

## POWER FOR OUR LIVES: Where does electricity come from?

*First in a series of articles*

BY F. WHIT HOLLOWELL JR./CEO

If you're like me, you often arrive home after a long day at work, flip the light switch and settle into your evening routine—maybe watch a little TV from your favorite easy chair while enjoying the cool comfort of air conditioning.

It's hard for us to imagine a time when folks weren't able to enjoy the comforts made possible by electricity, because most of us have always had electric power. We know that when we flip the switch, our lamp, stereo and computer are going to come on.

But, even though electricity is a convenience we tend to take for granted, there are people behind the scenes working hard every day to make sure we have all the electricity we need to enjoy the conveniences and pleasures of life. Have you ever stopped for a moment and considered how

electricity gets into your home?

In Georgia, most of our electricity is produced at large electric generating facilities that are powered by coal or nuclear fuel. Once produced, this energy travels along high-voltage power lines, a sort of interstate highway system for electricity that crisscrosses the state. These high-voltage lines connect to local facilities known as substations, where your EMC or other energy provider takes the electricity and delivers it over their system of distribution lines to homes, businesses, factories and schools.

As you might imagine, it takes enormous amounts of electricity to power a large, fast-growing state like Georgia. That's why utilities like ours,



**F. Whit Hollowell Jr.**

along with our power supply partners, are continually looking ahead, examining growth patterns and predictions and taking the necessary steps to ensure that there is an adequate supply of power for the future.

One other thing to keep in mind is that electric supply planning is a long-range exercise. On average, it takes eight to 10 years to plan and build a new coal-fired or nuclear power plant. And, because of the length of time it takes, we are literally planning today for your needs 10 to 20 years into the future. By doing that, we can help make sure Georgia has the electric power it needs to continue to grow and prosper.

So, the next time you settle into that easy chair in the cool, air-conditioned comfort of your home, keep in mind that the electricity you are using doesn't magically appear out of thin air. It is, in fact, brought to you by the hard work and planning of thousands of people throughout the state who strive each day to ensure you have a better life.



# Coastal Electric to bring 'smart meter' technology to Members

New technologies are sweeping across the utility landscape, and in many cases, it's the nation's electric co-ops, customer-owned systems like Coastal Electric, who are leading the way with innovative systems. Using the latest technology, Coastal Electric has put a high

digital "smart" meter that has already begun to revolutionize the utility business. Gone are the days when the co-op would send a field representative to your home each month to obtain a meter reading. Soon, that information will be transmitted electronically through the power lines directly to the co-op office. Daily meter readings, or even hourly interval readings, provide the opportunity for innovative billing and rate options while making it easier for co-op Members to get involved in managing energy use in the workplace and at home. This new technology is called Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI).

With Coastal's new AMI smart-

meter technology, for example, a member services representative can answer billing questions easily and accurately, as well as connect or disconnect your power without sending a serviceman to the property.

Automated meter reading saves more than just time and fuel for trucks. Doug Elliott, vice president of Engineering and Operations, says the Co-op is discovering the virtual 'Swiss Army Knife' usefulness of AMI.

"Co-ops may start with AMI for meter readings, but quickly find how useful it is for helping Members better understand their energy-use patterns," says Elliott. "Other useful benefits of AMI include outage detection, resolving power-quality issues, monitoring end-of-line voltage and helping with engineering and system planning."

CEO Whit Hollowell agrees. He says co-ops are much more innovative than other sectors of the electric utility industry. "Small companies like Coastal Electric have to be innovative to stay competitive. The decision-making process can be much easier

**'Small companies like Coastal have to be innovative to stay competitive. The decision-making process can be much easier for us. We have fewer layers of management, and our employees take more responsibility for keeping costs low for Members.'**

—F. WHIT HOLLOWELL

priority on helping Members manage their energy use and control costs.

This month, Coastal Electric will begin the deployment of a new

## FAQs about AMI

Coastal Electric will soon be replacing your old electric meter with the newest and most advanced technology available in automated meter reading. The co-op will be able to read meters more efficiently, and the data the meter communicates to the cooperative will provide tools to enhance customer service and improve power reliability.

### What is AMI?

AMI is the acronym for Advanced Metering Infrastructure. AMI is a method of using communications technology to transmit meter data to a central location.

### How does AMI work?

The AMI meter transmits data via power lines to the substation. The data then travels by data circuits from the substation to Coastal Electric Cooperative headquarters.

### Why is Coastal Electric installing an AMI system?

The AMI system will make the cooperative run more efficiently. It will also improve Members' customer service experience and allow the cooperative to increase electric service reliability.

### What is the meter installation schedule?

The transition to the AMI system has just started. Coastal has already begun to install the first 1,250 meters in the Keller community in Bryan County and will complete the changeout of all its meters by the end of 2009 or early 2010.

### How much will the implementation of the AMI system save the cooperative?

The system is projected to save the cooperative roughly \$500,000 a year, due to reduced transportation and labor costs,

helping the cooperative to continue providing competitive electric rates and enhanced customer service and reliability.

### What information does the AMI meter record?

The new meter records and stores your hourly energy usage. Periodically, that information is sent to Coastal Electric. The meter also records when the lights blinked, how long the power was off and when the power was restored. The data is especially useful in resolving Members' inquiries, because now the system can report not only how much electricity you use but the date and time you used it.

