[Executive Summary]
In the past 10 years, Dixie Electric has made vast advancements in technology and offers many useful tools to its members. The ultimate goal of the association is to effectively communicate and to provide the best service to its members.

[Situation Analysis]
Dixie Electric Power Association failed to communicate with its members (consumers) in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, which severely damaged its reputation with both the membership and the local media organizations.

[Goal]
Dixie Electric would like to rebuild its reputation with its members, as well as enhance the relationship with the local media reporters and editors.

[Objectives]
Objective 1: To increase awareness of the efforts made by the employees of Dixie Electric in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Objective 2: To create awareness of the technological advancements made by Dixie Electric in the 10 years after Hurricane Katrina.

Objective 3: To increase awareness of the communication channels made available to the members since Hurricane Katrina.

[Target Audiences]
The target audience is the local media and members of Dixie Electric.
- Newspapers: Laurel Leader Call, Laurel Miss.; Impact of Laurel, Laurel, Miss.; The Chronicle, Laurel, Miss.; The Wayne County News, Waynesboro, Miss.; Richton Dispatch, Richton, Miss.; Petal News, Hattiesburg, Miss.; and Hattiesburg American, Hattiesburg, Miss.
- Television Station: WDAM Television, Hattiesburg, Miss.
- Radio Stations: Pine Belt Radio, Hattiesburg, Miss. (B95, Rock 104, KZ94); Super Talk Radio, Laurel, Miss., WLAU 99.3; Super Talk Radio, Hattiesburg, Miss., WFMM 97.3
[Key Messages]
• Effective communication with members and media is vital in a crisis or storm restoration

[Strategies]
Hire an intern in April 2015:
• Intern to research the communication issues at Dixie Electric in the aftermath of Katrina.
• Intern to research the advancements made at the cooperative in the past 10 years.
• Intern to plan a media day to talk about the advancements in the association.
Media should disseminate information to the 29,000 members through the local media during August 2015.

[Evaluation]
The research project and Media Day were successful and goals and objectives were met.
• The intern was able to assess the situation at Dixie Electric during August 2005 in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina through interviews and research.
• A media day was planned and materials were provided for media professionals.
• Seven of 10 media outlets that were invited attended the media day or had a response. Of those media outlets, seven reported on Dixie Electric’s technology improvements in their coverage.
• A survey completed by those media professionals showed that relations had improved with Dixie Electric.

[Appendix]
I. Action Plan
II. Table of interviews and interview purpose
III. Table of Media Outlets and media coverage
# APPENDIX I:
Hurricane Katrina Anniversary Media Day

