

Alabama CURRENTS

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Future Home of **OPELIKA** POWER SERVICES

New building, new and expanded services will
benefit customers of Opelika Power Services

See Page 12



FROM THE EDITOR

I have said it before and I will say it again... scholarships are our best investment in tomorrow. We must continue to make smart investments in our children.



The business community has a vested interest in lending support to the education of its community. The Alabama Municipal Electric Authority (AMEA) and its 11 Members are committed to investing in the children of the communities we serve through such initiatives as the AMEA Scholarship Program. AMEA and its Members are helping enrich the lives of students throughout the state.

So when I was invited by the Alabama State Treasurer's office to attend a press conference announcing the launch of a new statewide scholarship program, I could not have been happier. For the past year, State Treasurer Young Boozer and his staff, including Deputy Treasurer Glenda Allred, have been putting a lot of time, effort and research into exploring the best practices of scholarship programs throughout the state. One of those programs which received some recognition was the AMEA Scholarship Program. We met with Deputy Treasurer Allred last year to talk about our program and how it has benefitted thousands of students statewide. It was a proud moment for us to share the details of our program, which has been in existence since 1992.

We commend State Treasurer Boozer and his staff for putting their hard work and efforts into motion. The newly-established CollegeCounts Scholarship Program will help qualified Alabamians who may find it difficult to get other types of scholarship assistance.

As State Treasurer Boozer so eloquently put it, "Not every student makes a 30 or higher on their ACT, or has parents who can afford to write a check for tuition. But there are thousands of bright young minds in our state who work hard and deserve help achieving their dream of a college degree." We agree.

Read more about the CollegeCounts Scholarship Program on Page 5.

Also, please notice the article on this page about AMEA's Scholarship Program. Deadline for the program is **Monday, Feb. 4, 2013**.

AMEA takes its role as a good corporate citizen seriously. That's why we, along with our Members, support education initiatives that contribute to making our state economically competitive. Together, we can all help the next generation of leaders by giving them the support and experiences they need today to make sound decisions in the future.

Happy New Year!

Lisa Miller

AMEA Manager of Communications and Marketing

High School Seniors: Alabama Municipal Electric Authority (AMEA) Scholarship Program Applications Available!

College scholarship applications are now available to high school seniors graduating this spring.

Each year, AMEA and its Members make available 33, \$2,500 scholarships, which include regular and technical school scholarships.

To be eligible for either of AMEA's scholarships, a student's family must receive electric service from an AMEA Member city/utility and the student must attend an Alabama college or university.

Applications are currently available from school counselors in the AMEA Member cities of Alexander City, Dothan, Fairhope, Foley (Riviera Utilities), LaFayette, Lanett, Luverne, Opelika, Piedmont, Sylacauga and Tuskegee, or you can go line to the AMEA web site, www.amea.com, Scholarship Program

For more information on the program, contact your school counselor or Pamela Poole, AMEA's Scholarship Program Coordinator, (800) 239-2632, Ext. 110, (334) 387-3504, or pam@amea.com.

**DEADLINE IS
MONDAY, FEB. 4, 2013**



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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 Opelika Power Services (OPS) construction project for the new and expanded services is well underway, and folks who drive by the public works facility area can now see much more than the "Future Home of Opelika Power Services" sign that features the architectural renderings of the new facilities.

The satellite farm and the fiber building are now complete and all of the video, voice, and data equipment are currently being installed. The structural framework is in place for the warehouse building and the final phase will be the administrative building.

In the very near future, crews will be finished laying the fiber network throughout the entire City of Opelika and OPS will be able to start testing the basic network systems, looking for any unforeseen "glitches" in the network before offering the new services to the public.

For more information about the new services to be launched during FY 2013, see Page 12.

AMEA: The Power That Works For You!

Throughout the past year, I have talked about looming environmental regulations which will lead to the shutdown of many coal-fired electric generation plants over the next several years.

This scenario is playing out across the country, where operators of coal-fired plants – the predominant producers of electricity – are grappling with how to comply with impending U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standards limiting emissions of mercury, sulfur dioxide and other pollutants from their smokestacks.

Current and pending EPA power plant regulations could cost the U.S. economy up to \$275 billion between 2010 and 2035 if the regulatory timeline is followed, according to updated findings from the Electric Power Research Institute.

The American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity released an analysis recently that said more than 200 coal-based generating plants are scheduled to shut down in the next three to five years, representing 31,000 MW of electric generating capacity, due in large part to regulations issued by the EPA.

Although it is clear that as a result of EPA's regulatory actions, coal plants will be impacted by additional costs.

AMEA is committed to identifying electric generation options which provide our Members and their customers economical, reliable electric power. AMEA's 31-year history has proven that the organization is an innovator in exploring electric generation options to improve generation costs. AMEA continues to study all types of electric generation to determine the most economical and reliable sources for the future.

An example of our innovation is our efforts to study the feasibility of constructing a hydroelectric generating plant at the George W. Andrews Lock and Dam on the Chattahoochee River. The project is currently projected to generate between 13 to 18 megawatts. Through the 36-month permit that was issued by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), AMEA has the exclusive rights to study the economic feasibility of this project, as compared to other electric generation options. Hydro-power remains one of the cleanest, most environmentally-safe and affordable sources of renewable energy.

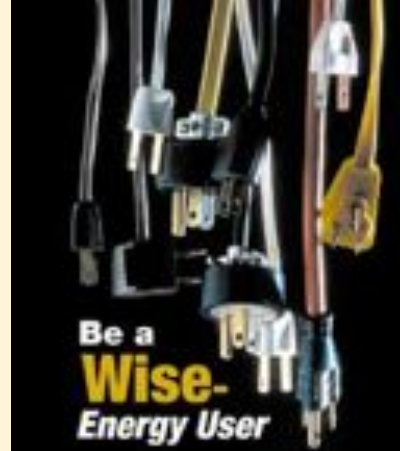
Our decision-making is based on long-term sustainability as we are committed to providing cost-competitive, reliable electric power for our Members and their customers. We are hopeful the Andrews Hydro Project will meet the cost benefit test as we work to maintain the most economical energy possible.

