A LETTER FROM
Robert Drinnon
President of AEC Board of Directors

ABC’s 75th anniversary. It’s a time to celebrate all the wonderful things we made possible. And by “we,” I am referring to the very foundation of the Cooperative: our members.

It’s a time to look back and reflect upon what it’s taken to get where we are today. As we become further removed from the generation of East Tennesseans that experienced the advent of electricity first-hand, it’s important to pay tribute to the vision, determination, and hard work it took to bring electric power to rural communities. To reach isolated homes and farms that would otherwise have been left, quite literally, in the dark.

Three-quarters of a century later, it’s hard for us to imagine the excitement of people around here when the word spread that electricity would be coming out into the country. To try to understand the sense of anticipation they must have felt, consider this fact: deliveries of refrigerators were made from Skeen Furniture Company in downtown Jefferson City to many individuals before their homes had electricity — or had even been wired to be able to receive it, once it became available. These country folks were so ready to finally enjoy the convenience afforded by modern electric appliances that they bought them before there was even a way to plug them in or turn them on!

That same spirit of optimism helped build our electric system. We learned that the sky’s the limit when we work alongside our neighbors for something we believe in.

As your Board President, I could not be more pleased with what we’ve accomplished together — or more appreciative of the contributions of our members. Along with my fellow Directors, may I say “thank you” for allowing us the privilege of representing your interests in making policies that govern our Cooperative. The partnership we’ve shared has made ABC great, and we pledge to keep earning your trust as we guide this organization into the future.

I can hardly imagine what amazing things will become reality for the next generation of Co-op members. But for all the advances that will no doubt occur, for all the ways in which they will benefit from innovations that have yet to be conceived of, I am sure of one thing: we are leaving for them a legacy of which they may be proud.

Sincerely,

President, AEC Board of Directors
We’re known in this part of the country for being fiercely independent and self-reliant. As the descendants of hardy mountain folk who made homes in what had been wilderness, it’s part of who we are. Our Southern Appalachian heritage and culture means that we’re used to doing for ourselves, thank you very much. We’re more than a bit stubborn at times and have a reputation of being downright suspicious of “outsiders” with different ways or new ideas.

But the time came, not so very long ago, when we rose above our natural inclinations and with the help of others and to rely solely upon ourselves our immediate family members to meet our needs. It wasn’t easy, it didn’t happen overnight, and there were more than a few obstacles along the way. But in the end, it was worth it.

Out in the hills and hollows of this part of East Tennessee, as they say, “The hills and the hollers” we had to overcome doubt and isolation and maybe even a little fear to make it happen. We had to believe in ourselves and in our neighbors. We had to try to see beyond the needs of just those in our family. We had to work hard—but we were used to that. We had to take a leap of faith and put our community at risk. It was impossible without the convenience offered by labor-saving devices that were powered by electricity. We were determined that our children’s (and their children’s) lives would be better and easier than those powered by electricity. We were determined that our country folk needed electricity. And we had to work together to get it. We had to overcome doubt and isolation and maybe even a little fear.

The coming of electricity was the talk of the countryside. We lingered after church services to discuss it with our neighbors. We gathered after work in church pews and along fence rows. That’s where we began to make the same commitment we were prepared to undertake. It was the first topic of conversation when we met folks “in town” on Saturdays. “Have you signed up yet?” “Sure did. You?” Farmers leaned on fence posts while adjoining fields and wondered aloud to each other how long it would take before the lights came on. Nothing—not the Great Depression, not the market prices of hay or cattle, not even war in far-off Europe—had the potential to impact the everyday lives of rural East Tennesseans to the extent that the advent of electricity would. We were all aware that our individual ability to receive the transformational benefits of electric power hinged upon the willingness of other community members to make the same commitment we did.

City-dwellers throughout the region, attending meetings designed to explain all the advantages offered by electricity and how to go about getting it. Sometimes, a Rural Electrification Administration engineer spoke from the platform of a flat-bed truck parked in a field. Agricultural extension agents from Jefferson, Grainger, and Hamilton counties made hundreds of contacts, driving out into the country and standing on porches and in pastures to speak with farmers and other rural residents about new ways to make their lives easier and better. The key factor was how to pay for the initial costs involved. In order to obtain a loan from the FSA to fund startup costs, each household would have to commit to the idea of signing up for the service, once it was available.

In the 75 years that have passed since AEC was established, the Co-op has adapted to accommodate the changing needs of its members. In the beginning, the whole idea was to simply find a way to get power to those who needed it. Electric use grew steadily with each decade of the 20th century, as did the membership numbers. Innovation brought new types of appliances, from electric dishwashers to microwave ovens. Products and small businesses moved to our area, and AEC began to serve more community challenges was to make electricity available to members, it soon became important to help them understand how to use it wisely. An entire range of energy efficiency programs and products were rolled out and marketed to Co-op members. Advances made possible through the use of computers, hydraulic equipment, GIS-based mapping, radio communications, fiber optics, and other technologies transformed Co-op operations.

