

# PLAIN TALKS

December 1986





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Volume 65

Number 10

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## PLAIN TALKS

December 1986

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Employees who change residences or offices should fill out company mailing-address-change forms (GSU0012-00-81) and return them to the mailroom in the Edison Plaza. GSU publications, departmental mailings and other company information are not automatically forwarded; addresses must be corrected when employees move.



## Cooperation noted

James E. Moss  
Gulf States Utilities  
Baton Rouge, La.

Dear Mr. Moss:

I would like to thank you for the fine cooperative effort which Gulf States has provided the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service over a long period of time.

There have been several recent events which called to my attention the need to formally express our appreciation. Gulf States has long supported the youth activities of our organization through personal involvement as well as generous donations on an annual basis. For the past several years, many of the programs of Gulf States and the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service have run parallel. There has been a fine spirit of cooperation which resulted in enhancement of both energy education programs. There have been many joint endeavors in the the Baton Rouge Division involving the individuals in Wayne Hiter's group. Miss Harriet Babin and her staff have cooperated on many occasions in conducting educational programs both on the parish and regional levels. I am sure that you are aware that Harriet recently received the Citation for Outstanding Service to 4-H for her fine volunteer efforts in working with 4-H youth.

Mr. Joe Smilie and Mr. Gene Baker, both of our staff, have been heavily involved in cooperation with Gulf States. Joe Smilie was recently involved with the program on maintenance of residential heating and cooling systems. Gene has served on the Energy Advisory Committee for Gulf States for the last several years.

I am convinced that this type of cooperative effort between the university and industry serves to enhance and strengthen both programs. The specific event which

brought this to my attention was the jointly-sponsored program concerning earth-coupled water source heat pumps. This was a very successful statewide meeting which brought together engineers, architects and heating and air dealers. This meeting served to update these individuals on the progress in water source heat pump systems.

Harriet and her staff did an excellent job of coordinating this activity. As a result, the people of this state are more informed and have a potential for wiser use of their energy dollars.

Again, we appreciate the cooperation we have enjoyed throughout the years and look forward to continuing these efforts.

Sincerely,  
Denver T. Loupe  
Vice Chancellor & Director La.  
Cooperative Extension Service

**Editor's note:** Hiter is marketing superintendent in Baton Rouge, while Babin is supervisor-consumer information services.

## Engineers assemble

George Irvin  
Gulf States Utilities  
Lafayette, La.

Dear Mr. Irvin:

On Wednesday, Sept. 10, the Lafayette Chapter of the Louisiana Engineering Society held a meeting for our members and their spouses at the GSU Assembly Center. Speaking for all who attended, thank you for allowing us to use your outstanding facility. Also, please extend our thanks to Mr. John Hollier for his assistance with all the arrangements.

Sincerely,  
Gary K. Landry  
President

**Editor's note:** Irvin is general superintendent-Lafayette District, while Hollier is a right-of-way representative in Lafayette.

## Church work

Tass Young  
Gulf States Utilities  
Nederland, Texas

Dear Tass:

I just want to say thanks for working so cordially with us. It's unfortunate that things sort of worked against us. Nevertheless, we now have everything hooked up and working. We appreciate the way you took a personal interest in the problem and did everything possible to expedite matters. You are a credit to Gulf States Utilities and to our community.

Thanks again. Drop by and see me anytime.

Sincerely yours,  
Pastor Randy Clark  
Triumph New Testament Church

**Editor's note:** Young is a senior district service representative in the Mid-County office.

## THE COVER

Bears, baskets and geese are all trends for holiday decorating and the Texas Basket Company capitalized on their popularity with the custom-made basket pictured on the front cover.

The factory, which includes a large specialty gift store, represents economic development for Navasota in Grimes County. A hometown man — "Cookie" Swanson — returned to the area to open the store and with plans to ultimately expand the operation to manufacture a variety of baskets there. Read more on page 6.

Susan Gilley of Employee Communications shot the cover photograph.





*Vicki McNeel checks a customer's credit history on a computer terminal.*

## Small office equals big responsibilities

by Mike Rodgers

Vicki McNeel is a veteran GSU employee at the age of 22. A customer accounting clerk at the Mid-County office in Nederland, McNeel started working for the company in 1983 not long after her high school graduation. Prior to that, she had been with the company as a Vocational Office Education (VOE) student in high school. "I wanted to come to work here full time after high school," she recalls. "During my VOE experience, GSU impressed me as a good company to work for, with excellent benefits and some interesting training programs."

McNeel and the other customer accounting clerks in the Mid-County office rotate among collections, the service desk, book-keeping and cashiering on a regular basis. Presently, she is working on collections, taking dozens of calls from customers daily. "You hear a lot of stories from people in need — people who are asking for extensions on

paying their bills," says McNeel. In most cases the decision on granting an extension is up to her, and she often listens as customers use her to vent their anger or hurt feelings. "When someone is truly in need, I really want to do all I can to help. It's not fun being yelled at by someone who is upset, but most of the time it isn't directed at me personally. I'm just the outlet for their frustration."

McNeel enjoys the working atmosphere in a small office, emphasizing that the rotating assignments mean each employee has more responsibilities. In a community the size of Nederland, where it's easy for people to know each other and feel a sense of closeness, she often sees friends who come into the office to pay bills.

Coming to work as a VOE student, McNeel admits she didn't know a great deal about utility companies and how they operate. "Now I can see both sides. I tell my friends who are critical of GSU that the company really

does care about its customers and works hard to keep costs down. Although I never used to think that people couldn't afford to pay their utility bills, it's obvious to me now that some people are having a difficult time meeting expenses."

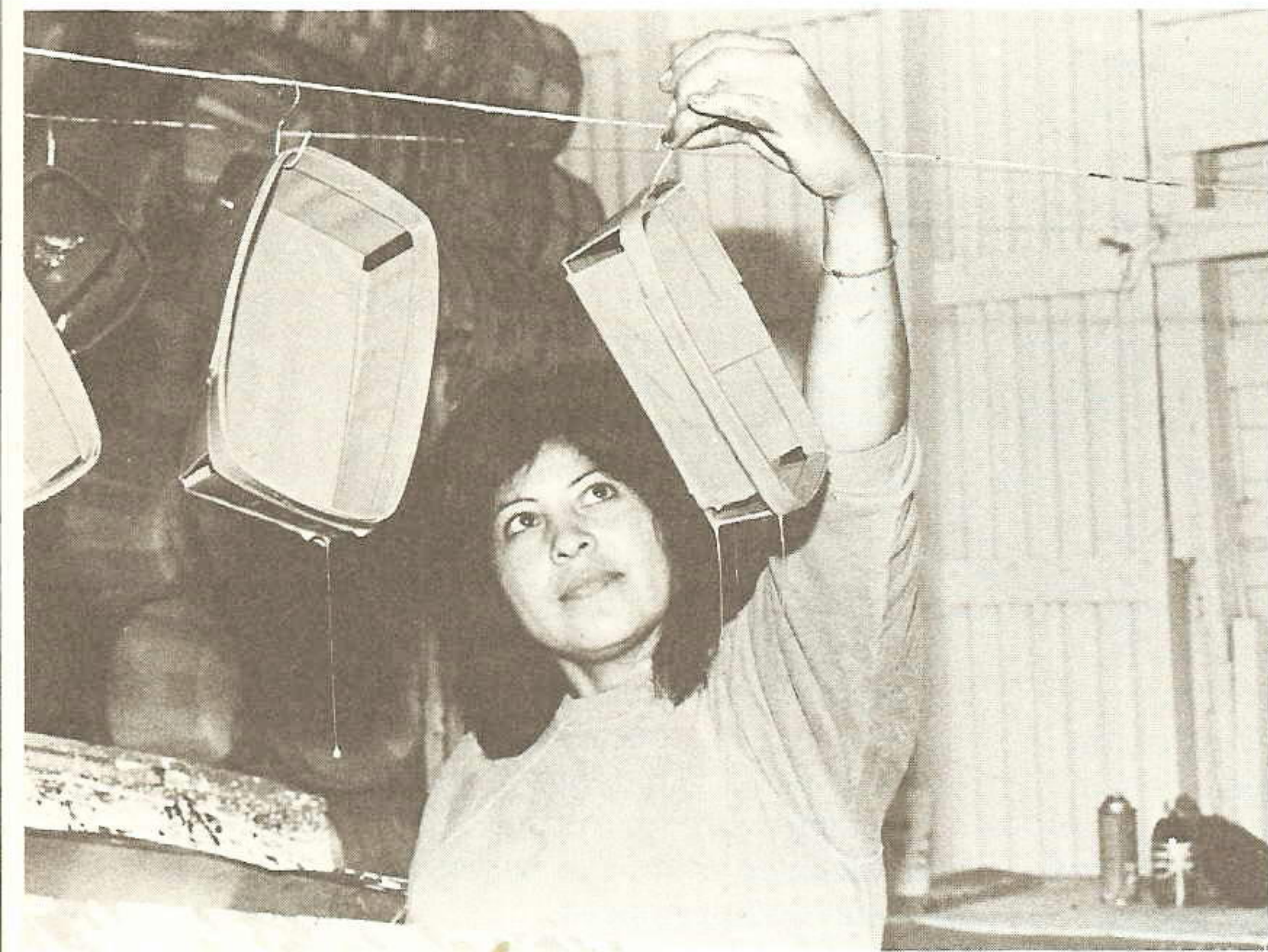
McNeel recently took the first step in a long-range career goal — a college degree in business. Toward that end she is taking night computer courses at Lamar University. She believes that the computer training GSU provided her as a customer accounting clerk helps in her current classes and will be of assistance in later business courses.

