

# KEFENOKE

RURAL ELECTRIC MEMBERSHIP CORPORATION

"OWNED BY THOSE WE SERVE"

OKEFENOKE REMC • VOLUME 71, NUMBER 1 • JAN/FEB 2019



Meter Technician Wayne Altman changes out a meter, replacing the old mechanical one with one of the new electronic meters.

## Inspecting & Updating Our Metering System

The “meter reader” once was as much of an electric utility icon as the lineman, but changes and upgrades in metering technology over the years have minimized human interaction in day-to-day meter reading and power connection/disconnection.

The same is true at OREMC. In 2003, we first began transitioning to electronic meters equipped with a two-way automated communication system utilizing our distribution power lines. The first step was to retrofit existing mechanical meters (27,000) to enable remote meter reading and connectivity functionality. Not only has this technology been more cost effective, it has enhanced safety for both our employees and members while capturing meter usage data. Meter data is used to assist dispatchers with diagnosing and pinpointing system issues on our distribution lines.

Since then, electronic meters have become the standard industry-wide, and we continue installing them for all new construction accounts. Additionally, we have continued to replace our mechanical meters with newer electronic meters as a part of our ongoing system maintenance and improvement. Recently, OREMC had the opportunity to advance purchase a multi-year supply of electronic members at a significant savings. As a result, we can now continue efforts to further upgrade our system more quickly. Enhanced features to our consumer-members include same-day service for remote connections, historic energy usage data, and enhanced distribution system diagnostics.

This means OREMC meter techs — Billy Ray Harris, Wayne Altman and Aldean Hodges—will likely be more visible in the field as they proactively replace meters. Our employees may install the new meters when called to connect/disconnect power or responding to service requests. Periodic field inspections are required and can be more efficiently conducted while employees are within a particular service area. In addition, field inspection of member metering equipment may require meter upgrades and/or member equipment corrections per national industry safety standards.

Please be mindful that our meter team will need access to your property in order to replace and install the new meters. If you have made a request for service/connection, please make sure security systems/gates are unlocked and pets are secured. If you have questions, please call customer service at 800-262-5131.

# Members... Not Just Consumers

The dawn of 2019 signals an important milestone for Okefenokee REMC. In September we will celebrate the 80th anniversary of our incorporation. Thanks to our visionary incorporators/founding members, OREMC changed the fate of rural residents across southeast Georgia and northeast Florida by “bringing the lights” when no one else would. Then and now, OREMC would not exist without its members.

To us you are more than just a consumer, and as a cooperative we have a different “bottom line.” While our priority is always to provide reliable and safe energy, there is another equally important part of this equation. Our members’ well-being that of the larger community that we serve are of paramount concern.

Back in 1939 members of the community understood we were different because they likely knew someone who helped to create OREMC (see *Powering Rural Life*). For many people, our founding and its circumstances have been long forgotten. Over time, folks in the community may have come to think of us as simply another energy provider. But we are not. We are a co-op that is constantly evolving to meet the needs of the communities we serve, and we are able to do this because of members like you.

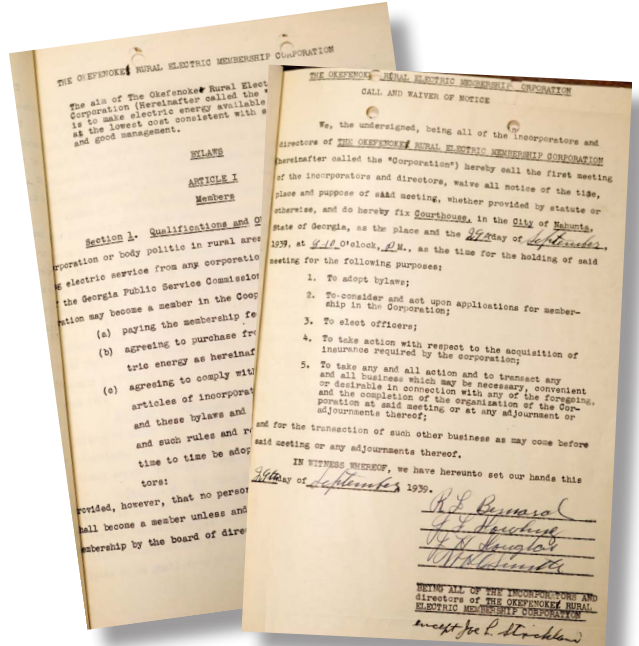
Since our inception, we have sought feedback and engagement from you and that of the larger community to guide our long-term decisions. This is why we hold annual meetings and conduct satisfaction surveys (see Survey Says!) to engage with you and obtain your feedback.

