

**Eight take with them  
nearly three centuries  
worth of experience**

**“He has achieved  
success who has worked  
well, laughed often and  
loved much.”**

***Elbert Green Hubbard***



**Shirley Cassady**  
**36 years**

## WFEC bids a fond farewell to retiring employees

**D**uring the course of their careers at West Florida Electric Cooperative, they've played many roles — lineman, serviceman, maintenance technician, crew foreman, accountant, warehouse supervisor, purchasing agent, to name a few. At the same time, they've held a variety of unofficial titles, such as friend, mentor, advisor, role model.

The eight employees retiring from WFEC have accumulated a total of more than 270 years' experience. Each began serving WFEC's members even before some present Co-op members and employees were born. Now going on to enjoy the fruits of their labor, they take with them a measure of knowledge, wisdom and skill only their years of experience can provide.

While WFEC salutes them and bids a fond farewell, these individuals share the following memories, plans and advice:

As Supervisor of Purchasing, **Shirley Cassady** has been responsible for acquiring “everything from transformers to toilet paper” for WFEC, as well as overseeing the cleaning of its buildings and grounds. She began her Co-op career as a billing clerk in 1964, then went on to serve as a general office clerk, payroll clerk and executive secretary before assuming her purchasing duties.

During her early years at WFEC, clerks handled the billing and financial transactions by hand, Cassady recalls. “That’s one of the biggest changes I’ve seen since I started working here – the Co-op going from manual equipment to computerization.”

Among her most memorable workday experiences was having to use a ground rod to kill a huge rattlesnake in the Graceville district’s pole yard two summers ago. “I had nightmares about it later,” she says. “I could just see the men going out to get equipment in the morning, and that snake biting one of them.”

Cassady’s after-retirement plans are “to not do anything I don’t want to do,” she says. But if you drive by her house, you’re sure to see plenty of gorgeous flowers and are likely to find her grandson, Devin, playing with his “Mimi.” She leaves the following advice for those who’ll carry on her work at WFEC:

“Always listen to your conscience. That way you don’t have problems sleeping at night.”

“It was some hard work,” **Kenneth Chestnut** says of his earliest days as a WFEC lineman. He began working in a right-of-way crew in 1965, trimming trees and clearing right-of-way under WFEC’s lines. He was assigned to a line crew about three years later. “We had to do hot line work and use hot sticks,” he remembers. “We didn’t have bucket trucks — We had to climb.”

WFEC didn’t get its first bucket truck until 1969, he

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**Kenneth Chestnut**  
34 1/2 years



**Florence Donaldson**  
36 years



**Freddie Golden**  
34 years

continues. “Two men were on that truck. The other men didn’t have one. If you were working on a hot line, they’d come by and help you, and then go on back to doing maintenance. It was about two years before every line crew had a bucket truck.”

Chestnut eventually graduated to crew foreman, the last title he held at WFEC. Since his retirement, Chestnut and his wife, Jeanette, have been enjoying fishing and spending time at their place on Holmes Creek. He also plans to work on his 1955 Chevrolet and 1965 Chevy Nova and do some hunting.

His advice upon passing the torch is simply, “Work hard and do what your boss man tells you to do.”

Over the last 36 years, **Florence Donaldson** has dealt with every aspect of WFEC’s financial record-keeping. Her duties have included all posting of cash receipts and journal entries, supervision of cash disbursements, filing the Co-op’s tax forms and handling of wire transfers.

Even in her teens, Donaldson was making her way toward becoming head of WFEC’s accounting department. Instruction in bookkeeping was part of her high school education, and attending a business school further honed her accounting skills. She first cashiered and answered the radio at WFEC before applying her knowledge as bookkeeper, then accountant and finally, supervisor of accounting.

Donaldson attributes her long WFEC career to her enjoyment of her work. “You have to like what you do, and I like what I do,” she explains. “I like figures. I guess that’s why I’ve stayed so long.”

Since the arrival three years ago of WFEC’s current CEO, Bill Rimes, the Co-op has undergone some of its most significant and positive transformations during her tenure, Donaldson says. “We’ve also gone through three conversions to different types of computer systems since we went from keeping the books by hand” she adds.

Donaldson looks forward to spending time with her husband, LaRough, working in her yard and taking care of some home improvements upon her retirement. “But I’m going to do whatever I want to and be lazy for a while,” she laughs. As she leaves her accounting duties behind, she advises her successors, “Do the very best you can at whatever you do. Work hard and earn your pay.”

