# Alabama CURRENTS

March/April 2015

A Publication of the
Alabama Municipal Electric Authority

## Blue Bell®

*on the grow in Sylacauga*

See Page 14

# into energy efficiency

Warm weather has a way of making things grow: flowers, grass, and your to-do list. So what's one more task? While you're scrubbing and inspecting your home this spring, check for energy efficiency around the house. Making a few energy-related repairs could help lower your electric bill all year long.

Engaging in a bit of minor repair work and maintenance can go a very long way to increasing your savings by reducing the amount of energy wasted in your home. From the air conditioner and water heater to your thermostat and ceiling fan, here are some energy-efficiency tips that even the most technically deficient among us can follow to get your home ready to combat summer heat.

- **Perform an HVAC check-up.** According to EnergyStar.gov, a seasonal air conditioning (HVAC) check-up can save you a lot of headaches later on. But, here's a few things you can do yourself to help improve your air conditioning unit's energy efficiency. On the outside heat exchanger: Check for and replace damaged pipe insulation on air conditioning coolant lines; clear any leaves or brush away from the heat exchanger. There should be nothing that obstructs the fans on top or the sides; hose off dirt and leaves from the grill-like area. Keeping the condenser cooling coils free of debris enables them to work more efficiently. On the inside, replace the air filter and clean off the return air duct covers. Dirty filters will force your air conditioning system to work harder and waste energy. Turn on your air conditioning and let it run for half an hour to confirm that it is working properly. By finding out about problems now, you'll have a far easier time to arrange for a service call rather than in mid-July when it's 95 and service companies are swamped with calls.
- **Install a programmable thermostat.** Have you installed a programmable thermostat? EnergyStar.gov estimates that a properly used programmable thermostat can save $180 off energy costs annually.
- **Check your attic air circulation.** Keeping your attic cool keeps your whole house cool and helps to improve your AC system's energy efficiency. While it's still cool, go into your attic and check to make sure that soffit vents are not blocked by loose insulation that may have blown around during a winter storm. Also check that gable vents are not blocked. If your roof has soffits but not ridge vents, it's a good idea to install them because they circulate more air through your attic and keep your home cool and dry. Installing an attic fan or a wholehouse fan are also good ways to help vent hot air on hot days.
- **Maintain your ceiling fans.** Switch the spin-direction on your ceiling fans. If you raise your thermostat by only two degrees and use your ceiling fan, you can lower air conditioning costs by up to 14 percent over the course of the cooling season. Also, ceiling fan blades collect lots of dust over a few months. Remember to clean the dust off the fan blades before you turn the ceiling fan back on. Otherwise, the reversed airflow will send little gray "dust-caterpillars" all over your room.
- **Check your windows for leaks and drafts.** One of the best things about spring is being able to air-out your home. So, it's a good thing to check your window screens and see what kind of shape they're in. On newer windows, look for tears along the edges of the screen where they attach to the frame. The same goes for storm windows. Also, on older windows this is a good opportunity to look over the condition of the window glazing. Glazing keeps the window glass sealed against the frame, eliminates drafts, and improves energy efficiency. Clean off any cracked or crumbling window glazing and replace it to help seal and support the window glass. While re-glazing a window is best, silicon is sometimes the most convenient way to go.

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## MISSION STATEMENT

AMEA's mission is to provide for our Member communities a reliable and economical source of electric power, enabling them to preserve and enhance the benefits of municipal utility ownership for their citizens and the electric customers they serve. We strive to offer services that our Members need and can adapt to provide the best value for their communities and customers.

# Alabama CURRENTS

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## On the Cover

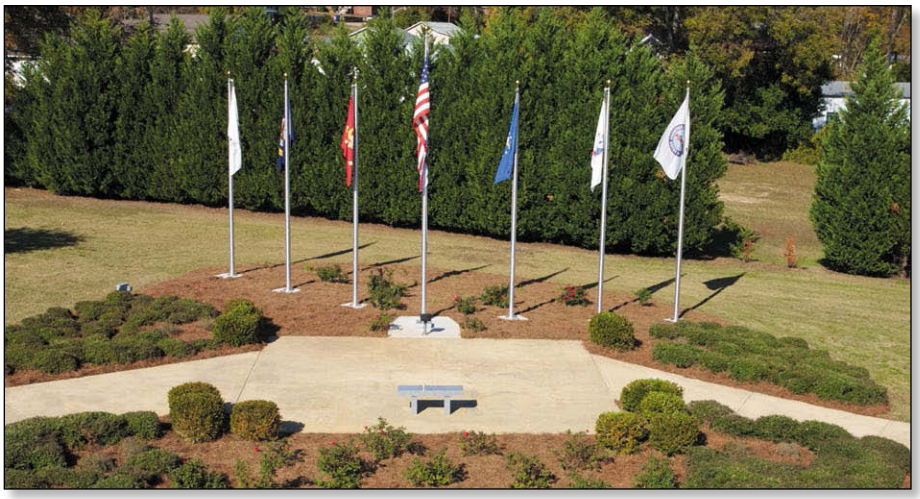
The Sylacauga Utilities Board recently completed the first phase of several electrical upgrades at the Blue Bell Creameries plant in Sylacauga. These upgrades are part of improvements underway to accommodate production growth and increased electrical load at the plant. Additional service will also be required for a new production building to be constructed later this year.

Shown on the cover are two 3750 KVA transformers being unloaded and set into position at the plant. Transformers for Bank 1, Bank 2, and Bank 3 were all upgraded to 3,750 KVA units. Bank 1 and Bank 3 were put in service in October, while Bank 2 was installed in January. *(Photos by Christa Jennings, The Coosa County News)*

# Partnerships that help build sustainable communities

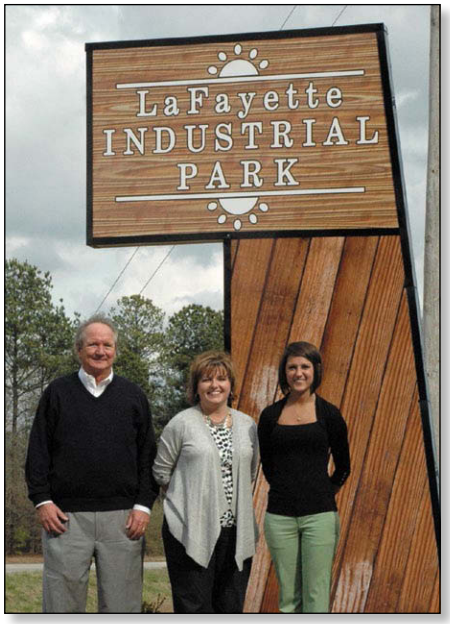
The Alabama Municipal Electric Authority (AMEA) is dedicated to contributing to the economic growth of Alabama and to making a lasting impact on the 11 communities we serve. We are committed to helping our local economic developers improve the quality of life as well as grow sustainable communities.

