, we exceeded it by some \$5,000! That spirit of united giving is such a blessing to see, especially in these tough economic times.

In other matters, please be sure to read our story on legislative involvement, which begins on Page 6. There are so many issues at the state and national levels that could impact your power bill, it is important for you to understand how your cooperative is involved in making your voice heard. ☞

Need help paying for college?

Apply for the Electric Cooperative Scholarship!

Wiregrass Electric Cooperative offers a scholarship opportunity to help high school seniors achieve their goal of attending college.

Area high school seniors who are a dependent of a WEC member have an opportunity to apply for a \$1,000 scholarship through the Electric Cooperative Foundation.

Each year the foundation awards scholarships to deserving seniors from each cooperative represented. Any eligible high school senior entering an accredited learning institution as a full-time student may apply.

Seniors may receive an application from their high school guidance counselor, at any WEC office, or online at www.wiregrass.coop.

Deadline for completed applications is March 16
APPLY TODAY!



Want to save money on heating costs?

Avoid heat strips!


Big swings on your thermostat's dial can lead to big numbers on your next power bill.

When you set your heat pump's thermostat to suddenly jump several degrees, its auxiliary heat source kicks in. Most often, this means heat strips.

For example, you may set your thermostat to 65 during the day to save energy when no one is home. But if you bump it to 75 when you get home, the heat strips will likely erase any savings.

"When the heat strips kick in, your energy demand soars," explains **Jesse Ingram**, manager of energy services for WEC.

The most efficient way to warm your home is to increase the thermostat gradually, by one- or two-degree steps, until it reaches the desired temperature. "Consider installing a programmable thermostat," Ingram suggests. "You can set it to gradually increase the temperature of your home so that it's warm and ready when you get up in the morning or return home in the afternoon."

And if you are in the market for a new heating unit, consider a dual fuel heat pump. You may be eligible for a rebate from WEC. For more information, contact Ingram at 800-239-4602 or 334-588-2223. 



WIREGRASS
ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

CONTACT INFORMATION

Business:
1-800-239-4602
(Mon.-Fri. 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.)

Toll Free Outage "Hotline":
1-888-4-MY-OUTAGE
1-888-469-6882
(24 hours a day)

website: www.wiregrass.coop
Find WEC on Twitter (twitter.com/wec2)
and Facebook

PAYMENT OPTIONS

BY MAIL
Wiregrass Electric Cooperative, Inc.
Department 1340
P.O. Box 2153
Birmingham, AL 35287-1340

WEBSITE
Payments may be made 24 hrs/day by
Visa, MasterCard, Discover,
American Express, and E-Check
on our website at www.wiregrass.coop

PHONE PAYMENTS
Payments may be made with a
customer service representative
during normal business hours.

NIGHT DEPOSITORY
Available at each office location.

IN PERSON
8:00 a.m. — 5:00 p.m. Mon.-Fri.

Hartford
509 N. State HWY 167,
Hartford, AL 36344

Samson
13148 W. State HWY 52,
Samson, AL 36477

Ashford
1066 Ashford Highway,
Ashford, AL 36312

Dothan
6167 Fortner St., Dothan, AL 36305

For questions regarding sanitation
service, call Houston County Sanitation
Department at 334-677-4705

LEGISLATIVE INVOLVEMENT

Cooperative groups keep an eye on state and national issues that could impact the price you pay for electricity

Sean Strickler has heard it before. He has listened to many people through the years make comments such as “the legislature doesn’t affect me,” or “nothing they do has an impact on me.”

But as vice president of public affairs for the Alabama Rural Elec-

tric Association (AREA), Strickler knows better. Serving Alabama’s electric cooperatives as their eyes and ears in state politics, he has seen the law of unintended consequences played out many times.

“That’s one of the reasons we as cooperatives are heavily involved in the legislative process,” says

Strickler. “We are not necessarily trying to initiate a lot of different laws in the legislature; rather, we’re working to stay on top of the issues to make sure what lawmakers do doesn’t have a big negative impact on our members.”

Not the original intent

The law of unintended consequences has played out dramatically since the November 2010 elections in Alabama. For example, stronger ethics laws were passed to prevent corruption among public officials. But as an unintended consequence of those laws, students cannot give a teacher a gift card for Christmas.

State and even national news outlets have reported on the unintended consequences of Alabama’s immigration laws passed in 2011. “We are now trying to clear up questions about whether an electric cooperative should be an enforcing body, checking a person’s status before providing them electricity,” says Strickler.

There is also a concern about the bureaucracy and paperwork added by the law. Strickler says electric cooperatives serve many state and local government buildings, putting cooperatives in a position of policing these entities to determine their hiring practices.