The Co-op’s partnership with the Tennessee Valley Authority has remained strong over the years. TVA has provided support and expertise that have helped AEC to be recognized Valley-wide for various measures of achievement (including both renewable energy and efficiency programs) among Local Power Companies. Through all the changes brought by the passing years, the Co-op has retained its identity, its autonomy, and its relevance to those it serves. AEC is a fundamental part of these communities in a way that almost no other entity is. Decades have come and gone since electricity first came to homes and farms in this part of East Tennessee, yet the Co-op remains as a constant—a universal and unifying element in our lives. Hardly any other product or service you can imagine was just as present and important in the lives of our grandparents as it is in our own. The same safe, affordable, reliable service today as it was back then.

But the Co-op itself has changed, in that it is now composed of and serves a much broader membership—including many folks whose parents and grandparents didn’t live here when AEC was established. Our Co-operative is better and stronger because of their contributions. In the midst of this diversity, AEC is a central thread woven throughout the very fabric of our communities. It’s a common denominator among those of different ages, ethnic backgrounds, incomes levels, religions, and value systems. For all the ways in which we’re different, the fact is that when we look at AEC, we’re seeing ourselves.

In the 75 years that have passed since AEC was established, the Co-op has adapted to accommodate the changing needs of its members. In the beginning, the whole idea was to simply find a way to get power to those who needed it. Electric use grew steadily with each decade of the 20th century, as did the membership numbers. Innovation brought new types of appliances, from electric dishwashers to microwave ovens. Products and small businesses moved to our area, and AEC began to serve more community challenges was to make electricity available to members, it soon became important to help them understand how to use it wisely. An entire range of energy efficiency programs and products were rolled out and marketed to Co-op members. Advances made possible through the use of computers, hydraulic equipment, GIS-based mapping, radio communications, fiber optics, and other technologies transformed Co-op operations.

The Co-op’s partnership with the Tennessee Valley Authority has remained strong over the years. TVA has provided support and expertise that have helped AEC to be recognized Valley-wide for various measures of achievement (including both renewable energy and efficiency programs) among Local Power Companies. Through all the changes brought by the passing years, the Co-op has retained its identity, its autonomy, and its relevance to those it serves. AEC is a fundamental part of these communities in a way that almost no other entity is. Decades have come and gone since electricity first came to homes and farms in this part of East Tennessee, yet the Co-op remains as a constant—a universal and unifying element in our lives. Hardly any other product or service you can imagine was just as present and important in the lives of our grandparents as it is in our own. The same safe, affordable, reliable service today as it was back then.

But the Co-op itself has changed, in that it is now composed of and serves a much broader membership—including many folks whose parents and grandparents didn’t live here when AEC was established. Our Co-operative is better and stronger because of their contributions. In the midst of this diversity, AEC is a central thread woven throughout the very fabric of our communities. It’s a common denominator among those of different ages, ethnic backgrounds, incomes levels, religions, and value systems. For all the ways in which we’re different, the fact is that when we look at AEC, we’re seeing ourselves.

When we’re proud of what AEC has accomplished over the years—the commitment to environmental sustainability, economic development, education, etc—we can be proud of our neighbors, our family members, and our fellow citizens. Great challenges lie ahead for the Co-op in the decades to come. The men and women who have devoted themselves to working for AEC will meet them with dedication, innovation, and a determination to keep providing the best possible service to the membership. Everything remarkable about the role that the Co-op has played and continues to play in the life of our communities is due to the same “can do” spirit that motivated our ancestors to reach out and work for a better life for their families.

Refocusing the contributions of those that came before us, it has been said of our generation that “we drink from wells we did not dig and are warmed by fires we did not build.” While this is very true, it’s also important to remember that the choices we make as a Cooperative today and the work we undertake on behalf of our members will impact those who come after us. Every day, all over our electric system, we are building a legacy. Our commitment must be so strong and enduring that members who gather to celebrate AEC’s 100th anniversary in the year 2040 will be able to look back and say of us, “They worked hard to add value to the lives of those they served.”
The Co-op is more than just the place that accepts your payments for the electricity you’ve used. Almost 100 of your friends and neighbors get up every day and work hard at tasks you may never even have realized were necessary to fulfill the mission of AEC.

Here are some of them.

**Today in Kodak,** an AEC employee took field measurements to design the placement of infrastructure that will be needed to bring electric service to a new member.

**Today at Co-op headquarters,** an AEC employee applied a voucher for emergency energy assistance to the bill of a member struggling to pay a past-due electric bill.

**Today in Rutledge,** an AEC employee worked alongside crew members to repair a double-circuit pole that was broken as the result of a car accident.

**Today at Co-op headquarters,** an AEC employee helped a member fill out an application to obtain a loan to upgrade to a new high-efficiency heat pump and pay off the cost on his monthly electric bill.

**Today in New Market,** an AEC employee met with a member who was concerned about an aging tree that was too close to power lines running along her property.