We strive to find new ways to help you use energy more efficiently and are always seeking to keep pace with the changing energy environment, evolving technology and shifting consumer expectations.

OREMC members help guide important co-op decisions that improve and enrich the community. As a local business, we have a stake in the communities we serve and value the perspective of our board members. They are members of the co-op and community – just like you.

While the times may have changed, our mission, outlook and commitment to our consumer-members have not. We view our role as a catalyst for good. Working together, OREMC can accomplish great things for our community now and in the future.

*Anne Prince contributed to this article. She writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives.*



Images of the meeting minutes and mission statement from OREMC’s very first incorporators/board meeting on September 29, 1939.

## POWERING RURAL LIFE

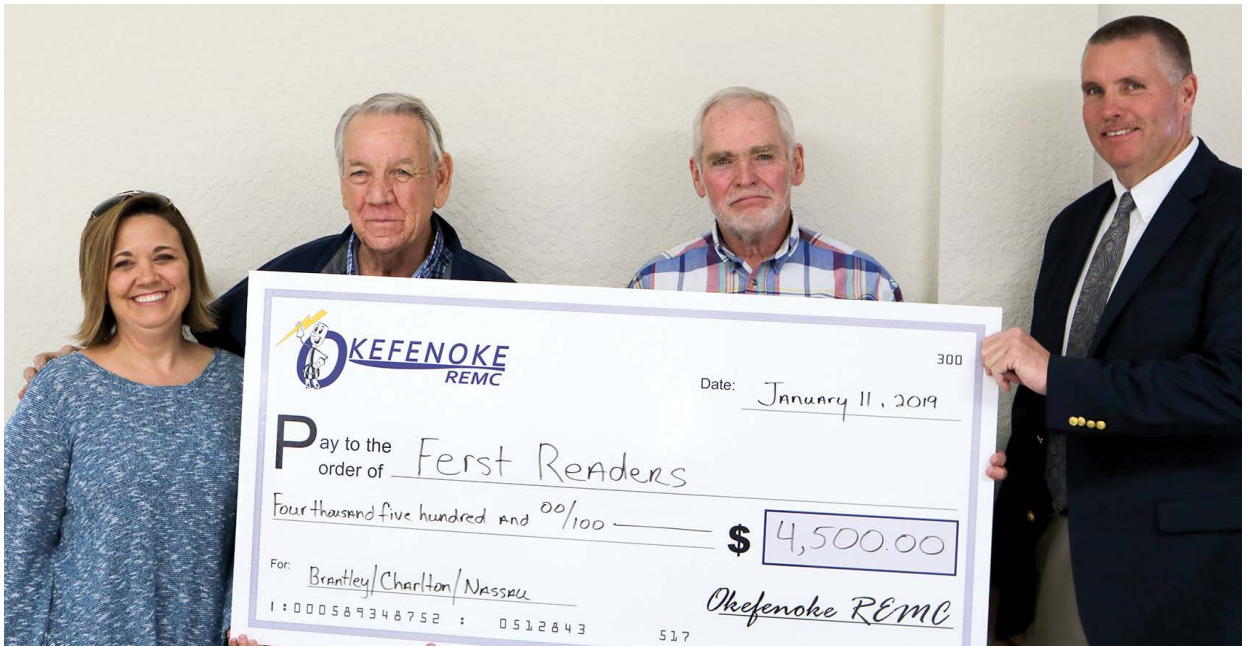
While our recent survey helps map our future, it is important to remember where we’ve been. In 2019, OREMC will celebrate its 80th birthday. It is hard to believe that less than 100 years ago much of rural southeast Georgia and northeast Florida was “in the dark.” *Powering Rural Life* is a brief history of OREMC from the perspective of members and employees who remember life before and after “the lights came.” Check it out on the history page of our website at <https://oremc.com/history-2>.



## SURVEY SAYS!

From October 2 - November 9, 2018, OREMC worked with Inside Information to conduct a member satisfaction survey. Members were randomly selected to take the survey online or via a phone call. Thank you to the 470 members who responded and shared their perspectives.

While we were pleased the results showed that 86% of our consumer-members are satisfied with OREMC overall, we also learned where our areas of opportunity are to improve service. These include preferred communication methods, energy efficiency programs and services, Cooperative Solar and community involvement. We will be working on these initiatives over the next several months to enhance our consumer-members and communities’ quality of life.