We will continue to work with members of Alabama's congressional delegation as well as consumer advocacy groups to try to protect our way of life. We are committed to working with Congress to establish climate and energy policies that will help protect the environment, while at the same time ensuring a reliable source of low-cost energy. It is critical to do so in a way that does not impose additional burdens on our struggling economy and put manufacturers in the United States at a competitive disadvantage.

We are hopeful that the U.S. Congress and EPA will take a realistic look at the enormous impact of all the regulations they are considering and how those regulations affect families and businesses.

Whatever the outcome, AMEA will continue to be *The Power That Works For You!*

Fred D. Clark, Jr.
AMEA President & CEO



Try these energy-saving tips for heating your home this winter

You don't have to spend a lot of money to save energy. The Alabama Municipal Electric Authority and its 11 Member cities offer these tips to help you lower your energy bill and keep your piggy bank full:

- When you leave a room, turn off lights, TVs and music systems. Shut down computers if you'll be away for a long period, or activate the unit's sleep mode for a short-term break.
- Dress in layers in the winter and throw an extra blanket on the bed so you can turn the thermostat down a few more degrees.
- About 15 percent of your energy bill is for heating water. Lower the temperature on the water heater to 120 degrees and wash clothes in cold water. Help your water heater work more efficiently by wrapping it in a \$20 insulation blanket.
- Weatherstrip your windows and doors. It's inexpensive and easy to do, and it's one of the best ways to trap warm air indoors.
- Seal joints in exposed ductwork in the basement and attic.
- If you can afford it, replace your windows with more efficient ones. If that's too expensive, install storm windows or smooth plastic sheeting over the panes. Both can reduce heat loss 25 to 50 percent.

For more energy-efficiency tips, visit www.amea.com, Energy Efficiency.

State Treasurer Young Boozer's Office and the CollegeCounts Board of Directors launch statewide scholarship program

State Treasurer and CollegeCounts Board Chair Young Boozer is calling on eligible Alabama students to apply for the newly-established CollegeCounts Scholarship.

"This scholarship program will help qualified Alabamians who may find it difficult to get other types of scholarship assistance," said Treasurer Boozer. "Not every student makes a 30 or higher on their ACT, or has parents who can afford to write a check for tuition. But there are thousands of bright young minds in our state who work hard and deserve help achieving their dream of a college degree."

Treasurer Boozer and other members of the CollegeCounts Board announced the scholarship program recently at Wetumpka High School. The program is designed to offer financial assistance to Alabama students who plan to enroll in Alabama colleges and universities. It will provide one-time awards of \$4,000 to qualified recipients enrolling in four-year schools and \$2,000 to those enrolling in two-year schools. Eligible students may apply online beginning January 2 at www.collegecountsalabama.com.

Applicants must meet all of the following criteria to be eligible for this scholarship:

- Be a high school senior or first-time college freshman
- Be a U.S. citizen
- Be an Alabama resident
- Be enrolled or planning to enroll in an Alabama eligible educational institution
- Demonstrate financial need
- Have a minimum GPA of 2.75
- Have an ACT score of 26 or below (applicants attending a two-year school will not be required to submit ACT scores)



Quick Facts:

- Scholarships will be applied to tuition, fees, books, supplies and equipment.
- Payments will be made directly to the institution and will be issued in the fall and spring.
- The application opens on January 2, 2013, and closes March 7, 2013.
- There are two primary funding sources for the Scholarship Program: administrative fees from the CollegeCounts 529 Fund and surplus funds from the Alabama Higher Education Loan Corporation (AHELC).
- Administrative fees explained: "CollegeCounts 529 Fund" is the marketing name for what is actually known as the ACES Trust Fund under Alabama law. The ACES Trust Fund is part of the ACES Program, which was established as a college savings alternative that allows contributors to open savings accounts to pay for a beneficiary's qualified educational expenses at an eligible institution of higher education. These savings accounts can be sold directly to individuals or sold to individuals by financial advisors. The

ACES Trust Fund receives a 0.10% administrative fee each year from the assets held in the advisor-sold program.

- AHELC Surplus Funds explained: The Alabama Higher Education Loan Corporation (AHELC) was established to provide student loans to Alabamians. After a long period of inactivity, AHELC was revived, only to see its business model abolished by the U.S. Congress. As a result, the AHELC board of directors chose to cease operations, dissolve the nonprofit corporation, and grant the existing surplus to help fund Alabama's CollegeCounts Scholarship Program. This decision was made in accordance with AHELC's founding purpose of funding higher education student aid.

The CollegeCounts Board of Directors is the sponsor of the CollegeCounts Scholarship Program, and the Alabama State Treasurer's Office is delegated the administrative responsibilities of the program. CollegeCounts is the marketing name for the Alabama College Education Savings Program created by Alabama law (Code of Alabama, as amended, §16-33C-10, et al). All promotional and marketing materials for the CollegeCounts Scholarship Program will utilize the name CollegeCounts in describing the savings program, the scholarship program and the Board.



YOU'RE GUIDING ALABAMA'S FUTURE

You've helped Alabama students find their way. Now help them pay for it.
Introducing the CollegeCounts Scholarship.

SCHOLARSHIP DETAILS

- Awards of \$4,000 for four-year college enrollees.
- Awards of \$2,000 for community and technical college enrollees.
- Award is non-renewable and granted on a semester basis in the first academic year.

ELIGIBILITY

Applicants must meet all of the following criteria to be eligible for this scholarship:

- Be a high school senior or first-time college freshman.
- Be a U.S. citizen.
- Be an Alabama resident.
- Demonstrate financial need.
- Be enrolled or planning to enroll in an Alabama eligible educational institution.
- Have a minimum GPA of 2.75.
- Have an ACT score of 26 or below (applicants attending a two-year school will not be required to submit ACT scores).

APPLICATION PERIOD

January 2, 2013 - 12:01 AM CST
March 7, 2013 - 11:59 PM CST

For more information and to apply for the CollegeCounts Scholarship, visit www.CollegeCountsAlabama.com.

Have a happy and a safe new year

2012
2013

Now, it seems like I wish you a Happy New Year just about every other column. Like they say, "Time really flies when you are having fun." And I am having fun helping you.