**Today in Jefferson City,** we participated in a meeting at Carson Newman that will help the University enhance campus street lighting for both improved safety and energy efficiency.

**Today in Rocky Valley,** an AEC employee field-checked a pole number against the data on the Co-op’s GIS map.

**Today at Co-op headquarters,** an AEC employee prepared paperwork related to the upcoming retirement of a co-worker who’s been with the Cooperative for the past 40 years.

**Today in Mt. Horeb,** an AEC employee installed a pad-mounted transformer that will help bring underground electric service to a new subdivision.

**Today in Jefferson City,** an AEC employee performed a safety inspection of a Co-op crew involved in a re-conductoring project.

**Today at Co-op headquarters,** an AEC employee participated in a conference call to discuss wholesale electric rates with fellow members of the Rates & Contracts Committee of the Tennessee Valley Public Power Association.

**Today in Alpha,** an AEC employee delivered and installed a hydraulic line on a digger derrick truck that had broken down.

**Today in White Pine,** an AEC employee spoke to a group of senior citizens about ways they can save money by heating and cooling their homes and apartments more efficiently.

**Today in Nashville,** an AEC employee met with state legislators to discuss pending bills that will impact electric rates.

**Today at Co-op headquarters,** an AEC employee compared the prices of distribution transformers and placed an order for the most cost-effective option.

**Today in Dandridge,** an AEC employee met with United Way officials to coordinate the Co-op’s annual campaign of giving.

**Today at White Pine,** an AEC employee marked out which poles will have to be moved for a TDOT road-widening project on Valley Home Road.

**Today at Co-op headquarters,** an AEC employee took a check from a college student paying the initial electric bill for her very first apartment.

**Today in Swansyvania,** an AEC employee conducted an onsite "tallgate conference," outlining the job ahead and making sure that each crew member is clear on his individual responsibilities.

**Today at Co-op headquarters,** an AEC employee answered the telephone at the switchboard and routed a call to a co-worker with the answer to a detailed question being.

**Today in Bays Mountain,** an AEC employee conducted a monthly inspection of the generator at the Cooperative’s radio communication tower.

**Today at Co-op headquarters,** an AEC employee scanned reports provided by the Co-op’s Automated Metering Infrastructure, to identify potential issues with a member’s electric service.

**Today in Jefferson County,** an AEC employee notified a member of the Co-op via the Green Power Providers program for the installation of rooftop solar collectors.

**Today at Co-op headquarters,** an AEC employee explained the Co-op’s eScore program to a member, outlining the various rebates available for energy efficiency improvement projects.

**Today at Co-op headquarters,** an AEC employee delivered a check to help fund project graduation activities for high school seniors.

**Today at Co-op headquarters,** an AEC employee helped a retired couple new to the area apply for electric service.

**Today at Co-op headquarters,** an AEC employee scanned reports provided by the Co-op’s Automated Metering Infrastructure, to identify potential issues with a member’s electric service.

**Today in Hamblen County,** an AEC employee delivered a check to help fund project graduation activities for high school seniors.

**Today at Co-op headquarters,** an AEC employee reviewed the procedures involved in processing member payments via credit cards, electronic checks, and an Interactive Voice Response system.

**Today at Co-op headquarters,** an AEC employee sat in on a management team meeting to discuss the Cooperative’s new Construction Work Plan.
A.J. Hoffner

“When you need ‘em, you call ‘em, and they come out and see you.”

“When all you’ve ever known is life without electricity, you’ll never forget the day when you finally got it.” After almost 80 years of living here in East Tennessee, long-time AEC member A.J. Hoffner still remembers the thrill of “when the lights came on.” A.J. and his family moved to a five-room house on Bays Mountain Road in Pigeon Forge in 1932 when he was a small child. Along with wife Elizabeth, he now lives on Russell Gap Road and (with help from sons Walter and Jamie) is still actively engaged in farming—raising beef cattle and mowing hay on approximately 260 acres.

Nights during his growing-up years were largely dark. An oil lamp sat on the table where the family ate supper. “We’d use it to read and study by,” A.J. says, “but it sure didn’t make much light.” Early morning farm chores requiring light were illuminated by a lantern he and his younger brother Bobby carried to the barn. “That’s what we milked the cows by,” he explains, “and we always had to be real careful because of the risk of starting a fire.”

He recalls seeing his first electric lights when he began his education at the two-room Cherry Hill School, and then at the local Methodist church. “When electricity came to McCampbell’s Chapel, boy,” he says, “we were glad to have it—Mama most of all.”

When asked about his AEC membership, A.J. doesn’t hesitate: “They’ve been good to us. I had problems with my security lights just recently and they put a new one in for me.” He says he’s thankful to have the service the Co-op provides. He sums it up this way: “When you need ‘em, you call ‘em, and they come out and see you.”

Buddy Morgan

“The electricity they brought made our lives better...I’d sure like to have it without it again.”