*Continued on page 5*



*Veteran's Memorial Park in Lanett*

*Wiregrass Soldiers Memorial in Dothan*




*New sign at LaFayette Industrial Park (left to right: Al Cook, AMEA Economic Development Marketing Consultant; Valerie Gray and Kimberly Carter of the Chambers County Development Authority)*

*Welcome banners in Piedmont*

*KFH Industries in Dothan*

Economic growth in Alabama is critical to economically stable communities.

Building strong, resilient communities starts with having a great team. Economic development, as well as community development, doesn't just happen - it takes a team of committed business people, policy makers, and citizens working to develop comprehensive plans and practices to see results with real impact.

Local economic development organizations are critical in stabilizing our economy, as well as our future economic growth. Local economic developers help communities around the country better meet their housing, transportation, and environmental goals, laying the groundwork for an economy that provides good jobs now and creates a strong foundation for long-term prosperity. I want to take this opportunity to thank these "champions" for the job that they do.

Communities are facing new challenges in attaining economic growth, increasing wealth, and improving the quality of life for their residents. Economic development organizations, like those in AMEA's 11 Member cities, strive to grow and improve the communities they serve by attracting and retaining development, residents, and jobs.

AMEA has a deep appreciation of the challenges and accomplishments of those working in economic development at the local level. We also recognize and appreciate the importance of local industries to our communities.

AMEA works with and supports the efforts of our Members by enhancing existing industries and bringing in new industry through various AMEA-funded programs and initiatives. That's why we continue to create partnerships and build relationships with those at the local level as well as with state and regional economic development organizations to provide opportunities to improve the quality of life in AMEA Member cities.

AMEA is committed to community development throughout its service footprint by helping our Member cities with those initiatives that can have lasting impacts on their communities for years to come.

We know that when prospective industries are considering communities for possible location, they are sometimes in these communities before we know it. They are looking at the schools, downtowns, parks and industrial parks. They are reading the local newspaper, they are stopping at the local convenience store and chatting with the person behind the counter, they are having a cup of coffee at the local coffee shop, and they are talking to local residents. That's why we continue to do everything we can to support our communities so that they are competitive in their desirability to a prospective industry. Whether it's having an attractive downtown, an appealing city park, or appropriate signage for an industrial park, AMEA continues to explore ways in which we can provide local economic developers with the tools and resources they need to grow their communities.

We commend the work that our local elected officials and their economic development professionals do in AMEA Member cities. While current economic circumstances are challenging, the work they do has never been more important to the communities they serve.

AMEA and its Members will continue to support these professionals in their vigilant efforts to grow sustainable communities. We look forward to continued dialogue and partnerships as we seek to find ways to help them improve the quality of life in our public power communities.

*Fred Clark*

AMEA President & CEO

## From the Editor

*Continued from page 2*

- **Clean refrigerator coils.** Clean your refrigerator condenser coils and ensure air can circulate freely; the motor works harder and uses more electricity when dust and dirt build up on the coils.
- **Make sure exhaust fans operate properly.** Spring is a good time to ensure all exhaust fans are operating properly. Check filters for dirt and wash or replace as required according to the owner's manual.
- **Improve indoor air quality.** Reduce energy costs and improve indoor air quality. Reducing air leaks and eliminating drafts is one of the most cost effective measures a homeowner can perform. Air leakage can account for up to 35 percent or more of heat loss in a home.
- **Install a low-flow showerhead.** Low-flow showerheads can reduce water use and the amount of energy required to heat the water.
- **Shop for ENERGY STAR® appliances.** Consider a front-loading ENERGY STAR® clothes washer which uses 50 percent less water. It also has a high-speed spin cycle. This removes more water from clothes, which means less drying time.

Energy-efficient improvements can make a home more comfortable and save money. Remember, you have the power to control your energy usage and your utility bill. It's all up to you.

For more energy-efficiency tips, we invite you to visit our web site, www.amea.com, Energy Efficiency, or www.energystar.gov.

Enjoy your spring!

*Lisa Miller*

AMEA Manager of Communications and Marketing

# Ready or not, here comes summer

**Doug Rye**
*Host – "Home Remedies" Radio Talk Show*

It is March and the wind is blowing, which will bring April showers to make May flowers. Does that sound familiar? If so, it is because it happens this way just about every year.

From an energy-efficiency standpoint, that is good news because not much heating or cooling is needed in the spring. But now, ready or not, here comes June, July and August, which typically means maximum cooling and higher utility bills.

I have been writing this column for six years and every column is intended to help you have lower utility bills and to have a comfortable house. Based on the calls that I have received, I am happy to have learned that many of you have benefited from the information presented in these columns.

Folks often ask me, "What is the one single thing that can be done on an existing home that will save the most money?" In most cases the answer is, "Convert to a geothermal heating and cooling system." That is because the heating and cooling cost is typically the biggest cost item on your utility bill, and a geo system can provide heating and cooling for less than any other system available. While that is the correct answer, it does not necessarily mean that it is the most feasible thing that you should do. However, if you are going to buy a new heating and cooling system anyway, you should definitely look at geothermal because it is more feasible than ever before. In fact, in most cases, it is a no-brainer when considering the 30 percent federal tax credit.

