

Blue Ridge Mountain EMC 2017 Annual Meeting

BY BYRON McCOMBS

A crowd of approximately 375 members attended Blue Ridge Mountain EMC's (BRMEMC) Annual Meeting on Sept. 9 at the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center in Blairsville, Ga. This was a new venue for the event, which has been held at the Anderson Music Hall in Hiawassee, Ga., every year since 1983.

When the doors opened at 8 a.m., members were welcomed inside the beautiful facility to register and receive their Annual Meeting gifts. Once seated, they enjoyed performances by two groups of talented teenagers. The Union County High School (UCHS) Chamber Choir, under the direction of Alicia Covington, and the

UCHS Jazz Band, under the direction of Will Stafford, provided wonderful musical entertainment.

The North Georgia Honor Guard presented the colors, and the national anthem was sung by the UCHS Chamber Choir. BRMEMC Board President Mickey Cummings welcomed members to their Annual Meeting and recognized distinguished guests.

General Manager Jeremy Nelms, who had just reached his one-year anniversary in that role, delivered his Manager's Report. "This year has been a time to educate myself and gain a better understanding of

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BRMEMC's bucket trucks proudly display the American flag in the parking lot of the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center in Blairsville, Ga., the location of the co-op's 78th Annual Meeting.

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the operations at BRMEMC so I can see clearly the challenges our co-op will face in the future,” Nelms said.

The general manager had words of praise for the co-op’s workforce. “After one year, it is apparent to me that the employees’ dedication to service, skill in their craft and their diligence and duty to both stand out as the greatest attribute of this EMC.”

Nelms shared with members that a small rate increase was planned by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), the cooperative’s wholesale power supplier. The average increase for a residential account—1.25 percent—took effect Oct. 1, 2017. The increase will be reflected on the fixed portion of members’ power bills for residential and single-phase general service accounts. Residential members will see their bill increase, on average, \$1.40 per month. Nelms emphasized that none of that increase will be retained by BRMEMC, but will be sent to TVA to cover their increase in rates to us.

In addition, Nelms announced that effective Dec. 31, 2017, the city of Hiwassee is instituting a franchise tax fee to any EMC electric and broadband account within the city limits. This fee will be 4 percent added to the gross sales of electric energy, as well as 5 percent added to the sales of fiber and cable services to the affected accounts. As with the TVA rate increase, no monies collected through the franchise tax will be retained by BRMEMC. Members affected by this franchise tax should direct any questions or concerns to their elected officials in Hiwassee.

Looking ahead, Nelms said, “BRMEMC’s strategic focus is to provide great value to our membership for the energy and other services purchased. We work dili-



Blue Ridge Mountain EMC Board President Mickey Cummings presided over the business session.

gently to keep the lights on and continually look for ways to improve the reliability of our system. We are conscious of each and every dollar you spend with us, so we strive to make prudent decisions to ensure member value is always considered and, when possible, enhanced.”

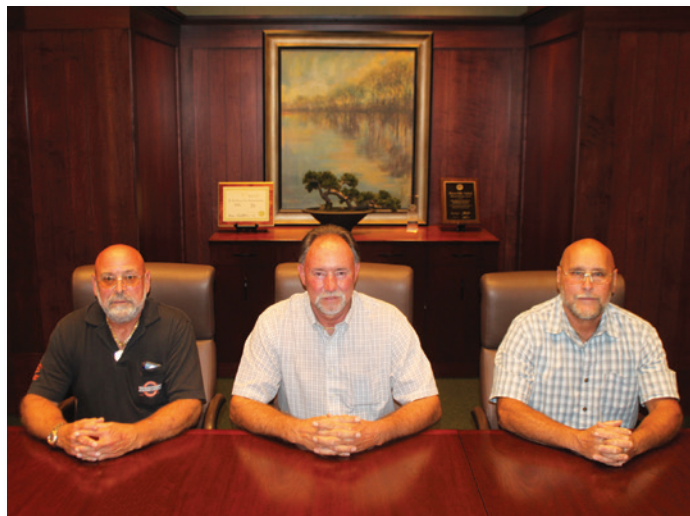
After a brief summary of some system statistics, Nelms told members the rebuild and upgrade of the Blairsville substation had been completed in August. “This upgrade will ensure that BRMEMC is well-prepared to accommodate the expected growth in energy needs and power demands of Union County members for many years,” he said.

In addition to providing electric service, the general manager outlined the value-added services

BRMEMC offers its members. One of those, broadband, now serves approximately 6,500 members, a 16 percent increase in the past year. “Our short-term plan is to sign up more members where our service is already available, which will generate more revenue from the existing infrastructure, allowing us to expand into new, unserved areas,” he said.

