

Jerry Pierce Reaches 40 years of Service

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Jerry Pierce still believes in the purpose behind SMEPA's formation – providing electrical energy to the members.

“That’s our job,” Jerry said. “Serve the Members. What we do affects the individuals at the end of the line. What we do affects what they pay for their power.”

Jerry was first introduced to SMEPA when working for Shows and Dearman, a company contracted to survey power lines. He was eventually hired to do layout surveying work for the original construction at Plant Moselle. Since that time, Jerry has held a number of positions within the cooperative, including Senior Engineering Assistant, Construction Superintendent and Transmission Department Manager. Now, he is Director of Transmission Construction, a role that is the culmination of all his working years.

General Manager/CEO Jim Compton is among those amazed by Pierce's longevity and service. “I consider him one of the smartest and most knowledgeable employees we have ever had regarding the transmission system,” Compton said. “The fact that he has worked here forty years is a remarkable record. He has seen South Mississippi Electric grow from an idea to a billion-dollar business.”

“South Mississippi Electric has been fortunate to have a person with Jerry's dedication and knowledge of the transmission system,” said retired general manager Henry Thomas. “He has been involved in the construction of it since South Mississippi began. Everyone who has worked with Jerry knows of his loyalty to South Mississippi and its Members.”

What Jerry remembers most about the start of SMEPA is what he calls the “true co-op spirit.”

“Everyone understood what it meant to be working for a co-op,” he said. “Everyone cared how energy worked and did whatever needed to be done, regardless of whose job description it fell under. I still work like that. I do for them (the line crews) what they expect me to do.”

His experience and expertise is now applied to the technical aspects of the business. His duties include assisting in routing transmission lines, contracting survey crews, issuing and overseeing the right-of-way clearing contracts, and supervising new transmission line construction projects.

Forty years of experience in the same company speaks to Jerry's always-positive attitude and desire to make a difference. Although his responsibilities have changed over forty years, his dedication to his work has not. “There's never been a day that I haven't wanted to come to work,” he says.

Mitch Westberry, a 33-year SMEPA transmission system veteran who is now a construction inspector, first met Jerry when Westberry was working for a contractor building the Magee substation. “No one has been more hard working when it comes to SMEPA—for Jerry, nothing is more important,”

Westberry said. "He is very humble, but he deserves a lot of credit for where we are as an organization. He has put his whole life into this company and that is hard to find these days.

"Jerry has not only been a great boss, but a great friend to me, and that means a lot. Back when I first started, we had limited resources, and we had to do more with less to be successful. We worked a lot of hours, and Jerry took on a lot of that extra effort himself. He has always been good at explaining things so that I knew what he wanted, although sometimes he thinks a lot faster than he can talk."

Although the business side of SMEPA has grown and changed, Jerry has stayed true to simple principles. To him, the secret is in the observation.

"Listen and watch from people who know," he said. "They will teach you what you need to know."

Pierce has also taught countless lessons to many people over the years. Line foreman Matt Ready, with 32 years of service at SMEPA, has worked with Jerry for all of that time. "Jerry has always been very knowledgeable about the jobs we had to do out in the field. I liked the way he did things—he always had things ready to go when we had a job to do. He is a good fellow, and he can catch fish, too."

The image of hard work and determination, Jerry is now being honored for his devotion to SMEPA, its Members and the power industry. His experience is valued, and his spirit is contagious. He believes in the commitment of safety, reliability and service and has proven to be an invaluable asset to the growth and success of the cooperative.

"SMEPA has been good to me, and I try to give them something back," he said. And he has.

"Whatever you do," he says, "make sure that when it is over you do not mind signing your name to it."

Congratulations, Jerry. You can sign your name to forty years of dedicated service to South Mississippi Electric and your co-workers. You have contributed from the beginning, and we are proud you have been a part of our lives.