Let me give you a couple of true stories involving geothermal. Recently, I was in a hospital ICU waiting room, waiting to see if one of my dear friends was going to survive after a massive aneurism. A middle-aged couple walked up to me from across the room and asked if I was Doug Rye. I answered that I was and they proceeded to thank me for the help that I had given them about converting to geothermal. They explained that it was a difficult decision but had proven to be one of the best decisions that they had ever made. They now had better comfort and much lower utility bills.

On the very next day, our next door neighbor was leaving his driveway just as my wife and I were entering our's. We made our customary friendly wave, but he didn't just wave back, but rather rolled his car window down and started doing hand signals that indicated that he wanted to talk to me. He is on the POA Lake Committee, so that usually means that he wanted to discuss something about the condition of the lake or about the crappie fishing. He walked hurriedly toward me and said, "I need the name of a good geothermal repair man." I answered, "But you don't have geothermal." He said, "No, but my mother has had geothermal in her house for 18 years and loves it; and she told me that she has never had a service call on the unit, but she needs one now." My neighbor paused, then looked at me and said, "I wish that I had never let my builder talk me out of installing geo on our new house. The units would have paid for themselves by now and they would be making me money every month". He is an accountant and he is right. So I gave him the phone number of a good company to service the unit and I learned that it was an easy fix.

Just three or four days later, I saw a HVAC company service van pull up at my other neighbor's house. That company worked at this house for the most part of two days, so I knew that they were doing more than just changing filters. This neighbor had built his house using all of the Doug Rye energy recommendations and had told me that he definitely was going to install geothermal. My calculations showed that his house needed a 2-ton system for the downstairs and a 2-ton system for the upstairs. I watched the house as it was being built and was disappointed when I saw two, 3-ton air-to-air heat pumps being installed. So my neighbor has paid for two extra tons of equipment that he will never need, has paid higher utility bills every month, and has had more maintenance costs. He has told me that he let the HVAC contractor talk him out of geothermal.

I am running out of space, so let me summarize. Both neighbors knew how to build their new house to have perfect comfort and super low utility bills. They also knew that the average life of a geothermal system is about twice that of a regular system. They also knew that the payback for geothermal would be about eight years (payback would be about four years now with the tax credit). Both houses are now over nine years old and both have had major maintenance costs. And I can assure you that both neighbors wish that they had not let someone, who doesn't pay the bills, talk them out of geothermal.

My wife and I have had geothermal for 23 years and would have it no other way. If you want me to help you determine if geo is feasible for your house, just call me at the office, (501) 653-7931, because ready or not, here comes summer.

*Doug Rye, an Arkansas architect, is known as the 'King of Caulk and Talk' and 'America's Energy Expert.' Doug has helped thousands of homeowners save money on their power bills. He hosts the popular "Home Remedies" radio talk program, which has been on the air for 15 years in 14 states. Doug speaks annually at American Institute of Architects meetings to hundreds of other architects on energy efficiency. He conducts over 150 energy-saving seminars per year all across the U.S. Have a question for Doug? Contact him at (501) 653-7931 or www.dougrye.com.*

# Batting a thousand during tax season

**Kylle' D. McKinney**
*Public Affairs Specialist*
*Social Security Administration*

Spring training for major league baseball teams begins in March. As you prepare to meet the April 15 deadline to file your taxes, here are some Social Security tax tips to help you knock the ball out of the park. Batter up!

**First Base**

If you changed your name due to marriage or divorce, or made another legal name change, make sure you change your name on your Social Security records and with your employer. Changing your name on all of your records will avoid a "mismatch" with our records (which could delay your tax return) and improper recording of your earnings. To learn more about your Social Security number and changing your name, go to www.socialsecurity.gov/ssnumber.

**Second Base**

You will need Social Security numbers for your children if you want to claim them as dependents on your tax return. In most cases, parents request a Social Security number for their newborn child at the hospital when applying for a birth certificate. If you didn't apply for a number for your child then, you can apply at your local Social Security office or by mail. Claiming your dependents will maximize your tax refund or minimize any amount you owe. To learn more, read our online publication, Social Security Numbers For Children, available at www.socialsecurity.gov/pubs.

**Third Base (Bases Loaded)**

If you receive Social Security benefits, you need to pay federal taxes on some of your benefits if your total income, including Social Security and all of your other taxable income, is $25,000 or more, and you file federal taxes as an individual. Married couples filing joint returns need to pay federal taxes on income of $32,000 or more. To learn more about taxes and your Social Security benefits, go to www.socialsecurity.gov/planners/taxes.htm.

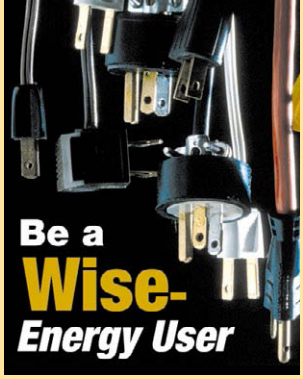
**Cleanup Hitter**

Now that you're working hard and earning Social Security credits, you can check your Social Security Statement online. Doing so will ensure that you have all your bases covered for the years you've worked. You can open or access your personal my Social Security account at www.socialsecurity.gov/myaccount.

**A Grand Slam**

If you own a small business, Social Security has a free electronic filing option that allows you to prepare and submit W-2s for your employees at www.socialsecurity.gov/employer. Registering online gives you freedom from paper forms and it's free, fast, and secure.

Follow these tips, and cover all your bases. To learn more about Social Security, visit www.socialsecurity.gov.




# Improve your air conditioner's efficiency

Air conditioners use a lot of electricity. Now is the time to have an annual tune-up in preparation for the summer.

Without regular service to your air conditioner, its efficiency can fall by as much as half, especially when it works overtime in the summer heat. However, proper maintenance and repair on your air conditioner will save you money and can extend its life for roughly 15 years.

Air conditioners are complicated and require specialized tools to service them. It is best to hire an air-conditioning technician. An annual tune-up of your air conditioner averages approximately $50 to $100, but can reduce your cooling costs by 5 percent or more.