For his entire 80 years, AEC member Buddy Morgan has lived in the Blackwell Branch area of Grainger County. The Morgan family farmed 200 acres, raising tobacco, milking cows, and growing that famous of Grainger County agricultural products: tomatoes. His current home, on Harbin Road just off of Lakeshore, features a beautiful view of the water just past hothouses full of tomato plants. After losing his wife of 57 years, he has lived by himself since 2011. Though not as spry as he once was, Buddy is still able to take advantage of the rich productivity of the land around him. On the day we visited, he’d just finished canning a dozen quarts of homemade tomato juice.

“We came up in the hard old times,” says Buddy, “but we didn’t know it back then. When I think back to how it was before we had electricity, I don’t hardly see how we made it.” One of five children, he recalls some of what was involved in doing chores around the house and on the farm: “We had to cut stove wood—and plenty of it. Me and my brothers had to keep Mama supplied with kindling for our Home Comfort wood stove. I’d sure like to have a piece of cordwood that she baked in that stove right now!”

He remembers the pot-bellied stove that stood in the old Blackwell Branch Mormon Baptistry Church. The sanctuary featured “Aladdin” oil lamps that were suspended from cables that were lowered and then raised to both light and extinguish the flame. “They seemed a lot brighter than the coal oil lamps we had at home,” says Buddy. “I still remember having to trim the wicks.” Laundry for the family of seven wasn’t easy, either. “My mother used a washboard powered by a gas motor.” He explains, “It sat out on the back porch and we’d have to lean the sparks plug to get it to start when it was cold.”

The hard work continued at the barn, where Buddy milked by hand until he married at 15 years of age. “I had eight cows I milked myself,” he says. “There were three of us up before daylight milking the whole herd by lantern light. I can remember shining the lights of our car on the hallway of the barn to put the cattle in the stalls.”

He was 15 years old when the family got electricity from AEC. “We were all so happy to get lights,” he says. “And one of the best parts was having an electric window fan close to where my bed was. You could finally get some sleep on those hot summer nights!” He’d help clean wheat with a piece of machinery operated by a hand-crank and was grateful for the difference electricity made with regard to that chore, as well. But perhaps the most impactful improvement was an electric well pump. According to Buddy, “We were in high cotton when we got water in the house!”

As it happened, his very first job involved electricity. Buddy worked on a crew that cleared brush from around and underneath transmission lines that carried power from Cherokee Dam. “For one dollar an hour,” he says. “In addition to farming, he spent time working in a furniture factory, in the mines, and as part of a construction crew.”

Along with practically anyone else around here that was old enough to remember, he clearly recalls the Big Snow of ‘52— “About 9-30 that morning, the temperature dropped and the rain began to turn into snow. Huge flakes, falling fast. By 1:00 that afternoon, we already had 15 inches of heavy, wet snow. It brought down power lines everywhere, and I guess Co-op crews had to work...
E.C. Dearing

“Maybe because I know quite a bit about how electricity works, I can really appreciate what it takes to deliver reliable electric service.”

You might say that 90-year-old Co-op member E.C. Dearing has a special connection with electricity—not to mention a sincere appreciation for the differences it made in the life of his family. Along with his wife of 75 years, Pearl, he lives on Keith Lane in Morristown, not far from the family homestead in Alpha. He retired in 2000, selling his share of the company he co-founded (Dearing & Smith Electric Service) to his partner. Not long afterward, the Dearings spent three years as missionaries in Romania and are enjoying their “golden years” spending lots of quality time with their seven grandchildren. He’s pictured here with a lantern very similar to the one he carried to make his way to the family dairy barn during the pre-dawn hours back in the 1930s: The old washboard is a remnant of laundry day before the advent of electricity.

E.C.’s family raised dairy cattle (Jersey, Holstein, and Guernsey) on 275 acres. They also raised tobacco, corn, hay, and ground their own dairy feed. He recalls getting up at 3:30 am to head to the pasture with a lantern in his hand—accompanied by his dog and a couple of chickens. They rounded up 42 cows and brought them into the barn to be milked by hand. Two hours later, they headed to the house to get ready to catch the school bus at 6:30. “The bus dropped us off back at home at the end of the day,” says E.C. “At that point, we’d grab a biscuit and head to the barn to milk again. We didn’t stay up much past suppertime, I can tell you!”

He was heavily influenced by a former Ag teacher at Morristown Raed High School, Mr. John Flah. “The Lord directed my path and put me where I could learn about what would become my life’s work,” he explains. “I have two brothers and eventually all three of us became electricians.” E.C. says that his curiosity was piqued by the fact that folks in the City of Morristown already had electricity at that time. He was determined to learn all he could about the subject, in hopes of being able to one day enjoy for himself the conveniences it offered. A quick learner, he wired a Grade A dairy barn at the age of 20. Looking back on his career, he estimates that he has wired around 1,000 homes in AEC’s service area—in addition to commercial properties, churches, schools, etc.