In between the customer calls which send her to a computer terminal checking credit histories, McNeel offers a hint of her idea of what it takes to succeed in her job. "You've got to have patience. It's important to be pleasant, but be firm when necessary. Don't let an angry customer get you down and, above all, don't take their problems home with you."



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*Celia Santoy paints the baskets over a wooden trough.*



*David Woods displays a completed bug box.*

## A basketful of jobs

by Susan Gilley

Residents of Navasota like to promote their town as one that triumphs over disasters. A fire during the Civil War nearly destroyed it, and two years later a yellow fever epidemic further devastated the Grimes County town.

Over a century later, residents have focused their fighting spirit onto turning around the economy. A couple of new businesses are helping to accomplish just that, says Louis Sandidge, GSU's superintendent of the Navasota District. Sandidge, who supplied information for last month's *Plain Talks*' feature on the Sorrell of Texas furniture factory, introduces us to the Texas Basket Company this month.

The business, which was begun

in Jacksonville, Texas, in 1919, now has a store in Navasota, and plans to expand into manufacturing a wide variety of baskets within a few months. Owned by J.C. "Cookie" Swanson and his son, Martin Swanson, the Navasota store opened in April 1985 in an abandoned feed store and feed mill. The Swansons have owned the business for about 11 years. The Navasota branch, which enabled Swanson to return to his hometown, presently employs six people. In addition to featuring a wide range of seasonal crafts items, the Navasota shop also produces some specialty items and and customizes baskets produced in Jacksonville, where 130 people work for the company. One of the favorites originating in

Navasota is a "bug box," especially designed for youngsters who wish to catch lightning bugs. The personalized boxes, which are made from wood and wire mesh, are made by craftsman David Woods, who also sells his oil paintings in the store.

A variety of other baskets are also painted and decorated for various holiday seasons in Navasota.

Browsers who walk into the shop find it hard to decide which items to buy.

The success of the shop represents another triumph for Navasotans — this one in economic development. And Gulf States benefits, too. "This is adding load for Gulf States — and we like that," exults Sandidge.



# Working outdoors appeals to meter reader

by Susan Gilley

On what was probably her worst day on the job, Carol McManus required 11 stitches in her forearm after being bitten by a weimaraner that had slipped off its chain.

But even that bleak day in 1983 has not convinced the Silsbee meter reader to seek a less-exciting position. "I like being outdoors, even if it does have its hazards," she admits. Although she has been bitten seven different times, she says geese, wasps and snakes can also pose job hazards when you're reading meters. A self-described horse- and dog-lover, McManus says she generally has no problems with the animals on her route, which includes the Silsbee, Lumberton, Kountze area. "You learn a lot about the different breeds of dogs," she points out.

She also has a sense of humor. Once, when she was walking toward a house to read the meter, she simultaneously carried on a conversation with a dog that had previously been somewhat wary of her. The pooch was friendly enough until McManus tripped over a root and almost fell. Her resulting gyrations "frightened the dog, which then began to growl at me. He must have thought I was up to something."

As McManus approaches her 10-year anniversary date with GSU in February, she notes that one of the best parts of her job is finding the good in people. "Most of the customers who aren't raising sand are really behind us. Most of the ones I deal with are pretty understanding," she adds.

Northern District Superintendent Robert Sheffield describes McManus as a very flexible employee. For instance she spent two years as a customer contact clerk in the Anahuac office "doing a little bit of everything," she recalls. She then spent two years there as a meter reader before

transferring to Silsbee in 1981. Even though she grew up in Anahuac, she had long harbored a desire "to get away from the coast and all the mosquitoes."

McManus now lives about six miles north of Silsbee on a two-acre tract that permits her to provide roaming room for her three horses, five dogs and cat. Her roommate, fellow meter reader Nancy Behnken, has two horses on the property as well.

McManus' favorite is an 18-year-old Appaloosa mare named "Old Punkin." Her slender owner, who has ridden since age 4, says her family owned Punkin from the day she was born. She also has two registered quarterhorses, a mare called "Red," whose registered name is "Count's Candy Bar" and a stallion colt called "Starlight," whose registered name is "High-Time Boy."

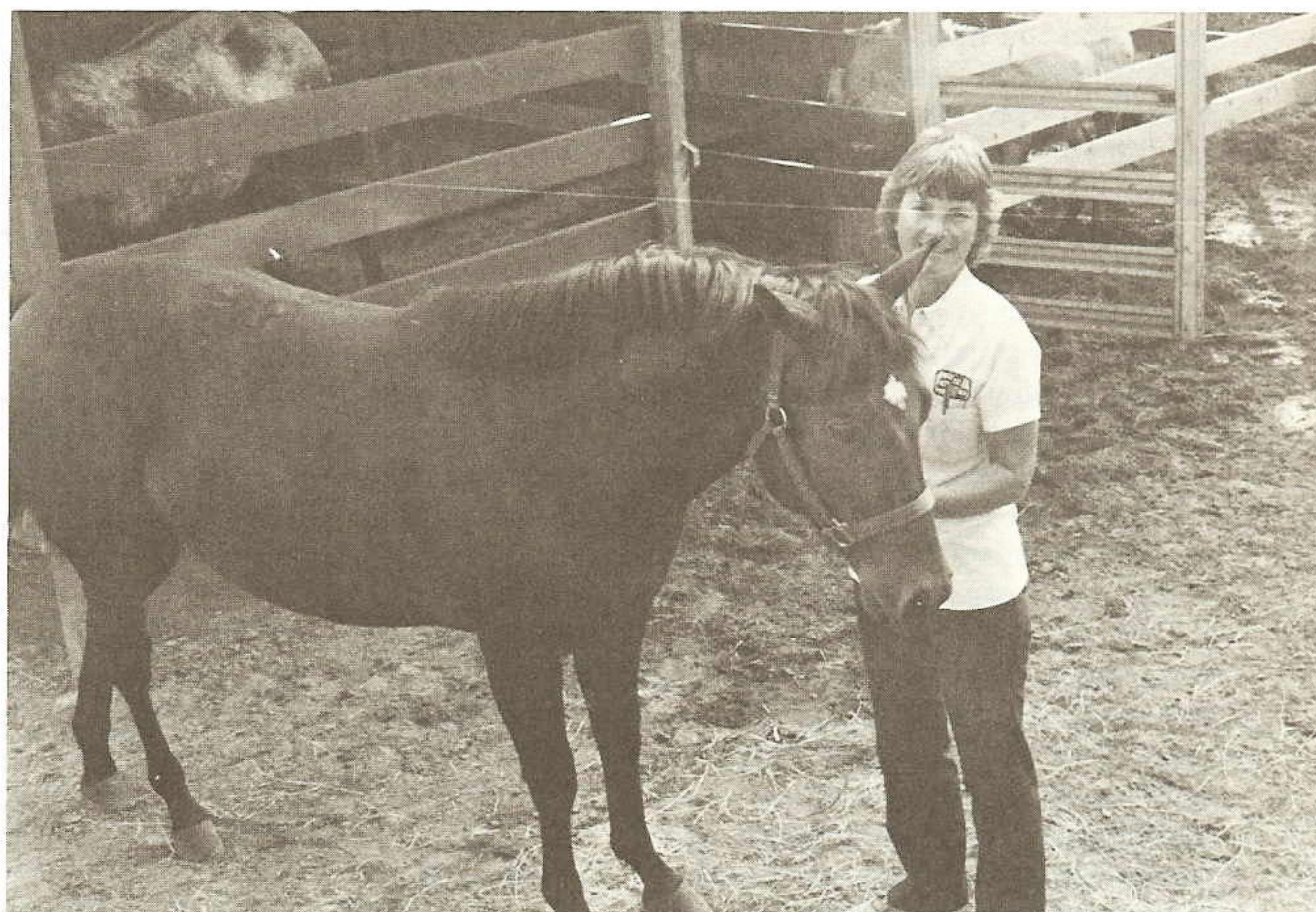
McManus admits that raising horses "is an expensive hobby, but it's fun. I must spend money to feed them, trim their hooves and make trips to the vet."