“AREA represents the interests of all the electric cooperatives in the state,” says **Michael S. McWaters**, CEO of WEC. “They have the important role of monitoring the

Please see AREA, Page 34

How to contact your state legislators

Sen. HARRI ANNE SMITH (I)



DISTRICT 29
(Geneva, Houston, Dale)
P.O. Box 640 • Slocomb, AL 36375
State House: (334) 242-7879
Home: (334) 699-3208
Business: (334) 886-2367

Sen. JIMMY W. HOLLEY (R)



DISTRICT 31
(Coffee, Covington, Dale & Houston)
4212 Co. Rd. 364 • Elba, AL 36323
State House: (334) 242-7845
Home: (334) 897-5181

Rep. DEXTER GRIMSLEY (D)



DISTRICT 85
(Henry, Houston)
168 Res Dr. • Newville, AL 36353
State House: (334) 242-7693
Cell-Pager: (334) 313-8847
Home: (334) 889-0602

Rep. PAUL LEE (R)



DISTRICT 86
(Houston)
2319 Eddins Rd. • Dothan, AL 36301
State House: (334) 242-7600
Home: (334) 792-9682
Fax: (334) 793-5232

Rep. DONNIE CHESTEEN (R)



DISTRICT 87
(Geneva, Houston)
306 Goose Hollow Rd. • Geneva, AL 36340
State House: (334) 242-7600
Home: (334) 684-2196
Cell: (334) 449-1040

Rep. BARRY MOORE (R)



DISTRICT 91
(Coffee)
502 Windsor Trace • Enterprise, AL 36330
State House: (334) 242-7600
Home: (334) 348-2402
Work: (334) 393-4264

Rep. MIKE JONES (R)

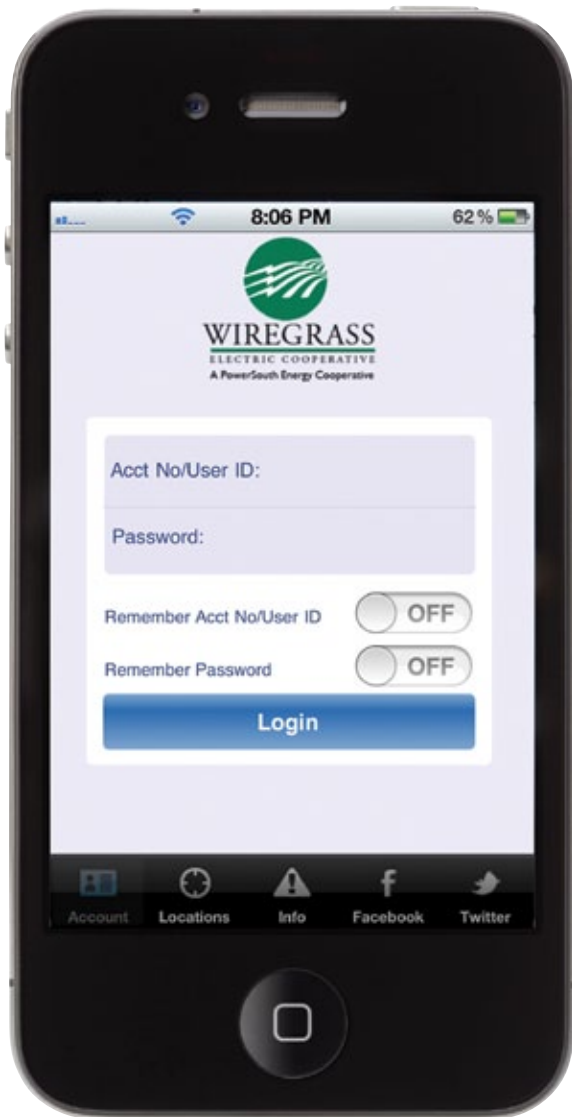


DISTRICT 92
(Covington & Escambia)
486 Sutton Rd. • Andalusia, AL 36420
State House: (334) 242-7600
Home: (334) 222-4367
Cell: (334) 804-8240

Rep. STEVE CLOUSE (R)



DISTRICT 93
(Dale, Houston)
P.O. Box 818 • Ozark, AL 36361
State House: (334) 242-7717
Work: (334) 774-9122
Home: (334) 774-7384



Ready to pay your power bill? There's an app for that!

Now you can manage your Wiregrass Electric Cooperative account on the go, with the new WEC iPhone and iPad app.

“We are always looking for ways to make it more convenient to do business with us,” says **Brad Kimbro**, director of member services for WEC. “Our new mobile app gives our members the power to manage several aspects of their account any time, from anywhere they have mobile service or a Wi-Fi connection.”

With the app, you can:

- view basic account information
- view your current bill
- pay your current bill
- see an overview of past bills
- view PDFs of past bills
- update your account information

Members can also use their app to report an outage or to view a graph showing their electricity use for a certain date range.

