

Is This the Party to Whom I Am Speaking?



MESSAGE FROM GENERAL MANAGER AND CEO JERRY D. WILLIAMS

Those of you who grew up watching Lily Tomlin do her “Ernestine” character, (the loopy telephone operator), will remember her signature line. Of course whoever answers the call “is” definitely the party to whom she’s speaking. This line and her “One ringy dingy, two ringy dingy” was all a part of the comedy. In those days, the operator would simply interrupt your conversation if another caller had an urgent matter. Ernestine is gone and we now have computerized telephone switches, ISDN, (sip trunking) session initiation protocol, (VoIP) voice over internet protocol, the Queue and a lot of other challenging words for Ernestine and me.

A lot of folks never call our office, unless the lights go out. Last week we had one of those rare thunderstorms that came roaring across pretty much the entire three county areas, with a lot of lightening mixed in with severe wind. Some estimates were as high as 80 mph wind. Many areas with clean right of ways had large trees blown onto the electric lines from outside the easement area. Seems the 3-7 inches of rain the week

before, helped loosen the roots and allowed healthy trees to be uprooted. The tops of more than one electric pole were mangled when a lightning bolt selected that spot to strike. At one time we had over 3,000 people out of power, and almost every one of them tried to call us. A lot of them got a busy signal. Within 14 hours only 200 folks were still out.

At one time we could distinguish a busy equipment signal by the fast signal sound. If a person was talking, there would be a slow signal sound. That distinction can no longer be made. There are many reasons you may have gotten a busy signal that may not have anything to do with Lamar Electric. For example; if you have a Blossom, Powderly or Clarksville phone number and many from your community tried to call a Paris number at the same time, you would likely have a “Trunking Issue”. There are a limited number of call paths out. Some will call this network congestion, but what you hear is a busy signal. It would-

n’t matter if you were calling Lamar Electric or calling to order a pizza.

At Lamar Electric we have 23 phone lines. Depending on the situation, some of those lines are reserved for inbound calls from linemen and some are reserved for emergency outbound calls. All calls to our main number 903-784-4303 are automatically answered by our phone system (a computer server sitting in our computer room). The server will play a greeting and give you the opportunity to use our “automated system” to “make a payment or report an outage by pressing 1” or stay on the line for the next available person.

If you press #1, your call is routed to a different computer and you are asked if you want to make a payment or report an outage. Those using the automated system to report their outage will be asked for either a phone number, account number or meter number. Once the system has identified the specific account, you will be given an opportunity to give more information, such as: Broken Pole, Wire Down or Heard a loud noise. Reporting an outage using this method usually takes less time than speaking to a person and the outage report flashes on our Dispatcher’s computer screen the exact same way it does if you speak to a live person to report the outage.

The automated system can handle calls quicker than a live person. As more people use the automated system, it frees up the phone lines for more inbound calls. The automated system will even give you the option of receiving a call on your cell phone when power is restored. This allows you to leave and not return home till power is restored. On a slow night, I have even had some folk call back and go into the automated system to see if their outage had actually been reported. Sure enough the system will report the outage has already been reported and ask if you have more information to report, such as wires down etc. Some folks will never select the automated system and we understand this. For this reason, we will always have live people that you can talk with.

The other night we had five ladies answering the phones. As soon as 5 lines were talking, the next calls went into what is called a Queue. The phone will tell each person in the Queue to please hold and the next available person will help. The calls are then answered in the order in which they are received. The lesson to learn is: if you are having trouble getting thru and you are placed in the Queue, don’t hang up, someone will speak to you shortly.

If your neighbors are out of power, most likely we already know your electric line is dead. Our outage program has a prediction routine based on who calls in. If more than three people call in that are downstream from a fuse, the system





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1485 N. Main St. • P.O. Box 580
Paris, TX 75461

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will predict the fuse is out and the linemen will be directed to the fuse first. If calls come from people downstream of several fuses, the system will predict the main line breaker is off. This is sort of like having several plugs in your house not working because a breaker in your breaker box is tripped. Most of the time we ultimately receive a phone call from almost everyone that is out of power. This is what causes hundreds of people trying to get thru at the same time and most will get a busy signal.

We have several things in the works that should help you report an outage. Within a few months we will be introducing an App for smart phones that can be used to report an outage. We are also working on the ability to report your outage with your lap top computer or smart phone, using a web page. We are considering a separate set of phone lines that are dedicated to automated outage reporting only. This would allow us to skip the greeting etc. and go directly to your information. When our new meters are installed, we will be able to "Ping" all meters at the end of a large storm and determine if any meters did not come back on.

We know it is frustrating to sit in the dark, listening to a busy signal not knowing for sure if your outage has been reported. The more alternatives we have available to report outages will free up the phone lines and allow those people who want to speak to a person to get through. Till then, we appreciate your patience. Just remember, we can't talk to everyone at the same time.

Country Corner Events

September 5-6

The Horse Flea Paris Horse Auction, 9 miles west of Paris on Highway 82. For information call Kevin Cannon at (903) 348-3694.

