

Life on the Line

For Chris Crews, general foreman in Nahunta, it seems like yesterday he joined the right of way (ROW) crew at OREMC, not 35 years ago. He was just a young “lad”—as former General Manager Emory Middleton would always say—hunting a good job near his home in Hoboken.



After about a year on the ROW crew he spoke to the supervisor, Carlton Lang, about his desire to do more than just work right of way. It wasn't long after that Foreman Culbert John said he wanted to make Chris a “pole jockey” and placed him on a two-man truck with Levon Lyons.

“We did a lot of pole climbing to switch out transformers, fix security lights or catch outages,” Chris recalls during his time as a lineman trainee.

Once he became a lineman first class, Chris moved to a construction crew where he worked under the direction of Forman James Altman, then Terry Wainright. His linework experience expanded when he had the opportunity to join Roger Chancey's hot line crew.

“Reconductoring, conversion work and system upgrades—all that work was done while the lines were hot,” Chris says. “You learn the importance of safety processes to keep yourself and the other guys alive.”

While Chris spent lots of time working overhead lines, it wasn't until he joined Johnnie Cleland's crew that he got some underground experience. In 2007 he was promoted to line crew foreman after working with Wayne Crews back on construction. He says he has had some good times, and some rough times over the years that give him stories to tell, but says, “The people I work with and the people we serve is what makes OREMC the place to be.”

Looking back over the years Chris reflects on what is the same and what is different about the job. He insists, “Keeping the lights on was and is our top priority.” But the tools, technology and focus on safety to support that mission have changed significantly.

Chris explains, “We have better equipment. Everything back in the 80s was manual and the work was more involved. Technology has been huge, particularly with SCADA and sectioning of line. Outages can be pinpointed so much faster and more accurately. Back then we had a big book of maps that we used to find outages. After a while of shooting trouble, you learn where the outages were likely to be. Now with the iPads and GPS, we can drive right to an outage.”

Still in awe of the fact that he actually has actually worked at OREMC for 35 years, Chris sums up his experiences saying, “I've done a lot of swamping and bogging and it is rough work. But I hung on over the years and I'm glad I did.”