Here are some maintenance tips that should be performed by a professional:

- Inspect the ductwork for loose joints and other leaks.
- Air leaks waste energy and should be sealed with duct mastic, not duct tape.
- Check hose connections for leaks, and make sure the condensation tube is draining freely.
- Clean the blower so that it can move air more efficiently.
- Oil the motors, and check the belts for tightness and wear.
- Verify the airflow by measurement. Improper airflow can affect efficiency.
- Clean the indoor evaporator and outdoor condenser coil. If it doesn't have an access panel, have one installed.
- Check the refrigerant charge and adjust if needed. Remember that the law requires refrigerant to be recaptured when units are recharged.
- Straighten any bent films on the condenser and evaporator coils.
- Inspect the electric terminals.
- Make sure to clean and tighten the connections.
- Inspect the thermostat to ensure that it provides a reliable reading.
- Install a programmable thermostat to adjust your home's temperature automatically. This thermostat increases the temperature setting while you're gone and then returns the home to a more comfortable setting before you return.

WATTS NEW IN
Alexander City

# 2ND ANNUAL LEAD FORWARD WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

## *planned for March in Alexander City*

**By Tracy Kendrick and Ann Rye**

The Alexander City Chamber of Commerce will host its Second Annual Lead Forward Women's Conference and Business Expo on Friday, March 20 at the Betty Carol Graham Technology Center on the campus of Central Alabama Community College.

Ann Rye, Chamber President and CEO, said "This day is designed to motivate women across our region to listen to their inner voice that calls them to be more than what they currently are; to make a difference. For some women, that calling is to be the best wife, mother, or daughter they can be. However, for others it may be to influence someone in a positive direction, empower a group or individual to make a difference, run for public office, serve their community in some capacity, or even start a business. Whatever it is, we want to help them be inspired to take steps in that direction."

Of the 440 women who attended the conference last year, several made huge steps towards accomplishing their dreams from the motivation they received during the luncheon. This included one woman starting her own business. One year later, she is a success story, proving that sometimes courage and a group of encouraging women to support you is all you need.

The Lead Forward Business Expo provides those who target the female demographics to have a booth the day of the conference. Exhibitors will have the opportunity to promote their goods and services to those who attend. The expo will start at 9 a.m. and end at 2 p.m. Exhibitor space is free to Alexander City Chamber business partners. However, if you are interested in exhibiting, but are not a member, booth space is $100. Space is limited. Contact the chamber at (256) 234-3461 for availability.

This year's keynote speaker is Stacy Brown, founder and partner with her husband, Kevin, of Chicken Salad Chick. Now with over 100 franchises spanning seven states, Mrs. Brown will share her inspirational story of turning the perfect chicken salad recipe into a way to provide for her children; ultimately building a thriving business in just eight years. Her story is not without bumps in the road and problems to solve. Her passion to succeed is inspirational and entertaining.

The conference will also raise money for The Chicken Salad Chick Foundation which has two major initiatives: fighting cancer and feeding the hungry. All money collected from donated items will go to make a difference in these areas.

During the conference, two awards will be given. The Tallapoosa County Woman of the Year will be presented, now in its second year. Also, the Alexander City Chamber is happy to announce that it will award for the first time the Coosa County Woman of the Year. These awards are prestigious leadership awards recognizing deserving women who have influenced and empowered others and in doing so have set a positive example to follow. If you would like to nominate a deserving candidate for either award, please contact the chamber for a nomination form.

The Lead Forward Women's Conference is uniting women across counties and throughout the region of central Alabama. If you would like to be part of this uplifting day, tickets are available by contacting the Alexander City Chamber of Commerce, (256) 234-3461, or ann.rye@alexandercitychamber.com. Tickets are $20 for the lunch conference and each ticket holder will receive a Lead Forward t-shirt as a souvenir along with multiple goodies from our sponsors. Attending the women's expo is free.

Don't let another year go by without reaching your potential. Attend the Lead Forward Women's Conference and Business Expo and be motivated to move your life forward.

*Tracy Kendrick is Tracy Kendrick is Administrative Assistant for the City of Alexander City Light and Power. Ann Rye is President and CEO of the Alexander City Chamber of Commerce.*

WATTS NEW IN
Dothan

# Dothan Utilities' personnel to don new protective gear

By Chris Phillips

In the very near future, you may notice Dothan Utilities' employees wearing full Hazard Risk Category (HRC) 4 protective gear when working around energized equipment.

To help ensure the safety of electrical system personnel, industry standards have changed and revisions have been made in the OSHA regulations related to electric power generation, transmission and distribution workers.

Dothan Utilities is currently evaluating these changes in order to ensure compliance and safety of personnel. These protective suits are designed to prevent burns that could result when an arc flash occurs from energized electrical equipment. These changes will directly affect the utilities' approach to working in the vicinity of energized equipment.

Dothan Utilities' engineering staff will be evaluating all future work to determine what level of protective equipment is required for working around energized equipment.

*Chris Phillips is the Electric Operations Superintendent for Dothan Utilities.*

WATTS NEW IN
Fairhope

# Fairhope experiencing improved economy

By D. Fran Morley

Evidence of an improved economy and increased economic development is blooming all over Fairhope this spring. From the opening of a new aviation-related training facility at the Fairhope Municipal Airport and the construction of a fourth city fire station, to multiple new subdivision and mixed-use development requests — business is booming.

"Fairhope is a very business-friendly city with a high quality of life for residents, which makes it easy for businesses to attract workers," said Fairhope Mayor Tim Kant. "Growth across the bay in Mobile at Austal and with Airbus means more people will be looking for homes in a community that is healthy and attractive, and that's Fairhope. And of course, at the same time, we continue to work hard to ensure that growth in Fairhope is controlled so that the city stays a desirable place for all ages to live, work, and play."

Jonathan Smith, director of planning and building for the City of Fairhope, notes several factors that are contributing to growth.

"Alabama is ranked fourth in the top 10 states for doing business, and our metro area is in the top 100 of America's 'smartest' cities. Also, we're in the process of becoming designated as an Alabama Community of Excellence, we're updating our Comprehensive Plan, and updating traffic and planning reports with environmentally-friendly guidelines. All of this makes us attractive to businesses" said Smith.

