



# DREMC NEWS

MARCH/APRIL 2024

## Thank you!

It has been a pleasure serving you, our members, for the past five years. As I write one last column, I want to both thank you for supporting this team and publicly acknowledge the Duck River Electric team one more time.

Duck River Electric was built on the backs of the first team members and community members who had a vision 88 years ago for bringing electricity to rural parts of southern middle Tennessee. We are fortunate to carry on their work, and it has been a blessing to have shared the experience with so many great teammates.

Without a doubt, the pandemic and all the changes associated with it have influenced many national trends. It was exactly four years ago that our lives were first impacted by COVID-19.

Together, this team navigated shutdowns, mandates, supply chain issues and labor market challenges unlike anything previous DREMC teams had ever faced.

Many of the changes spurred by the pandemic will continue to shape how organizations work moving forward—remote work, new technologies and high volumes of growth in the DREMC service area to name a few.

I have seen firsthand how capable and motivated the Duck River Electric

team is to meet these opportunities head-on, and I applaud them for their commitment to navigating them well for the benefit of the membership.

We can be especially proud of the progress they've made to reduce the cooperative's debt burden from over \$92 million to \$72 million (a reduction of 28%).

That progress required sacrifice and creative solutions to adapt to the changing and challenging business environment. No one person can take credit for this achievement - it has taken every one of them doing their part.

Reducing debt like that without significant rate increases is an amazing accomplishment, but they accomplished that while also expanding a growing distribution system by \$47 million (an increase of 23%) to serve a growing population in this area. These accomplishments, when viewed together, are evidence of their outstanding service.

Their efforts have saved you millions of dollars in reduced interest expenses, especially in this higher-interest rate environment. These savings have helped offset much of the incredible inflation in the cost of materials over the past few years.

In addition to all of this, the DREMC team has helped me grow



Scott Spence  
Duck River EMC  
President & CEO

personally and professionally. Working with them has taught me valuable lessons about leadership, communication and teamwork, and I am grateful for the ways they have contributed to that growth.

I am confident that the interim leadership team will serve you and the DREMC team well in the coming months.

I am equally confident that the Duck River Electric team will continue to support you and the communities they serve every day and carry on the mission the first team members saw so clearly for this area in 1936.

In short, thank you, and I wish each of you the very best.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Scott Spence".

# Keeping trees in a safe place

**D**uck River Electric is committed to delivering safe and reliable power to the homes and businesses of those we serve. To fulfill this commitment, our team invests in regular, proactive maintenance of the electric system, which includes right-of-way (ROW) management.

DREMC's ROW management team performs regular tree and vegetation trimming and removal from overhead power lines using safe mechanical and hand-trimming methods. We also control tree and vegetation growth in the right of way with herbicide treatment, which is a proactive, ground-level approach. Combined, these two methods of clearing DREMC's right of way means that our team can better ensure electric reliability, safety and cost for those we serve.

**Ensuring reliability:** Severe weather events can cause trees to fall, and trees take down power lines and utility poles within their reach. While many factors can impact power disruptions, historically, many outages that occur on DREMC lines can be attributed to trees that fall inside and outside the right-of-way.

Ongoing ROW maintenance has proven impactful as outage duration times have been greatly reduced since DREMC began its current ROW clearance process. In addition, the number of outages that occur and the number of DREMC members affected by those outages have also been reduced.

**Ensuring safety:** Working near power lines can be dangerous, and DREMC crews take extra precautions to work safely every day. When severe weather brings power lines down, causing outages,

work conditions become even more serious – especially when crews work in the dark to make repairs and restore service. When the right of way is overgrown with trees and underbrush, crews cannot easily see where lines are down, which adds another layer of concern for the crews' safety.

Aside from these concerns, trees touching power lines pose a danger. If children climb trees where limbs are within reach of a power line, they can potentially climb into a danger zone. Electricity can arc, or jump, from the line to a nearby conductor, such as a tree.

Trees and limbs that fall across power lines create potentially dangerous situations, especially when they bring lines down, hiding them on the ground under the tree and its foliage. Keeping the ROW clear improves safety for all.

**Ensuring affordability:** It's more cost-effective to undertake ROW preventative maintenance than it is to make repairs to damaged electric infrastructure after the fact.