September 6

6 d at the Gibraltar The Gibraltar 5-6:30 p.m. Main Street Community art project

September 6

Dancing with the Stars Love Civic Center 6:30 p.m.-11 p.m. Social hour, dinner and dancing competition

September 6

Red River County Annual Stew Cook-Off/Auction Clarksville Fairgrounds 5 p.m. For information, call (903) 427-3868.

September 13

2014 Mud Volleyball Tournament Paris Rodeo Arena, 570 E. Center St. 8 a.m.-4 p.m. Benefitting the United Way of Lamar County. For information, call (903) 784-6642.

September 17

Red River County Parade 5 p.m. For information, call (903) 427-3868.

September 17-20

Red River County Fair Clarksville Fairgrounds Entertainment at 7 p.m. nightly. Rides shut down at 10:30 p.m. For information, call Lynn Golden at (903) 427-3868.

September 20

Habitat for Humanity's 6th Annual Redneck Golf Open Pine Ridge Golf Course, 2 miles northeast of Paris on Pine Mill Road 8 a.m.-2 p.m. Enter a team and have a fun field day of golf—redneck style!

September 27

1st Annual Poppa Joe's Fish Tournament Pat Mayse Lake, Sanders Cove Loop C, 6 a.m.-3 p.m. Big bass fishing tournament. There will be live music, and food and T-shirts available to purchase. For information, call Amber Maynard at (903) 517-3478 or (903) 715-1463.

September 27

Joe Howard Memorial Ride Paris Harley-Davidson, 10 a.m.-12 p.m. For information, call Fred Erben, (903) 495-3818 or Dana Golden at (903) 517-3478.



TOP LEFT: James Smith, Michael Sorensen and Jesse Smith clear rights-of-way in the Hopewell community. BOTTOM LEFT: James Smith is on-site with Ty Huie and Laytner Kennedy in the Kiomatia community, assisting the crew with some spraying. RIGHT: Right-of-Way Superintendent James Smith recently became a certified arborist and utility specialist.

Smith Becomes Certified Arborist and Certified Arborist Utility Specialist

Lamar Electric Cooperative Right-of-Way Superintendent James Smith recently passed the Certified Arborist and the Certified Arborist Utility Specialist examinations administered through the International Society of Arboriculture and the local chapter of the ISA.

A certified arborist and utility specialist is an individual who has achieved a level of knowledge in the art and science of tree care through experience and by passing a comprehensive examination developed by some of the nation's leading experts on tree care.

Becoming a certified arborist and utility specialist was a goal Smith has had for some time. Lamar Electric General Manager Jerry Williams encouraged Smith to become one of the best-trained arborists in Texas.

"It wasn't as simple as it seemed," Smith said. "At first I attended a lot of schools to get more training to go with my experience. I had to meet certain criteria before I could even apply for either exam. For example, I had to have three years of full-time experience in arboriculture to apply for the certified arborist exam, and have a minimum of 2,000 hours of verifiable work experience directly within utility vegetation management to apply for the arborist utility specialist exam.

"Once I met that criteria I attended more classes at Texas A&M, but the rest was up to me to read and comprehend the information provided. It's been awhile since I was in school, so studying again was all new to me. After spending a lot of time becoming familiar with all the materials, I finally felt confident to take

the licensed arborist test. It was the most difficult, and I wanted to get it out of my way. When I found out I passed the test, I knew I could pass the utility specialist exam. Passing both exams and becoming certified in both areas was a huge accomplishment for me."

Having a certified arborist on staff helps assure Lamar EC members that right-of-way clearing is being done using the most efficient arborist practices. Williams added, "This area has a lot of trees and we want to have safe power lines while maintaining the beauty of the surrounding country life."

We are very proud of James and glad to have him as a part of our team. This shows how dedicated James is to his job and that he takes pride in his work.

Congratulations, James!

Remember To Look Up

In recognition of National Farm Safety and Health Week, celebrated September 21-25, here are few tips to keep you safe:

- ▶ Be aware of overhead lines when operating machinery with an antenna or handling long items such as irrigation pipe, ladders and rods.
- ▶ Stay at least 10 feet away from power lines on all sides. Remember, field cultivators and sprayers can often reach as high as 12 feet into the air.
- ▶ It is a good practice to make sure that you are not underneath a power line when removing a large round bale from the baler or dumping picked cotton.
- ▶ Use a spotter to make sure you stay away from power lines when using equipment.
- ▶ Don't attempt to move a power line on your property if it's sagging, or try to fix a broken guy wire. Contact Lamar Electric at (903) 784-4303 to report it.
- ▶ Don't build structures under power lines. And if you're undertaking a project that requires digging, call 811, a free service to locate underground utilities.



Drew Conder and George Scroggins pick up a pole that had been hit by a tractor.



These wires were connected to the pole that was hit by the tractor. Wires were down across the highway stopping traffic until crews arrived.



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POWER TIP

Save **ENERGY** • Save **MONEY**

When it's hot outside, appliances and lighting can heat up our homes more than we think. To save energy, minimize the activities that generate additional heat, such as burning open flames, continuously running a computer, or using hot hair devices like curling irons. This will ultimately keep your house cooler.



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Happy Labor Day

Our offices will be closed Monday, September 1, in observance of the holiday.

As always crews will be standing by in the event of an outage or emergency.

We wish you and yours a happy and safe holiday.