Did anyone ever tell you what the frog said? He said, "Time is really fun when you are having flies." Yes, I know that that is bad, so we had better get on with more serious matters.

Please notice that I wished you both a happy and a safe new year. Being safe can include many things, but I am talking about safety at your house. In my seminars, I often mention that I feel very strongly that houses should be all electric. That statement always results in someone asking why I would make such a statement. My answer is actually very simple. Years of experience have taught me that an all-electric house is potentially safer and more energy efficient than a house with gas appliances. That means lower utility bills and less worry, and surely everybody wants that. Let's talk about safety.

Every winter I hear and read about folks who actually die as a result of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning in their home. Many Internet sites, including the Center for Disease Control and Prevention site, state that hundreds die every year and thousands become ill due to CO poisoning. CO can't be seen. CO can't be smelled. And CO can't be heard. It is often called the silent killer. Most CO is the result of incomplete combustion when burning a fossil fuel. The most common fossil fuels around a house are natural gas, propane, and gasoline. Probably all of us are aware that a gasoline engine can produce CO. That would include both an automobile engine and a gasoline-powered electric generator. And both can be deadly if operated without sufficient ventilation. Read the instructions. Never leave a car running in the garage and never operate a generator inside a structure.

Now let's look at the use of a fossil fuel in a house. A gas oven and/or a gas cook top will produce some CO. A gas furnace will produce some CO. A gas water heater will produce some CO. A gas fireplace will produce some

CO. The amount of CO produced will vary depending on the percentage of combustion that takes place in the fuel. Regardless of how much CO is produced, safety may not be an issue as long as the CO is not mixed with the air that you breathe. This is where I have learned that problems can and often do exist.

As I was writing this column, a lady called me from Oklahoma. She wanted to know where she could purchase an electric fireplace like the one we have in our house. She told me that they had removed their ventless gas logs because she and her husband got a headache every time they used them.

Two days prior, our radio producer told me about a time that he had gotten lightheaded and fell over on the sofa. He managed to get up and found his grandfather in the next room who was also having trouble. They suspected CO and found that the flue for the gas water heater had somehow been knocked off to the side of the heater.

About a month ago, a lady came to me after church and told me that she had thought about me several times during the week. She said that she was lucky to be alive. She went on to say that she had been feeling really bad for several days and then her 25-year-old gas heating system had stopped working. A HVAC service technician checked the system and told her that, by law, he had to red tag the unit, which meant that he could not turn the heat on. He told her that the heat exchanger was so badly cracked that she was lucky not to be ill or worse. In all fairness, a new system did solve the problem, at least for now.

Folks, I have been hearing stories like this for over 25 years. I am in no way trying to scare you. I am very much aware that most houses with gas appliances may be safe and not have CO problems. I am also aware, from testing and from years of experience, that many houses that use a fossil fuel have the potential for CO problems. I decided years ago that I would recommend that houses be built so that CO did not exist. In my opinion, you can do that in a house that is all electric.

As for the energy efficiency and the cost of heating and cooling, I have covered that in past columns, and will do so again in the future. But for now, I just want you to have a happy and a safe new year.

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.dougyre.com.

WATTS NEW IN **Dothan**

Dothan Utilities completes installation of new emergency generator

By Joette Booker

Dothan Utilities makes every effort to provide its customers with reliable electric and water service. However, continuous electric and water service cannot always be guaranteed. Disasters can occur, causing service disruptions that are out of the control of the utility. In an effort to minimize the effects of these types of service disruptions and provide emergency water supply to the citizens, Dothan Utilities has recently installed a diesel-fueled generator at one of the highest producing water well sites.

With the addition of this new power supply, Dothan Utilities has the ability to produce 7.5 million gallons of water per day during an area-wide electrical outage. When combined with the water storage capacity of 16 million gallons, the water system will be able to supply the current average day demand for three consecutive days. This meets the Dothan Utilities' water system emergency planning strategy for supplying the average demand for the first 72 hours of an emergency.

Dothan Utilities will continue to explore ways to improve emergency responsiveness and system reliability to better serve our customers.



WATTS NEW IN **Piedmont**

Piedmont Community Association hosts downtown activities

By Ben Singleton



Downtown Piedmont is stirring with many activities. The downtown committee, the Piedmont Community Association, is hosting many activities for citizens and visitors to enjoy.

The association hosts a downtown Trade Day each month on the third Saturday from 7 a.m. until 12 p.m. Plans for other activities include a 5K Run, a Native American Pow Wow, a St. Patrick's Day event, and a downtown cruise-in.

The association is also responsible for Piedmont's Fall Festival on the third Saturday in October, downtown Halloween Trick-or-Treat and the annual Piedmont Christmas Parade.

We hope everyone will join us and enjoy these great activities.

★ WATTS NEW IN Alexander City

Alexander City Library retires two public servants

By Alexander City Library staff

In November, over 60 local citizens gathered at the Adelia M. Russell Library in Alexander City for the dedication of the new Alabama History Room. The occasion marked both a beginning and a conclusion for Library Director Judy Tidwell and Assistant Director Joy Denney. The Alabama History Room was the final project for Ms. Tidwell and Mrs. Denney, who both retired the end of 2012.

For the past 23 years, Ms. Tidwell and Mrs. Denney have worked side by side at the library, serving the public and promoting the benefits of reading. Ms. Tidwell began her career in 1989 and worked her way from part-time employee to Director. She has seen many changes during her tenure with the most dramatic involving technology.

“When I first began work here in 1989 we had one computer,” she said. “Today we have 48 computers. We have Nooks, Kindles, iPods and MP3 players, but nothing can replace holding a child in your lap and reading a book to them.”

Ms. Tidwell and Mrs. Denney saw the library expand its social outreach with a downstairs area featuring magazines, periodicals, a television and a large selection of audio books and movies. According to Ms. Tidwell, these changes reflect the ever-evolving landscape for libraries today.

Looking back on her career in public service, Ms. Tidwell cites several projects she is most pleased with. In 2001, she assisted in opening Mamie’s Place Children’s Library, which has served the needs of countless children in Tallapoosa County. The three Kress paintings that adorn the walls with

beautiful Renaissance artwork have returned after almost nine years of restoration.