One recent trip resulted after someone shot Old Punkin, ap-

parently just to see her run, causing the old mare to run into some pine trees. The mischief hurt McManus, who has always taken especially good care of Punkin. "If I ride the old horse, I have to feed her baking soda to get her electrolytes back up. Anytime she gets stressed, I feed her baking soda. This (the shooting) was more of an emotional injury for her."

McManus expresses a fierce devotion to her employer. "I feel like I owe the company. I feel like I have a responsibility to do my job the best that I can. If I run across a problem — like somebody tampering with a meter — I owe it to the company to report it."

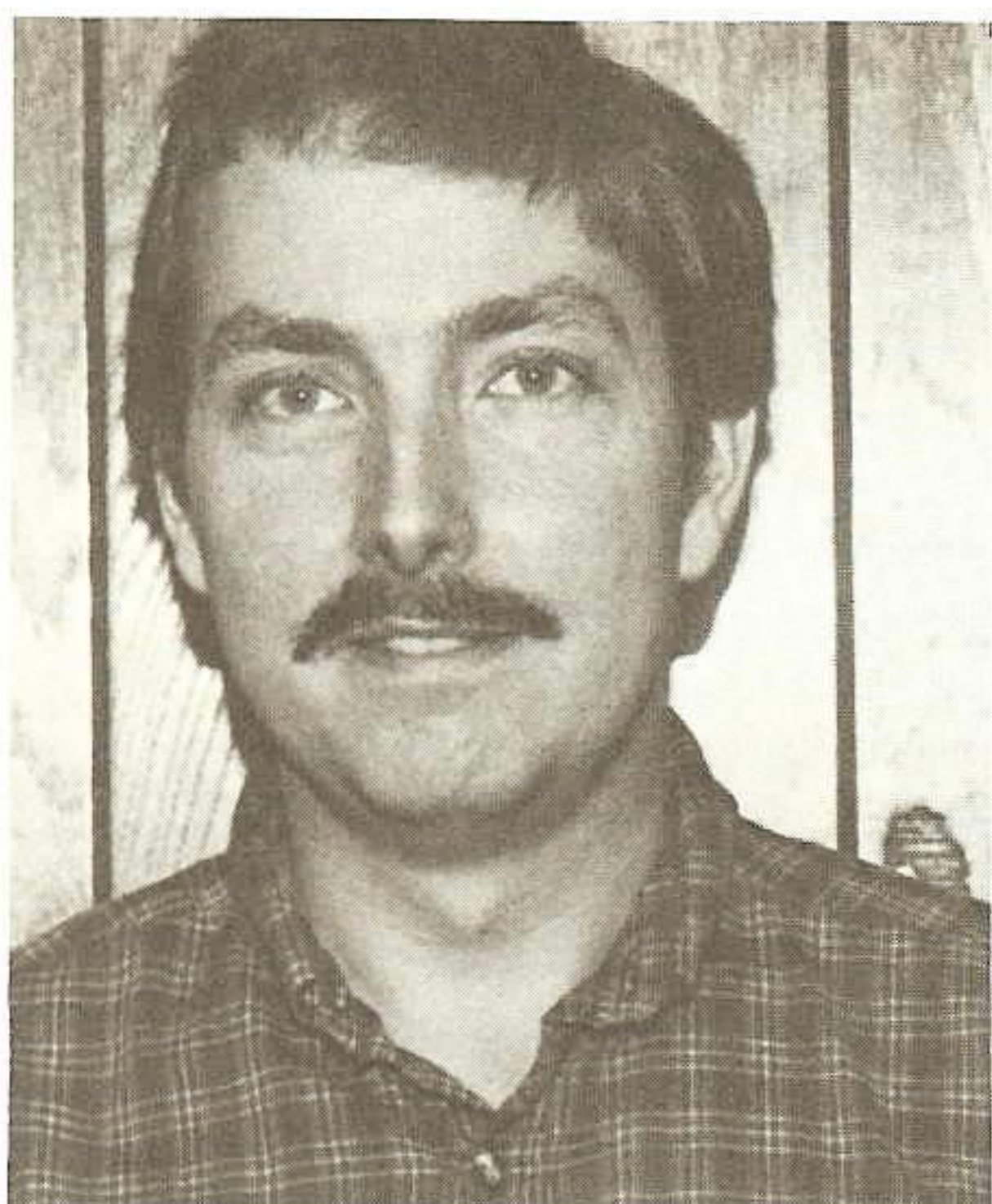
Like other employees, McManus hopes that GSU can soon obtain rate relief so that the company can resume normal operations. And she admits that, besides the wish to preserve her job, she has a very special reason for hoping the company gets back on track soon. "I want to buy some more horses and a bigger place," she explains.



*Carol McManus spends much of her free time grooming and working with her three horses.*



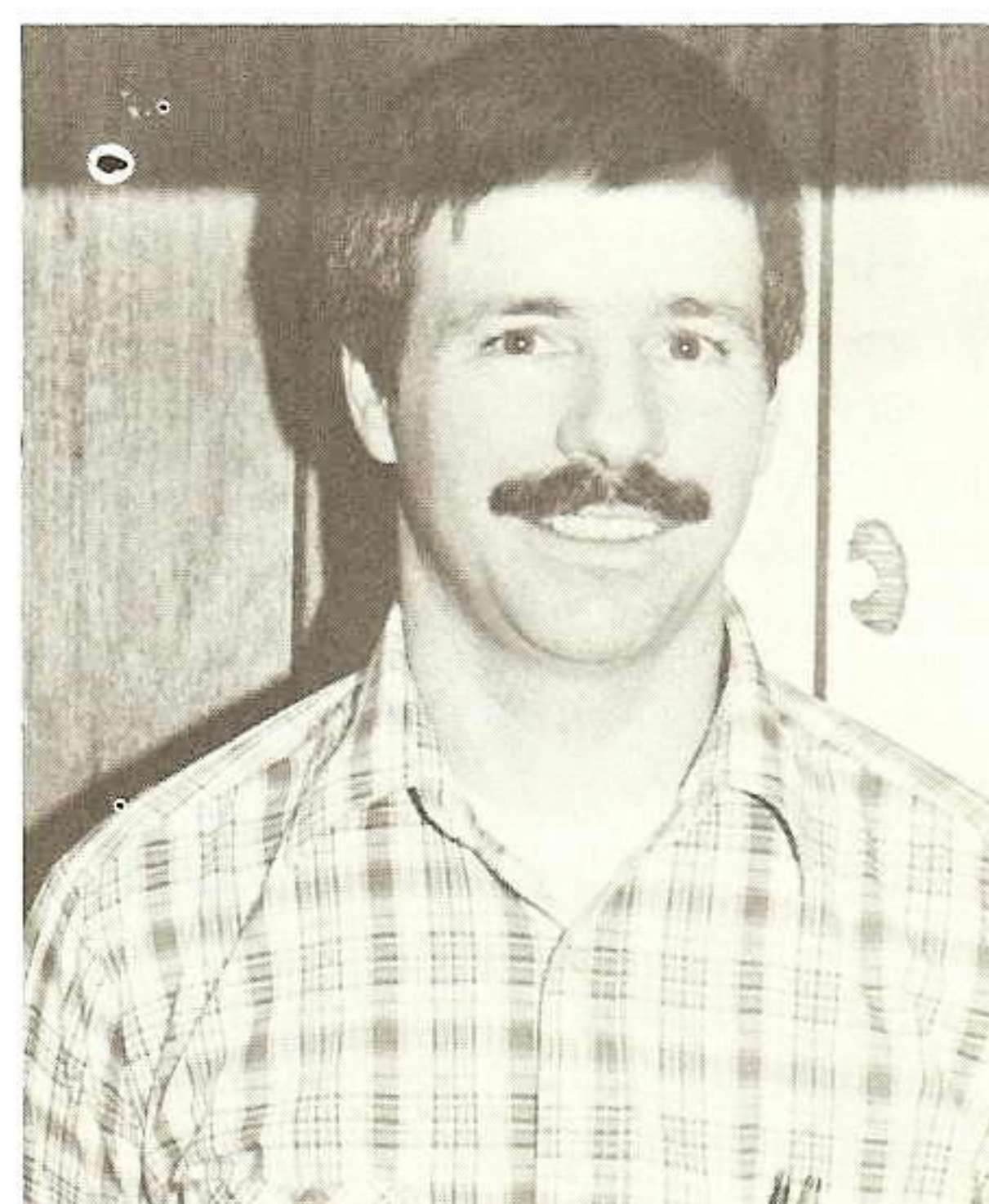
# Employees reveal win



*Ricky Mayeux*



*David Zalfen*



*James Onorato*

by Susan Gilley

**F**or the third consecutive year, Gulf States has earned the Injury Frequency Reduction Award by the Edison Electric Institute (EEI), reports Mike Durham, manager-occupational health and safety.

