

RELEASED

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Flag raising ceremony marks end of restoration effort

LIVINGSTON – Thursday afternoon marked the completion of major restoration process in Sam Houston Electric Cooperative’s 10-county service area. Woodville Operations Supervisor Mike Garess raising the flag over the Tyler County Courthouse in Woodville symbolically capped off the road to recovery that began with tree removal and damage assessment just hours after Hurricane Rita’s landfall on Sept. 24.

“We completed this restoration effort sooner than thought possible,” said Kyle Kuntz, Sam Houston EC’s CEO. “Thanks to the hard work of our employees and the efforts of our contractors, we were able to get the largest restoration project in our company’s history quickly and safely.

“We appreciate the patience and understanding of our members during this difficult time. We will continue working hard to provide reliable and affordable electricity with the quality service our members have come to expect over the years.”

Polk, San Jacinto, Montgomery, Tyler, Walker, Liberty, Trinity, Hardin, Jasper and Angelina counties were all declared major disaster areas by FEMA. Hurricane Rita broke more than 2,500 poles; 3,400 miles of distribution line was damaged as well.

At the height of the storm, all Sam Houston Electric Cooperative members experienced a loss of power. Backed by an army of 1,300 contractors and cooperative crews from 15 states, the Cooperative was able to restore service to its members in less than three weeks. The last of these crews were released Thursday.

Kuntz said there is plenty of work ahead for Sam Houston EC. In addition to completing temporary service disconnects so that members may safely repair damaged meter loops, crews will clean up rights-of way and align poles that were shifted during the storm. Engineers will also evaluate the distribution system for any potential upgrades that may be needed.

Friday, the Cooperative began dismantling the tent city located at the Tyler County Fair Grounds just west of Woodville. More than 600 men and women called this place home during the restoration process. With full catering, shower and laundry facilities, a fueling center, a materials yard and air-conditioned tents, Sam Houston EC’s massive staging area was on par with many temporary military campgrounds.

On Oct. 23, Sam Houston Electric began to operate under its disaster recovery plan. All employees were placed on 12-hour shifts with many working far more than 12 hours each day during the past three weeks without off days. Restoration efforts began even before Rita struck and ran continuously until completion.

The first major milestone came early September 26 when the Israel Road, S.W. Dorrell, Onalaska, Carlisle, Blanchard and Bold Springs substations were energized at 1 a.m. By Oct. 1, the Cooperative restored power to more than 40,000 members and by Oct. 3, the first lights came on in Tyler and Hardin counties, and by Oct. 11 more than 99 percent of Sam Houston EC’s system had been restored to normal operation.



As Sam Houston Electric Cooperative wraps up Hurricane Rita restoration efforts, Mike Garess, Woodville Branch Operations Supervisor, hangs a new flag above the Tyler County Courthouse. Said Tyler County Judge Jerome Owens, “Sam Houston Electric always comes through for us.”