The Alabama History Room contains three terra-cotta sculptures which were completed during the Great Depression. The sculptures were originally displayed in the local post office, but were moved to the library in 2008 and now can be enjoyed by everyone.

Although the last 23 years have brought challenges and changes, Ms. Tidwell and Mrs. Denney have persevered and worked together through it all. So what is their secret? It is simply a combination of hard work and good people, says Ms. Tidwell.

“Joy and I come from the old school of hard work,” she said. “We were never afraid to tackle hard projects and see them through. We have a common affection for the library and for seeing things done right. I could not have done anything without the staff. They are



Judy Tidwell

truly good people to work with. I also thank the board members. I’ve worked under five mayors with new Mayor Charles Shaw being the last.”

The Alabama History Room will serve as a lasting legacy to the vision and determination of these two public servants.



Joy Denney and Judy Tidwell

TO REPORT AN OUTAGE IN ALEXANDER CITY:
Day Time (256) 409-2080, After Hours/Holidays – Call Police Dept. (256) 234-3421 Please do not call 911

WATTS NEW AT Utilities Board of Tuskegee

A bold vision for the future

By Mark Ennis

The Utilities Board of Tuskegee (UBT) has been engaged in a strategic business planning process for several months. We looked both internally and externally for ideas and opinions on issues that affect UBT directly and indirectly. A vision has emerged and it extends far beyond UBT. The vision is representative of the hopes and dreams of this community.

We asked several groups to tell us what they see in the future. We molded the responses into a story centered on Macon County in the year 2020. In this imagined scenario, Macon County's municipalities are thriving boomtowns with a prosperous middle class. There are plenty of high-paying jobs, tax revenues have increased and public sector services are greatly improved.

Right now this story exists only on paper, but if the community at all levels decides this will be our reality, then it will happen. We can say this with conviction knowing that we have tremendous brainpower in our midst. We also have deeply ingrained love and loyalty for our cities, towns and neighborhoods. These attributes are at the core of the comments we heard as we listened to various stakeholders.

Recently, we held a series of meetings to again receive input from different groups on the strategic business plan. We started the day engaging UBT department heads and employees in discussions about the strategic business plan. The meetings culminated with political, business and civic leaders along with graduates of the UBT Academy program, assembled for their turn at discussing the plan. Throughout

the day we consistently received a positive response from each group with everyone resonating strong approval and enthusiastic support.

Having a plan that serves as a road map for where we want to be within the next 10 years and how we can get there is just one of the bright spots on our economic horizon.

The work being done by the Macon County Economic Development Authority is also yielding strong results. The Authority is doing an excellent job at letting the world know Macon County is ripe for development and that we welcome manufacturing, technology, and retail businesses along with other sectors that value the advantages Macon County has to offer.

Through its web site and other resources, the Authority is promoting such assets as the five exits off Interstate 85 and the list of properties that are suitable for major industrial development. A study commissioned by the Authority is an excellent marketing tool that has already boosted our bottom line. This study shows that \$138 million in spending leaves this community each year. Economic Development Consultant Joe Turnham shared this information with national retailers and hit the jackpot with Auto Zone. This multi-billion dollar company that specializes in automotive parts and accessories was motivated by the study to open a store in Tuskegee.

It has been exciting to see the strategic planning process build consensus about shared priorities and goals as expressed by various constituencies within this community. And the external focus is connecting Macon County with the right mix of resources to improve our economy and community branding. The list of external relationships includes WSFA-TV 12, an NBC affiliate with a huge audience. We encourage viewers to watch the television spots on WSFA called "Community Spotlight" that promote Macon County's assets.

With so much positive energy at work, our enthusiasm about the future is clearly justified.

For more information on the strategic business plan, contact Theresa Bogan at (334) 720-0750 or by e-mail at tbogan@yourubt.com. The website www.madeinmacon.com is a good starting point for economic development information. Phone or e-mail inquiries should be directed to Macon County Economic Development Authority Consultant Joe Turnham at (334) 725-8496 or joeturnham@aol.com.



UBT employees contributed valuable opinions and suggestions, as did others in the community, during the development phase of the strategic business plan.

Little girl with a big voice

By Jennie Gunnells

Faith DeLee, the 10-year-old daughter of David and Cindy DeLee of Valley, is a Christian and God has gifted her in song. She displayed some of that talent during the City of Lanett's Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony in December. Faith's father, David, is the Utility Superintendent for the City of Lanett.

Some of Faith's earliest influences in music were Elvis Presley and Michael Jackson, but she enjoys all types of music, especially the 80s. Her dream is to sing onstage at the "Country Tonight" Theater in Pigeon Forge, TN.

Faith has a heart for the elderly and enjoys singing engagements at Lanier Nursing Home's Christmas parties and beauty pageant. She sings at area churches, West Point, Georgia's Fall Festival, Timeless Antique's Car Show, family gatherings and just when and wherever opportunities arise. She enjoys theatre and has participated in several summer acting camps at New Horizon's Community Theatre in West Point. She has participated in four productions at New Horizons and Xanadu Productions in West Point.

Faith attends LaFayette Lanier Elementary School and W.F Burns Middle School for Accelerated Reading. She has high aspirations and wants to be a doctor or medical researcher one day. Faith is a member of the National Honor Society and the state gifted program for Accelerated students.

Faith attends Springroad Christian Church in Lanett,

where she is actively involved with Sunday School, the Kingdom Kids program and adult and children's choirs. She attends church camp annually.

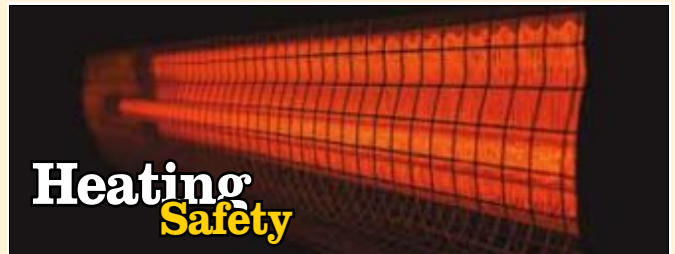
Faith is an avid University of Alabama football fan just like her father. She loves attending Alabama football games. Her favorite player is Alabama's center, #75 Barrett Jones.