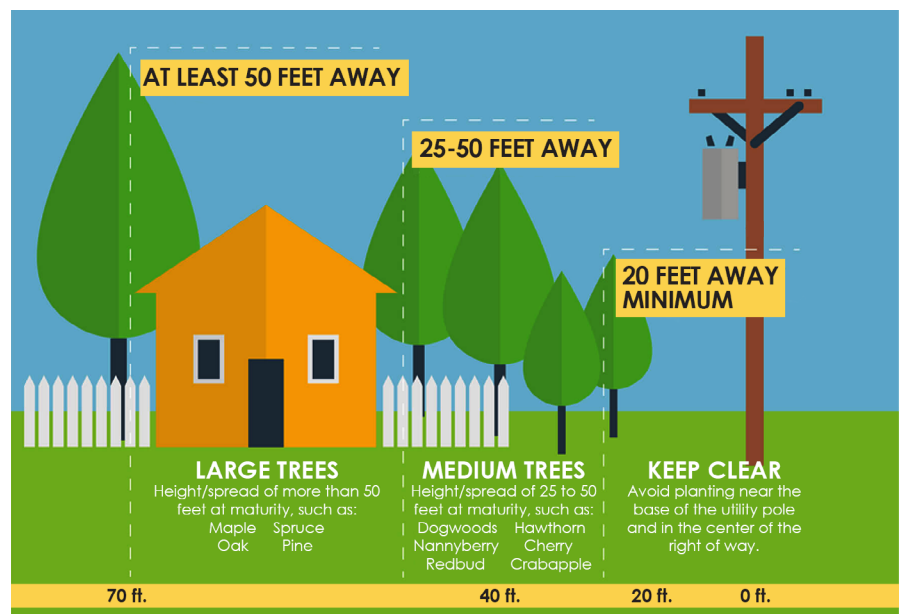
As the cooperative's fourth-largest operations expense, DREMC invests approximately \$10 million annually to clear and maintain the right of way. If trees and other vegetation are left unchecked, they can become overgrown and expensive to correct. A regular, strategic ROW management program helps keep costs down for everyone.

Another way to ensure that trees do not interfere with safe, reliable electric service is to be mindful of where new trees are planted. Below are ways to help keep trees in a safe place.

**Trees provide shade, privacy, cleaner air and other benefits, and planting the right tree in the right place not only beautifies your property, but it also helps DREMC keep maintenance costs low.**

## Here's how you can help:

- Plant trees in the right place.
- Avoid blocking pad-mounted electric transformers.
- Avoid planting trees and other vegetation in the center of the right of way and around the base of poles and other electric equipment.





**A few seats are available at the Home Energy Workshop in Shelbyville.**

**SHELBYVILLE**  
March 26 ● 6:00 p.m.  
DREMC Office  
1411 Madison St.

**D**on't miss out on this opportunity to learn how a few simple improvements can increase efficiency, lower monthly energy bills, and create a more comfortable home! Our team will also introduce DREMC's programs and services that are designed to help members get the most from their energy dollars.

Join us for a light supper and educational program presented by DREMC's residential energy advisor. For attending, each household will receive a FREE Home Energy Kit to begin your improvements.



**RESERVE YOUR SEAT BEFORE THEY'RE GONE!**

**CALL 931-680-5880 OR VISIT [DREMC.COM/WORKSHOP](http://DREMC.COM/WORKSHOP) FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO REGISTER ONLINE.**

*Stay informed!*

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Opt in to receive the next issue by sending your preferred email address to [DREMCNews@dremc.com](mailto:DREMCNews@dremc.com).

# Paperless options add convenience

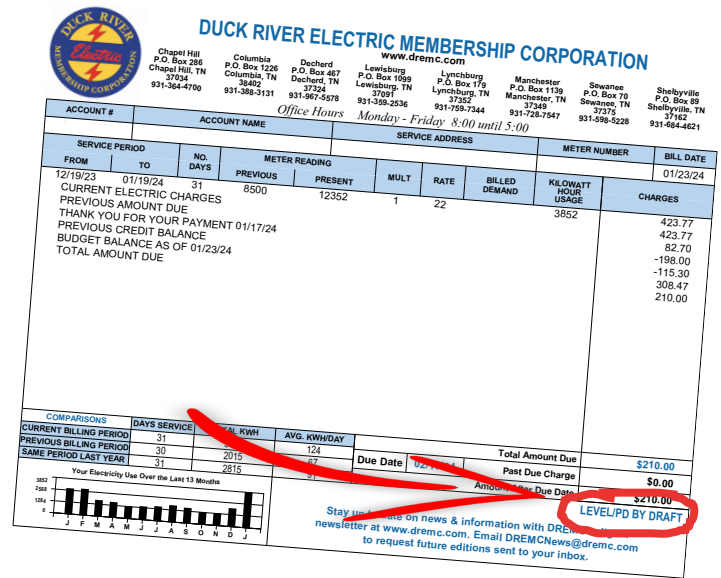
Duck River Electric's autopay options help ensure your payments are drafted on the due date each month so they are made on time, every time. Payments can be automatically drafted from your active checking, savings or credit card account.