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Item</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Assigned to</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hire an intern</td>
<td>April 2015</td>
<td>Lydia Walters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write job description</td>
<td>May 2015</td>
<td>Lydia Walters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Define goals and objectives</td>
<td>May 2015</td>
<td>Lydia Walters Elissa Fulton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research – Dixie's effort during Hurricane Katrina and issues in the aftermath</td>
<td>June-August 2015</td>
<td>Elissa Fulton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct interviews, read articles and publications</td>
<td>June-August 2015</td>
<td>Elissa Fulton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outline and organize the results of the research for a presentation to the media</td>
<td>July-August 2015</td>
<td>Elissa Fulton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect photos for the presentation</td>
<td>July-August 2015</td>
<td>Pollyanna Magee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare Media Day invitation, agenda, handout and evaluation</td>
<td>Late July</td>
<td>Elissa Fulton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invite the news media</td>
<td>July 27, 2015</td>
<td>Lydia Walters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Day event</td>
<td>August 7, 2015</td>
<td>Lydia Walters Pollyanna Magee Elissa Fulton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect results - media articles, stories and social media posts</td>
<td>August 2015</td>
<td>Lydia Walters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person Interviewed</td>
<td>Date of Interview</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MICHAEL CALLAHAN CEO of Electric Power Associations of Mississippi Public Service Commissioner/Southern District (at the time of Hurricane Katrina)</td>
<td>May 29, 2015</td>
<td>Discussed the storm and its aftermath and the effects it had on the southern region of Mississippi. Also reviewed Dixie’s communications and how they could have improved communications from the view of Public Service Commissioner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SARA PETERSON Corporate Communications Manager, South Mississippi Electric Power Association (SMEPA)</td>
<td>June 7, 2015</td>
<td>Spent a day at SMEPA touring the operations of the generation facility. Toured Plant Morrow and SMEPA’s control center. Viewed the newly implemented Field Operations Center and took away a basic knowledge of operations and how they have improved at SMEPA in the event of a future crisis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LYDIA WALTERS Communication and Human Resource Manager, Dixie Electric Corporate Communications, SMEPA (at the time of Hurricane Katrina)</td>
<td>June 10, 2015</td>
<td>Discussed the Media Day project and went over goals and objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RON STEWART VP of Communications, Electric Power Associations of Mississippi</td>
<td>June 19, 2015</td>
<td>Discussed Dixie’s communications with the public after Hurricane Katrina and received information. Mr. Stewart passed along all information the statewide office had on damage reports and press releases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLLYANNA MAGEE Community Relations Coordinator, Dixie Electric</td>
<td>June 25, 2015</td>
<td>Discussed Mrs. Magee’s role at Dixie Electric in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. She gave a realistic account of the situation at Dixie and some of the obstacles that prevented the association from effectively communicating with its members and the media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RANDY SMITH General Manager Dixie Electric (phone interview) Engineer Dixie Electric (at the time of Hurricane Katrina)</td>
<td>June 26, 2015</td>
<td>Mr. Smith went over the information that was researched and helped to clarify some of the information, as well as correct much of the findings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX III:
Media Outlets and Media Coverage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media Outlet</th>
<th>Attendance or Requested Information</th>
<th>Media Coverage</th>
<th>Reach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laurel Leader-Call</td>
<td>Did not attend; Requested Information</td>
<td>Quarter page story in special Katrina edition</td>
<td>Circulation: 10,000 subscribers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Chronicle</td>
<td>Reporter attended</td>
<td>Full page story in special Katrina edition and doubled our ad size for providing photographs for the special edition</td>
<td>Circulation: 8,000 subscribers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Wayne County News</td>
<td>News Editor attended</td>
<td>Lengthy article using the material from the media day handout</td>
<td>Circulation: 5,000 subscribers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact of Laurel</td>
<td>Reporter attended</td>
<td>Front and second page article during the following week</td>
<td>Circulation: 45,684 homes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richton Dispatch</td>
<td>Did not attend</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petal News</td>
<td>Did not attend</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hattiesburg American</td>
<td>Did not attend</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WDAM Television</td>
<td>Reporter attended</td>
<td>Story on 6 and 10 p.m., newscast on August 7; Posted story link on Facebook and Twitter</td>
<td>130,000 homes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pine Belt Radio – B95, Rock 104, KZ94</td>
<td>News Editor attended</td>
<td>Used audio clips during the August 7-8 weekend and ran audio clips again during the week of the Katrina anniversary, August 24-29, 2015; Posted on Twitter throughout the media day itself</td>
<td>103,000 people tune in for at least 15 minutes during a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Super Talk radio for Laurel/Hattiesburg Laurel, WLAU 99.3; Hattiesburg, WFMM 97.3</td>
<td>Did not attend; Did request an interview</td>
<td>Live interview on Tuesday, August 25, as part of their Katrina anniversary coverage</td>
<td>Circulation numbers not available.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
You are invited to our Media Day

As we reflect on Hurricane Katrina as a community 10 years later, come see how we’ve evolved at Dixie Electric.

Friday, August 7, 2015
11:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Dixie Electric Power Association
1863 Highway 184 • Laurel, Mississippi 39443

Lunch will be provided.
Please reply to Lydia Walters at 601-422-4264, or respond to this email.
As we reflect on Hurricane Katrina as a community 10 years later, come see how we’ve evolved at Dixie Electric.

Friday, August 7, 2015
11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.
Rebecca Pridges
Dixie Electric Member

“I remember the crews and trucks that flooded in to help us. We had co-ops from all over the United States ready to work long hours. We would have not made it without all of the extra help.”
Joe Donald
Safety Manager

“Thank you all for all of your hard work during this time of EXTRA hard work and EXTRA long hours. We tip our hats to you.”
Michael Pridges
Dixie Electric Member

“Thanks to all of you who worked so hard to restore our power to such a devastated county, I think it was restored very promptly considering the mangled mess the poles and lines were. I’m so thankful to have power again.”
Mary McCary
Dixie Electric Member

“I appreciate Dixie Electric for their great effort in restoring electricity after Katrina. A job well done. I'm sure that God was with you in this great effort. May he continue to smile upon you. Thank you again.”
Rev. James Burke

“Thank you all for your hard work during Katrina days and nights. We realize that each one of you had to make choices between your family and ours. Our jobs are not easy but can make life much better. So, God Bless each one of your and your families.”
David Holbrook family

Dixie Electric has installed a dispatch center. The dispatch center integrates modern technology that provides more accurate and timely information to the servicemen and linemen when they are making repairs and restoring power after a storm.

August marks the anniversary of one of the worst natural disasters to strike the Southeastern United States, especially Mississippi. On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina entered Dixie Electric Power Association’s service area, bringing 100 mile per hour winds, spawning tornadoes and snapping large trees. The addition of 1,100 line workers brought unique circumstances because the line workers had to be housed and fed, and their clothes washed. This difficult task was made worse when considering the devastation that the local community faced. In many instances, members volunteered to help, so the line workers could continue restoring power. In this photo, Dixie Electric employees are preparing and serving food to the line workers.