The latest award recognizes the company's outstanding safety performance in its operations during 1985. Over the entire three-year period, GSU has cut its injury rate by more than 50 percent.

Linn Draper, GSU's president and chief executive officer, comments, "Every employee within the company contributed to this record because safety is a personal matter with each of us. GSU continuously emphasizes safety because we consider it a very important measure of the quality of our operations."

Three power plants were especially instrumental in helping the company achieve the safety record, notes Draper. Employees at River Bend Station have worked more than 4 million manhours without a lost-time injury — one of the best records in the industry. Employees at Sabine Station in Bridge City and at Willow Glen Station near

St. Gabriel have worked more than 2 million manhours at each plant without a lost-time accident.

In addition to the EEI award, GSU also recently received the National Safety Council's Award of Honor for safety performance in 1985. The company also received that honor for 1984. According to the council's data, Gulf States' safety record is about seven times better than the electric service industry average.

Draper added, "I'm extremely proud of the accomplishments our employees have made in safety. We've shown that we care about the safety of our co-workers as well as that of ourselves. By reducing our injury rate, our employees and their loved ones have avoided the pain, suffering and loss which would have resulted from possible industrial accidents."

*Plain Talks* asked 12 employees from Willow Glen, River Bend and Sabine stations to explain why safety is important to them and how employee attitudes played a role in winning these awards. Following are their comments:

## River Bend Station

**Ricky Mayeux, nuclear control operator:** "In my position, safety

is especially important. There are things that could occur in our jobs — even though their possibility is slim — that could affect people in other parts of the plant or even outside the plant. It makes us think of safety a lot, because the responsibility goes beyond us. Safety is a way of thinking."

**David Zalfen, electrician-1st class/nuclear:** "Everyone knows what safety means to them — it's their protection, as well as protecting other people. Electricians work two-man crews and we try to keep safety in the forefront.



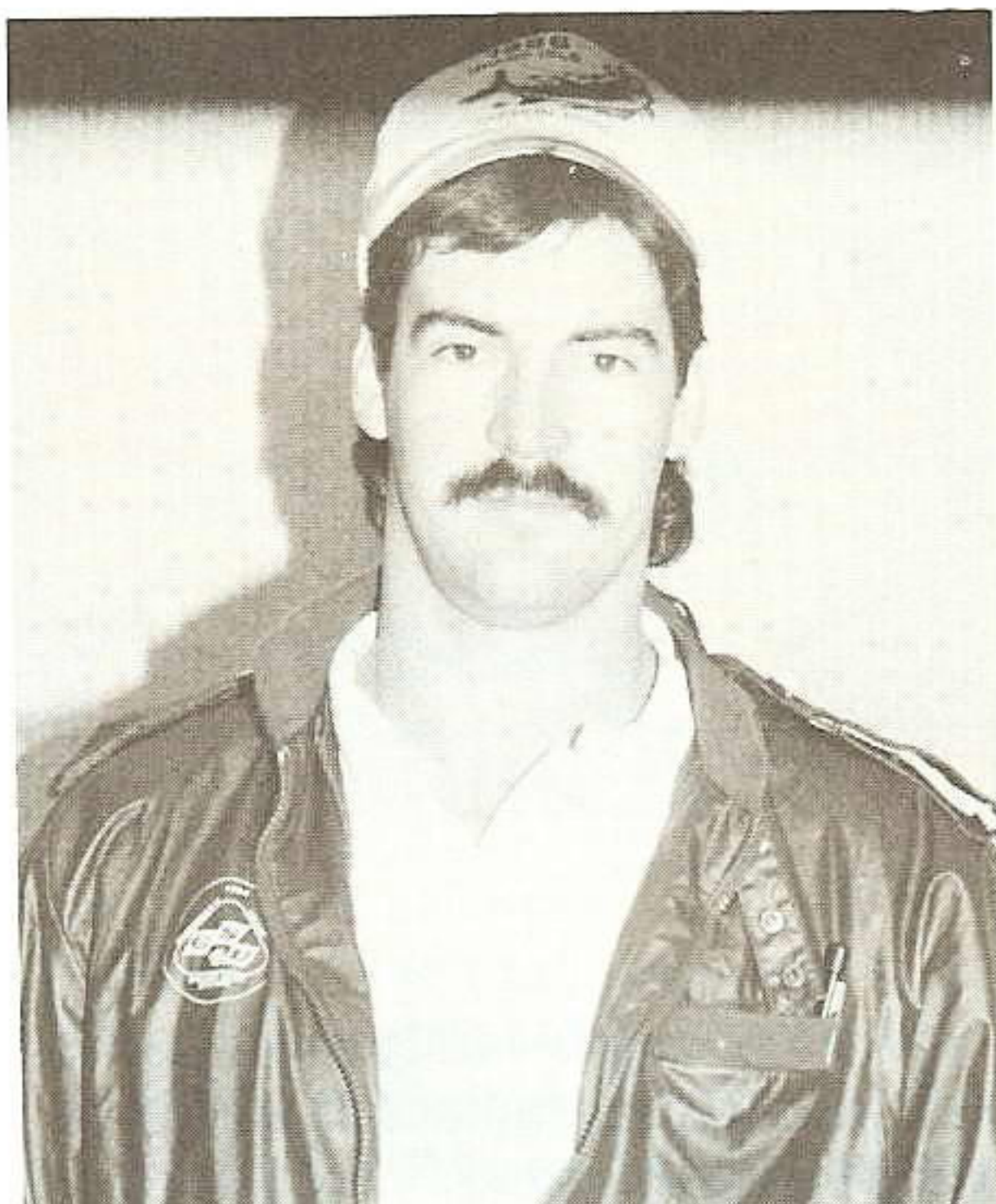
*R.R. Vachon*



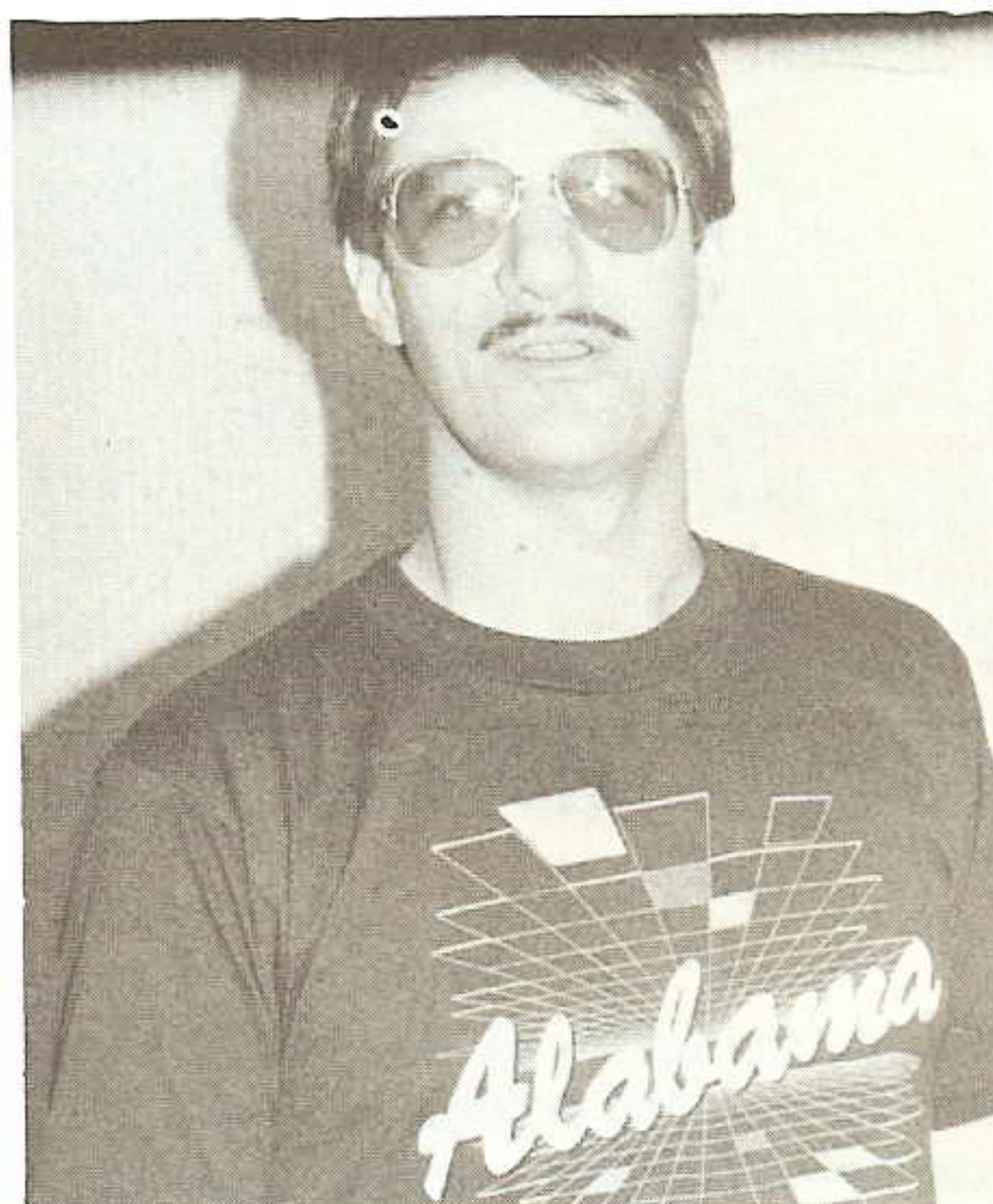
# ning safety attitudes



Cindy Holmes



Art Roshto



Glenn Young

Any problems that we encounter, we try to correct. Our record has been real good. I guess that can stand for itself. For myself, I really try to emphasize safety in and out of the plant."