Sign up for DREMC's bank draft using your checking or savings account and receive a one-time bill credit of \$10!

With automatic payments, you will continue to receive a monthly statement, but you no longer need to worry about sending payment.

For added convenience, go paperless with DREMC's electronic billing and receive monthly electric bills via email. Pair electronic billing with one of the autopay options to complete the worry-free, paperless experience!

Visit [dremc.com](http://dremc.com) or speak with a member service representative at any DREMC office to enroll.



## Making a difference through Project HELP

Duck River Electric's Project HELP program offers emergency electric bill assistance to qualifying members who face financial hardships and are unable to pay the bill.

One DREMC member recently shared this thought about donating to Project HELP: "I am happy to support my neighbors when I can. Giving a dollar every month to Project HELP may not be much, but when added to the dollars that others give, our combined donations help make a difference to someone."

Thanks to your generous donations to Project HELP, the agencies partnering with DREMC were able to pay \$11,500 towards electric bills of those who qualified for assistance in January. Project HELP makes a difference!

Please join us in donating to the program to ensure that when someone in your community needs emergency assistance, Project HELP is able to assist them this month or any other month throughout the year.

Donations can be made by signing up to donate through your monthly electric bill, at [dremc.com](http://dremc.com) or by donating spare change when visiting any DREMC office.

*All donations, regardless of the amount, are appreciated!*



**If you or someone you know needs assistance paying the DREMC electric bill, Project HELP is available. Contact your local community partner agency for more information and to qualify for assistance.**

# Connecting more Middle Tennesseans in 2024



*A message from William Bradford  
President and CEO of United Communications*

Project UNITE remains one of United Communications' most important priorities so that more Middle Tennesseans can experience "the good life." Whether empowering a rural family with vital telehealth access or enabling a small business to thrive through high-speed internet connectivity, the team at United wants to create more opportunities for rural communities.

That being said, I wanted to share a few reasons why we expect 2024 to be another successful year:

### **We're setting an ambitious goal of reaching more communities.**

The partnerships forged through Project UNITE have helped us expand and enhance internet service to more than 20,000 residents and businesses since its inception in 2020. This year, plans include reaching an additional 12,000—our single-year deployment record!

To achieve this, United Communications will invest \$15 million of its funds alongside the grants received. The groundwork has begun to further bridge the digital divide in eight Middle Tennessee counties. This ambitious goal wouldn't be possible without the hard work and dedication of our entire team.

### **We're committed to building a network that supports our communities for decades to come.**

Creating networks is one thing, but creating a reliable, world-class network is what makes Project UNITE truly transformative. Success for us isn't just about providing internet service; it's about delivering it with unparalleled reliability and exceptional customer service. Moreover, as a local company with deep roots in our community, the United

team is committed to the long-term well-being of the areas we serve. We live and work here, and we're here to stay. United ensures your internet experience is built to last.

### **We're proactively pursuing grants to further enhance the support for Middle Tennesseans.**

Grants have been instrumental in expansion endeavors. I'm proud of the way our team proactively identifies and pursues grant funding opportunities, turning them into tangible progress for local communities. This approach, combined with a collaborative spirit, ensures we make it a priority to tap into available funds. We're hoping to secure significant grant funding in 2024 to further support the communities we serve.

### **We will continue to leverage strategic partnerships and internal investments for greater impact.**

United Communications isn't alone in the mission to bridge the digital divide. Our close collaboration with Middle Tennessee Electric and Duck River Electric provides invaluable support and access to existing infrastructure. This synergy allows us to reach more communities faster, maximizing the impact of Project UNITE. By combining our internal investments with strategic partnerships and grants, we can accelerate our efforts for a more connected Middle Tennessee.

I'm filled with anticipation and hope for the thousands of lives that will be impacted by Project UNITE in 2024. But if there's one thing I've learned over the past few years, it's that everyone plays an important role in bridging the digital divide in Middle Tennessee.

Visit [United's website](#) for more information about the Project UNITE initiative and how you and community leaders can support future expand in Middle Tennessee.

## **Build efficiency into your new home!**

Duck River Electric members can qualify for a rebate when building a new home. Rebates are available for:

- Air source heat pump
- Mini-split unit
- HVAC dual fuel heat pump
- Heat pump water heater
- EV connectivity
- *And more!*

Visit [DREMC's website](#) for details and how to qualify.