The Holbrook family would like to say thank you for your hard work during Katrina days and nights. We realize that each one of you had to make choices between your family and ours. Our jobs are not easy but can make life much better. So, God Bless each one of your and your families. – David Holbrook family

Since Hurricane Katrina, Dixie Electric has added 18 positions to its workforce. Nine of the positions were the addition of linemen. At the time of Katrina, Dixie Electric worked three five-man line crews; current-year, there are four six-man line crews. One of those crews is assigned to the Petal area. Other positions have been added in the following areas:
right-of-way maintenance, information technology, safety, mapping and warehousing.

Adding Personnel

Since Hurricane Katrina, Dixie Electric has added 18 positions to its workforce. Nine of the positions were the addition of linemen. At the time of Katrina, Dixie Electric worked three five-man line crews; currently, there are four six-man line crews. One of those crews is assigned to the Petal area. Other positions have been added in the following areas: right-of-way maintenance, information technology, safety, mapping and warehousing.

Since 2005 Dixie Electric has worked with the local media to build a relationship and to communicate its members through them during significant power outages. Dixie Electric also has two websites available for member information, dixieepa.com and prepared.dixieepa.com. Prepared.dixieepa.com has a real-time outage map, so members can view outages. It posts a small yellow hard hat when a lineman has been dispatched to the local area. Dixie Electric’s communication staff also regularly posts outage updates to Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

Dispatching linemen

Dixie Electric has installed a central dispatch center. Over the past several years, Dixie Electric has upgraded its phone system and added an outage management system. This system predicts the location or possible cause of an outage from calls received from the members. This integrated outage system removes some of the guesswork, allowing linemen to be dispatched quicker and sending them to specific locations to restore power.

Communicating with members

Since 2005 Dixie Electric has worked with the local media to build a relationship and to communicate its members through them during significant power outages. Dixie Electric also has two websites available for member information, dixieepa.com and prepared.dixieepa.com. Prepared.dixieepa.com has a real-time outage map, so members can view outages. It posts a small yellow hard hat when a lineman has been dispatched to the local area. Dixie Electric’s communication staff also regularly posts outage updates to Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

Since Hurricane Katrina, Dixie Electric has added 18 positions to its workforce. Nine of the positions were the addition of linemen. At the time of Katrina, Dixie Electric worked three five-man line crews; currently, there are four six-man line crews. One of those crews is assigned to the Petal area. Other positions have been added in the following areas: right-of-way maintenance, information technology, safety, mapping and warehousing.

Adding Personnel

Since Hurricane Katrina, Dixie Electric has added 18 positions to its workforce. Nine of the positions were the addition of linemen. At the time of Katrina, Dixie Electric worked three five-man line crews; currently, there are four six-man line crews. One of those crews is assigned to the Petal area. Other positions have been added in the following areas: right-of-way maintenance, information technology, safety, mapping and warehousing.

Dispatching linemen

Since Hurricane Katrina, Dixie Electric has added 18 positions to its workforce. Nine of the positions were the addition of linemen. At the time of Katrina, Dixie Electric worked three five-man line crews; currently, there are four six-man line crews. One of those crews is assigned to the Petal area. Other positions have been added in the following areas: right-of-way maintenance, information technology, safety, mapping and warehousing.

Communicating with members

Since 2005 Dixie Electric has worked with the local media to build a relationship and to communicate its members through them during significant power outages. Dixie Electric also has two websites available for member information, dixieepa.com and prepared.dixieepa.com. Prepared.dixieepa.com has a real-time outage map, so members can view outages. It posts a small yellow hard hat when a lineman has been dispatched to the local area. Dixie Electric’s communication staff also regularly posts outage updates to Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

Since Hurricane Katrina, Dixie Electric has added 18 positions to its workforce. Nine of the positions were the addition of linemen. At the time of Katrina, Dixie Electric worked three five-man line crews; currently, there are four six-man line crews. One of those crews is assigned to the Petal area. Other positions have been added in the following areas: right-of-way maintenance, information technology, safety, mapping and warehousing.

Adding Personnel

Since Hurricane Katrina, Dixie Electric has added 18 positions to its workforce. Nine of the positions were the addition of linemen. At the time of Katrina, Dixie Electric worked three five-man line crews; currently, there are four six-man line crews. One of those crews is assigned to the Petal area. Other positions have been added in the following areas: right-of-way maintenance, information technology, safety, mapping and warehousing.

Dispatching linemen

Since Hurricane Katrina, Dixie Electric has added 18 positions to its workforce. Nine of the positions were the addition of linemen. At the time of Katrina, Dixie Electric worked three five-man line crews; currently, there are four six-man line crews. One of those crews is assigned to the Petal area. Other positions have been added in the following areas: right-of-way maintenance, information technology, safety, mapping and warehousing.