“The app has powerful notification capabilities,” Kimbro adds. “Members can set it to send them text or email notices for due date reminders, past due notices, account profile changes, returned checks and confirmation that a payment has been received.”

To download the free app, visit the App Store on your iPhone or iPad and search for “Wiregrass Electric.” You will need your account number and password to access your WEC account through this mobile app. [↗](#)



Have you ordered your free energy audit?

When an accountant audits your finances, he is looking for where your money is going. When **Jessie Ingram** and **Deanna Albritton** audit your home, they are looking for where your energy is going.

An energy audit from WEC can identify areas in your home where the cold air of winter is sneaking in, and where your heated air is escaping. “We can help homeowners identify practical steps that can save them a substantial amount of money on their power costs,” says Ingram, energy services manager for WEC.

Many homeowners are surprised to discover how many air leaks they have around windows, doors, light switches and electrical outlets. Even homes that are considered well insulated often show signs of air infiltration when exposed to an infrared camera.

An energy audit typically requires a visit of less than one hour in your home. There is no charge for the service. To schedule your free energy audit, contact Ingram or Albritton at 800-239-4602 or 334-588-2223. [↗](#)

Alabama Agribusiness

Drought dampens winter grazing

[EDITOR'S NOTE: This article is part of a series examining the agribusiness industry in Southeast Alabama. This month, we look at one of the many challenges faced by farmers in the Wiregrass area.]

Some cattle farmers are still feeling the impact of the 2011 summer drought, even in the dead of winter.

Columbia, Ala., cattleman **Richard Meadows** stocks a surplus of summer hay. He also sows crops for winter grazing. But a severe drought like the one that hit the Wiregrass region in 2011 reduces how much extra hay is produced for storage. It also slows the growth of grazing crops.

"The drought followed by the cold weather has made winter grazing difficult for the past couple of winters," says Meadows. "Our hayfield didn't produce as much hay as it normally would, and because the fields weren't producing, what hay you could get you had to feed your cows in the summer instead of holding it all in."

The drought has even prevented winter grazing crops, like rye oats and rye grass, from coming in as fast. Some years, Meadows says, the grazing grasses are in by Thanksgiving or at the latest by Christmas. By the end of 2011, it was taking even longer than that.

"There's still hope for it, but it's not coming fast," Meadows says.

The drought has also affected the quality of the hay being produced. When the hay is lower quality, cows have to eat more to meet their needs or farmers have to supplement hay with feed, according to Meadows. His cows also feed on standing grass in pastures,



Photo by Cherokee Spivey

The 2011 drought reduced the amount of hay available for farmers to feed their cattle this winter. Cattle like these on Richard Meadows' farm are being given feed to supplement hay.

but there is none of that either, he says.

"If the grazing will come on, we'll be okay," says Meadows, "but we are purchasing more feed than we normally would."

Fellow Houston County cattleman **Jamar Ivey** has withstood most of the drought conditions, thanks to an irrigation system installed by his father, Lamar, in the 1970s. Instead of purchasing crop insurance, the Ivey's invested in irrigation.

Yet even with irrigation, the farm is not totally immune from the drought's effects. Water for irrigation has to come from somewhere.

Ivey prefers to use pond water, but the drought lowered water levels in ponds, too. When ponds are too low, the system pumps well water, which uses more electric-

ity and raises the farm's expenses. "When you have a year like this year, when you don't have any extra water from your ponds, you have to pump," Ivey says. "You just have to bite the bullet and do it."

Neither farmer feeds with corn, but Meadows says cattle operations are affected by rising corn costs anyway because corn sets the market for all feed. Higher corn prices mean higher prices on corn byproducts used as supplemental feed, as well as other feed supplements.

"Right now there's nothing cheap to feed cows," Meadows said. "Even gin trash, from the cotton gins, is a cheap substitute for hay, but by the time you haul them in here, pay the fuel and pay a trucker, it's expensive." ❧

AREA

continued from Page 6

legislative process on our behalf, making sure our government leaders understand how their actions impact the member at the end of the line.”



MOVE OVER — AREA is working on legislation to add utility workers to Alabama’s “Move Over” law.

Move Over for utilities

Beyond monitoring legislation and keeping lawmakers informed, AREA is sometimes active in getting laws passed that are important to electric cooperatives, their members and their employees. In the 2012 regular session of the Alabama legislature, Strickler says AREA will be working with lawmakers to expand the state’s “Move Over” law.

Alabama law currently requires motorists to move to an open lane or slow down when they encounter emergency and highway maintenance vehicles parked on the roadside with their lights flashing. AREA is leading efforts to have lawmakers introduce a bill that would add utility vehicles to the “Move Over” law.