"In addition, the two downtown campuses for Faulkner State Community College and the University of South Alabama, Baldwin County, are great assets," Smith said. "Having these schools here greatly increases our ability to produce a capable and competent workforce, especially in the field of nursing. Faulkner invested a lot in their nursing program when they built the new science and nursing building on the Fairhope campus. Thomas Hospital is a major part of our community and our local colleges are helping produce the workforce the hospital and healthcare facilities and other clean industries need."

The number of residential building permits issued by the City has been rising over the past few years, said Building Official Erik Cortinas.

"We are up from 1,166 permits in 2011 to 1,638 in 2014. The total dollar amount of investment for single-family home construction continues to increase as well. In 2014, which stood at $63,018,688, more than double what it was in 2009."

The total number of new single-family homes built in Fairhope has almost doubled since 2011 as well, according to the building department. There were 144 in 2011; 248 in 2012; 268 in 2013; and 279 in 2014.

*D. Fran Morley is a contributing writer for the City of Fairhope.*

WATTS NEW IN
LaFayette

# LaFayette Day has grown over the past 18 years

**By Chris Busby**

It doesn't seem like it was very long ago when the idea to bring a unique fundraising opportunity for Valley Haven School to LaFayette first came to fruition. But as the 18th Annual LaFayette Day approaches, it's hard not to marvel at how far the event has come.

The first ever LaFayette Day took place in 1998. The intention was to allow the City to have a unique contribution to Valley Haven's annual Hike/Bike/Run fundraising campaign.

Valley Haven is an independent, non-profit organization that is designed to help the community meet the needs of its infant and adult citizens with special needs. The school currently serves over 80 clients in Chambers and Lee counties, including approximately 20 from the LaFayette area.

That first LaFayette Day drew approximately 200 people and raised $2,000 for Valley Haven. In 2014, LaFayette Day drew over 1,000 visitors and more than $12,000 was raised. Organizers considered it the biggest LaFayette Day ever.

What first began as a small idea has become LaFayette's signature event. It's something everyone looks forward to each year, and it's hard to ignore the sense of community it breeds for LaFayette's residents.

"It's important to us as a city," LaFayette Mayor Barry Moody said. "And it's exciting to see everyone come together to be a part of the fundraising for Valley Haven. The school provides such a valuable service to this community and it's important that we are able to support their efforts.

"It's also a chance for us to show off our city to those that don't come here often. The City is truly fortunate that LaFayette Day has grown so much over the past 17 years and we are all looking forward to this year's event."

"We're very fortunate to have a city like LaFayette which goes out of its way to make this event such a special day for us," said Craig Brown, LaFayette Day co-chair and incoming director of Valley Haven. "It's invaluable because they give us whatever we need. From the City leaders to the merchants and businesses, that they allow us to use the City and the space to promote the school is such a great thing."

This year's LaFayette Day will take place on Saturday, April 11 in downtown LaFayette on the historic courthouse square from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. CST.

LaFayette Day will bring arts and crafts, kids rides and games, a community yard sale, an antique and classic car show, a motorcycle ride, food, fun, a full day of musical entertainment and much more to the streets of LaFayette. The event is free and offers something for every member of the family.

"As LaFayette Day continues to grow, we hope that everyone in east Alabama and beyond will come join us to celebrate our City and to support this worthy cause," Mayor Moody added.

*Chris Busby is a staff writer for The LaFayette Sun.*

*Above: Crowds at LaFayette Day enjoy mingling with friends, great food, games and a day full of fun.*

*Right: Kids enjoy a train ride through LaFayette Day at last year's event.*

*Below: The scene around LaFayette Day's antique car show as the motorcycle ride tours through the streets of downtown LaFayette.*

WATTS NEW IN
Lanett

# Lanett High School honors long-time supporter

**By Wayne Clark**

In January, the Lanett High School (LHS) boys and girls basketball teams, the school cheerleaders, coaches, administrators and fans paid tribute to one of the school's most ardent and dedicated supporters, the late Vickie Looser.

A long-time classroom teacher and counselor at LHS, Mrs. Looser lost a battle to cancer on Nov. 10, 2014. She and her husband, Charles, were ever present at any school-related event, especially at the Lanett High football and basketball games.

Her absence from the games this year was keenly felt by many. It just wasn't the same without her cheering on the Panthers.

On the final Friday home game of the season, the school paused to say thank you for what Mrs. Looser meant to the school system and the students. In a mid-court ceremony, her husband, Charles, was presented a plaque in memory of Mrs. Looser and her long-time support of the school. Making the presentation was Athletic Director/Head Football Coach Clifford Story. Standing alongside him were Dr. Richard Carter, Boys Head Basketball Coach; Jennifer Norris, Girls Head Basketball Coach; and Principal Jennifer Boyd.

In an impressive showing of love and respect for their former counselor, every member of both the boys and girls teams, plus the cheerleaders, stood on the court as the presentation was being made. Mr. Looser was deeply moved by it all.

"We say to the family of Vickie Looser, who was a great educator and a great person, that we love her and thank her for her hard work, dedication, commitment, compassion and love for her students, co-workers, this school and this community," School Resource Officer Trey Norris. "She will forever be in our memory."

Mrs. Looser, who was 66 when she died, was married to Charles for 44 years. Both served the city school system for many years…Charles as a high school principal and superintendent, and Vickie as a history teacher…guidance counselor and sponsor for the school yearbook and cheerleader squad.

Mrs. Looser held a Bachelor of Arts degree in History Education from the University of West Georgia, a Master of Arts degree in History from Auburn University, and a Master in Arts degree in Counseling from Troy University. Her career in the field of education spanned more than 30 years. In addition to her time at Lanett High, she had earlier taught for the LaGrange, GA, school system, Springwood School, Valley Junior High, Lanett Junior High and Southern Union State Community College.

At her retirement in 2014, Mrs. Looser said that she was most proud of the accomplishments of her students. Scores of them passed through her classrooms and her office and she tried her hardest to help each one reach his or her potential.

In 2010, when she moved from her role as classroom teacher to counselor, Mrs. Looser was often asked if she missed being in the classroom. "I don't think about it too much," she'd say. "I'm too busy taking care of our students."

She hastened to add, though, that being in that classroom had given her what she'd looked for in life – the chance to make a positive difference in the lives of young people.