Communicating with members

Since 2005 Dixie Electric has worked with the local media to build a relationship and to communicate its members through them during significant power outages. Dixie Electric also has two websites available for member information, dixieepa.com and prepared.dixieepa.com. Prepared.dixieepa.com has a real-time outage map, so members can view outages. It posts a small yellow hard hat when a lineman has been dispatched to the local area. Dixie Electric’s communication staff also regularly posts outage updates to Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

Since Hurricane Katrina, Dixie Electric has added 18 positions to its workforce. Nine of the positions were the addition of linemen. At the time of Katrina, Dixie Electric worked three five-man line crews; currently, there are four six-man line crews. One of those crews is assigned to the Petal area. Other positions have been added in the following areas: right-of-way maintenance, information technology, safety, mapping and warehousing.

Adding Personnel

Since Hurricane Katrina, Dixie Electric has added 18 positions to its workforce. Nine of the positions were the addition of linemen. At the time of Katrina, Dixie Electric worked three five-man line crews; currently, there are four six-man line crews. One of those crews is assigned to the Petal area. Other positions have been added in the following areas: right-of-way maintenance, information technology, safety, mapping and warehousing.

Since Hurricane Katrina, Dixie Electric has added 18 positions to its workforce. Nine of the positions were the addition of linemen. At the time of Katrina, Dixie Electric worked three five-man line crews; currently, there are four six-man line crews. One of those crews is assigned to the Petal area. Other positions have been added in the following areas: right-of-way maintenance, information technology, safety, mapping and warehousing.
Katrina
10 years later
A look at THEN and NOW

2005 - 2015
“It’s rare for an electric power association to suffer a 100% power outage due to a natural disaster. After Katrina, nine of them did.”

– Hobson Waits

“Ten years later Hurricane Katrina is still the worst natural disaster to strike the United States. The devastating storm caused not only all of our 35,568 plus accounts to lose power, but every service south of Interstate 20 in Mississippi lost electric power. At no time previously had our entire system been without power; let alone the entire southern half of the state.”

Randy Smith
General Manager

Source: NOAA
Damage to Dixie Electric’s Service Area

Katrina 10 years later
Challenges
Results of the Storm

Katrina 10 years later
Dedication Despite Personal Loss

Katrina 10 years later
Top 10 Changes for Dixie Electric In 10 Years

Katrina 10 years later
Communications

Katrina 10 years later

DIXIE ELECTRIC POWER ASSOCIATION
Planning And Preparedness

2

Katrina 10 years later

THEN

NOW
We Made Smart Decisions
3

Generators

Katrina

10 years later

NOW
Mapping System

Katrina 10 years later
Automated Phone System

Need members to update contact information
Brings together...

- Automated Phone System
- Automated Meter Infrastructure
- Outage reporting & dispatching
Automated Meter Infrastructure (AMI Smart Meters)

Katrina 10 years later

THEN

NOW
Staffing Increase

THEN

78 Employees

NOW

97 Employees
10
District Offices

Katrina
10 years later

THEN

NOW
Our Commitment
To Excellence

Katrina
10 years later

OUR COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE
TO THOSE WE SERVE
Katrina 10 years later
Katrina
10 years later
Dixie EPA Then and Now - Katrina 10 years later

By Linda Crawford

If you lived in any of the 38 counties in the southern part of Mississippi, south of I-20, in August 2005, then you have probably been saying to yourself, “I can’t believe it’s been 10 years since Katrina.” And, more than likely you have been reflecting on those horrific days following Hurricane Katrina, which hit on August 29, of no electricity, no fuel for vehicles or generators, and no communications.

Still, 10 years later, Hurricane Katrina is considered to be the worst natural disaster to strike the United States. But, at the time, and probably still today, the rest of the world does not know the devastating blow that Mississippi took from Hurricane Katrina.

Among those reflecting on the days of Katrina, is Dixie Electric Power Association, which has district offices in Laurel, Waynesboro, and Petal.

“As you may recall, Hurricane Katrina was 200 miles wide,” said began Lydia Walters, Dixie EPA Communications Manager/Human Resource Manager. “The eye of the storm was 30 miles wide, and crossed over the Bay St. Louis area near Waveland, Mississippi. The hurricane bands stretched out 100 miles on either side of the eye of the storm. Winds were in excess of 100 miles per hour, and here in the Jones County area, gusts were up to 125 miles per hour. South of I-20, we were 100 percent without power, which was the first time, in now a 75 year-history, that all meters were out at the same time, which was over 35,000 meters.”

Walters added that another statistic discovered through the research on Hurricane Katrina by Aliston Fulton with the South Mississippi Electric Power Association, which generates and supplies electricity to South Mississippi electric power association co-ops, found that statewide, there were over 2.7 million trees downed during Katrina.