She loves the mountains and has made tons of memories on her annual trips to Tennessee and the Great Smoky Mountains. She loves roller coasters, particularly in Dollywood.

Faith enjoys spending time with her grandparents. She helps out from time to time at the local Timeless Antiques Flea Market Mall where her grandmother works part-time. Faith enjoys lending a hand at the register, wrapping items, meeting the customers and speaking with them.



Cindy, Faith and David DeLee



Heating Safety

There is something about the winter months and curling up with a good book by the fireplace. But did you know that heating equipment is a leading cause of home fire deaths? With a few simple safety tips and precautions you can prevent most heating fires from happening.

BE WARM AND SAFE THIS WINTER!

- » Keep anything that can burn at least three-feet away from heating equipment, like the furnace, fireplace, wood stove, or portable space heater.
- » Have a three-foot "kid-free zone" around open fires and space heaters.
- » Never use your oven to heat your home.
- » Have a qualified professional install stationary space heating equipment, water heaters or central heating equipment according to the local codes and manufacturer's instructions.
- » Have heating equipment and chimneys cleaned and inspected every year by a qualified professional.
- » Remember to turn portable heaters off when leaving the room or going to bed.
- » Always use the right kind of fuel, specified by the manufacturer, for fuel burning space heaters.
- » Make sure the fireplace has a sturdy screen to stop sparks from flying into the room. Ashes should be cool before putting them in a metal container. Keep the container a safe distance away from your home.
- » Test smoke alarms monthly.



Heating Equipment Smarts

Install wood burning stoves following manufacturer's instructions or have a professional do the installation. All fuel-burning equipment should be vented to the outside to avoid carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning.

Install and maintain CO alarms to avoid the risk of CO poisoning. If you **smell** gas in your gas heater, do not light the appliance. Leave the home immediately and call your local fire department or gas company.



FACT

Half of home heating fires are reported during the months of December, January, and February.



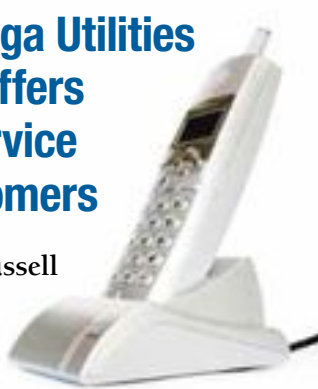
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www.nfpa.org/education

WATTS NEW IN Sylacauga

Sylacauga Utilities Board offers new service to customers

By Darol Russell



One new service has enhanced responding to outage calls more efficiently than ever before. The new call system uses IVR (Interactive Voice Response) technology to answer outage calls from customers, giving on-duty personnel the ability to concentrate on dispatching crews and restoring service quickly. Customers have the convenience of a dedicated number available when reporting an outage.

YOUR ADDRESS, ACCOUNT, AND PHONE NUMBERS ARE VERY IMPORTANT

When you call, the new system may already have your number programmed in. If not, you will need to speak your telephone number, or enter the telephone number using your phone's touch-tone keypad. From then on, the system will use a telephone number we have on file for your account to signal our 24-hour dispatcher. After the system matches your phone number to your location, it will provide the on-duty dispatcher with all the known information about your account – name, address, account number, phone number, meter number, and line section are available at a glance. The dispatcher can then provide that information to a service technician for faster response time and enhanced troubleshooting capability. The new call and dispatch system is monitored 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by an employee of the Sylacauga

Utilities Board (SUB). Your call is very important to us and we will respond quickly.

The reality is that no utility could ever staff enough employees to personally answer each trouble call that comes in during an outage. During a power outage, depending on its severity, hundreds of customers could call at once to report their outage. Utilities are faced with the option of either letting their customers hear a busy signal or giving them an automated system to immediately answer and report their outage.

What are the benefits?

The automated system is the most effective way to report an outage. It can handle more calls at once than our entire staff, usually without a busy signal. The system identifies the caller by their phone number. If we have a phone number match, all information pertaining to that billing address is immediately available to the dispatcher to send out to the crews in the field. If there is no match to the phone number, the system will prompt the caller to leave a detailed message including the customer name, location, and any information that might help restore service or locate the problem. All messages are checked and callbacks are started once service is restored to insure that everyone is back on.

Cell phone numbers associated with your account can be very important. If the power is off, most cordless phone systems will be off as well.

Why did the Utilities Board change out my meter?

SUB is nearing completion of the Automated Meter Infrastructure (AMI) system. Your new meter is configured to send your reading automatically to the billing department without having an employee physically read each meter at each residence, business or industry.

What are the benefits?

The new AMI system provides a number of benefits to our customers and the Utilities Board. Just to name a few:

- accurate meter readings are taken

multiple times each day

- meter tampering and damage notifications
- automatic cutoff capabilities
- customer utility consumption history
- triggers excessive use alarms so that customer may be notified

If you have any questions, please contact the Utilities Board and we will be glad to supply the information you need regarding your new meter and your customer account.

The new AMI provides the customer and the Utilities Board added benefits when combined with Electric Outage Management software. The ability of the Utilities Board to respond quickly and decisively during an electrical outage is greatly enhanced. Without AMI and outage management capabilities, most utilities depend on customers to report electrical outages. Data shows that up to 30 percent of single customer calls are not classified as an outage. To make matters worse, nested outages can go undetected for several hours during severe storms. As a result, valuable time is wasted on crews dispatched to incorrect locations or return trips to nested outages.

With the deployment of AMI and critical information provided by the outage management software, the Utilities Board can ping, or send and receive, a signal to an electric meter at any time. The system-wide map available to the dispatch personnel shows whether power is on at the meter or not. Our employees are also able to evaluate the entire circuit or feeder to determine the status of the line. We can do prediction validation. In other words, the system can enable dispatch employees to determine where the power outage originated. We can also verify outage restoration and identify nested outages. One of the most dramatic results is realized in the efficient use of limited resources during the outage event by sending crews to the most strategic sites to begin the work of restoration. No wasted time chasing "false" outage claims.