**James Onorato, radiation protection technician-1st class:**

"The basic function of Radiation Protection is protection of persons from harmful radiation. We do that through training and actual implementation of the Radiation Protection Program, which involves Radiation Work Permits (RWPs), routine surveys and general surveillance. To most people,

when they think of safety, they think of hard hats and safety glasses, but it's a lot more out here. Half the equipment out here represents safety systems."

**R.R. Vachon, senior compliance analyst:**

"We hear so much about safety out here at River Bend because we're attuned to it in our daily lives. It even extends to our homes. For instance, there's the Louisiana law to buckle up your seat belts. People here at River Bend are educated in safety, because the consequences of not being safe would be devastating. It's a science in itself. It's a shallow way of thinking to pooh-pooh safety."

## Willow Glen Station

**Cindy Holmes, repairman-1st class:**

"Safety anywhere determines your own personal future. If you're not concentrating on safety, any mistake you make could be the worst — you could be injured for life. We should always make it our first priority. Out here, we look out for each other. We share a feeling that, 'It's my responsibility to take care of my fellow workers.' It never hurts to be safe, especially on big jobs. That's when the stress is highest."

**Art Roshto, test technician-1st class:** "Safety is about the most

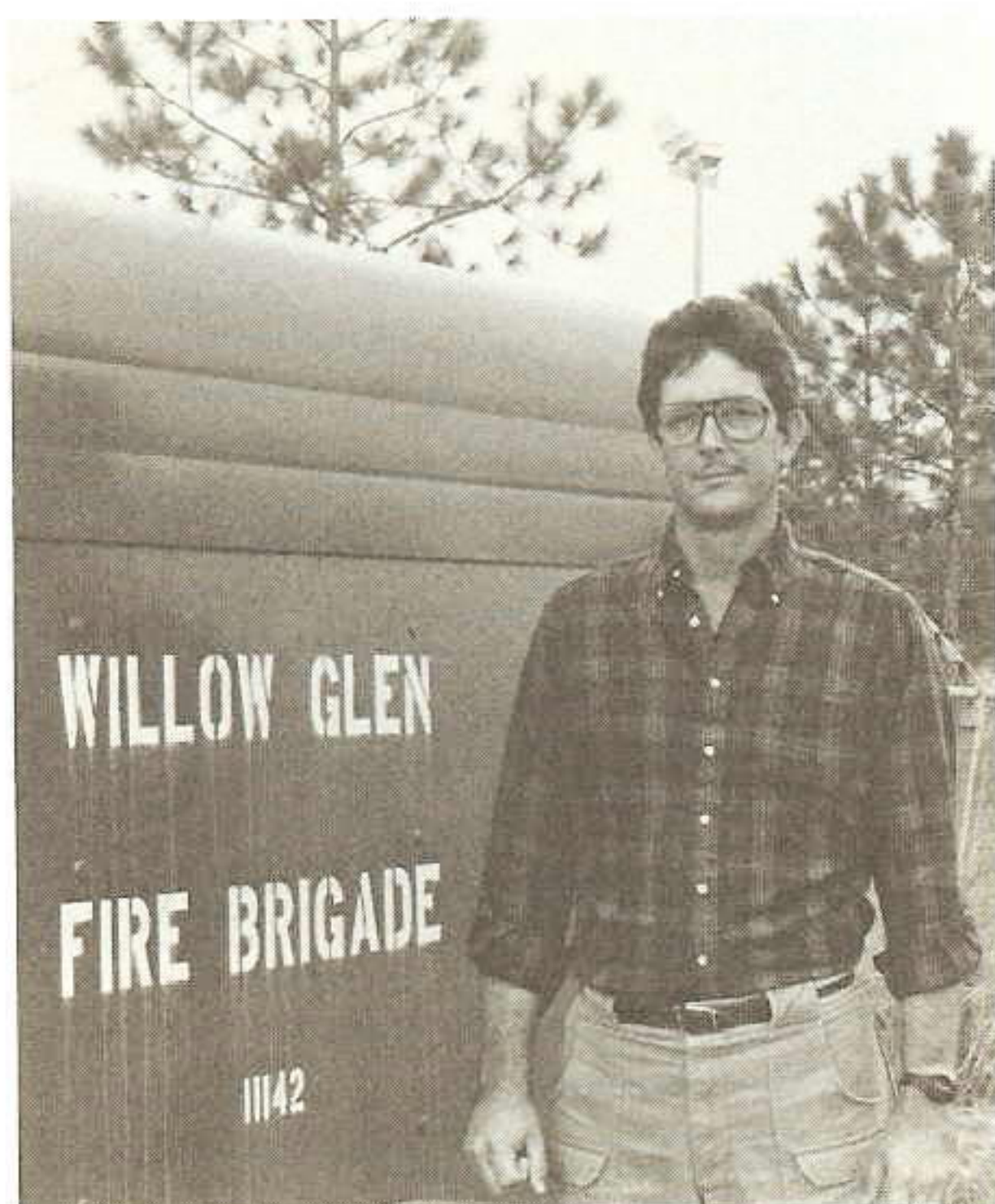
important thing. You have to be conscious of what you're doing to keep yourself from personal harm. You've also got to watch out for others — be aware of what effect your actions will have on others. We're pretty safety-conscious here. All the employees are pretty tight-knit. It really comes down to caring about people you know."

**Glenn Young, equipment operator:**

"You should practice safety on the job or off by planning and taking precautions to eliminate accidents. As a result, I am better prepared to handle an accident if one actually occurs. In tagging out equipment, we're more familiar with how accidents can occur. I'm an outdoorsman, and I have to have the same attitude when I'm hunting or cutting firewood. I'm more safety-conscious and more conscientious."