Walters said 5,000 power poles were downed, and 10,000 work crews came into the state from 21 different states across the county to help with the restoration.

“We had several thousand workers, eleven hundred were working with Dixie EPA. Which presented a challenge in itself,” said Walters. She said Pollyanna Magee, Dixie EPA Community Relations Coordinator, was responsible for coordinating the efforts to feed, house, and do laundry for the 1,100 linemen, as well as getting them to their work locations every day.

“It was an emotional time, as well,” said Walters. “We were all working long hours, and away from our families.” She said approximately five Dixie EPA employees had significant damage to their homes, and at least a dozen had some level of damage at home. Of course, everyone was affected in one way or another.

Randy Smith, Dixie EPA General Manager, today, was the Distribution Engineer during Katrina and described coming to work on Monday morning. “Of course like everyone else, I had to cut my way out, to get to the office. It was after nine o’clock when I finally made it to our town.

Since Katrina, Dixie EPA has installed a Central Dispatch Center in the Laurel District Office. Photo/Linda Crawford

PAYNE PORTABLE BUILDINGS
601-426-9484 • 601-319-3555
Office located at 332 Hasey Rd. • Hwy. 84 W. • Laurel

Buildings Starting at low as $800
12x16 - $1,125
12x20 - $1,245
12x24 - $1,365
12x28 - $1,485

Cabin Custom Built Any Size

37 YEARS EXPERIENCE • WE CUSTOM BUILD FOR YOU
12 MO. SAME AS CASH • FINANCING AVAILABLE. WE RENT TO OWN
RENT TO OWN AS LOW AS $440 PER MONTH

The Gold Shop
105 S. 16TH AVE., STE F, LAUREL
Mon. - Fri. 8:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.
601-342-2490 • 601-467-0690

Easy drive on

COMPLETE CANCER CARE IN LAUREL
Chemotherapy • General Surgery • Radiation Oncology • Plastic Surgery

Chick-fil-A

NEW GREEK YOGURT PARFAIT
more fresh fruit & a creamy vanilla yogurt

SNAP AND DRIVE COMBO

SNAPANDRIDE.COM SNAPANDRIDE.COM SNAPANDRIDE.COM
Dixie EPA General Manager, Randy Smith, described how the staff had to revert to the manual system for power outage management during Katrina, using hand-written power outage tickets, and pins on the map. Photo: Linda Crawford

"That was then," said Walters, "but where are we now, ten years later?"

Walters said they have improved their communication efforts with the establishment of two websites – dixiepa.com and prepared.dixipea.com. The dixiepa.com website is where members can pay online, receive other information about the association, and it has a basic energy calculator. The prepared.dixipea.com website has a real-time outage map, so members can view outages. It posts a small yellow hard hat when a lineman has been dispatched to the outage area. The Dixie Electric communication staff also regularly posts outage updates to Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

With the technological advancements over the past ten years, Smith said they have made decisions along the way to improve their operations including upgrading their district offices' generators to provide full operations capabilities for the entire office, establishing and maintaining an Emergency Response Plan, installing a central dispatch center, upgrading its automated phone system, joining the Cooperative Response Center (CRC), and adding personnel.

Smith said in the central dispatch center, several large screens provide dispatchers with maps to streamline power outage management. With the upgrading of the automated phone system, they also added an outage management system which populates outage reports onto the map, and predicts the location or possible cause of an outage from calls received from its members. This removes some of the guesswork, and allows linemen to be dispatched quicker, and sends them to specific locations to restore power.

By joining the CRC, after-hour calls can be handled more efficiently, because the operators are trained in the electric power industry, and can assist with power outages and emergency situations. CRC is a national cooperative that works with more than 200 electric cooperatives, and allows phone calls to be answered even if local phone systems are down.

"From where we were ten years ago, we’ve come a long way. It’s not perfected, but we are in a lot better situation to respond," said Smith.

Lydia Walters, Dixie EPA Communications Manager/Human Resource Manager, provided statistics of the magnitude of damage to the electrical power grid in South Mississippi caused by Hurricane Katrina. Photo: Linda Crawford
Walters remembered watching a mare with a 1-month-old foal in the pasture during the storm. "No matter what direction it was coming from or where it got, she got between that wind and her foal, and it was about to blow her down."

— Fred Walters

"That wind didn't play," Walters said, shaking his head. Besides the tens of thousands of dollars' worth of damage to their homes and outbuildings, Walters remembered one little thing that showed the awesome power of the storm. "There was a little tree — I don't know what kind it was — but the wind blew the skin clean off of it," he said.

He also remembered watching a mare with a 1-month-old foal in the pasture during the storm. "No matter what direction it was coming from or where it got, she got between that wind and her foal, and it was about to blow her down."

— Fred Walters

Dixie earns high praise for storm response

I t was a challenge of unprecedented proportions. All 35,568 meters that get their power from Dixie Electric were knocked out of service. But what at first looked impossible was finished in 31 days.