### If no one has to read the meter, does it still need to be accessible?

Yes. According to Coastal Electric's Member agreement, reasonable access to equipment must still be maintained.

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Hollowell expects the day will come when the co-op will offer Members a choice of pre-paid metering, in-home displays and Internet portals that assist Members with tracking and adjusting electric use.

“The age of cheap, abundant energy is over,” says J. Mark Bolton, Vice President of Marketing and Member Relations. “The challenge we face today is educating our Members about the true economic and environmental costs of energy. AMI bridges the communications divide between the co-op and the people we serve.”

According to Bolton, who has worked at Coastal Electric for 28 years, the Co-op has always been recognized by its peers as being a leader in innovation and new technology. “Another key ingredient in this innovative culture is the Co-ops’ focus on customer service. We put member satisfaction before

immediate profit,” he says.

“We realize that ‘smart meter’ technology is a way to introduce new efficiencies in reading meters, identifying and resolving outages more quickly and providing equal levels of service to remote rural members. When your customers are neighbors, friends and community businesses, service and reliability are high priorities. You want to give them your best and create the greatest value,” says Bolton.

Coastal Electric is finding innovative ways to combine the power of AMI with other technologies like geographic information systems, outage restoration and even account management.

What’s next? According to Elliott, electric system automation will provide an unprecedented level of operational



**Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) technology has begun to revolutionize the electric utility business. These new “smart” meters allow Members to get involved in managing their energy use at home and the workplace. The meters transmit information quickly to Coastal Electric, allowing us to provide quicker service while reducing operating costs.**

efficiency and cost control.

“I see the advent of smart energy homes where consumers can allow utilities to reduce consumption to particular devices during critical peak periods to avoid a blackout, or simply to save money,” Elliott says. “Customer signaling via the Web or an in-home display will help consumers take advantage of cost-saving and conservation programs. They may choose to purchase power when it is most abundant and least expensive. Everybody wins.”

### **Will someone other than Coastal Electric be able to electronically read the meter?**

No. The AMI system’s computer software is specially written for Coastal Electric. Someone using a home computer will not be able to read the AMI meter.

### **What is the difference between the AMI meter and my current meter?**

The AMI meters are digital electronic devices that replace your old electro-mechanical meter. The new AMI meters will continue to display the familiar meter reading in a clear, easy-to-read LCD window. You will still always be able to check your meter reading with the reading on your monthly bill. The key difference is inside of the meter. The AMI meter contains technology that allows it to transmit energy usage data over

power lines to Coastal Electric substations, which then communicates the information to the cooperative’s office.

### **Can the meter tell Coastal Electric if your power is out?**

Yes. But it is still important that you call to report your power outage as soon as possible. Your calls are valuable to us in determining where lines may be down or other safety concerns. We can then “ping” your meter and others in the vicinity to get an immediate assessment of how many meters are without power.

### **On what day of the month will the meters be read?**

The new meters will allow Coastal Electric to read them at a variety of times to obtain a history of account information. For billing purposes, your monthly billing cycle will remain the same.

### **Will Coastal Electric continue to do service inspections of meters?**

Routine inspections of all meters and services in accordance with Coastal Electric’s policies and industry standards will continue to ensure meters are in proper working condition and to look for safety hazards, theft or other problems.

### **What if my bill reports more kilowatt-hour usage than normal, or if I think my new meter is not working correctly?**

Contact Coastal Electric Cooperative at (800) 421-2343 right away to discuss your billing concerns.

### **Where can I go for more information about the AMI?**

For more information, visit [www.CoastalElectric.coop](http://www.CoastalElectric.coop).

# CONNECTIONS

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## Report outages

Call us at (800) 421-2343

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# Coastal Electric employees fishing for a cause

Hurricane Hannah wasn't enough to stop Coastal Electric Cooperative from helping the American Cancer Society. The storm's threat forced the co-op to postpone its "Fishing for a Cause Trout Tournament" for a week. But, with better weather on Sept. 13, the competition was on. Fourteen boats with more than 30 fishermen took part, along with 51 community-based sponsors.

More than \$4,200 was raised for the American Cancer Society. "We had some great fishermen come and participate in the tournament," says Kimberly M. Sachau, a Coastal Electric accountant and tournament coordinator.

The big winners were Mark Rewis and Alan Daniels from Richmond Hill, Ga., who took home the top prize of \$1,000 for the boat with the highest weigh-in. "Several of the winners gave some of the



**Mark Rewis (left) and Alan Daniels of Richmond Hill took first place in the Coastal Electric "Fishing for a Cause" Trout Tournament. The team won \$1,000 with 9.3 pounds (aggregate) of trout and also first place with a 4.1-pound flounder. Coastal Electric raised more than \$4,200 for the American Cancer Society.**

money they won back to the cause," says Sachau, who also praised her co-op colleagues for hosting the event. Their commitment to community will be on display at the next December blood drive.

## Holiday closing

The offices of Coastal Electric Cooperative will be closed Thursday, Nov. 27 and Friday, Nov. 28 in observance of the Thanksgiving holiday. In the event of a power outage or safety emergency, you may reach us 24-hours a day at (800) 421-2343. Payments and other service requests can be made through our Web site at [www.CoastalElectric.coop](http://www.CoastalElectric.coop).