Ferst Readers Regional Program Coordinator Michelle Maddox accepts a check to help support reading programs in three counties that OREMC serves—Brantley and Charlton counties in Georgia and Nassau County, Florida. Presenting the check was OREMC Board Directors Jimmy Woodard, Clyde Mizell and Craig Morgan.

## Giving the Gift of Reading

Giving the “gift of reading” is the motivation behind Okefenokee REMC’s recent \$4,500 donation to Ferst Readers to support the establishment of a program in Charlton County and the existing programs in Brantley and Nassau counties. They are among the 90 programs in Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Montana and Texas aimed at promoting early literacy skills and school readiness in children from low-income families.

Giving back to the community is also one of the seven cooperative principles, and OREMC is able to make a donation such as this by using unclaimed

capital credits. Qualified organizations must be located in one of the eight counties OREMC serves.

“Having supported and seen the success of the Ferst Readers program in Nassau County,” notes OREMC Member Service Representative Dewayne Johns, “and knowing Ferst was interested in establishing the program in other communities, OREMC was more than willing to help bring the program to Brantley and Charlton counties. Education is the backbone of community development and the foundation of our cooperative principles.”

According to Michelle Maddox, regional program coordinator for Ferst Readers, “Our goal is to get parents to read to their children by providing a developmentally-appropriate book each month from birth to age five. Among low-income families, 61 percent do not have age-appropriate books for children. Ferst works to close that gap by fostering a language-rich environment and promoting kindergarten readiness.”

The program is free to families living in participating communities, and every child under the age of five can be registered. Each month they will receive a Read To Me book selection, along with a parent newsletter that outlines activities, vocabulary and key outcomes related to the book.

Read the full press release online at <https://oremc.com/news>.



Children enrolled in the Head Start program received their first books from the newly established Ferst Readers program in Brantley County just before Christmas, thanks in part to a donation from OREMC.



OREMC Linemen practice pole top rescue: Ryan Carter, Nahunta; Omar Garay, Kingsland; and R.A. Sikes, Hilliard.

## SAFETY FIRST: Pole Top Rescue

“It is something I hope none of the guys ever have to do,” says OREMC’s Safety Coordinator David Smith relative to each of the co-op’s linemen demonstrating proficiency in pole top/bucket rescue as outlined by OSHA (Occupational Safety & Health Administration). “That is why we practice every year, so if the unthinkable happens we can respond effectively and efficiently.”

So on two very chilly days in late November, OREMC linemen at the co-op’s three offices—Nahunta and Kingsland, Georgia and Hilliard, Florida—each took their turn climbing a pole to rescue and lower a “dummy” comrade to the ground. The exercise was then repeated rescuing a downed lineman in a bucket.

“While seconds count, safely executing the rescue is paramount,” Smith notes. “Knowing what to do and how to do it in a situation like this ensures the safety of the rescuers as well.”

## Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Laundry Tip: Dry towels and heavier cottons separately from lighter-weight clothing. You’ll spend less time running the dryer for lighter-weight items, which saves energy.

*Source: energy.gov*



# Pam Harper: Beginning a New Chapter

Ring in 2019 Pam Harper, plant accountant at Okefenoke REMC, closed the book on her OREMC career after 44 years of service, and stepped confidently into the next chapter of her life—retirement. “The only thing I haven’t done is climbed a pole,” Pam chuckled as she reflected on her OREMC experiences.



Pam wrapping up her final projects before retirement.

Her story began in 1974 when she first came to OREMC as part of the Vocational Office Training program at Brantley County High School. Back then she, along with Ronnie Crews, used to feed the machine that would imprint documents and forms.

Pam recalled, “It was all very mechanical back then, and computers were only just being introduced. Mark Middleton and I used to work on the billing machine. It was as big as and higher than a desk, and we would have to manually insert a ledger card and a billing card for each member and punch in the meter reading. It is just amazing to think about all the changes and computer conversions. Today we have tablets and laptops, but back then the computers took up a whole room.”

As computers shrank in size over the years, OREMC’s headquarters building in Nahunta expanded. Pam’s office used to be an outdoor patio in the middle of the building. The east wing was added on, and what used to be the garage is now the break/meeting room. Pam not only saw the headquarters building change, she was pivotal in opening the Hilliard and Kingsland district offices.