That's how long it took Dixie Electric employees, with a surge of help from 1,100 linemen from around the country, to replace 5,000 utility poles and bring power back to its customers. Most Dixie Electric employees were having to put their needs and their families' needs on the back burner so they could help everyone else, working around the clock in brutal heat and debris to get the job done.

Dixie electric customers like James Burke and David Holbrook summed up the feelings of thousands of customers in a letter he wrote to Dixie Electric officials: "I appreciate Dixie Electric for their great effort in restoring electricity after Katrina. A job well done, I'm sure God was with you in this great effort. May He continue to smile down upon you. Thank you again."

From Holbrook: "Thank you for your hard work during Katrina days and nights. We realize that each one of you had to make choices between your family and ours ... God bless each one of you and your families."

As a result of the sweeping outage — everyone south of Interstate 20 was without electricity — Dixie Electric now has technological upgrades to help pinpoint more isolated outages. Customers can go to www.dixieepa.com to see a real-time outage map and find out when and if workers have been dispatched to take care of it. There's also an upgraded phone and dispatch center that eliminates the guesswork about the location of outages.

There's also an emergency response plan that clearly defines roles and responsibilities for employees so they'll be prepared for mass outages.

"They're all lessons that Dixie Electric officials hope to never have to use again, but they're ready if they have to. After all, they handled their part of the worst natural disaster in U.S. history, Dixie EPA General Manager Randy Smith pointed out. "At no time previously had our entire system been without power, let alone the entire southern half of the state," Smith said.

The total cost of restoration was $45 million. But no value can be put on the good will and experience that the company built.
Dixie Electric has made great strides of advancing the company’s equipment and plan of action in the event another storm like Hurricane Katrina ever hits the area again. Many people who were living in or around Jones County probably have their own unique stories to go along with the storm that was at its peak 200 miles wide and a Category 5 hurricane.

"Many of our own employees had damage to their homes," said Lydia Walters, human resource manager of Dixie Electric. "It was not only physically demanding, but also emotionally."

Dixie Electric Power Association certainly had a significant part in the resupplying of the county before, during, and after Katrina.

The power cooperative recently held a media day to explain advances in technology that may help recover from the next storm easier and faster.

Walters shared many honorable stories about her fellow coworkers and others that have contributed to the effort of advancing the power company’s efforts before, during and after the storm.

"Our process of how we work has come a very long way since Katrina," said Walters.

The technology and most every aspect of Dixie has remarkably progressed since Katrina.

General Manager Randy Smith pointed out the differences in the company’s operations before and now.

Walters commented that Alyssa Fulton of the statewide association put in nearly 100 hours of research about Katrina. It was determined that a total of 1,100 line workers assisted in the re-establishment of power to our area when about 36,000 meters lost power which totaled $45 million dollars just in power restoration.

"Dixie Electric was significantly affected by the storm along with the other power associations," stated Walters. "It was the first time in our (Dixie’s) 75 year history that all of our meters were out at any one time."

Smith said, "We are not by any means saying that what we have been able to accomplish is everything over the past 10 years since Katrina. However, we are much more prepared for any type of storm that we could have now.”

Smith said that everyone comes together and knows what his or her role is in order to operate smoothly under disaster type situations, and the plan is updated and revised each year to make certain the employees are ready.

Dixie EPA started the process of advancing its technology before Katrina, but the storm slowed the process down. Since the hurricane, Dixie has an updated its mapping system, installed an automated phone system and a cooperative response center where people are specifically trained to know what to do in the electricity servicing area.

"We now can read our meters automatically and we determine the cause of the outage easier," stated Smith.

Employment has increased significantly with Dixie, and a new crew has been added in Petal. The size and number of people on each crew has grown also.

Dixie has also invested in their information technology (IT) departments to make sure all the computer systems are running up to par.

Smith said he wanted to reiterate the importance of customers updating their phone number with the power company so they can better serve the public.

For more information about the power association, visit www.dixielectric.com or call 601-425-2535.
We Remember
Katrina taught Dixie Electric many valuable lessons

By Paul Keane

Dixie Electric, the association providing electricity for the majority of Wayne County, learned a number of valuable lessons and has made numerous improvements since Hurricane Katrina struck 10 years ago.

Officials with the power association recently hosted a media day entitled "Katrina: 10 Years Later." The group hosting the event said the association has made great progress in the area since Katrina made landfall on Aug. 29, 2005.

After the storm made its way through the service area, officials found that 3,568 meters served on the system lost power, and it took 11,000 linemen and women to assist Dixie Electric with getting back up and running. The total cost of power restoration ended up being $45 million.

