

## BAPTISM BY FIRE

Allen Robbins became the General Manager of Sevier County Electric System on August 9, 2016. Barely four months into his tenure, Sevier County suffered one of the most devastating events imaginable. “When I went to work on Monday morning, November 28, 2016, Sevier County Electric System served approximately 56,500 customers. By the end of the day nearly 3,000 of those customer accounts no longer existed,” said Robbins.



“This is the most catastrophic event we have experienced in modern times. Blizzards, ice storms and wind storms are all difficult storms to deal with from an electric utility perspective. But 100 mile an hour plus winds and fire is something I hope to never see again.”

According to Robbins, one of SCES’ lineman was working at the north end of Gatlinburg looking south toward the Great Smoky Mountains National Park stating that it looked like a rolling fire plume coming from the Park and embers the size of bricks were flying through the air.

Superintendent Robbins estimates that as many as 160 lineman and tree-trimmers were working during the fire. Much of the help came from Townsend Tree Trimming Service, Wolf Tree Service, Clinton Utilities Board, Knoxville Utilities Board, Lenoir City Utilities Board, Cleveland Utilities Board and Chattanooga based Service Electric. Robbins said neighboring LPC’s also called to offer their help as well. “What makes the Tennessee Valley unique in electric

distribution and better than anywhere else in the country is the willingness to help a neighboring LPC in a time of need,” said Robbins.

The estimated cost to SCES for the wildfire storm is \$4.5 million. “As of today we have replaced 414 poles, several transformers and many miles of conductor. As a manager you try to prepare your utility for storms both in material and finances but I hope to never take a blow like this again.”

