

## More Than Just Lines on Paper

The first thing Mark White, staking supervisor at OREMC, will tell you about his job is that it is so much more than what you see—poles in the ground and wires in the air. In a nutshell, Mark is responsible for determining the intricate array of poles and wires, overhead or underground, necessary to deliver power to homes and business. However, getting from plans on paper to powered on, involves navigating a complex maze of decision along the way.



“Line design is one thing, but people are at the end of that line who have a need for affordable, reliable energy,” explains Mark. “When you design system connectivity you have to start with what is, address the immediate needs, consider operational efficiencies and upgrades, but also think about any challenges/obstacles, visual aesthetics and plan for current and anticipated load and demand. It is what you don’t see that really shapes the job,” he says.

Every job is different and what Mark likes most about his work—all the little details, technical considerations and problem-solving that go into each project. He also enjoys the integration with other departments at OREMC as all jobs involve member service, operations, project management, construction and maintenance, not to mention policy and consumer accounting. There are several external partnerships Mark must navigate as well, including civil engineers, Georgia Department of Transportation and other utilities.

Over the years Mark has been involved in some of OREMC’s biggest projects, from building 44 miles of new three phase line out of the St. George substation in 1997; the complete redesign of supporting infrastructure relative to the building of the Sanctuary Cove subdivision; employing new strategies and techniques at Cumberland Harbor; and most notably the Cumberland Island project in 2019 rebuilding 3.5 miles of line that had far outlived its useful life, was weather worn from recent hurricanes and was due for a complete rebuild.

“From helicopters, airboats and barges, Cumberland Island rebuild involved so many moving parts,” Mark recalls. “Not to mention coordinating with the Department of Natural Resources, the Nature Conservancy, Army Corps of Engineers, private landowners and extensive easement research. But it was amazing to see everything fall into place. That is what makes it fun.”

A little more “fun” than picking tobacco was what Mark was looking for in a summer job back in 1986 when he hired on as a member of OREMC’s right of way (ROW) crew. He worked temporary, part-time during the summer of 1987 but got pulled in to help with the construction of Hi-Hat and Lake Windy substations. He then went back to ROW, noting he did two complete cycles of maintenance on the OREMC system before moving into a dispatcher position.

As an overnight dispatcher Mark tapped in to more of the technical side of the co-op and worked in closer proximity to Engineering and Staking. Once a staking position came open in Hilliard, he made the transition and worked closely with Terry Johns. Terry’s mentoring played a significant role in shaping Mark’s career at OREMC. “We were partners,” Mark recalls fondly. “We worked together to figure things out.” Sadly, Terry passed away in the mid 1990s.

That on-the-job training, problem-solving skills developed in the field and relationships cultivated over time are the foundation of the work he continues to enjoy today. As Mark surmises, “It suits me.”