"We had 100 percent outage for all of our customers," said Lindsey Walters. "We had 24 substations that were getting hit by power, and there were two million trees in 80 counties that were knocked over by the storm. While all of those trees weren't in our county, it put a burden on crews to get them cleared, and that was part of the reason that it took so long to restore power in some areas because we had to wait for the trees to be removed."

General Manager Randy Smith said after the storm, Dixie Electric was a little overwhelmed by the magnitude of the damage inflicted.

"Our general manager at the time was a very reserved, calm and collected gentleman. We learned a lot from his approach and the way he handled the situation."

See Dixie, Page 7C

A state-of-the-art dispatch and monitoring system at Dixie Electric's main offices in Laurel is just one of many upgrades and improvements Dixie Electric Association has made in the years since Hurricane Katrina struck the area in 2005.
man," Smith said. "In times of emergencies, he was the calming force and always knew what to do."

"When I arrived at our main office after Katrina, I looked him up and asked him what we were going to do. He said he really didn't know because there had never been anything this big to hit this area before. He sent me to the Wayneboro offices and told me to do what I could."

Smith said the storm was devastating for everyone south of Interstate 20.

"Ten years later, Hurricane Katrina is still the worst natural disaster to strike the United States," he said. "The devastating storm caused not only all of our 35,685 plus employees to lose power, but every service south of Interstate 10 in Mississippi lost electric power.

"At no time previously had our entire system been without power, but the entire southern half of the state."

Officials quickly found out that many of the systems in place were not capable of handling the storm. Service calls were still being handled by hand, with a map having tags placed on it to monitor outages and other issues with the system.

A number of other blemishes on the system appeared in the days after the storm, causing officials to make a concentrated effort to make needed upgrades to both the system and the internal structure of the association. The storm may have caused problems for months afterwards, but Smith said a number of changes since have improved the system — both in day-to-day operations and in the event that another storm should come through.

Some of those improvements included:

* Communications — Since the storm, Dixie Electric has worked with the local media to build a relationship and communicate to its members through them during significant power outages. Dixie Electric has also created a website, which are up-to-date and other services online.

* Planning and preparedness — Dixie Electric has an Emergency Response Plan in place that clearly defines roles and responsibilities for employees in the aftermath of a storm. This plan is reviewed annually and has been updated with diligence since Hurricane Katrina.

"Sufficient generators that can now handle the computer and other needs for the central office in Laurel, allowing dispatchers and other staff to continue working without being limited by not having full power.

* A new mapping system

* An automated phone system that includes a central dispatcher's location. Over the past several years, Dixie Electric has upgraded its phone system and added an outage management system. This system predicts the location of probable outages and emergency situations.

* A new and upgraded dispatch system that features a control room with monitors, computers and radios. The system can now monitor substations and other devices.

From Page 4C

"We've come a long way from where we were before Katrina," Smith said. "Hopefully, we are in a better position to respond to the next big storm."
## Spotlight on Excellence Entry Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NRECA Voting Member Classification *</th>
<th>Distribution Cooperative: 20,001–50,000 meters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category *</td>
<td>16. Best Event</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entry Title *</th>
<th>Katrina 10 Years Later</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I wish to receive Judges' comments on this entry</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact's Name *</td>
<td>Lydia Walters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative *</td>
<td>Dixie Electric Power Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mailing Address</td>
<td>PO Box 88&lt;br&gt;Laurel, Mississippi 39441–0088&lt;br&gt;United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact's Email *</td>
<td><a href="mailto:lydiawalters@dixiepa.com">lydiawalters@dixiepa.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact's Phone Number *</td>
<td>(601) 422–4264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of entrant as it should appear on the award (if given)</td>
<td>Dixie Electric Power Association</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Describe your/the co-op's role in the project**

Dixie Electric’s Communication Manager Lydia Walters wanted to hold a media day to remember Hurricane Katrina and Dixie Electric’s power restoration efforts after the storm. Dixie Electric received negative publicity for not communicating through the local media to its members after Hurricane Katrina. Knowing that it would be difficult for anyone within the cooperative to research this project, Lydia hired intern Elissa Fulton who is working on a communication degree from Tulane University. Elissa is also an employee at the statewide association for the Electric Power Associations in Mississippi. Lydia instructed Elissa to research the communication issues and the restoration efforts in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and research the changes made at the cooperative in the past 10 years to correct the communication issues. Lydia and Elissa jointly wrote the goals and objectives for the project.

Community Relations Coordinator Pollyanna Magee worked at Dixie Electric after Hurricane Katrina, so it was important that she keep a distance from the project until near the end. Elissa interviewed Pollyanna, who shared many of the communication challenges. When it came time to put the presentation, display and other materials together for the media day itself, Pollyanna collected and organized photos, set up a display, ordered food and helped plan the event.

Lydia Walters worked with Elissa to put together the printed materials, including the invitation and handout, and organized the research into a concise presentation for the media day. General Manager Randy Smith and Lydia Walters presented the information to the media, and Randy did interviews with the reporters. Lydia also did follow-up interviews with a local radio station.