In closing, Nelms expressed his appreciation to BRMEMC’s Board of Directors, management team and dedicated employees for their commitment to meeting the needs of the membership. While also thanking the members in attendance, he said, “I remain focused on working with the employees as we strive to provide affordable and reliable electric service throughout the communities BRMEMC serves. I am here for each and every one of you and will always take time to meet with you and listen to your concerns.”

Nancy Mitchell, general manager of Customer



From left, Danny Henson, Union County; Jeff Ledford, Clay County; and Bert Rogers, Towns County, were elected to the BRMEMC Board of Directors.

Service for TVA's Southeastern Region, addressed the members concerning capital credits. She explained that TVA prohibits BRMEMC from issuing capital credits, but rather requires monies collected beyond the necessary margins to be invested back into the co-op's plant.

Board President Mickey Cummings opened the floor to member questions. The bulk of the discussion revolved around two amendments proposed by co-op members. The first would restrict members from voting for directors outside of the county in which they reside. Present bylaws permit members to vote for candidates in each of the races, regardless of the county the candidates represent in BRMEMC's five-county service territory. This amendment would allow members to vote only in a director election that involves their home county.

The second proposed amendment would limit the reasons the board can go into executive session. If passed, the amendment would allow executive session only for real estate transactions, limited litigation discussions and personnel issues. Both amendments were approved by the members present, to be placed on next year's ballot for a vote.

Following the amendment discussion there was an inquiry about BRMEMC's plans for the old headquarters. Nelms responded that an environmental assessment of the property is being conducted and the board was also waiting to see what impact the Georgia DOT's Young Harris Bypass project will have on the value of the property.

Several members asked when BRMEMC's broadband service might be available to them. Nelms reiterated



Top, the Union County High School Jazz Band, directed by Will Stafford, and above, the UCHS Chamber Choir, directed by Alicia Covington, provided a wonderful morning of musical entertainment at the Annual Meeting.

that the first objective is to increase subscribers in areas where the co-op already has broadband. If that initiative is successful, the additional revenue will allow the co-op to consider expanding our broadband service into other areas in the future.

BRMEMC Attorney Larry Ford then announced the board election results. In the four-way Union County race, Danny Henson prevailed with 45 percent of the vote. Incumbent Charles Jenkins received 24.1 percent, Karen Pirie, 12.9 percent; and Tommy White, 7.5 percent. In a three-way race for the Clay County board seat, Jeff Ledford was the winner, receiving 31.2 percent of the vote, while Preston Cabe received 29.9 percent and incumbent Chris Logan received 28.5 percent. The Towns County seat was won by Bert Rogers, who received 49 percent of the vote to Jason Waldroup's 36.6 percent.

Sonny Mahan, director of Member Services, thanked the members for attending and drew names for door prizes.



Sonny Mahan, right, director of Member Services, congratulates Vivian Keling, of Blairsville, Ga., the proud winner of the grand prize, a flat-screen TV.



Jeremy Nelms
General Manager

Manager's Message

Restoring Power Swiftly and Safely

Located in North Georgia and Western North Carolina, Blue Ridge Mountain EMC's service territory is carved out of a beautiful section of the country. In every direction are mountain backdrops with creeks and rivers winding through tree-filled terrain. We are fortunate to live in a setting of scenic beauty second to none.

These wonderful attributes associated with our area take on a different appearance when severe weather visits our system. Unfortunately, a little wind can go a long way through our extensive and unique service territory.

Although Tropical Storm Irma was here briefly (thankfully!), from the evening of Monday, Sept. 11, through the morning of Sept. 12, its effects were widespread. In fact, more than 1.55 million power outages were reported in Georgia as a result of damage from the storm. At the height of the storm, electric cooperatives in Georgia reported approximately 550,000 outages. Damage to electrical systems occurred in service territories of all 41 EMCs in Georgia. The only other time this occurred was during the Storm of the Century in March 1993 (also known as the Blizzard of '93).

Irma was a historic storm, and electric utilities coordinated a historic response. In Georgia, more than 4,500 linemen participated in the restoration effort.

More than 1,500 linemen and right-of-way personnel from 18 other states came to help.

As many as 13,500 members in the BRMEMC service territory lost power as a result of Tropical Storm Irma. Union and Towns counties in Georgia and Clay County in North Carolina suffered the most damage.

BRMEMC was able to restore power to the 242 outages scattered across our service area within approximately 70 hours. During that time, 62 broken poles and 36 transformers were replaced. Crews cleared hundreds of fallen trees before they could start repairing the downed lines.

This would be a difficult task in the most ideal of weather conditions. However, when you consider the severe winds, extremely wet conditions and the difficulty reaching areas in our service territory, even in the best of circumstances, it makes the

restoration efforts remarkable.

I cannot express enough my admiration and respect for the employees at BRMEMC as they worked together to restore power for the members of this co-op. While we can't predict the extent of outages caused by weather conditions, you can be sure when they do occur, that your co-op is working around the clock to restore your power swiftly and safely.