E.C. was married to his first wife and living in a “tenant house” on the family farm when he first obtained electric service from AEC. With three little girls not yet old enough to attend school, the first appliances the young family bought were an electric stove and a refrigerator, thus eliminating the need for having a 25-pound block of ice delivered from Morristown to keep things cool in the old wooden ice-box. And the benefits of electric power extended to farming operations. “The greatest thing was when we got the electric milker,” he says. “After milking cows by hand all those years, it felt like a miracle!” The addition of a 350-foot-well (pumped by a four-horsepower electric motor) made another important difference, according to E.C.: “We built a concrete tank to water the cows. Instead of drinking pond water, they could drink good clean water—and they gave more and better milk, as a result.”

He and Pearl are glad to be AEC members, he says: “We’ve always had excellent service from the Co-op. I look forward to evaluating electric service. “You’re just another number down there,” she says, referring to the municipal-owned utility at that location. “AEC always made me feel as if they cared. They are responsive when you call and the service is good. A while back, my meter had to be switched out and the nicest fellow stopped and talked to me about it. It really meant something to me that he took the time to explain why they were doing it. And the linemen are the best anywhere. I remember one time after a big storm we kept the Wagon Wheel open all night so they could get a place to stay while they were out trying to get the lights back on. I guess doing that kind of work in those kinds of conditions really works up an appetite, because I’m telling you, those guys could really eat!”

Louise Miller Browning

“When my grandmother finally got a Maytag washing machine, oh, what a blessing that was!”

She may have entered her ninth decade, but AEC member Louise Miller Browning of Dandridge is not slowing down. She still drives, enjoys flower gardening, is an active member of First Baptist Church of Dandridge, gets together with other Maury High School graduates for breakfast once a month, and volunteers each week at the Jefferson County Nursing Home. She and her late husband, Charles, owned the Wagon Wheel restaurant back in the early 80s. Louise grew up in the countryside around Dandridge. In an arrangement not uncommon back then, her father farmed a number of properties in the area and took his family with him from place to place. Louise and her little brother lost their mother when she was a young girl and spent many of their growing-up years with their grandparents. The flat iron she is pictured with here is the same kind her grandmother used on laundry day back before her family had Co-op power. Made of solid cast iron and weighing a hefty seven pounds, it had to be heated (and frequently re-heated) on top of the wood stove. “If you’ve ever heard somebody from the country say ‘I’m as tired as if I’d done a washing,’” says Louise, “you’d know where that expression came from. I was too little to be of much help, but I can only guess how exhausting it was. Regular clothes and linens would have been hard enough—to get them clean using strong lye soap and rubbing them on a washboard set inside a galvanized tub. But to get the ground-in dirt out of Daddy’s work clothes my mother had to build a fire under a big iron kettle and boil them. Can you imagine? I don’t even like to think what that would have been like on a hot day. Oh, and laundry day in the winter wasn’t easy, either. In really cold weather, she’d hang the last diaper on the clothes line and by that time, the first one would be frozen stiff!”

With no electricity or indoor plumbing, water had to be hauled from the spring house and heated on the wood stove for the once-a-week bath. Her grandmother put that wood stove to good use. The menu wasn’t particularly varied, according to Louise: “We’d have pinto beans and potatoes one day, and the next day we’d have potatoes and pinto beans! But every Sunday morning, she’d fix us fried chicken for breakfast. That was a real treat.”

Some country folks had an ice box, but Louise’s family kept milk and butter cool in the spring house. She recalls a wooden platform just outside the kitchen window where items prone to spoilage were stored in the wintertime. Canning was another hot, miserable chore in pre-electricity days, and she remembers her grandmother making apple butter in a brass kettle over an open fire. As best as she can remember, Louise thinks they got Co-op electricity in 1942, about the time she graduated from high school: “When my grandmother finally got a Maytag washing machine, oh, what a blessing that was!” She also recalls an electric cream separator that made a big difference in the farm chores. “We were very grateful for all the ways electricity made our lives easier,” she says.

Louise now lives near Douglas Lake in the Terry Point area, but she spent quite a few years in Florida and still goes down there in the winter. That’s given her a unique perspective from which to evaluate electric service. “You’re just another number down there,” she says, referring to the municipal-owned utility at that location. “AEC always made me feel as if they cared. They are responsive when you call and the service is good. A while back, my meter had to be switched out and the nicest fellow stopped and talked to me about it. It really meant something to me that he took the time to explain why they were doing it. And the linemen are the best anywhere. I remember one time after a big storm we kept the Wagon Wheel open all night so they could get a place to stay while they were out trying to get the lights back on. I guess doing that kind of work in those kinds of conditions really works up an appetite, because I’m telling you, those guys could really eat!”
Mary Crawford Gombert

“AEC is a great asset to our community and to this part of East Tennessee.”