**Describe others' role in the project (Reference outside sources of material, including templates; pre-existing Web tools and apps; information from outside groups, such as Straight Talk or Touchstone Energy; stock photos and music, etc.)**

Elissa Fulton, who is the communication specialist at the Electric Power Associations of Mississippi office, extensively researched this project. She put 100 hours into the research, planning and implementation of this project. She interviewed employees of Dixie Electric, a former public service commissioner and other employees who were knowledgeable of communication challenges after Katrina. Elissa was given this opportunity because it provided an internship for her, and she could bring an unbiased opinion to the research.

She also researched the many technological advancements, internal and organizational changes, and business improvements over the past 10 years. After this extensive research, Elissa and Lydia worked together to create a presentation for the media, providing information on the devastation caused by Katrina, the communication challenges, the hard work by the employees to restore the system and the improvements mentioned above.

Graphic Artist Mark Bridges assisted Elissa with the design of the presentation, handout, invitation and agenda. He created a consistent look for all of the pieces, using the same Katrina word graphic that was used by the electric cooperatives in Mississippi 10 years ago.

**Circulation or Number of People Reached**

- **Number of Attendees** 5
Project's Budget $125

Target Audience(s) Local Media and Dixie Electric's Members

Project's Objective

Restrictions/Limitations There were no restrictions and only a few limitations. There were a few challenges in finding documents from 10 years ago, but this was only a minor issue.

Describe why you chose this type of social media and how you used it

Provide a brief summary that states the purpose of the event, how the program was implemented, and results and how they were measured

Research:
Dixie Electric failed to communicate with its members in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, which severely damaged its reputation with both the membership and the local media organizations.

Intern Elissa Fulton extensively researched this project. She interviewed employees of Dixie Electric, a former public service commissioner and others within the electric cooperative network in Mississippi. The interviews and materials she read gave her an unbiased overview of the communication challenges that Dixie Electric faced after Hurricane Katrina. She also researched the changes within Dixie Electric to overcome these communication challenges and the advancements in technology since Katrina.

Community Relations Coordinator Pollyanna Magee found numerous photos, printed materials and thank you notes from the Katrina-era.

Planning:
Communication Manager Lydia Walters and Elissa worked together to plan a media day. The goal was to plan the media day early in August 2015, so reporters could use the information as part of their Katrina 10-year-later coverage. The target audience is the local media and members of Dixie Electric.

Lydia and Elissa worked together to set the goals and objectives and asked Graphic Artist Mark Bridges to assist with the design of the materials, including the invitation, agenda, handout and presentation. Pollyanna Magee ordered food and set up a display from the Katrina-era, so the media would have materials to photograph or video, capturing then versus now.

The specific goals and objectives are included in the attached material. Lunch was the only cost for this project. Elissa received college credit hours for her efforts.

Implementation:
Invitations were emailed to the media outlets two weeks in advance and a follow-up invitation was sent the week prior to the event.

Dixie Electric hosted a media day on Friday, August 7, 2015. Lydia Walters presented the historical information and discussed the external communication changes. General Manager Randy Smith discussed the restoration efforts after Katrina and explained the technological changes made over the past 10 years.

The reporters were given an opportunity to visit the dispatch center and receive further explanation on how the technological advancements work together. This visit also provided additional artwork for their news stories.
Evaluation:
Ten news outlets were invited to participate in the media event. Five of them sent reporters, and two others requested information or an interview.

The research project and media day were successful, and the goals and objectives were met.  
• The intern was able to assess the situation at Dixie Electric during August 2005 in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina through interviews and research.  
• A media day was planned and materials were provided for media professionals.  
• Seven of 10 media outlets that were invited attended the media day or had a response. Of those media outlets, seven reported on Dixie Electric’s technology improvements in their coverage.  
• A survey completed by those media professionals showed that relations had improved with Dixie Electric.

A breakdown of the specific media coverage and copies of the news articles are included in the attachments.

Provide a brief summary that states the purpose, how the program was implemented, and results and how they were measured using the RACE framework. Each component has its own word limit noted below.

| Research * |
| Action * |
| Communication * |
| Evaluation * |

Upload Supporting Materials File #1  
[katrina_media_summary_invitation_handout_presentation.pdf](katrina_media_summary_invitation_handout_presentation.pdf)  
8.92 MB · PDF

Upload Supporting Materials File #2  
[katrina10_newspapers_articles.pdf](katrina10_newspapers_articles.pdf)  
1.97 MB · PDF

Supporting Materials Link

Special Instructions

| Created | 19 Nov 2015 2:26:18 PM | 173.166.199.169 IP Address |
| PUBLIC | |

1 Comment

Carol Crabtree · 16:33 on 14 Dec 2015  
REVIEWED 12/14/15–KC