*Wayne Clark is the news editor of The Valley Times-News in Lanett.*

WATTS NEW IN Opelika

OPS OPELIKA POWER SERVICES

# Opelika's fiber optic network will change the landscape of the city

**By June I. Owens**

Opelika is known for a great heritage, rich in tradition. Just as the railroad and interstate brought life to our City as an important means of transportation, our fiber optic network will change the landscape of our City as the new information highway. With fiber, you can travel at the speed of light. There is no faster means of communication than fiber, and it provides the most reliable means of transporting data. Greater reliability at the speed of light.

Is there a need for gigabit speeds? Opelika Power Services (OPS) doesn't have many gig customers today, but not so long ago, consumers thought 30/4 speeds were off the chart. Now with entertainment apps, streaming live video and sharing data files, online gaming, social media, video and teleconferencing, symmetric speeds are a big favorite of our OPS customers. Starting with 30/30, you can also get 50/50, 100/100, 300/300 up to a GIG symmetric. Both residential and business customers now backup data to cloud services. With our symmetric upload, time and speed are no longer an issue.

Still confused about download and upload speeds? When you see the numbers 30/15, 50/25, 100/100, the first number refers to download, the speed at which you receive information. The second number is your upload speed, the speed at which you send information.

Since we talk about this being the information highway, think of this in terms of how fast you drive to Montgomery on I-85. The speed limit is 70. How fast do you want to drive back to Opelika? What is your speed limit? This is a perfect example of symmetric speed, 70/70. With OPS Internet, you can send data as fast as you can receive it. You can travel fast in both directions.

For those who still want to know what makes OPS fiber network different, OPS is not a "fiber rich" network. We are a 100-percent fiber network. There are no electronics in the outside plant. It is a fiber connection from our head-end all the way to your home or business. Again, fiber provides greater reliability and security.

As for the "fiber rich" networks used in older technology, this means there is fiber to your neighborhood, to a node. From that node, your neighborhood shares the bandwidth provided to that node location. One analogy is a water faucet that feeds your entire neighborhood. The more people who turn on the water, the less water pressure each home will have. Typically, you will see increased speeds during the day when most families are at work and school, only to see reduced speeds at night when households are busy using their connection. With fiber, your connection is from our office to your home or business, allowing you to get the speeds you pay for.

Opelika is one of a few cities that owns its own fiber network, becoming the first municipality in Alabama to offer fiber to the premise within our city limits. Both Huntsville and Tuscaloosa are looking for ways to bring this to reality in their cities.

Google Fiber began in 2010, deploying first in Kansas City, followed by Provo, UT, and Austin, TX. More recently, Google announced plans for Atlanta, Charlotte, and Nashville. When you consider the cities that have fiber and the cities that are waiting, you can easily see that our City Leaders in Opelika have us well ahead of the race across our nation. Everyone says that fiber is the future.

*OPS Customer Service*

Thank you Mayor Gary Fuller and the Opelika City Council for providing us with a future that is here today. Opelika citizens, support your local provider, and together, we will make a difference in our community and build a brighter future for our great city.

*June Owens is the Manager of Marketing and Communications for Opelika Power Services.*

# Opelika joins 38 cities calling on FCC to respect local Internet choice

**By June I. Owens**

Opelika Mayor Gary Fuller joined mayors and elected officials from 38 communities and Next Century Cities in a letter urging the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to respect community choice for Internet infrastructure. The FCC is currently considering whether to allow laws to stand that restrict the ability of communities to pursue high-speed Internet.

Mayor Fuller led the way for Opelika to become the first municipality in the state of Alabama to offer symmetric speeds up to a GIG, both to residential and business customers.

"With this fiber network, we have turned probabilities into possibilities," Mayor Fuller said. "We have positioned Opelika to attract new companies that require the ultra-high data speeds that we can offer, but at the same time, it will allow our existing businesses the opportunity to grow and expand. No other provider was willing to invest in our community so we determined this was an investment we couldn't afford to leave on the table."

Opelika is a member of Next Century Cities, a city-to-city initiative founded to support communities and their elected leaders as they seek to ensure that all have access to fast, affordable, and reliable Internet.

In 2014, Next Century Cities member cities Wilson, NC, and Chattanooga, TN, filed petitions with the FCC seeking relief from state laws that have inhibited their ability to expand their broadband Internet networks to other communities. The agency is expected to rule on the petitions sometime this year.

*June Owens is the Manager of Marketing and Communication for Opelika Power Services.*

WATTS NEW AT
Riviera Utilities

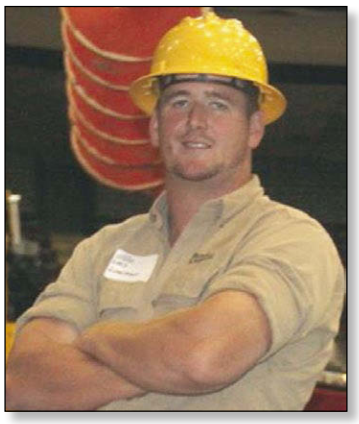
# Identifying the good guys — thwarting the bad ones

**By Miles McDaniel**

Riviera Utilities works hard to earn and keep your trust. We also look out for our customers by alerting them to possible scams.

Some scammers are brazen enough to walk right up to your door. A new, but equally low breed uses technology and telephones.

First, we want to help you identify your Riviera Utilities' employees and those of the contract utility companies we hire, such as those that inspect our utility poles.



*Riviera Utilities' employees like Wesley Givens, Apprentice Lineworker II, are easily identified by their uniforms. They also carry identification with them at all times.*

All of our field employees, and many office employees, wear Riviera Utilities' uniforms and drive vehicles with our name and logo. Most importantly, legitimate utility employees always carry identification. Should you have any doubts, call us.

Unfortunately, technology masks a lot of crooks. Utilities nationwide are warning customers about a rise in bill payment fraud scams over the phone.

Fake home energy audits and scams related to prepaid credit cards are becoming more common at utilities across the Southeast. Callers demand people make a large payment to cancel an order to shut off power. They pretend to negotiate and accept a lower amount if you immediately obtain a prepaid credit card.

