



Thanks to Covington Electric, others for help

During the first full week in October, public power electric utilities across the United States join to celebrate Public Power Week. It is typically filled with events and activities that help customers and stakeholders learn about the benefits of being part of a public power community. This year, Public Power Week took on a whole new meaning as Hurricane Michael – just two mph shy of a Category 5 storm – barreled toward Florida’s Panhandle.

As it became evident a hurricane would hit the state, the Florida Municipal Electric Association (FMEA) jumped into action days before Michael made landfall to arrange mutual aid from around Florida and other states. We knew we could count on help from public power communities across the country because they had come to our aid last year following Hurricane Irma and the year before during Hurricanes Hermine and Matthew.

The fourth strongest hurricane to ever hit the contiguous U.S. (by wind speed) and, by far, the strongest to ever hit the



Guest Columnists
Anna Zubaly



Jacob Williams

Panhandle, Hurricane Michael caused a level of destruction not seen since Hurricane Andrew more than 25 years ago. Nearly 122,000 public power customers in Tallahassee, Havana, Quincy, Chattahoochee and Blountstown were without power. Tallahassee had more than 95 percent of its customers out and lost nearly 60 percent of its transmission system. Havana, Quincy, Chattahoochee and Blountstown were left 100 percent in the dark. Entire electric systems were destroyed and needed to be rebuilt from the ground up.

This is when public power is at its strongest. We are a community that’s bigger than one city or town. We are a network of thousands of public power communities that always answer the call for help. More than 600 public power restoration personnel from Florida and 15 other states with more than 80 utilities combined helped restore power and rebuild the electric grid in communities impacted by Hurricane Michael, including crews from Covington Electric Co-Op Inc. They left their homes and families to

work 16-hour shifts in challenging and dangerous conditions.

For some of the hardest hit public power communities, the Florida Municipal Power Agency (FMPA) assisted by sending its staff to help with power restoration, material logistics and document damage for federal disaster assistance. Other FMPA staff helped two cities with communications by managing the cities’ social media accounts so customers could receive up-to-date information on power restoration efforts.

This year’s Public Power Week illustrated the strength, solidarity and support that public power provides. It’s about neighbors helping neighbors – whether that neighbor is from Florida, Texas, Kentucky or Alabama. It’s about having each other’s backs in times of need.

As another hurricane season comes to close, we extend our deep gratitude to all who came to our aid once again. Thanks to all from Covington Electric Co-Op Inc. who helped us in Florida. You are the power behind public power.

Amy Zubaly is the Executive Director of the Florida Municipal Electric Association and Jacob Williams is the General Manager and CEO of the Florida Municipal Power Agency.

General aviation is saving lives in state

As a combat veteran in the Navy’s En Route Care program, an air transport nurse for Duke and Vanderbilt’s Life Flight networks, and a full-time critical care air transport instructor at the University of Alabama in Huntsville, I can attest firsthand to the life-saving impact of smaller aircraft, or general aviation. That’s why I’m proud to be part of a program at the University of Alabama in Huntsville that starting this year, has made a commitment to inspiring the next generation of air transport nurses and pilots by offering a Critical Care Transport Nurse course.

The fact is, most people don’t realize the role that general aviation and flight nurses have in emergency healthcare. I have seen firsthand how general aviation is often the only way to rapidly provide advanced medical care for patients that ground transportation cannot fulfill. In these cases, when patients experience medical emergencies – like a car accident or a heart attack – every second matters. General aviation allows us to transport these patients to nearby medical centers in a matter of 15-30 minutes as opposed to the several hours it could take in traffic-ridden roads.

In addition, medical centers in rural areas do not always have the capacity to offer the right services for their patients. Medevac flights are extremely vital in transporting these patients to nearby hospitals in Huntsville, Birmingham, and Vanderbilt where they can get the care that they need. These aircraft also carry the necessary medical tools that an air



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Ron Bolen

transport nurse needs when performing the emergency care to stabilize the patient. Without access to air medical services, these trauma patients simply would not survive their injuries.

For example, medical flights are life-saving for some of our most vulnerable populations in Northern Alabama. Just ask Jason Peterson, who’s a Flight Nurse for Children’s of Alabama’s Critical Care Transport Department. His department handles over 1,000 transports a year exclusively for children seeking emergency and specialized care. Many of his trips take him to hospitals in Huntsville, Athens, Florence, Decatur, and others for pediatric patients that need care that only Children’s of Alabama in Birmingham can provide. As one of the largest pediatric medical facilities in the country, Children’s of Alabama saves the lives of children throughout the state and the country, but many of those critical care operations would not be made possible without general aviation.