“Our crews encounter many hazards as part of their jobs,” explains McWaters, “from working high off the ground to working with high-voltage power lines. But the most dangerous situation a lineman finds himself in is often working on the side of a road or highway within a few feet of busy traffic.”

In fact, the Centers for Disease Control reports that highway transportation crashes are the leading cause of on-the-job deaths in the U.S.

“It’s dangerous for our guys out there working near traffic trying to keep our power on,” says Strickler. He believes adding utility vehicles to the law will raise awareness among motorists of the need for greater caution.

National issues of concern

AREA is not the only group looking out for the interest of Alabama’s cooperative members. As the wholesale power provider for many utilities in the

state, PowerSouth Energy Cooperative monitors activity on the state and national levels.

PowerSouth is currently paying close attention to new EPA regulations that could increase energy costs for consumers across the country.

Heather Coleman, senior manager of government and public relations, says PowerSouth’s natural gas and coal plants were built to EPA standards, yet face swift, costly retrofitting to meet new requirements despite having been upgraded several times.

For example, the company recently spent \$400 million on environmental improvements at its Lowman Power Plant in Leroy, Ala., alone, but now faces even more required expenses.

The EPA wants to add 15 new rules that Coleman says will require additional costs and could force the company to close some of its plants, which are some of the cleanest in the nation.

“The EPA is moving these proposed regulations forward on a rapid pace without regard to the added costs to the consumer or the risk to the reliability of electric supply,” Coleman explains. “EPA is regulating too much, too fast without fully considering the feasibility, costs or impact on jobs.”

Energy and the environment will also be a topic in Congress when Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee Chairman Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., introduces legislation requiring a portion of the country’s electricity be generated from low-carbon energy sources, Coleman says. In 2011, President Barack Obama asked Congress to pass energy standards requiring power companies to generate 80 percent of the country’s electricity from low-carbon sources such as wind, solar, natural gas and nuclear.

While PowerSouth is committed to being a good steward of the environment, Coleman says such requirements would cause huge changes in the company’s operations. The bill would lead to a 41 percent drop in coal-fired electricity by 2035 and a 75 percent increase in renewable power generation, according to Coleman. Those changes would mean a 21 percent increase in electricity prices, she adds.

“All regulation must take into account who is ultimately going to pay the price,” says McWaters. “Our relationships with organizations like PowerSouth help ensure that the concerns of our members are heard when people in Washington start passing laws that will hike energy costs.”

Coleman says PowerSouth and the distributors they serve need to be represented in government so they can continue to provide affordable, reliable power to their members. “We have a vested interest in politics,” she says. “It is important that we remain a player with a seat at the table when decisions are made — rather than becoming a victim of those decisions.”

PAY YOUR WAY!

WEC offers many convenient options for bill payment

When it comes to paying your electric bill, Wiregrass Electric Cooperatives offers a number of options that are more convenient than dropping a check in the mail.

“Paying your bills should be as simple as possible,” says **Brad Kimbro**, director of member services at WEC. “For some people, taking time to write out a check, stamp an envelope and go to the mail box or post office is a real hassle. Fortunately, we have several options to help our members pay their bills in a way that best fits their lifestyles.”

Following are some payment options available from WEC:

BANK DRAFT



This option automatically pays your bill for you by allowing WEC to withdraw the total amount due directly from your bank account each

month. Users who choose this option never have to worry about making a late payment or having to remember when their bill is due. Credit card payments can also be scheduled this way. For more information, see our website.

IN PERSON



During regular business hours, bills can be paid at any of the four WEC offices: Ashford, Dothan, Hartford and Samson. These locations also have night deposit boxes for after-hours service. The Dothan, Ashford and Hartford offices also have convenient drive-thru windows.

INTERNET



Visit www.wiregrass.coop in your Web browser and click on the button marked

“PayBill.” It will open a new window, where you can access all your account information and pay your bill instantly.

PHONE



Bills can be paid over the phone 24 hours a day by dialing 800-239-4602. Please be sure to have your account number ready. Bills can be paid using check, debit or credit cards.

If you have a bill due soon, consider using one of these payment options. Not only are they convenient, they help ensure your payment will not be late.

“We encourage our members to take advantage of one of these options,” says Kimbro. “They will save the time and hassle of mailing, plus they will avoid the chance that their check could get lost or delayed in the mail and cause them to be charged with a late fee.”

“

Part of offering great customer service is being able to answer questions as quickly as possible. If members will have their account numbers ready when they call or come by, we can access their records in just a few seconds, instead of searching by names and addresses. We know our members are busy, and we want to give them fast service so they can go on about their day.

”

—**BETHANY RUTHERFORD, MEMBER CARE TEAM**