New construction project well underway for Opelika Power Services

By Jan Gunter

The construction project for the new and expanded services by Opelika Power Services (OPS) is well underway, and folks who drive by the public works facility area can now see actual buildings emerging and taking shape.

And, in the very near future, crews will be finished laying the fiber network throughout the City of Opelika. They will then be able to start testing the basic network systems, looking for any unforeseen “glitches” in the network before OPS offers the new services, which include video, ultra-high speed Internet and telephone, to the public.

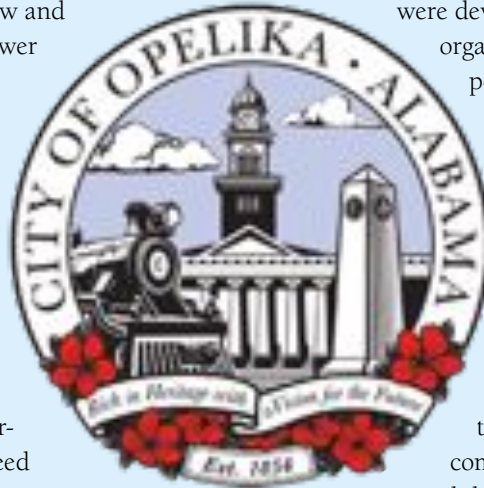
One of the best things this newly-modernized power system will offer to the public – and, indeed, is one of the basic building blocks of the system – is the Smart Grid (SG) system which more than half of all U.S. households are expected to receive by 2015. Some of the benefits of this new system include:

- Improved electric system reliability by providing to utilities near real-time information about electricity usage. This enables OPS to identify and respond more quickly to potential power outages before they take place, and help us pinpoint and repair outage problems when they do occur;
- SG will also provide a two-way communications system for customers who wish to monitor their electricity usage, enabling them to change their consumption habits and lower their bills if they desire to do this;
- SG will help stabilize the electricity grid and ensure that adequate power can be delivered to meet customer demands/ needs at any given time;
- The SG system will also allow us to integrate different sources of electricity generation – such as wind and/or solar power – when or if that source becomes available to us;

There have been frequently asked questions presented to us over the last couple of months. Here are a few of the questions and the responses:

Q. Are smart meters accurate?

A. Yes. The meters rely on an extensive data validation processes to protect the accuracy of billing records. Smart meters must meet rigorous requirements for accuracy, which



were developed by independent standard-setting organizations. A recent study by an independent testing group found that 99.91 percent of smart meters were accurate within 0.5 percent—a greater level of accuracy than traditional meters. And utilities routinely monitor meter performance.

Q. Does the radio frequency (RF) signal produced from smart meters cause health effects?

A. No. Some smart meters use technologies that transmit RF to enable communication between electric companies and their customers. While questions have been raised about the potential effect of the RF generated by meters that use it, numerous studies have shown that smart meters using RF technologies pose no health risk. In fact, RF exposure from a smart meter is far below and less frequent than other common electrical devices, including cell phones, baby monitors, and microwave ovens. Exposure levels also are well below levels permitted by the Federal Communications Commission.

Q. Are smart meters a threat to the privacy of customers' data?

A. No. Electric companies use advanced encryption technologies to protect the privacy of the data transmitted by smart meters. Also, in a proactive move the Opelika City Council and the Mayor appointed a Smart Grid Committee, made up of local citizens that were charged with creating, and adopting a Smart Grid Bill of Rights. This document serves to safeguard the privacy of every OPS consumer.

Q. Do smart meters present any physical hazard, such as fires?

A. No. Electric meters, whether the older analog meters or the advanced smart meters, often receive blame for overheating, and in very rare cases, a fire. However, the root cause of this problem is typically a defective or “hot” socket into which the meter is installed. Changing meters has always been an everyday activity of a utility, and it's not uncommon to discover in the meter change process old meter sockets that are defective. All meters are required to pass national standards for safe operation before they can be used, and installation technicians inspect for poor socket connections during smart meter installations.



WATTS NEW IN
Fairhope

Mardi Gras a special time in Fairhope

By D. Fran Morley

Mardi Gras is early this year, and the Knights of Ecor Rouge (KOER) kick off the season on Saturday, Feb. 2, with “Live from Fairhope, it’s Saturday Knights!” According to a KOER masker, the all-star tribute to famous *Saturday Night Live* skits from the past 40 years of the popular TV show will feature eight theme floats: ‘Coneheads,’ ‘Church Lady,’ ‘Wild and Crazy Guys,’ ‘Mr. Bill,’ ‘More Cow Bell,’ ‘Van Down by the River,’ ‘Celebrity Jeopardy,’ and ‘Blues Brothers.’ For the 29th year, the KOER emblem float, depicting a horse jumping through the waves of Mobile Bay below the bluffs of Ecor Rouge, will lead the parade, said the masked knight. “Of course with the men of KOER, parade goers can also expect great bands and other surprises.”

Next up, the Maids of Jubilee (MOJ) parade through town on Friday, Feb. 8 with Books on the Big Screen.

“The ladies of MOJ shine the spotlight on some of our past blockbuster favorites,” said a masked maid. “Floats designed by Craig Stephens of Carnival Artists will depict some of the best supporting roles in a novel-turned movie: *Jurassic Park*’s dinosaurs; *Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*’s Oompah-Loompahs; *Alice in Wonderland*’s Mad Hatter and Queen of Hearts; vampires and werewolves from *Twilight*;



Water for Elephants’ magnificent roaring beast; the sinking ship of *Titanic*; and the young hunters from *The Hunger Games*. The parade will be led by one of the Eastern Shore’s first female marshals on horseback.”

In addition, the MOJ parade will feature multiple high school bands, two brass bands, a pipe band, rock band, the Shriners, and the U.S. Marines.

The Order of Mystic Magnolias (OOMM) celebrates its 20th anniversary and wraps up Fairhope’s parade season on Monday, Feb. 11, with a trip back in time to Razzle & Dazzle: The Roaring Twenties. Along with new costumes and a newly-redesigned “Fairhope Float,” a lovely masker with the OOMM promises a night full of good times, with “Lights, Camera, Action,” “Cotton Club,” “Ain’t We Got Fun,” “Crooks, Gangsters & Thieves,” “Take Me Out to the Ballgame,” “Bathtub Gin,” and “The Cat’s Meow.”