Born and raised on a farm located on Chuckey Pike in Jefferson City, 85-year-old AEC member Mary Crawford Gombert left those parts in 1937—only to return 45 years later. One of eight children (four boys and four girls), Mary’s parents leased around 300 acres that included the land where Walmart is located today. They raised beef cattle, alfalfa hay, wheat, corn, tomatoes, and other crops. After graduating from Jefferson City High School and then National Business College in Knoxville, she went to work for a number of years

One of Mary’s chores as a young girl was to fill the oil lamps the family used to keep the wicks trimmed and clean the globes. “The inside of the woodbox next to the stove full of kindling. The risk of fire from the open flames that provided light and heat before the availability of electricity was ever-present. Though she was only four years old at the time, she distinctly recalls the family’s big barn burning to the ground. “The cause was never determined, but it was devastating. A big barn was loaded with hay, and we lost two mules and a cow and a calf.”

Mary was 12 years old when the family home was wired for Co-op power. She describes how excited she and her younger sisters were by the electric light. “The kitchen light was just a bare bulb hanging down from the ceiling by a cord. You turned it on and off by pulling a string. My sisters and I kept that string busy just to see the light come on and go off. It was truly beautiful. The family’s first appliance was a refrigerator ordered from Sears and Roebuck. To Mary and her siblings, that meant that “Mother could make ice cream.” She says the thing that made the most difference to her mother was the installation of a six-foot-tall hot water tank that stood in the kitchen. “Before electricity, we heated water in a tank that was on one side of the woodstove. After we got the water heater, we had plenty of hot water to use for bathing and even shampooing our hair. The process of home canning required lots of really hot water for washing and sterilizing the glass jars, so the water heater made Mother’s work preserving fruits and vegetables much easier.”

Mary maintains that you’d have to have lived without electricity to really appreciate the difference it makes in our lives. “I’m not sure young people today could do what my brothers and sisters and I did—and I’m glad they don’t have to. I’m grateful to the Co-op and all its employees for providing us with good service. AEC is a great asset to our community and to this part of East Tennessee.”

Veryl Atchley

“I was maybe about 10 or 11 when we got electricity, until then, I would learn spelling words and the multiplication table sitting real close to a kerosene lamp.”

Along with his brother-in-law, 84-year-old AEC member Veryl Atchley raises beef cattle and hay on 110 acres in Knoxville—part of the original acreage his father bought in 1925. When asked if his role in farming is still an active one, he replies with “Yes, at least when it’s not too hot.”

The old home place and the barn sit directly across Douglas Dam Road from the home Veryl shares with Marie, his wife of 63 years. After graduating from Sevier County High School, he continued his education at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville and graduated with a B.S. in Agricultural Education as well as certifications in other areas. He spent two years in the Army before returning to UT to get his Master’s degree in Educational Administration.

The bulb of his career was spent teaching mathematics at Carter High School, where he retired after 34 years. The oil lamp he’s shown with here is similar to the one he studied as a child. “I was maybe about 10 or 11 when we got electricity,” says Veryl. “Until then, I would learn spelling words and the multiplication table sitting real close to a kerosene lamp. It can’t be much light that you’d do well to be able to read by it. Everybody else in the family was in the same room, and they’d be talking. Mama would be sewing by the firelight, and I’d be trying to study my lesson. We had a wood-burning cookstove, but the fireplace was our only source of heat. In the wintertime, you’d stand next to the hearth—getting just as close as you could stand it—and then you’d run to the ice-cold bedroom, jump under about six quilts, and hope the warmth from your freshly-toasted nightclothes would keep you from freezing to death until your body heat took over and you got warm enough to be able to go to sleep.”

Before electricity was available, a pool of water, the Atchley family relied upon a cistern to catch rainwater. Veryl explains that the idea was to let it fill up during the winter and then the cool water would be available in the summertime. “We had a hand-dug well, too. I hauled lots of buckets of water up—about two gallons at a time, maybe 15 or 20 pounds—using a rope pulley. The worst was when we went a long time without rain in the summer. The pond would dry up, and then we’d have to water the cattle, one bucket at a time.”

He and his dad carried a lantern to the barn early every morning while the stars were still out. “Daddy would feed the animals,” he says, “and he took the lantern with him. That left me with the task of trying to find the cow—and milk it—in the dark.”

“Mother was always churned butter, buttermilk, cottage cheese, etc. ‘Mother made ice cream.’ The family’s first appliance was a refrigerator ordered from Sears and Roebuck. To Mary and her siblings, that meant that ‘Mother could make ice cream.’ She says the thing that made the most difference to her mother was the installation of a six-foot-tall hot water tank that stood in the kitchen. ‘Before electricity, we heated water in a tank that was on one side of the woodstove. After we got the water heater, we had plenty of hot water to use for bathing and even shampooing our hair. The process of home canning required lots of really hot water for washing and sterilizing the glass jars, so the water heater made Mother’s work preserving fruits and vegetables much easier.’

Mary maintains that you’d have to have lived without electricity to truly appreciate the difference it makes in our lives. “I’m not sure young people today could do what my brothers and sisters and I did—and I’m glad they don’t have to. I’m grateful to the Co-op and all its employees for providing us with good service. AEC is a great asset to our community and to this part of East Tennessee.”

