



BRMEMC 2015 Annual Meeting

BY BYRON McCOMBS

Blue Ridge Mountain EMC (BRMEMC) held its 76th Annual Meeting on Saturday, Sept. 12, at Anderson Music Hall in Hiawassee, GA. A crowd of approximately 700 members gathered to participate in the cooperative event.

Registration opened at 8 a.m., and the meeting was called to order at 10 a.m. Board President Bill Prather welcomed co-op members, recognized distinguished guests and thanked the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds for the use of their facility. He then invited former board member Lenny Parks up on

stage to read a resolution in memory of Director Bob Ensley, who passed away May 4, 2015. The framed resolution was presented to Ensley's wife, Melanie.

Following the presentation, Interim Manager Dan Brewer, hired by the BRMEMC board to serve on a temporary basis until the search for a new general manager is completed, addressed the members. He shared information regarding his extensive background in the electric utility business, as well as his hopes for moving the co-op forward.

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Interim Manager Dan Brewer introduces himself to the members at the Annual Meeting.

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A University of Illinois graduate with a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering, Brewer told the crowd he immediately went to work for a local electric utility after college and has remained in the business for 44 years.

He then detailed his experience in the business beginning with his first general manager position at Parke County REMC in Rockville, Ind., in 1987. After serving 5 years, he moved to Lexington, Ky., to manage Blue Grass RECC, which later consolidated with two neighboring cooperatives, changing the name to Blue Grass Energy. When he retired from Blue Grass Energy in 2012, the cooperative was serving 56,000 meters out of four offices.

Since "retiring," Brewer explained, he has remained active in the electric cooperative world in several roles, including interim general manager at co-ops experiencing difficulties. BRMEMC is the fourth local distribution cooperative in the past four years where he has served as interim general manager. His three previous assignments in that role were in Missouri, Colorado and Montana.

In addition, Brewer helps cooperative boards across the country conduct national searches to locate qualified candidates to fill their CEO or GM vacancies. To date, Brewer has assisted cooperatives in Colorado, Missouri, Illinois, Montana, Texas and Iowa in their search to find new CEOs.

Brewer reported that upon arriving at BRMEMC in late August, he was informed of a small rate increase planned by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), the cooperative's wholesale power supplier. The average

increase for a residential account, approximately 1.25 percent, took effect Oct. 1, 2015. He emphasized that none of the increase would be retained by BRMEMC, but would be sent to TVA to cover its increase in rates.

In closing, Brewer assured members he would do everything in his power to make BRMEMC an organization focused on the best interest of the member/owners of the co-op. However, he said, "I can't do it alone. It will take all of us—employees, board members and you, the member/owners of this organization—to restore BRMEMC to a position we can all be proud of, working together to provide the best service possible."

Emphasizing the importance of moving the organization forward as quickly as possible, Brewer added, "I am hopeful that the successful completion of this Annual Meeting will mark a new beginning and allow us to start moving in the right direction."

After announcing that 9,072 members had registered, establishing a quorum,

BRMEMC Attorney Larry Sorgen officially called the business session to order. He reported that the registration numbers included members who registered online, through the mail or in person at the meeting.

During the business session, members had the opportunity to ask questions from the floor. For approximately 90 minutes, Sorgen and Brewer fielded questions on a variety of topics, including electric rates, renewable energy, the customer charge, TVA's role as BRMEMC's exclusive power provider and the cooperative's long-term debt.

Once members' questions were concluded, the results of the Board of Directors election were



A resolution in memory of former BRMEMC Director Bob Ensley, who died in May, was presented to his wife, Melanie. Ensley's dear friend, former Director Lenny Parks, read the resolution recognizing Ensley for 23 years of faithful service to the co-op.



Newly elected members of the BRMEMC Board of Directors are, from left, Mickey Cummings, Union County, Ga.; Larry Williams, Fannin County, Ga.; and Roy Perren, Towns County, Ga.

announced. BRMEMC members elected three new directors. In the three-way Union County race, Mickey Cummings prevailed, receiving 47.1 percent of the vote to Patrick Malone's 17.9 percent and Charles Rich's 15.8 percent. In Towns County, Roy Perren garnered 51.7 percent of the vote, defeating incumbent Jerry Nichols, with 29.8 percent. Larry Williams, who ran unopposed for the Fannin County seat, received 62.3 percent of the vote.

Members also voted on a proposed amendment to the bylaws establishing term limits that would allow a director to serve no more than three consecutive three-year terms. The proposed amendment passed overwhelmingly, with 81.8 percent "Yes" votes.

BRMEMC Director of Member Services Sonny Mahan then drew names to give away door prizes. To conclude, Mahan thanked the members for their participation in the meeting.



BRMEMC would like to thank the Cartecay River Band and Randall Collins for sharing their musical talents at the 2015 Annual Meeting.



Interim Manager
Dan Brewer

Manager's Message

Moving Forward

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself to the members of Blue Ridge Mountain EMC and explain how I hope to move this organization forward while serving as interim manager. I was asked by the Board of Directors to serve in that role on a temporary basis until a search for a new general manager can be completed.

In 1971, after receiving a degree in electrical engineering from the University of Illinois, I immediately went to work for a local electric utility. I have remained in that field in some capacity for 44 years. During that time, I have gained a wealth of experience in management, engineering and operations of the electric cooperative business. I have served as president and chief executive officer during 27 years of my career.

The past three years I have served as interim general manager at three electric cooperatives suffering situations similar to BRMEMC. My personal experience convinces me that it is imperative we move quickly to provide some stability at the EMC, both for the cooperative's employees and members.

Since arriving at BRMEMC, I have been very impressed with the skill and dedication of the employees. However, as a result of the turmoil encompassing the co-op, it has been nearly impossible for them to perform their jobs effectively. This matter is of great concern to me because of the inherent dangers that already exist when working with electricity.

When meeting with employees for the first time, I told them my main focus was on the safety of the employees and the public, as well as providing the very best service possible to the members. Throughout my career, safety and service have remained my highest priorities for the co-op. I have been work-

ing with the BRMEMC staff to review all aspects of our operations and searching for opportunities to improve service while keeping costs under control.

I have been asked frequently how long it might take to restore stability at BRMEMC. It's too early for me to answer that question, having only been here for such a brief period. However, from my past experience helping cooperative boards conduct national searches for a highly qualified manager, I do know it will take a minimum of six months from beginning to end. I also know it is very unlikely that highly qualified candidates will be interested in the CEO position of an organization with the unstable environment that presently exists at BRMEMC.

Rural electrification is one of the great success stories in our nation's history. It demonstrated what can be accomplished when people work together for the common good. In the mid-1930s, nine out of 10 Americans in rural areas were without electric service. The signing of the Rural Electrification Act in 1936 gave power to the people by providing the resources needed to form their own electric cooperatives.

Blue Ridge Mountain EMC is part of that proud history that dates to 1937, when the first organizational meeting took place in the Young Harris College library. Those early pioneers looked ahead and accomplished what many said couldn't be done and what nobody else was willing to do—provide electric service to rural America, changing the landscape of our country forever.

That is why it is time to close this unfortunate chapter in the history of Blue Ridge Mountain EMC and begin moving in the right direction. There is nothing that can be done about the past, but we can focus on moving forward for the future.