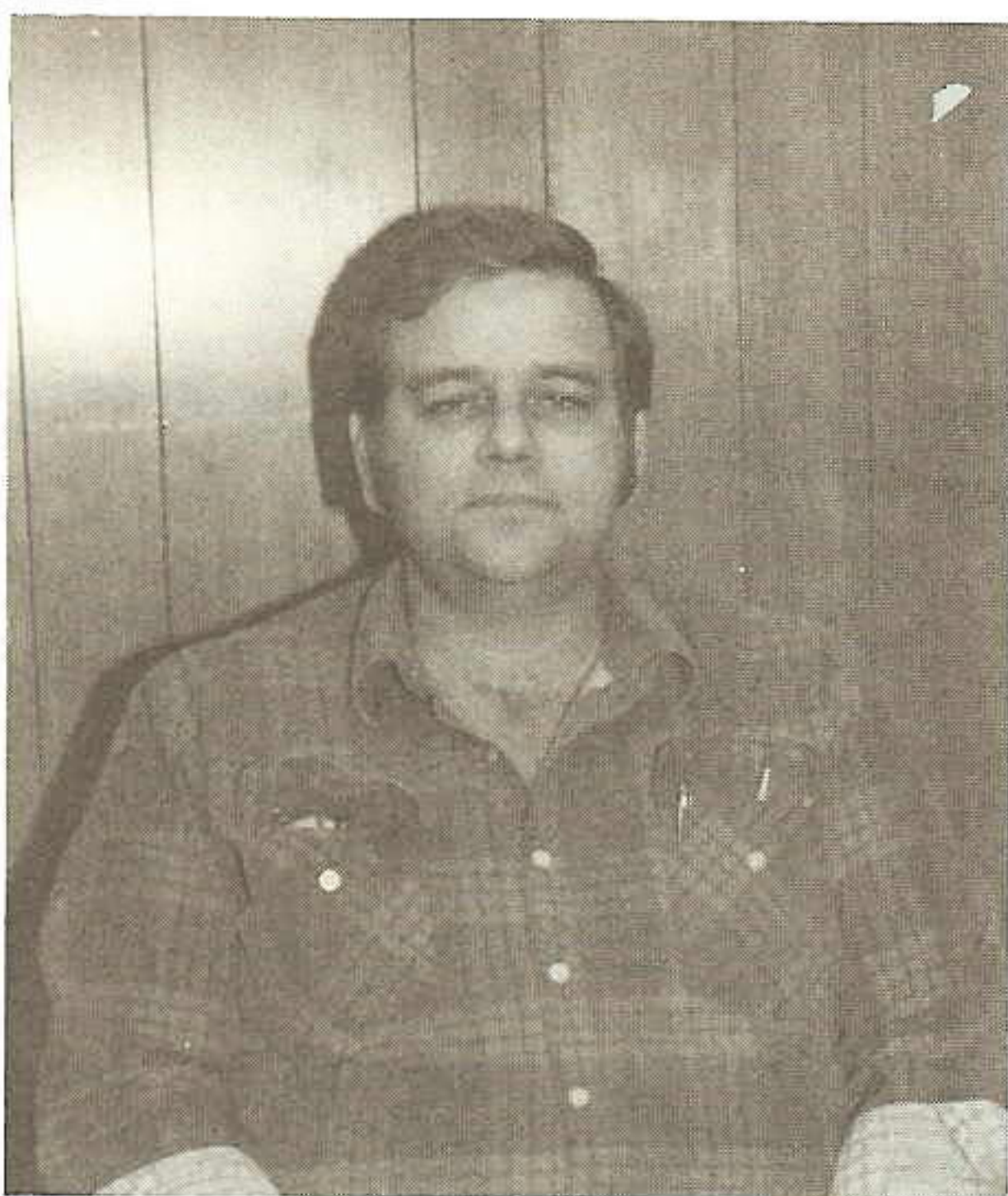
**Greg Beckstrom, senior engineering assistant:**

"Safety — it boils down to the right amount of training with common sense. To come out here without proper training would be tantamount to climbing into a new car without ever reading the manual. You don't do one without the other. If you're not exposed to



Greg Beckstrom





*Virgil Pearl*



*Phyllis Thomas*



*Brenda Broussard*

the equipment and not trained to use it, you have to be really aware and extra careful." A member of the plant fire brigade, Beckstrom also uses his firefighting knowledge as a member of the East Iberville Volunteer Fire Department. Regardless of what you're doing, he adds, "It's the training aspect, along with common sense, that makes the difference."

#### **Sabine Station**

**Virgil Pearl, repairman-1st class:** "I just want to be safe because I have a wife (Jacalyn) and a daughter (Stacey) and I want to come home safe every evening. Nobody out here seems to mind being informed or helped if somebody sees them doing something wrong, safety-wise, and tells them about it. We don't hold grudges about that kind of help." Ruefully, he admits, "I sometimes find myself not being quite as safety-conscious around smaller routine jobs, but being very aware for the big stuff." Pearl believes that the investigations typically carried out after an accident and the resulting reports "help prevent similar accidents from happening."

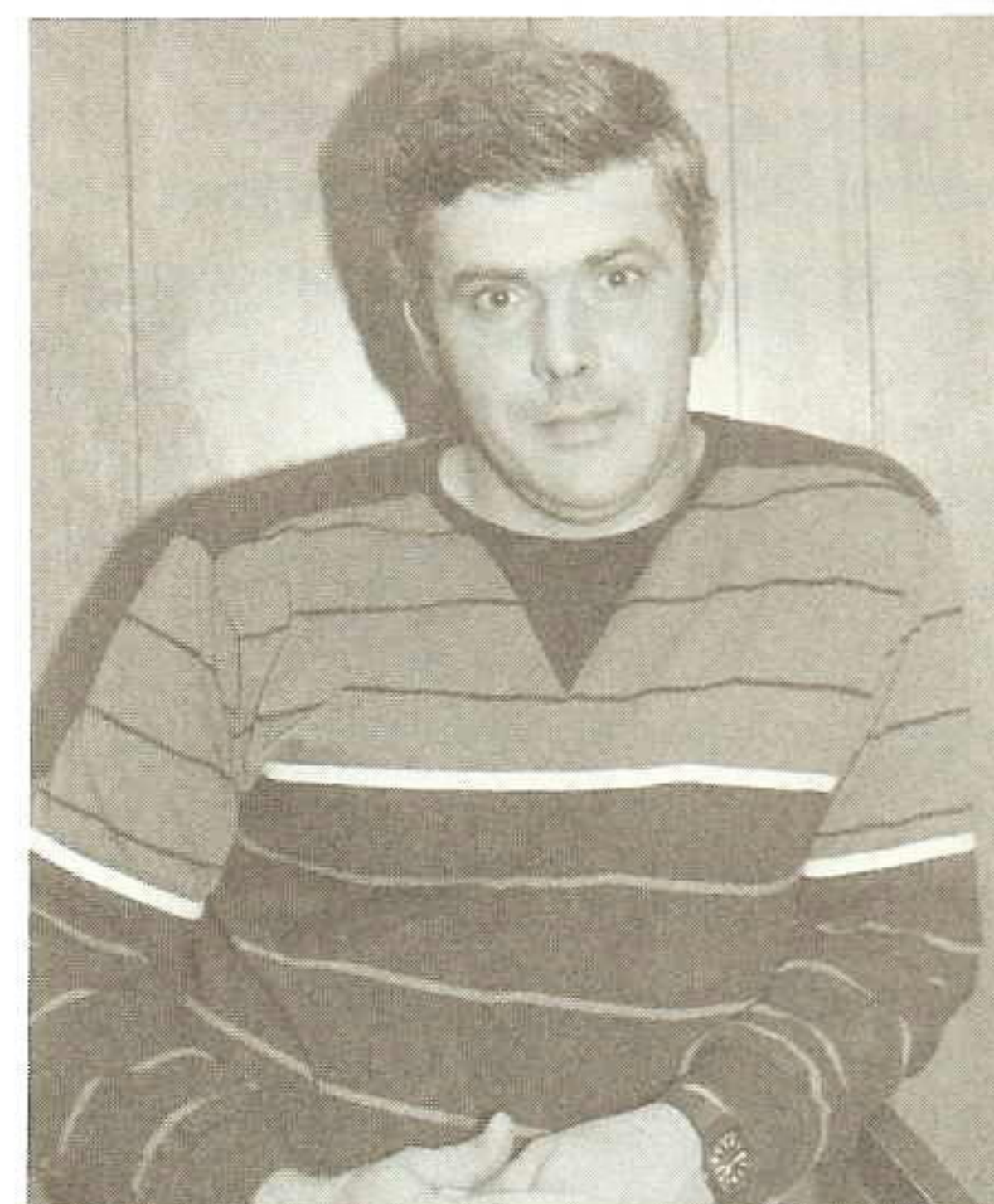
**Phyllis Thomas, departmental clerk:** "I've become more aware of the importance of safety, especially since I moved from a job in the warehouse to one in training. I'm more aware of the importance of teaching people

how to do a job safely. I've never felt that I'm complacent as far as safety is concerned." Although Thomas has an office job, her position requires frequent trips into the plant, where she is especially careful. But Thomas has found that safety-consciousness should extend to desk jobs, too, since she stapled her hand with an electric stapler.

**Brenda Broussard, electrician-1st class:** "Safety means being protected from harm and danger. As employees, we have that right, but it's our responsibility, too. Most people follow safety precautions on the job. Being an electrician is a very dangerous job. Unlike some jobs, your first mistake could also be your last one because you could be killed. I've been involved in one bad accident. After it was over, I went home and thought, 'I'm lucky to be alive!' But before that, I worked in an emergency room and I had seen accidents from the other end, too. I really believe in telling people to wear their safety glasses. Gulf States has a good safety program, and it means a lot to employees." Broussard takes her safety awareness home, too. "I taught my son-in-law and daughter CPR and the Heimlich maneuver after their baby was born, because so many children choke to death."

**Bob Smalley, equipment operator:** "Safety is probably our

job description. Our No. 1 priority is the safety of personnel and the safe and efficient operation of plant equipment. Our job, in particular, is tagging out equipment to be repaired. Our failure to be safe could kill somebody else. Safety is everyone's responsibility, but lots of times, you're put in a position where others are your responsibility, too. Because of that, the safety attitude has to be good among operators." Safety stays on Smalley's mind away from work, too. "On the road, I don't think that I've ever not been careful, except maybe when I was 16. At home, you've definitely got to practice safety. After all, kids learn by example."



*Bob Smalley*



# Tuning in to generators

by Robert Adams

On channel nine, CB radio operators sometimes receive distress signals from other people. Now, GSU can receive radio distress signals of a different kind — from a generator.

