



Bev Mattheisen checks Blachly-Lane Electric meters along her route.

Another Round to Read the Meters

Former BLEC employee comes out of retirement to fill in during transition

By Pam Spettel

Bev Mattheisen was a familiar face at Blachly-Lane Electric Co-op when she came back temporarily to read meters in August 2015. She was hired in 1987 as a contract meter reader, and in 1990 became a permanent employee.

When Bev retired in 2013, she thought it was for good.

“Retirement isn’t easy,” she says. “It’s one of the hardest decisions a person ever makes because it’s about change.”

Several changes at Blachly-Lane are what brought Bev back to work. Former meter reader Ginger Haworth moved from the area, leaving a vacancy. At the same time, Blachly-Lane’s metering equipment was being replaced with radio-read meters, which reduced the number of days required to gather readings each month from 21 days to three.

The co-op was planning to hire a substation and metering technician to collect meter

readings as part of the position, so Bev filled in until Jeff Jones came on board.

“When I left in 2013, I wanted to make sure that the job would go to someone who could do it even better than I had,” says Bev. “We got that when we hired Ginger, who made several improvements. Now we have Jeff, who is personable and very knowledgeable. He knows everything about the meters we use. Once again I can say that things are being left in better

hands than mine.”

Bev’s years at the co-op left a mark on staff, and the members she served.

“Bev has always been an ambassador to our members,” says Mary Locke, Blachly-Lane’s office and human resources manager. “She has such a good rapport with members, and she’s helped us get messages out to them. We’ve had many members comment that they are going to miss her, and so are we.

“Bev has been a very



New meter technology allows Bev to stay in her car to read meters and shortens the time it takes to read them from 21 days to three days.

dedicated, loyal employee all these years. She has real ownership of her job, and a very strong work ethic. We're lucky that she agreed to come back to help the co-op during this time of change."

Bev says she has always been thankful for the co-op.

"I volunteered to take kids to YES camp and I've worked here twice," she says. "As a member of the co-op, I'm on the AWARE committee. Through all of that there's been a lot of change. But you can't deny the change or you'll get left behind in the dust. Things evolve all the time. We

don't know what things will be like in 20 years. Change used to happen in baby steps. Now it happens in leaps and bounds.

"Learning technology isn't that easy. We feel it more than the younger generation, and that can make us uncomfortable. We have to look for the good in these changes. It's too easy to focus on the negative. We have to be open to the positive changes technology brings."

Bev says she noticed changes in the way people think shortly before 9/11, believing it was then the



Retired again, Bev spends a lot of time looking at the world from her horse, Cindy.

Photo courtesy of Bev Mattheisen

world started working on fear and negativity. It was then she noticed more properties with gates, separating themselves from their neighbors and community.

For that, she has some ideas.

"They're still our neighbors and our community," says Bev. "I believe in getting active in making the world a better place to live, rather than pulling away. I try to do at least one thing every day to make life better for someone else, without them knowing it was me. It's an incredibly humbling and connecting thing to do."

One of the biggest changes Bev notes at the co-op is the meters. From a meter-reader point of view, she says they are safer than before.

"Not getting out and walking every property for a read reduces the chances of dog bites or breaking a foot due to tripping. Both of those happened to me," says Bev. "Cutting down on driving time reduces the chances of

car accidents, too. Accidents and injuries end up costing members' money in the end. Less time reading meters is less time for hazards to occur."

Bev has some final words of wisdom to share with members.

"We're all doing the best we can," she says. "We elect our board to represent who we are. We should all take steps toward emergency preparedness and get to know our neighbors, because we may need to rely on each other at some point. And Blachly-Lane is small. No one is just a number."

Now she gets to go back to retirement and doing what she truly loves.

"The best thing about retirement is that I used to view the world through a windshield, and now I view it through two golden ears," she says. "I get to spend so much more time with my horse, Cindy. I've had the best job. I got to be outside in nature, and I got to talk with a lot of good people." ■