“After I graduated in 1976 I worked as a front counter cashier,” Pam said as she scrolled through her various positions at OREMC. “I did that for seven years. When I had my second child, I left to raise my kids. I came back part-time for a couple years before returning full-time in 1985.”

Coming back to OREMC she became a clerk in the Service Department answering phone calls, creating new service order requests and taking outage calls. Next Pam worked as a clerk in the Engineering Department entering data for staking sheets and issuing service orders to the job foreman. Having a comprehensive understanding of co-op operations, Pam was tapped as the customer service supervisor and opened the Hilliard, Florida district office when it was built in the mid-1990s, then moved on to do the same at the Kingsland office a couple of years later.

Pam eventually made her way back to the Nahunta office to work in Finance, where she closed out her tenure with OREMC. What will she miss most about coming to the office every day?

Choking up a bit, Pam said, “I’m going to miss the people. I’ve been here since I was 16 years old. Then and now the co-op is one big family. You know you can rely on your coworkers when you need them, particularly during times of change. The co-op has always had a good reputation for not only helping its members, but also helping employees better themselves by being a good place to work.”

Pam’s thoughts turned to her husband, spending more time with her grandkids and being able to set her own schedule as she shared a final thought, “I’ve had some fun times here, but I’m ready to have the freedom to do what I want, when I want to do it.”

After 44 years, she has earned it.

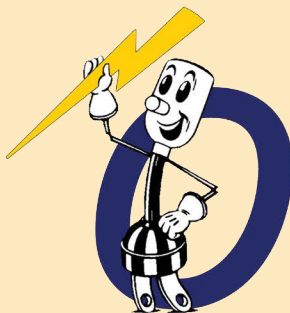


Pam and Danny Thornton, manager of distribution services reviewing Hilliard operations. *Below:* Pam issuing job numbers while working as an engineer clerk.



## Statement of Nondiscrimination

Okefenoke Rural Electric Membership Corporation is an equal opportunity provider and employer. If you wish to file a Civil Rights program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, found online at [http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint\\_filing\\_cust.html](http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html), or at any USDA office, or call (866) 632-9992 to request the form. You may also write a letter containing all of the information requested in the form. Send your completed complaint form or letter to us by mail at U. S. Department of Agriculture, Director, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Avenue, S. W., Washington, D. C. 20250-9410, by fax (202) 690-7442 or email at [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).



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## FAMILY FEATURES

**"In the new year, never forget to thank your past years, because they enabled you to reach today. Without the stairs of the past, you cannot arrive at the future."**

*—Mehmet Murat ildan*

(Cut Here) ✂

This month's featured recipe was submitted by Mrs. Joan Conner of Hilliard, Fla. She has been given a \$25 credit on her account.

### **Cold Night Soup**

*Makes 8 Servings*

- 1 lb. ground chuck
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 (19 oz.) cans savory vegetable soup
- 1 (15 oz.) can lima beans
- 2 (14.5 oz.) can diced tomatoes
- 1 (11 oz.) can whole kernel corn
- 1 (10 oz.) can mild Rotel tomatoes with green chilies

In large skillet, brown ground chuck and onion over medium heat. Drain well. In a 6-quart slow cooker, combine beef/onion mixture, soup, beans, corn and tomatoes. Cover and cook on high for four hours. Season to taste.

### **Send us your favorite Vidalia Onion recipes!**



Submit your recipe to Jen Shuman at [recipes@oremc.com](mailto:recipes@oremc.com). If yours is selected as the featured recipe for our March/April issue, you'll receive a \$25.00 account credit.



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### **2 Corinthians 5:17 King James Version**

*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*Published bi-monthly and mailed to members of Okefenokee Rural Electric Membership Corporation Nabunta, Georgia 31553*

**Michele Hutchins, Editor**

### **OFFICE HOURS**

8 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Monday through Friday

*Speak to a Customer Service Representative by phone Monday - Friday 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.*

### **CO-OP BUSINESS NUMBER**

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<https://oremc.com>

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To nominate your church, contact Dewayne Johns at 1-800-262-5131 Ext.1143 or email [dewayne.johns@oremc.com](mailto:dewayne.johns@oremc.com).

## **Church of the Month**



### **King Memorial Baptist Church**

- Sunday School** 10:00 A.M.
- Sunday Worship** 11:00 A.M.
- Sunday Evening Worship** 6:00 P.M.
- Wednesday Service & Youth Meeting** 7:00 P.M.

**Pastor: Tim Rowell**

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