If you receive a suspicious call regarding your utility bill, call Riviera Utilities. A service representative can confirm your bill and let you know of any problems with your account.

Variations include calls claiming expiration of automatic bank drafts. Scammers seek personal financial information, which could enable a thief to raid bank accounts. Other frauds include home walk-through scam calls. The customer is told they can save money on their utility bills if they schedule a walk-through energy audit of the home. It's a technique to get a layout of a home for a future burglary.

Remember, if you receive a call claiming you need to make an immediate payment with a money card or risk disconnection, don't do it. Hang up and call the utility. We'll verify the status of your account.

If you experience a problem, please call your local office: (251) 943-5001, Foley; (251) 626-5000, Daphne.

*Miles McDaniel is Manager of Public Affairs for Riviera Utilities.*

WATTS NEW IN Sylacauga

# Blue Bell® grows business, begins upgrades

By Christa Jennings

*Sylacauga Utilities Board Electric Superintendent Eric Carithers and lineman Jeff Whaley inspect the third transformer.*

Business is growing in Sylacauga – at least for the Blue Bell Creameries plant located on North Norton Avenue.

The Sylacauga Utilities Board (SUB) has been working with Blue Bell, its largest electric customer, through a process of upgrades to improve the plant's electric service. The plant was in need of upgrades as it prepares to grow and expand its business in Sylacauga.

Improvements to the distribution system began in October, as SUB worked with the company to increase plant capacity by replacing six single-phase transformers for transformer banks one and three with two, 3,750 KVA three-phase transformers.

Underground conduit and cables were also installed for those two units, as well as for a third 3,750 KVA unit to supply bank two, which was installed in January.

Also in October, three reclosers with electronic controls were installed to provide protection for the three transformers, as well as prevent single-phase conditions on plant equipment, according to Eric Carithers, Electric Superintendent, SUB.

"A fourth recloser and electronic control was installed as part of an automatic source transfer scheme to supply power to the plant from an alternate substation if the normal substation fails," Carithers explained.

Additionally, overhead power lines and poles were upgraded to connect the new equipment.

In January, the bank two transformer was installed, and SUB began relocating the power lines on Fourth Street to allow greater clearance from a new building which will be built at the corner of Fourth and Norton Streets.

According to Corey Weldon, Blue Bell plant engineer, and Jason Green, Blue Bell maintenance manager, the new building will be used for processing such ingredients as fruits, cookies, sauces, and more. This processing expansion with new equipment will enable the plant to make even more product on site. Additionally, the company is adding 900 pallets of storage.

This expansion will create 10 to 15 new jobs upon startup. The approximate completion date for the new building is scheduled for August 2015.

Weldon explained that Blue Bell had to replace the transformers because the old ones were maxed out. With the new ones installed, the plant will be able to add new equipment and have more stable power as the company continues to grow.

Green said the upgrades will allow for more capacity, which means equipment expansion inside the plant. He added that an emergency generator is now available, whereas the plant did not have that ability before. He explained that is particularly helpful in case of a sudden outage since it will allow the refrigeration system to get back on fairly quick.

The upgrade process will continue in the spring, as SUB will install a 2,500 KVA padmount transformer for the new building to be built at the corner of Fourth and Norton Streets. SUB will also complete the auto source transfer scheme by installing a fifth recloser at the normal plant feed point, according to Carithers.

*Christa Jennings is the senior staff reporter for The Coosa County News in Rockford.*

# Places to Go & Things to Do

*Alexander City*

**Senior Activity Center**. See all the senior activities planned for the months of March and April at http://www.acpr.me/senior-activity-center.php.

**March 12 and April 9, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., RECYCLE Electronics**. Public Works Department behind Darwin Dobbs. Electronics Recycling event every second Thursday. CE&E Solutions will be accepting electronics for recycling and they are ADEM certified. Contact Sabrina Wood at (334) 429-8832 or Amanda Thomas at (256) 409-2020. Sponsored by the City of Alexander City and the Middle Tallapoosa Clean Water Partnership.

**March 20, 12-1 p.m., Second Annual Women's Conference**. Keynote speaker, Stacy Brown, Founder, Chicken Salad Chick. Central Alabama Community College.

**April 4, 9 a.m., Citywide Egg Hunt**. Charles E Bailey Sportplex. For more information, call (256) 329-6736.

**April 12-18, National Library Week**. Adelia M. Russell Library and Mamie's Place Children's Library. Open Monday – Saturday. Also visit www.amrlibrary.net.

**Please call ahead to verify dates and times of events**.

*Dothan*

**March 21, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Spring Farm Day**. Landmark Park. Living history demonstrations of sheep shearing, blacksmithing, plowing, basket weaving, quilting and other traditional farm activities. Music and food available. Entertainment includes an "Old Time Fiddlers Convention" and two stages of traditional music. Admission is $8 for adults, $4 for kids, $6 for seniors and active military and free for park members Contact: Julie Heller for more information at (334) 794-3452 or jheller@landmarkpark.com. Visit www.landmarkparkdothan.com for additional information.

**March 23-25 and March 30-April 1, Spring Break Camps**. Landmark Park. The camps are available for 4-11 year olds.

**April 10 and 11, 10th Annual Tri-State BBQ Festival**. Houston County Farm Center, Dothan. The event features a concert and yard party Friday night, plus a car show, children's activities, cooking competition, tasting opportunities and live music on Saturday. Admission is $10 per person each day, with children 6 and under free. For more information, visit www.TriStateBBQ.com, or call (334) 699-1475.

*Fairhope*

**March 14, 9:30 a.m.-4 p.m., March Fantasy Doll and Toy Show and Sale**. Fairhope Civic Center Auditorium. Sponsored by the Eastern Shore Doll Study Club of Alabama. Adults, $3; Children ages 6-12, $1. For more information, contact Elizabeth Moore, (205) 789-0342 or Easter.Shore,DSC@gmail.com.

**March 6 and April 3, 6-8 p.m., First Friday Art Walk.** On the first Friday of every month, the Art Center welcomes 400-plusvisitors, free of charge, for the exhibit openings. Visitors are treated to refreshments made possible by generous local business sponsors. First Friday Art Walk will also include refreshments and live music from other local merchants. For information, call (251) 928-2228.