All of the evening parades begin at 6:30 and follow a route through downtown, beginning and ending at the Fairhope Civic Center.

Festivities begin in the afternoon on Saturday, Feb. 2, with the Mystic Mutts of Revelry which invites pets and their people to be “Waggin’ Away Again in Mutt-aritaville.” More than 700 pets and humans took part in the 2012 parade in an effort to help The Haven continue its work to create a no-kill community.

This year’s parade begins at 3:30 p.m. at the Fairhope’s Community Park on Church Street. To participate in the parade, pets and their owners can register at the park from 1 to 3 p.m. on the day of the parade. And because this is a Mardi Gras parade, there is royalty involved, said parade chairman, Bonnie Bishop. “Every mutt deserves a chance to be royalty. The king and queen positions are “for sale” to the highest bidder. As an extra bonus, the mutt with the single highest bid will have their picture in the MMOR logo for the next year’s parade.”

Parade information and the “Royal Bid Form” can be found on The Haven’s web site, www.havenforanimals.org.

For information on visiting Fairhope during Mardi Gras, call (251) 929-1466.

★ WATTS NEW AT Riviera Utilities

Stan Mahoney Youth Fishing Rodeo another successful event for Baldwin County

By David Horton



Stan Mahoney

Fishing should be something exciting and fun for a kid. At the Stan Mahoney Youth Fishing Rodeo each year, that is exactly what we try to accomplish. Nothing makes the volunteers happier than to see a youngster weigh-in a fish and the sparkle that is in their eyes when the weight is given. It may be just a 3-ounce pin fish, but you would never know it by the excitement in the child. They think it is huge and when others congratulate them. A lot of pats on the back are given and they learn from the event.

“At the 2012 rodeo, which was held in November, approximately 100 kids turned out to fish the waters of the Wolf Bay area,” said Richard Peterson, Rodeo Chairman. “It was a beautiful, crisp morning with hope of reaching temperatures in the 70s by noon. We were not disappointed as the sun rose over the horizon and the warmth of the sun heated up the day. Earlier in the morning, boats loaded with kids took off from Barber Marina and other areas

in hope of landing a big one, so that they could win one of the nice trophies offered at the rodeo. There were 52 trophies awaiting the fishing participants and their big catches.”

Barber Marina was the host for the rodeo again this year. The marina is a world class place located on the Intra-Coastal Waterway, just north of the City of Orange Beach.

“We want to thank Lee Harmon of Barber Marina for his assistance with the rodeo and for making our event special for the kids that fish the waters of the Wolf Bay area,” Peterson added. “The collective thought is that we want to encourage our kids to fish the waters, learn about the environment we live in, and learn how to protect the waters and the inhabitants that live in the waters, marshes and wooded areas. It is so important that they learn to protect our water resources and live responsibly with nature.”

Stan Mahoney, who the youth fishing rodeo is named after, was truly an icon of Baldwin County. Growing up in the area, his family once owned Wolf Bay Lodge.

“Stan was appointed to the U.S. Naval Academy and became a Commander of the USS Kirk,” said David Horton, Riviera Utilities spokesperson. “After having some problems with his heart, Stan had to have a heart transplant at

UAB in 1996 and retired from the Navy. Afterwards, he became commanding officer of the Wolf Bay Watershed Watch (WBWW) and helped make the WBWW one the premier volunteer watershed watch groups in the state of Alabama. He helped the Watershed attain Outstanding Alabama Water status, as designated by the Alabama Department of Environmental Management and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. At the rodeo, our efforts continue to support and remember Stan Mahoney, his wife Jessy, and their tireless efforts to make our area the best it can be.”

We want to thank the many wonderful businesses that bought ads in our program. Without your support, our efforts would not be as successful. Thanks to Gene Myers and the Paradise Marine Center for providing lunch and t-shirts for the kids. Thanks to Scott Forbes and Blue Water Ships Stores for the kayak that was part of our door prizes. Many thanks go out to Riviera Utilities for their continued major sponsorship and WBWW volunteers for continued efforts to make this a great rodeo for the kids. Thanks to you, Richard Peterson of Riviera Utilities, and a board member of WBWW, for your efforts to make this event successful. What a fantastic day for the kids of our area as they fished the great waters of Wolf Bay.



Participants in the Stan Mahoney Youth Fishing Rodeo

Places to Go & Things to Do

Alexander City

- Jan. 24, 7:30-9 p.m., Alexander City Arts** presents “St. Louis Brass” at Benjamin Russell High School Auditorium.
- Jan. 28, 1:30-3 p.m., Horizons Arts & Humanities** presents “Scott & Zelda in the Heart of Dixie” at the BOE Building at 375 Lee Street.
- Feb. 9, 8 a.m.-4 p.m., B & G Club Sport Clay Classic.** Wetumpka Shotgun Sports Club. Call Melissa at (256) 234-4757 for more information.
- Feb. 11, 1:30-3 p.m., Horizons Arts & Humanities** presents “Humor at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue: The Wit and Wisdom of Our Presidents.” Presented by Dr. Phil Koerper. Presentation will be at the BOE Building.
- Feb. 14, Alexander City Arts** presents “The Dill Pickles,” a program of gospel and bluegrass music from 7:30 until 9 p.m. at Benjamin Russell High School Auditorium.
- Feb. 18, 1:30-3 p.m., Horizons Arts & Humanities** presents “The Enduring Legacy of Hank Williams: He Wrote The Songs,” presented by Chris Phillips at the BOE Building.
- Feb. 25, 1:30-3 p.m., Horizons Arts & Humanities** presents “The Rise and Decline of the Redneck Riviera,” presented by Harvey H. (Hardy) Jackson, columnist for *The Anniston Star/Daily Home*. BOE Building.