Veryl Atchley

“I was maybe about 10 or 11 when we got electricity, until then, I would learn spelling words and the multiplication table sitting real close to a kerosene lamp.”

Along with his brother-in-law, 84-year-old AEC member Veryl Atchley raises beef cattle and hay on 110 acres in Knoxville—part of the original acreage his father bought in 1925. When asked if his role in farming is still an active one, he replies with “Yes, at least when it’s not too hot.”

The old home place and the barn sit directly across Douglas Dam Road from the home Veryl shares with Marie, his wife of 63 years. After graduating from Sevier County High School, he continued his education at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville and graduated with a B.S. in Agricultural Education as well as certifications in other areas. He spent two years in the Army before returning to UT to get his Master’s degree in Educational Administration.

The bulb of his career was spent teaching mathematics at Carter High School, where he retired after 34 years. The oil lamp he’s shown with here is similar to the one he studied as a child. “I was maybe about 10 or 11 when we got electricity,” says Veryl. “Until then, I would learn spelling words and the multiplication table sitting real close to a kerosene lamp. It can’t be much light that you’d do well to be able to read by it. Everybody else in the family was in the same room, and they’d be talking. Mama would be sewing by the firelight, and I’d be trying to study my lesson. We had a wood-burning cookstove, but the fireplace was our only source of heat. In the wintertime, you’d stand next to the hearth—getting just as close as you could stand it—and then you’d run to the ice-cold bedroom, jump under about six quilts, and hope the warmth from your freshly-toasted nightclothes would keep you from freezing to death until your body heat took over and you got warm enough to be able to go to sleep.”

Before electricity was available, a pool of water, the Atchley family relied upon a cistern to catch rainwater. Veryl explains that the idea was to let it fill up during the winter and then the cool water would be available in the summertime. “We had a hand-dug well, too. I hauled lots of buckets of water up—about two gallons at a time, maybe 15 or 20 pounds—using a rope pulley. The worst was when we went a long time without rain in the summer. The pond would dry up, and then we’d have to water the cattle, one bucket at a time.”

He and his dad carried a lantern to the barn early every morning while the stars were still out. “Daddy would feed the animals,” he says, “and he took the lantern with him. That left me with the task of trying to find the cow—and milk it—in the dark.”

“Mother was always churned butter, buttermilk, cottage cheese, etc. ‘Mother made ice cream.’ The family’s first appliance was a refrigerator ordered from Sears and Roebuck. To Mary and her siblings, that meant that ‘Mother could make ice cream.’ She says the thing that made the most difference to her mother was the installation of a six-foot-tall hot water tank that stood in the kitchen. ‘Before electricity, we heated water in a tank that was on one side of the woodstove. After we got the water heater, we had plenty of hot water to use for bathing and even shampooing our hair. The process of home canning required lots of really hot water for washing and sterilizing the glass jars, so the water heater made Mother’s work preserving fruits and vegetables much easier.’

Mary maintains that you’d have to have lived without electricity to truly appreciate the difference it makes in our lives. “I’m not sure young people today could do what my brothers and sisters and I did—and I’m glad they don’t have to. I’m grateful to the Co-op and all its employees for providing us with good service. AEC is a great asset to our community and to this part of East Tennessee.”
AEC touches your life in so very many ways, both large and small. We've been there for you in the past, we're here for you now, and we promise to be there for you in the future.

We're proud to be your Co-op.

When your 17-year-old daughter turned on her make-up mirror to get ready for prom, we were there.

When you stamped the snow off your boots and felt the toasty warmth of your home's entryway after a long trudge back from the mailbox, we were there.

When the lights came on in the operating suite at Tennova Jefferson Memorial Hospital for the day's first surgery, we were there.

When your grandson looked newlywed, we were there.

Thanksgiving turkey as a newlywed, we were there.

We've been there for you in the past, we're here for you now, and we promise to be there for you in the future.

AEC touches your life in so very many ways, both large and small. We've been there for you in the past, we're here for you now, and we promise to be there for you in the future.

We're proud to be your Co-op.

When the lights suddenly came on in a room you thought was empty and your best friends jumped out and yelled "Surprise! Happy Birthday!" we were there.

When you needed hot water to try to get the grass stains out of your son's Little League uniform, we were there.

When you left your truck under the brightly-lit canopy of the convenience store and ran in for a gallon of milk, we were there.

When you needed amplification for their electric guitars, we were there.

When the call light came on outside your grandmother's room at the Jefferson County Nursing Home, we were there.

When you stood in the kitchen and listened to the sweet sound of your baby turning over in her sleep in her second-floor nursery, we were there.

When your son's fireworks lit up the night and made your way to your car in the farthest corner of an empty but well-lit parking lot, we were there.

When you used your table saw to cut the boards for the floor nursery, we were there.

When you stepped inside your comfortably cool house after spending a sweltering Saturday afternoon mowing the lawn and grabbing a cold drink from the fridge, we were there.

When you plugged in the flashing "open" sign in the front window of your brand-new small business, we were there.