**March 14, 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Second Annual Fairhope Sunset Rotary BBQ & Brew.** Volanta Park. Bring your family and enjoy a beautiful Spring day of fun and food, sampling the best in barbecue and small batch home brewed beers. Great live music, plus arts and crafts vendors, too. Call (251) 928-3268 for more information.

**March 20-22, Fairhope Arts & Crafts Festival.** Downtown Fairhope. Sponsored by the Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce. A prestigious, highly juried show, arts and crafts. Features more than 230 exhibitors from throughout the country. For information, call (251) 928-6387.

**March 21, 37th Annual Spring Fever Chase**. Part of arts and crafts weekend. This 10K and 2-Mile Fun Run/Walk winds through beautiful downtown Fairhope overlooking Mobile Bay.

**March 26, 27th Annual Mayor's Golf Tournament.** Benefiting public education in Fairhope. Join Fairhope Mayor Tim Kant and Title Sponsor Terry Thompson Chevrolet at Quail Creek Golf Club. For information, call (251) 990-FEEF.

**April 4, 11, 18 and 25. Downtown Walking Tours.** April 4 is a tour of the Fairhope Beach Parks; April 11 is a tour of Fairhope Avenue, one block east and west of Section Street; and April 18 is a tour of Section Street, block north and south of Fairhope Pharmacy. These three tours will depart from the Welcome Center at 10 a.m. The final tour, Saturday, April 25, meets at 10 a.m. at the Oak Street gate to the Colony Cemetery. Donnie Barrett, Museum Director will give an overview of the town's history with visits to the graves of many of Fairhope's founders. For information, call (251) 929-1466

**April 4, Easter Bunny Visiting Downtown Fairhope.** The Easter bunny will be visiting Fairhope. The bunny will be in front of the Fairhope Welcome Center in downtown Fairhope from 10 a.m. until 12 p.m. for children to visit. Parents may bring their cameras to take pictures. For information, call (251) 929-1466.

**April 18, Celebrating Mobile Bay Earth Day.** The event is held at the Fairhope Pier Park, beginning at 10 a.m. and continuing through 7 p.m. Earth Day Mobile Bay will feature local vendors of green and earth-friendly solutions including windmills, efficient heating and cooling systems including solar, geothermal, insulation, green building, and local and naturally healthy food sources, hybrid cars and electric cars. Admission is free. For information, call (251) 929-1466.

**April 24, 7th Annual Hoot Scoot 5K and 1-Mile Walk.** 5K Run at 6 p.m., as racers of all ages take to the streets. This year's race offers prizes for both prediction and speed. Awards will go to the top five males and females who finish closest to their predicted times in the 5K, as well as to the three fastest male and female finishers. For information, call (251) 928-7483.

*Sylacauga*

**March 4, SouthFirst Brown Bag Winter Series, "Turn Back Time."** B.B. Comer Library. Dolores Hydock , "Money Still Talks, But It Used to Say a Lot More."

**March 7, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., Second Annual Chili Cook-Off and Car and Bike Show**. Sponsored by Comer Museum & Arts Center. Rain date is March 14.

**For the month of March**, Comer Museum & Arts Center will feature artist Jimmie Roberson of Henderson, TN. Reception will be on March 19 at 6:30 p.m.

**April 7-18, Magic of Marble Festival**. Visit http://www.bbcomerlibrary.net/marblefestival/ for more information.

**April 9, 2015 Taste of Sylacauga.** J. Craig Smith Community Center. Sponsored by Sylacauga Chamber of Commerce. Tickets are $10 for adults, $5 for children 7-12, free for children under 7.

**For the month of April**, Comer Museum & Arts Center will feature sculptors from Magic of Marble Festival. Reception will be on April 23 at 6:30 p.m.

**April 28-May 1, Congressional Student Art Competition**. Comer Museum & Arts Center. Reception will be on May 2 at 2 p.m.

**Alabama Municipal Electric Authority**
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Montgomery, Alabama 36104

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WATTS NEW AT
# Utilities Board of Tuskegee

## George Washington Carver Festival culminates with a Birthday Blast

**By Dr. Elaine C. Harrington**

On May 2, planners for the George Washington Carver Commemorative Festival will culminate Dr. Carver's 150th birthday with a Birthday Blast, citing him as a renowned scientific and humanitarian genius.

The 12th Annual Festival will be staged in downtown Tuskegee on the city square from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m. Festival participants and attendees will celebrate the theme, "150 Years Later: Carver's Genius Still Lives."

Numerous festival activities and events have been announced for this 150th Carver Birthday Blast:

Tuesday, April 28: Delivery by students of their essays, poetry, and other theme- related exhibits for review and selection of awardees.

Thursday, April 30: Carver Image Reception with more than 15 former students and acquaintances of Dr. Carver.

Saturday, May 2, starting at 10 a.m.: Annual Festival Parade with invited Grand Marshal, Dr. Brian L. Johnson, 7th President of Tuskegee (Institute) University, and Carver Images/ former students as honorary marshals. Local, area, and statewide schools and groups/organizations are invited to register for participation.

*Winning poster entry*

Car Show of antique cars will be on display. Owners will be vying for awards.

Birthday Blast program of Macon County student expositions that will highlight the theme, which promises to be an all-day stage explosion.

Science Fair exhibiting the genius of young and creative scientists. Trophies will be presented.

Numerous vendors will converge on the streets of downtown Tuskegee with food and diversified items of art, clothing, jewelry, etc. Vendor applications are available online, www.carverfestival.org, or you can call (334) 727-4728.

Musical entertainment will be featured throughout the festive event. Prizes and awards galore will be received by several individuals, schools and group presenters.

The Carver Festival has been listed as one of the top events in the state of Alabama. Don't miss the May 2 festivities and the 150th Birthday Blast for Dr. George Washington Carver.

*Dr. Elaine C. Harrington is Professor Emeritus and secretary of the Carver Festival Board of Directors.*

*Carver Proclamation Presented from City of Tuskegee*

*Meloneze Robinson, 92 years, Rides Motorcycle*