Dothan

- Jan. 1-15, Alabama in the Making Exhibit.** Interpretive Center Lobby, Landmark Park, Dothan. Collections of photographs, audio interviews and videos from the Smithsonian Project and Alabama Community Scholars Institutes. Using iPads, visitors can listen to Alabamians tell the stories of their experiences in foodways, music, occupational folklore, and material culture. Free with paid gate admission.
- Jan. 5, 10 a.m., Purple Martins.** Interpretive Center Auditorium, Landmark Park. Earl Suggs, a longtime park volunteer, will present this workshop. He has been growing his own gourds to serve as homes for these birds for many years. Free with paid gate admission. Registration required.
- Jan. 5 and Feb. 3, 9:30 a. m., Wiregrass Woodturners.** Ag Museum, Landmark Park. Open to the public. Free with paid gate admission.
- Jan. 5 and Feb. 3, 1 p.m., Landmark Dulcimer Club.** Landmark Park. Must have a dulcimer. Classroom. Free with paid gate admission.
- Jan. 12, 10 a.m., Bluebirds.** Interpretive Center Auditorium, Landmark Park. Dr. Gary Manfready, professor, Troy University Dothan, will be back with new and updated information based on the recent findings regarding bluebird populations in recent years. Free with paid gate admission. Registration required.
- Jan. 13 and Feb. 10, 4 p.m., Reptile Feeding.** Interpretive Center Classroom, Landmark Park. Watch park staff feed the snakes and learn why these animals are important to the environment. Free with paid gate admission.
- Jan. 19, 10 a.m., Backyard Bird Habitats.** Interpretive Center Auditorium, Landmark Park. Dr. Gary Manfready will share his knowledge of birds and gardening to help turn your garden into a backyard habitat for wildlife. Free with paid gate admission. Registration required.
- Jan. 25, 5:30 p.m., A Party for the Park/Annual Membership Dinner.** Landmark Park. Annual fundraiser featuring whole hogs roasted over an open pit outside the Stokes Activity Barn. Racks of ribs also available at the event and for takeout. Live music. During the annual meeting, winners of the Heritage Award and Volunteer Service Award will be announced. Dinner will be served at 6:30 p.m. Advance tickets required.
- Jan 26, 10 a.m., Hummingbirds.** Interpretive Center Auditorium, Landmark Park. Fred Bassett, a licensed bird bander and a member of the Hummer/Bird Study Group, is known throughout the Southeast for his work. Free with paid gate admission. Registration required.
- Jan. 26, Seed Swap** (time to be announced). Landmark Park. Hosted by Wiregrass Master Gardeners. Gardeners are encouraged to bring samples of their favorite seeds to exchange with others. The park is especially interested in obtaining heirloom seeds. Free with paid gate admission.
- Feb. 2, Hide Tanning Demo.** Landmark Park. Eric Varnum will demonstrate tanning hides using a process that was common with Native Americans in the 1500s. Visitors will have a chance to see different stages of the process and Eric will explain the techniques. Free with paid gate admission.

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Places to Go & Things to Do

Continued from page 15

Feb. 5-7 and 12-14, 9 a.m.-1 p.m., Living History.

Landmark Park. Participants will have lunch in the Waddell house prepared by the students, traditional games, a wagon ride and activities typical of life in the 1890s. \$12 per student, teachers free. Suggested grade levels: 3rd-8th. Pre-registered school groups only.

Feb. 8 and 15, 6-9 p.m., Astronomy Nights.

Landmark Park. View stars and constellations through telescopes and binoculars, experience a "starry" hayride, refreshments, planetarium shows and stories by the campfire. \$2 for members, \$3 for scouts and their leaders in uniform and \$5 for nonmembers and free for children 5 and under. Meets several requirements for the Astronomy Badge. Registration required.

Feb. 9, 10 a.m., Hide Tanning Workshop.

Landmark Park. Get a more hands on experience in tanning hides with Eric Varnum. Wear clothes you don't mind getting dirty, an apron and rubber gloves. A good knife and a drawknife are recommended. \$10. Registration required.

Feb. 11, Spring Break Camp Registration for Members.

February 18 for non-members. Landmark Park. The camps will run March 25-27 and April 1-3, 2013 for 4-5 year olds, 6-8 year olds and 9-11 year olds. These camps are one day each, scheduled from 9 a.m. to noon. The cost is \$15 per camp for members and \$20 for non-members. Schedule will be available online around the first of February.

Feb. 16, 10 a.m., Beeswax Workshop.

Auditorium, Landmark Park. Class participants will take home their own handmade products. Instructor Roslyn Horton. \$15, plus gate admission. Limited to 50 people. Registration required.

Feb. 22 and 23, 5-9 p.m. and 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Quilting

Retreat. Landmark Park. Instructor Sherry Burkhalter. Raggedy Reverse Applique. Each participant should be able to complete a small quilt including binding. \$55, includes supper and lunch. Sewing machines will be needed and three fat quarters per 18 inch block. Registration required.

Fairhope

Jan. 19, 11:30 a.m., Children of the World Chinese New

Year Parade. Parade line-up will be held in the Fairhope United Methodist Church parking lot.

Jan. 21, 2:45 p.m., Senior Bowl Practice.

South Team. Volanta Park.

Feb. 23, 11:30 a.m.-2 p.m., Annual EMI Chili for

Charity. Oak Hollow Farm. Join the Brothers of the Craft Master Motorcycle Association for a fun ride to kick off Ecumenical Ministries' annual fundraiser. Motorcycle registration starts at 9:30 a.m. with the hour-long ride beginning at 10 a.m., returning to the farm around 11 a.m. Participation is free with the cost of adult admission to the event. Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$5 for children ages of 3-12. For more information, tickets or team registration forms, call (251) 928-3430 or (251) 943-3445 (Foley office). EMI is a proud partner with Baldwin County United Way.

Sylacauga

For the month of January,

the Isabel Anderson Comer Museum will present the Childersburg Art League exhibition and Ms. Sheri Van Pelt's Formed Baked Glass Art. A reception will be held on Jan. 17 from 6:30 until 8 p.m.

For the month of February,

the Isabel Anderson Comer Museum will feature water color paintings by Pete Hosey and wood sculpture by Perry Andrews. A reception will be held on Feb. 21 from 6:30 until 8 p.m.