Called Radio Frequency Monitoring (RFM), it allows maintenance personnel to tune into the generator much like listening to your favorite radio station. Then, they are able to check the generator's windings for any breaks in the wires.

All generators emit radio signals when they run. You have probably heard something like it when you hear lightning static on your car radio. And when a wire in a generator breaks, the resulting spark, or arc, also sends out radio signals, like a tiny radio station. Careful monitoring of the strength and wavelength of a generator's signals can indicate if a wire is broken.

The arc created by a broken wire begins very small and gets progressively larger over several weeks. It could eventually result in an explosion and fire. So, it is important to determine if this type of problem exists.

Other types of monitoring would probably detect a break before a fire erupted. But, the damage could have progressed to the point that the generator's wiring would have to be rewound, costing millions of dollars. RFM enables maintenance personnel to detect a break while it is still small. Then, the break can be repaired without rewinding and at a much lower cost.

An Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI) study details using radio frequencies as a means of generator monitoring. Ideally, each generator should have its own permanent radio frequency monitor attached. However, GSU, using the EPRI

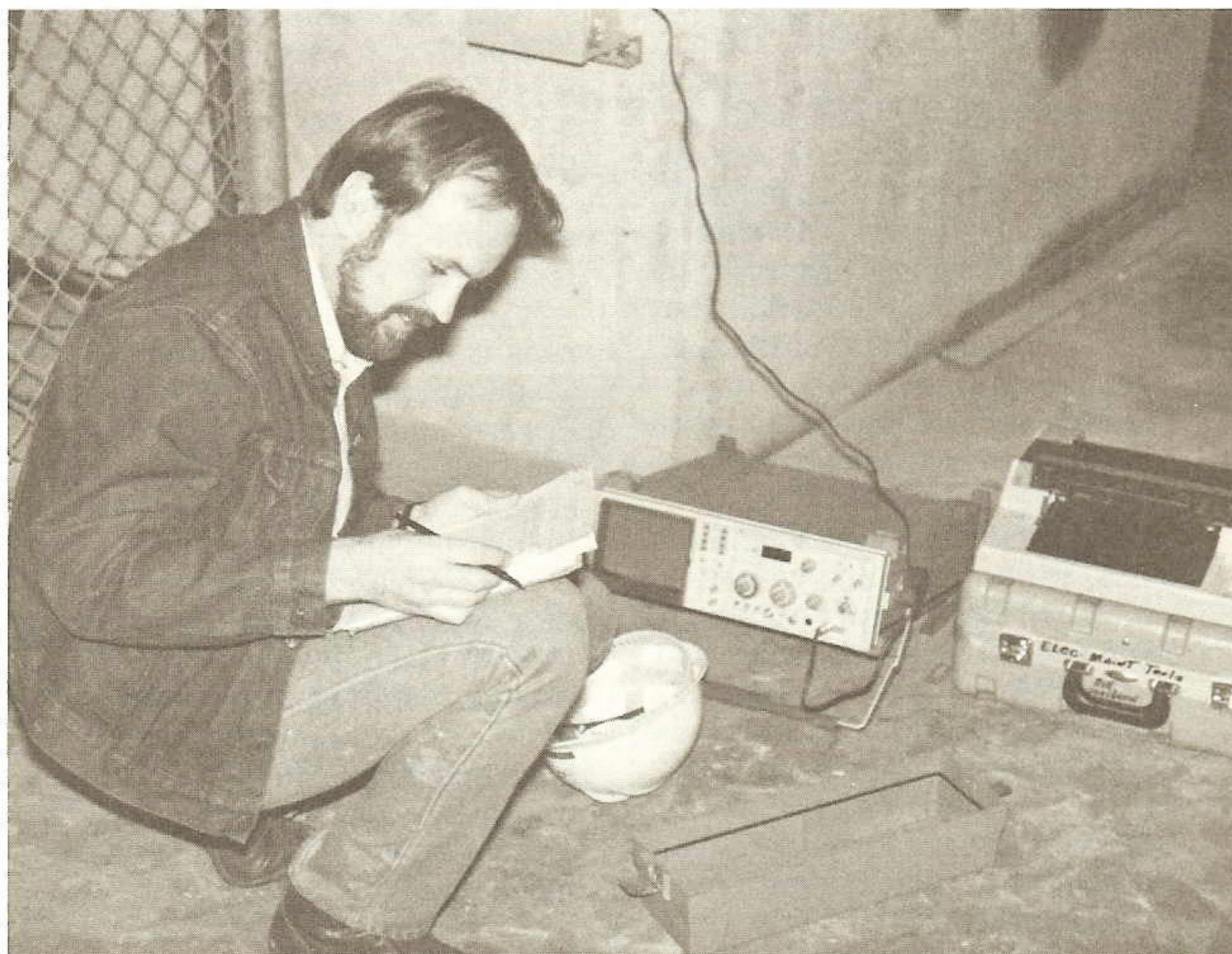
study, innovated a portable design, which can be used to monitor each generator on our system. Tom Davey, senior instrumentation engineer, helped design the system. He also published an article in *Power Engineering* detailing how the system works. Basically, it takes advantage of the fact that arcing usually takes several weeks to cause significant damage. A schedule of monthly checks on each generator should be sufficient to catch any abnormalities in their early stages.

Since Davey's article appeared, at least three other utilities have contacted GSU about the portable system. According to the article, the estimated installed cost of a monitor on each of GSU's generators is about \$15,000 apiece. The portable system now in use cost the company about \$10,000.

GSU monitors generator performance several other ways as

well, according to Ricky Fernandez, electrical maintenance supervisor. As the generator's field rotates in the wire windings, sensors observe heat levels there. A temperature increase may mean a loss of hydrogen, which is used to cool the windings. Core monitoring looks for elements of combustion, like a smoke detector in your home. If the monitor detects their presence, it may mean the beginning of a fire.

Observing a generator problem in its initial stages can lead to prevention of a catastrophic loss. Easily, the money saved on repairs and lost revenues can be in the millions of dollars. "It's an insurance policy," says Fernandez. "During a rewind, a unit would be unavailable for at least 12 weeks. Instead, making repairs would probably take about two weeks and we could probably do it ourselves," he adds.



Tom Davey checks out the system he helped design.



# Oh, Christmas Trees!

by Susan Gilley

Children, tradition and the outdoors are all important to Doug and Wanda Watkins of Baton Rouge.

And the couple has found the perfect part-time business to match their interests. Watkins, industrial accounts manager-Louisiana, says their venture — a Christmas tree farm dubbed “Bo-Jingle Christmas Tree Farm” — also represents planning for his eventual retirement. Now 55, Watkins has worked for GSU almost 29 years.

The farm is part of a 25-acre tract amid the rolling hills of east Louisiana near Covington, making it a good location for Christmas tree seekers from New Orleans and Baton Rouge since it is located about midway between the two cities.

Mrs. Watkins recalls their first introduction to southern-grown Christmas trees. “We moved to Baton Rouge (from Port Arthur) around the Christmas of 1973, and we grabbed the first tree we came to,” she explains, adding that, not surprisingly, it was an extremely dry northern-grown tree. Hoping to find a fresher tree the following Christmas, the couple were intrigued when they read an article about Christmas trees being grown as part of a research project underway by the Louisiana Forestry Club at Louisiana State University. The research farm offered Virginia pines, white pines and cedars which had been grown to study their needle retention, color and aroma. “After a few years,” Mrs. Watkins adds, “It got to be a fight getting trees from LSU, so when a friend of ours opened a Christmas tree farm in Zachary, we bought their very first tree.”

Although Christmas trees have been widely cultivated throughout the south only for the past decade, Watkins reveals, “They have now become a fairly significant segment of the economy.”

The Watkinses purchased their farm in 1982, and planted their

first crop of about 1,000 Virginia pine seedlings by hand in January 1983. “It was bitterly cold,” notes Mrs. Watkins, “and I was ready to throw those seedlings away.”

Luckily, they resisted that urge and offered their first trees, averaging about eight-feet-tall apiece, for the Christmas of 1985.

Now a bright red Dutch-style barn and a cheery wooden sign catch the attention of those driving past their farm. An elfin figure points to the “Bo-Jingle” moniker, which was selected in honor of their late son, Bo. Nearby, a refurbished antique sleigh further sets the holiday mood.

The couple’s daughter, Jamie, a former Gulf Stater herself, is also active in the family operation. She spends much of the selling season seated in the red barn, creating garlands and wreaths from not-so-perfect Christmas trees that have failed the Watkinses’ inspection. Pointing to a forlorn-looking specimen, Mrs. Watkins explains, “Some trees you can fertilize, talk to and love — I don’t care what you do to them — they just don’t look like Christmas trees.” Even so, Jamie’s creativity saves them from being losses.

