

Murfreesboro Electric Department

TMEPA Member Spotlight

November 2017



Behind every thriving city is a strong electric utility powering its success. So it should come as no surprise that as Murfreesboro, Tennessee, has become one of the fastest-growing cities in the nation. Murfreesboro Electric Department has developed into one of the most reliable utilities on the TVA system.

While it wouldn't be founded until 1939, Murfreesboro Electric Department's roots go back to the early 1930s. With rural Americans still fighting their way out of the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt enacted programs to help get the country working again.

Born out of the New Deal, the Tennessee Valley Authority was one such initiative, tasked with improving flood control, river navigation, and economic and agricultural development, along with the generation of public electricity.

TVA went on to purchase the Tennessee Electric Power Company, a statewide private utility providing electricity to Murfreesboro. Following a Supreme Court decision that confirmed TVA's right to offer public power in the area, Murfreesboro residents acted quickly to establish their own public electric utility on Aug. 16, 1939.

Things started out small for Murfreesboro Electric Department. Just a single line crew was responsible for building, maintaining and repairing every distribution line in the city, while a handful of staff worked with customers to explain the benefits of electric power and to set up service. In its earliest days, Murfreesboro Electric Department employees even helped install new electric appliances like stoves and irons. Then, they taught customers how to use them.

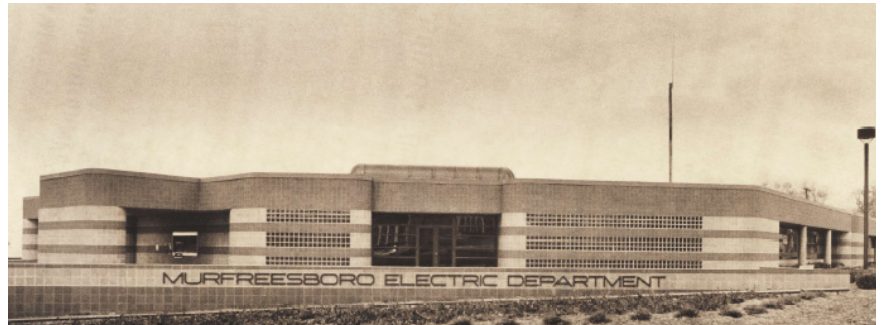
The utility started with 14 employees, but even with the magnitude of the task, their work didn't go to waste. By 1951, Murfreesboro Electric Department expanded to 29 employees and brought electricity to 5,500 customers throughout the city.



In 1969, Murfreesboro Electric Department built its first substation owned and operated by the electric department. Located on Jones Boulevard, it represented a major step toward better control of electric distribution throughout the city.

The energy crisis of the 1970s marked the first true challenge to Murfreesboro Electric Department's claim of offering the lowest electric rates in the nation. Following a 20 percent rate increase from TVA in 1974, Murfreesboro Electric Department announced it had absorbed a loss of \$50,000 in 1975 and was forced to raise rates anywhere from 11.6 percent to 28 percent, depending on how much energy customers used.

The 1980s proved to be a period of tremendous technological growth for Murfreesboro Electric Department, with one of the key improvements being the upgrade from paper route books to electronic, handheld devices for meter readers in 1985. Data could be stored in these electronic readers until it was downloaded into a computer system.



To reflect its modernity, the department completed a headquarters expansion in 1986, designed by local firm Johnson and Bailey, that gave the city the striking building residents know today.

The following year, Murfreesboro Electric Department's customer load reached 19,365, a more than 25 percent increase over five years. To contend with such tremendous growth, the department began investing in future development and infrastructure needs, including cutting-edge technology.

In 1993, Murfreesboro Electric Department installed a Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition system, or SCADA, to monitor substations for problems like downed lines and blown transformers. The meter-reading system was again updated in 1997, giving employees handheld devices that could read meters from a distance via radio signal.

The introduction of digital mapping and the two-way automatic communication system in 2004 brought Murfreesboro residents the quick response times they enjoy today. The TWAC system allows Murfreesboro Electric Department to read electric meters automatically, confirming all meters are receiving power or helping to remotely pinpoint issues on the system with unprecedented accuracy.

Today, Murfreesboro Electric Department continues to search for new ways to improve reliability and affordability for its customers, as well as new programs that make it easier to interact with their electric department.



In March 2017, the department's Board of Directors appointed P.D. Mynatt as the Murfreesboro Electric Department general manager. He previously served as chief financial officer for 27 years, before being named as general manager.

A graduate of the University of Alabama, Mynatt began his utility career at Bessemer Electric and Water Service in Alabama. He went on to take positions at the Tullahoma Utilities Board and TVA before joining Murfreesboro Electric Department in 1990.

While Mynatt believes Murfreesboro's rapid growth presents challenges, he is confident in the department's readiness to continue building on its past successes.

"Most people probably can't really fathom how much is going on in Murfreesboro right now, but that's where I think our people have done an excellent job in keeping up with the growth," he says. "We've got a great group of employees who are dedicated to their job, and I'm very honored to be able to lead them."

Mynatt also has his sights set on expanding new technology that will benefit Murfreesboro Electric Department, its customers and the city as a whole. First among those is an upcoming project to upgrade all of the system's electric meters that were installed in 2004, allowing the department to identify outages even faster and further cut down response times and remotely connect and disconnect meters for the office.

Murfreesboro Electric Department does all of this while also working hard to live up to the standard of being a true hometown power provider. Through the Magic Dollar program, the department partners with Community Helpers of Rutherford County to raise money for emergency financial assistance to residents throughout the county.

The department even plays a central role in important community events. Murfreesboro Electric Department is the founder of Murfreesboro's annual Earth Day Celebration, as well as a key contributor to the county's Christmas Tree Lighting on the downtown square, JazzFest and many other events that make Murfreesboro a vibrant city.

Murfreesboro Electric Department has been committed to these values for more than 75 years because it believes in the importance of hometown power providers. Murfreesboro Electric Department is proud to continue to power the progress of Murfreesboro.