

Nowhere He Would Rather Be

Michael Hickox Celebrates 35 Years at OREMC

“The best thing that ever happened to me was getting laid off [from SCAPA] because I ended up here,” insists Michael Hickox, purchasing coordinator at Okefenoke REMC.

It was over 35 years ago on March 14, 1986, when Michael started working at OREMC in the warehouse with Gary Strickland, warehouse/transformer technician, and John Gibson, warehouse/meter technician. Then the warehouse—and automotive shop—were located where IT is currently in the main office building in Nahunta, and it served the entire OREMC service area.

Early on, Michael’s days consisted of mowing grass, picking up trash, working on transformers, and then at 3 p.m. each day he says, “We stopped what we were doing to draw materials for the next day’s jobs. We drew every item needed for a job, including nuts and bolts . . .today the linemen draw their materials.”

Then in March 1993 the “storm of the century” hit, and everything changed. Michael recalls, “It was late Friday night, early Saturday morning and a strong winter storm began lashing the OREMC service area. It was all hands on deck and when I came in that morning, I was in charge of acquiring and delivering the materials needed for the restoration efforts. I did things I had never done before and worked 56 hours straight. It was significant growth opportunity for me.”

A month later Michael was promoted to purchasing agent. Even back in the early 1990s, everything was handwritten, and materials weren’t charged out to individual jobs. Processes began to change when the Hilliard and Kingsland offices opened in the mid-1990s, and warehouse functions expanded. Rob Taylor was hired to work in Hilliard and Jason Williams worked in Kingsland, while back in Nahunta, it was Michael and two warehousemen.

Technology changed things again once OREMC implemented SEDC utility software solutions. All those handwritten orders and inventory counts were now automated and interconnected with other OREMC functions. For example, when a new line is designed, redesigned or rebuilt, staking enters that information in the system that automatically generates major and minor components supply lists for the linemen to pull. Components are charged accordingly based on whether they are major (i.e., insulators, transforms, cross arms) and expensed to specific jobs, or minor (nuts and bolts) and charged as overhead.

Through it all, Michael says what he knew of OREMC way back when has stood the test of time: it is a good job and a stable place to work. “I can’t think of a better place to work,” he says. “It has always been like family.”

That family focus is magnified with one of OREMC’s signature community event, the Annual Okefenoke REMC Golf Tournament. Involved from the beginning, Michael explains that it was started by Gary Strickland to bring a group of employees together to play after work. A few years later, fundraising for a charitable cause was added. Today it has grown to a sold-out event attracting over 100 golfers, raising money for the Southeast Cancer Unit, Inc., and about to celebrate its 30th year.

“I am overwhelmed by the growth in the support from our sponsors and players of the OREMC tournament,” Michael says with a crack of emotion in his voice. “Being a cancer survivor myself, it means so much for all these people to come together with OREMC to support and give to an organization that helped me when I needed it. It is family, community and heart of who we are as a co-op.”