

January 11, 2006

Blue Ridge Electric makes large donation to county

By Sandy Foster
Editor

By law, Blue Ridge Electric can defer up to \$300,000 of its yearly tax obligations to help with local infrastructure improvements, so instead of sending \$50,000 to the state, the company chose to invest the money in sewer infrastructure at the Commerce Park in Liberty.

Last Tuesday, County Council approved a contract that will allow the company to share the cost of the sewer line with the county.

Terry Ballinger, manager of communications for Blue Ridge Electric, was on hand to present the funds to the county.

He explained that the Rural Development Act, passed by the SC General Assembly in 1996, allows taxpaying utilities like Blue Ridge to defer funds to help local infrastructure improvements that would support job-creating projects.



County Council chairperson Jennifer Willis accepts a check for \$50,000 from Terry Ballinger of Blue Ridge Electric.

"The law provides Blue Ridge with a choice. The dollars can be sent to Columbia each year to the Department of Revenue as a tax payment, or they can be diverted to the economic development arms of local governments," said Ballenger.

He said that previous RDA grants from the company have supported other infrastructure additions at the Pickens County Commerce Park, as well as similar parks in Oconee and Anderson County, where the company also provides power.

"In recent years, all of these parks have seen success in attracting job-creating businesses or industries to their respective campuses," said Ballenger.

According to Blue Ridge President and CEO Charles Dalton, deciding where the money should go over the years has been an easy choice.

"There should be no doubt in anyone's mind that the best economic development decisions are made on the local level," he said.

"The industrial recruitment agencies in the Blue Ridge service territory have consistently used these resources effectively in their job creation initiatives. I'm just pleased the cooperative can have a part in helping to bring new jobs to our service area and, therefore, in supplementing efforts to build the local tax base," Dalton added.

Since the law was enacted, Ballinger said that Blue Ridge has supplied about \$2.5 million in RDA funding to the three-county region. The cooperative serves 61,000 members in portions of five counties in the northwestern corner of South Carolina.