When you stitched a seam for your granddaughter's Halloween costume, we were there.

When your daughter removed her smartphone from the charger so as to be ready for a long evening of texting with that cute guy in English class, we were there.

When the forecast called for sub-zero temperatures overnight and you plugged in the "mane" that stood straight up, we were there.

When your 16-year-old son decided to shave his head (except for that weird-looking "mohawk" that stood straight up), we were there.

When that delicious-sounding new recipe called for the oven to be pre-heated to 375 degrees, we were there.

When you dimmed the lights and put Marvin Gaye on the sound system in your apartment just before your data's arrival, we were there.

When you used the electric skillet to fry up the catfish your husband and son brought home from their day on the lake, we were there.

When the morning announcements came over the intercom at Graninger High School, we were there.

When you hung the trouble light from the underside of your car's hood to change the oil, we were there.

When the "beep, beep" of the school bus signaled that you were nearly home, we were there.

When the call light came on in a room you thought was empty and your third-year-old's bedroom was lit up, we were there.

When you turned on your heat lamp during chilly nights, we were there.

When you stitched a seam for your granddaughter's Halloween costume, we were there.

When you stepped inside your comfortably cool house after spending a sweltering Saturday afternoon mowing the lawn and grabbing a cold drink from the fridge, we were there.

When you plugged in the flashing "open" sign in the front window of your brand-new small business, we were there.

When you stitched a seam for your granddaughter's Halloween costume, we were there.

When the lights suddenly came on in a room you thought was empty and your best friends jumped out and yelled "Surprise! Happy Birthday!" we were there.

When you used your table saw to cut the boards for the floor nursery, we were there.

When you stepped inside your comfortably cool house after spending a sweltering Saturday afternoon mowing the lawn and grabbing a cold drink from the fridge, we were there.
A LETTER FROM

Greg Williams
General Manager of AEC

“YOU SEE, WE'RE ALL ABOUT SERVING OTHERS: ALWAYS HAVE BEEN. ALWAYS WILL BE.”

An anniversary is, by its very nature, an opportunity to look back and reminisce. We've enjoyed doing that all throughout 2015, recalling special times in years past and the special people we shared them with. Yet it's also important that we pause at this moment to look ahead. In the entire history of our Cooperative, I'm convinced that there's never been a better time to be an AEC member.

As energy markets and consumer demands change, so must we. To stay efficient and prepare for new challenges, we're developing more and better service options. All these programs won't be for everyone, of course, but certain groups of members will benefit in different ways, from each one. Our goal is to meet members where they are, with the tools, information, and programs they need most.

It stands to reason that informed and empowered members will expect more from their Co-op, and that's a test of leadership that we're prepared to meet. We're very intentional about looking ahead to anticipate emerging issues that have the potential to impact our members—and formulating strategies to tackle them head-on. We evaluate new technologies based not on how “cutting edge” they are, but rather with regard to their ability to address member needs in an appropriate and cost-effective manner.

Co-ops are more than just poles and wires and kilowatt-hours. They're about people. In the case of AEC, I happen to think that we serve the best members in what I firmly believe to be the most special place in this part of the world. I am so incredibly honored to be your General Manager, taking direction from an engaged Board and applying the future-oriented and mission-guided policies they've developed to the day-to-day operations of AEC. I am very fortunate to be able to draw upon the Cooperative’s most valuable resource—our employees—to work toward the goals set forth in AEC's Strategic Plan—a roadmap for where we want to be as an organization.

Along with the awesome responsibility we have to provide the best possible electric service to our members comes a rare opportunity—one that fits perfectly with the celebration of AEC’s 75th anniversary. As we find ourselves at the intersection of yesterday and tomorrow, we want to reach higher and do more. The concept of servant-leadership is one that has a particular resonance for Co-op folks. You see, we’re all about serving others: always have been, always will be. But while we want to do that humbly, we also want to inspire those we serve to achieve their fullest potential. A servant-leader focuses primarily on the growth and well-being of people and the communities to which they belong. I believe that sums up who we are and what we strive to do each and every day.

We will be constantly working to find meaningful ways to help you connect with your Co-op, so that today’s generation finds just as much value in being served by AEC as did their great-grandparents. We're here not to talk at you, but to listen to you. We'll learn from our members as we share impactful information with them, and we'll be a better Cooperative as a result of this dialogue.

I think back to the time when homemakers in our area gathered at AEC on a regular basis to see modern appliances demonstrated. They wanted to learn how these shiny new machines worked, and they trusted their Co-op to show them. Of course, today’s members don’t need us to provide them with guidance on how to operate their electronic devices. But I can promise you this: residential and commercial members across our service area can still trust their Co-op to offer them energy solutions and options that make their lives better and their businesses more profitable. It’s what we’ve done for the past 75 years, it’s what we’re still doing today, and it’s what we will be doing for many tomorrows to come.

Sincerely,

Greg Williams
President, AEC Board of Directors

Here's to another 75 years for Appalachian Electric Cooperative.
We've got you covered.