From cutting right-of-way to managing the warehouses and stores, **Freddie Golden** has done his share of hard work throughout a 34-year career at WFEC. Between his right-of-way work and warehouse supervisor position, he’s served as a lineman, serviceman and crew foreman, getting the job done with little of the equipment WFEC’s crews have now. He well remembers a time when the Co-op had no bucket trucks, and right-of-way was cut with axes before WFEC bought a few chainsaws.

One his most memorable —and aggravating — workday moments happened while he was a crew foreman overseeing work on a single phase line one day in the 1970s. A crew member at the farthest end called for him to come there,

so Golden went to see what sort of help the lineman needed. “I thought he had something important to tell me,” he says. “But when I got down there, he was poking at some ants with a stick. He held it up and said, ‘Look at this.’ I wanted to choke him.”

Grandchildren Rusty, Anna and Lillian are sure to enjoy being with “Pa” after his retirement. And, given his gardening talents, they’ll probably have plenty of fresh vegetables to eat.



**Jimmy Jones**  
**31 years**

**Jimmy Jones** knows what it means to “go with the flow.” He’s witnessed and adapted to many changes during his 31 years at WFEC.

Like his fellow veteran linemen, he’s watched WFEC employ increasingly modern technology to perform tasks he once accomplished through human effort alone. Today, he sees WFEC evolving in other ways to meet the demands of a new, competitive marketplace. “This whole industry’s changing so fast, you’ve got to stay on top of it,” he observes. “You’ve got to be ready to learn new things and change with it.”

Jones began his WFEC career “trimming trees and swinging a bush axe,” he says. Since then, he’s worked as a lineman and serviceman, then a staking engineer and lastly, as the interim manager of construction and operations in the Co-op’s Graceville district. For his outstanding dedication, attitude and example, his co-workers voted him Employee of the Year in 1999.

Jones’ post-retirement plans are “to do what I want to when I want to,” he says. “I’ll start out doing a little gardening and messing around at first.”



**Charles Mitchell**  
**30 years**

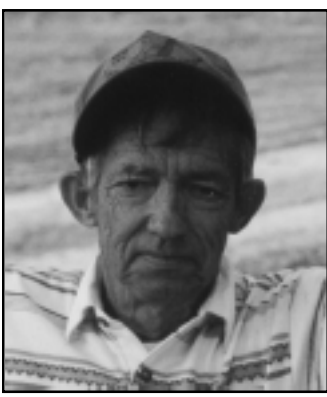
Understanding the mechanics of providing electricity has been **Charles Mitchell**’s vocation for 30 years. After serving as a lineman, he became WFEC’s maintenance technician, maintaining the Co-op’s line voltage regulators, meters and three-phase banking of transformers and substations and working as a plant electrician.

One of the most notable transitions the Co-op made during his career was the upgrade of its system from 12.5 to 25 kilovolts, he recalls. “The second runner-up would have to be when we went from mechanical meters to electronic.”

You might say Mitchell has a lot of irons in the fire to keep him busy after his retirement. He enjoys forging creations from metal, occasionally giving demonstrations at local events or meeting to compare notes with other craftsmen. He also expects to devote time to fishing, gardening, woodworking, babysitting, “a little grass cutting and some R and R,” he says. “I really look forward to all of it.”

WFEC’s members in Westville should know **Broward Padgett** well. For 22 of his nearly 36 years with the Co-op, he worked as a serviceman, mostly in the Westville area when WFEC had a small office there.

After the Westville office closed, Padgett went to work out of WFEC’s Graceville district office with Charles Mitchell on maintaining all the Co-op’s substations, transformers for underground services, regulators and meters. The advent of computers has had a significant impact there, he says. “You’ve got to know how to use a computer if you’re going to do much



**Broward Padgett**  
**35 1/2 years**



**Jerry Smith**  
**33 1/4 years**

of anything these days.”

Now that he’s retired, Padgett spends his time fishing, raising cows and “tending to grand young’ uns.” To the next generation of WFEC employees, he recommends, “Pay all you can into your retirement so you can retire early!”

**Jerry Smith** has worn many hats for WFEC over the past 33 years. “I’ve done everything the Co-op had to do, from working in right-of-way to working in the substations,” he explains. “In all, I believe I wore out nine trucks for West Florida Electric.”

The truck he drove at one time had a homemade-type tool box on the back, he recollects. “It looked like a fish box. When I went over to Malone, people were always asking if I had any mullet for sale.”

Smith trimmed trees for WFEC before becoming a lineman and serviceman. Like Padgett, he’s a Westville office alumnus, having performed engineering duties out of the small office. WFEC later moved engineering and construction functions from Westville to its Bonifay district office, where he was staking engineer until his recent retirement.

With his engineering duties out of the way, Smith now plans to return to his other calling — music. “I’m going to pull out my guitars and get ready to pick and sing,” he says.



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