I am routinely reminded of the life-saving role general aviation plays every hurricane season. As Hurricane Michael ripped through the Gulf Coast and the Florida Panhandle, some of our coastal communities witnessed the worst conditions in history. According to the Alabama Forestry Commission, over 40,000

forested acres were destroyed in the hurricane, which accounts for an estimated \$20 million in timber. Communities in the Gulf region are still recovering. Despite this devastation, general aviation brings people together in the best way possible. Relief organizations like Operation Airdrop use general aviation aircraft to send supplies to disaster communities that are cutoff from other means of transportation. Operating out of the Gainesville Regional Airport in Florida, Operation Airdrop was able to carry more than 50,000 pounds of supplies using small aircraft to communities along the coast. This is just one example of dozens of groups that use general aviation to perform relief operations to our regions devastated disaster areas.

So much of the conversation around aviation has to do with commercial travel, but there are so many ways that general aviation serves our communities. My career as an air transport nurse has given me the opportunity to experience the side of the industry that is overlooked. Across the country, small and medium-sized airports support general aviation aircraft that provide access to medical services, disaster relief programs, business development opportunities, and industry growth to communities that need it the most. With those impacts in mind, it is more important than ever to protect the access that this vital infrastructure thrives in.

Ron Bolen is a Clinical Instructor at the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

Her calendar says ‘Christmas tree up’

My daughter walked into the room and with three words proclaimed the start of the Christmas season at our house.

“Christmas tree up,” she said, giving me a look that let me know she meant for me to take her seriously.

Autism may limit her ability to carry on a conversation, but it does not stop her from letting me know that according to her schedule, it is time for the decorations to appear.

“Christmas tree up,” she said a little more firmly.

“Yes,” I told her. “I’m going to put the Christmas tree up.”

There is a calendar in her head and things are supposed to happen according to that calendar. When they don’t, it throws her world into a tailspin. She does her best to handle it, but I can tell it causes her great anxiety. Christmas decorations going up at a certain time are on that calendar.



Commentary
Nancy Blackmon

So, I started taking down the fall stuff and dragging out the holly jolly decorations. Now understand, I have all this stored in one closet, one kind of medium-sized closet. That means a major juggling act takes place every time I change out decorations.

Every year I think I’ve put them up in such a way to make pulling them out easier. And every year, I realize I didn’t.

Since I did a major rearranging when I stored things after last Christmas, it took some figuring out before I could start. I finally decided the best way to proceed was put all the fall things in a stack in the corner of the living room. Then pull out the Christmas things and put the fall stuff in the space left by the Christmas things.

Yes, I realize that this is going to be a problem when it is time to take down the Christmas things, but I’ll cross that bridge when I come to it. (Something I say to myself every year). For now, the mission was “Christmas tree up.”

Getting the tree up is something I’ve made a bit easier by not un-decorating it. I know this is lazy person decorating, but it works for me.

I just push the tree (it’s not a big one) fully decorated into the closet and close the door. Then when it is time to put it up, I pull it out, fluff up places where it got squashed in the closet, plug in the lights and boom – it’s Christmas.

So, with my daughter watching, I crawled along pulling the tree from the closet to the spot in front of the window where it will shine until Christmas. It was slow going and I lost a few ornaments along the way, but it arrived at its destination mostly decorated.

I placed the angel on the top, arranged some of the ornaments that were hanging sideways and flipped on the lights. Instantly, the house had the glow of the holidays.

I stood back looking and smiling.

“Christmas tree is up,” I said to my daughter.

She smiled her approval.

Now it’s on to putting the finishing touches on Christmas at the Blackmon house. There is the garland for the mantle, the angels that sit on the buffet, the snowman collection for the center of the table. Every piece carries sweet memories of other Christmas seasons in this house.

Maybe that’s why my daughter wants the tree up on schedule. She, like me, only begins to feel the season with all its wonderful memories when the lights from the tree shine in the window.

It seems to me that this year, the whole world is longing to feel the season, to embrace the light and love that it embodies. We all “need a little Christmas right this very minute...”

At my house, it is beginning to look a lot like Christmas. I plan to enjoy that little sparkling tree from now until exactly two days after Christmas when my daughter will announce, as she does every year, “Christmas tree down.”

Nancy Blackmon is a former newspaper editor and a yoga teacher.

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