While the selling season, which runs from the Friday after Thanksgiving until just before Christmas Eve, is perhaps Mrs. Watkins’ busiest time, the couple stays fairly busy with the operation throughout the year.

The couple must plant once a year, with this being their first year to plant in October, a change resulting from their switch to containerized trees from seedlings. They believe the new method, which keeps the root system intact, could make as much as a 16-inch-a-year difference in growth per tree.

Watkins credits everything the couple knows about growing and perfecting the trees to “learning from the Louisiana-Mississippi Christmas Tree Association and the LSU Cooperative Extension Department and learning from



*Little Blair Buras selects the perfect Christmas tree for Doug Watkins (kneeling) to saw down, while her mom, Cherie, admires her choice.*

trial and error.”

For instance, about six months after a young tree is in place, the growers must trim off lower branches so as to allow at least a 10-inch stem. This procedure is called “setting the handles.” By the second year, says Watkins, “You start trimming for shape so as to set the taper. From then on, you start trimming up and out.” There’s also fertilizer to be applied, as well as a three-pronged spraying program (insecticides, pesticides and herbicides) to carry out.

Although some Christmas tree farms act as wholesalers only, the Watkinses prefer the smaller-scale “choose and cut” method. “If you don’t choose and cut, there’s so much you miss,” insists Mrs. Watkins. She admits that she actually finds herself matching various trees to different customers’ homes or decor. She says they’ve discovered that choose and cut customers prefer a little bit of openness in a tree so that they may place ornaments inside, too. In contrast, a tree that is “too tight” can only have ornaments laying on the outer portion.

Looking back at the past few years, Watkins says, “We went through a whole cycle of reading, hearing and doing. People in this business are never hesitant to share what they know. They’re a sharing, helpful group.”



# Blending in with the environment

Responding to the surge in environmental awareness in the last two decades, utilities have devoted increased attention to the impact of transmission towers and lines on the natural surroundings while balancing this issue with practical considerations of efficiency and economics.

Traditionally, utilities have made every effort to place towers unobtrusively. According to Bill Barksdale, vice president-engineering and technical services, GSU lines are run along existing pipeline routes, roads, railways and through undeveloped areas to minimize interference with natural contours and landmarks. Whenever possible, towers are placed to avoid silhouetting against the sky (skylining) and many old brown insulators have been changed to light blue and gray to be less conspicuous against unavoidable sky backgrounds.

But why do the lines have to run overhead? For one thing, building overhead lines costs only a fraction of what underground lines cost, making the latter economically feasible only in dense urban areas. Also, locating and repairing line failures underground takes longer.

In addition, the overhead lines are insulated and cooled automatically by the air, but underground lines require complex treatment with expensive insulating pumps and materials like oil, gas and polyethylene to prevent short circuits and overheating. Consequently, their capacity, which is generally limited by initial installation, is less than that of similar overhead lines, which can take increased voltages usually with a few simple adjustments.

So, faced with the necessity of running lines overhead, utilities such as GSU have tried to minimize any adverse environmental impact and to make the towers as aesthetically pleasing as possible. This presents a challenge, since

tower design requirements are unique for each project — varying considerably according to the line's path, location, span length and voltage. Their galvanized steel or aluminum sections are latticed or braced to form "A," "H," and sometimes "V" or "Y" frames. GSU's latest Extra High Voltage (EHV) project (500kv) to Mississippi used guyed "Delta" towers.

Designs differ according to the specific function of a tower. A tangent tower supports conductors moving in a straight line and can therefore be fairly simple. Angle towers are stronger and more complex since they bear the stresses of a change in the direction of a line route. Deadend towers are the most massive since they support the entire pull of lines at anchor and takeoff points and at certain unusual angles on a line.

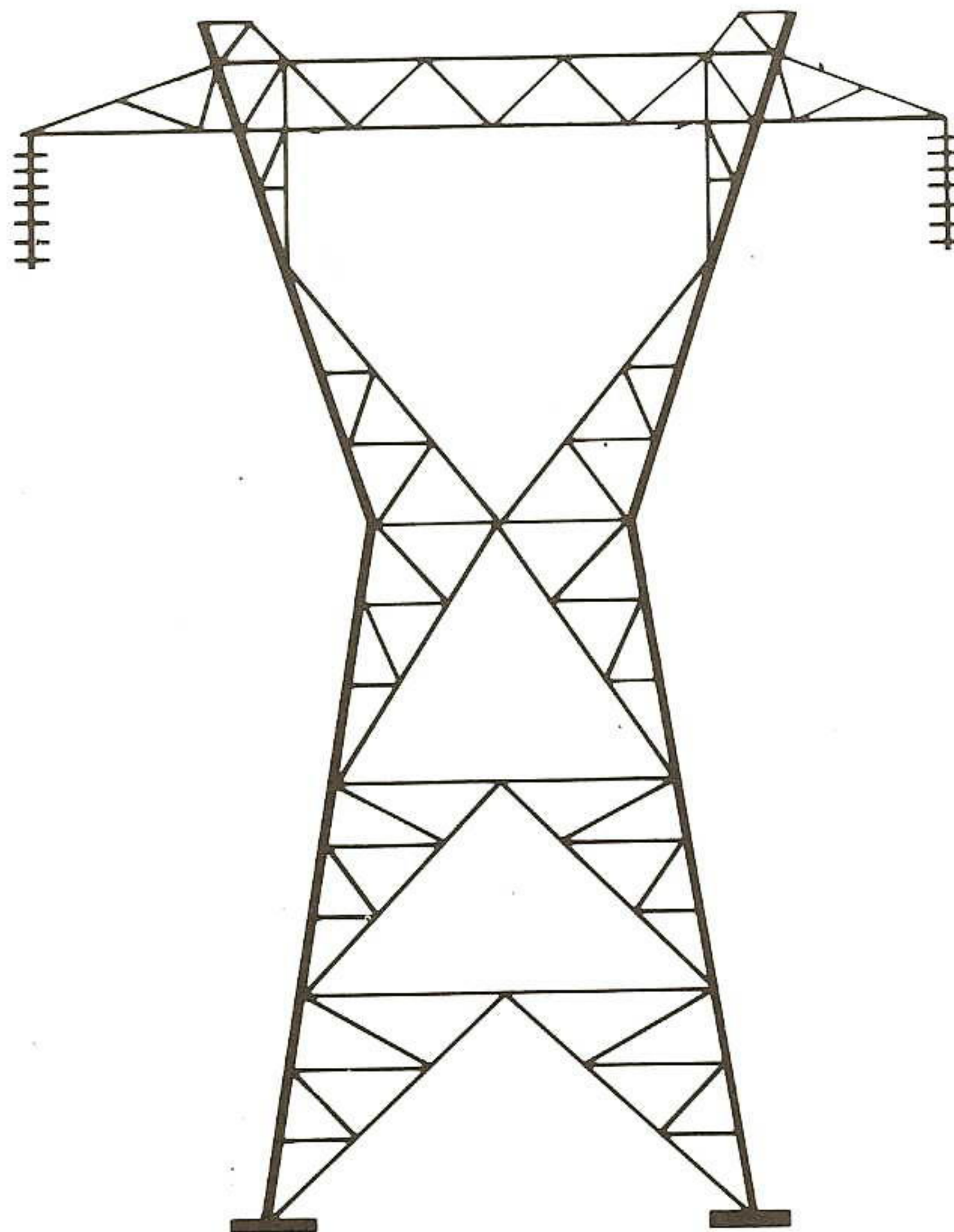
Over their 30-to-40-year lifetimes, all these structures must

endure strains from their heavy suspended wires that constantly expand and contract and from different foundation soils, shifting ground, wind, ice and fallen trees.

The growth in demand for electricity, though declining somewhat, is a fact of American life, so electrical transmission towers and lines will remain a part of the landscape. according to EPRI, from now until the year 2000, utilities plan to increase the number of line miles by about 40 percent, from today's 275,000 to a total of 388,000, in order to keep the spreading suburbs and shifting population densities supplied with the electricity they demand. (GSU's next major EHV project is not scheduled until the 1990s.)

Delivery of that power will depend to a great extent on the nation's energy support system — the network of transmission towers.

Excerpted from a Reddy Communications Fact Sheet





## Policy restated for columns

All contributions for Inside GSU, Retiree Update and Mailbox must be signed by the contributor before they will be accepted for publication, notes Susan Gilley, *Plain Talks*' editor.

## Scouts, church keep Jones busy

Boy Scouts and church activities have been keeping Raymond Jones busy since he retired March 1.

Jones, who was a shop and field tester in Baton Rouge, began working for GSU on Aug. 16, 1948.



Jones (right) accepts a plaque from Fred Eubanks, operating supervisor in Baton Rouge.

## Parker retires in Port Arthur

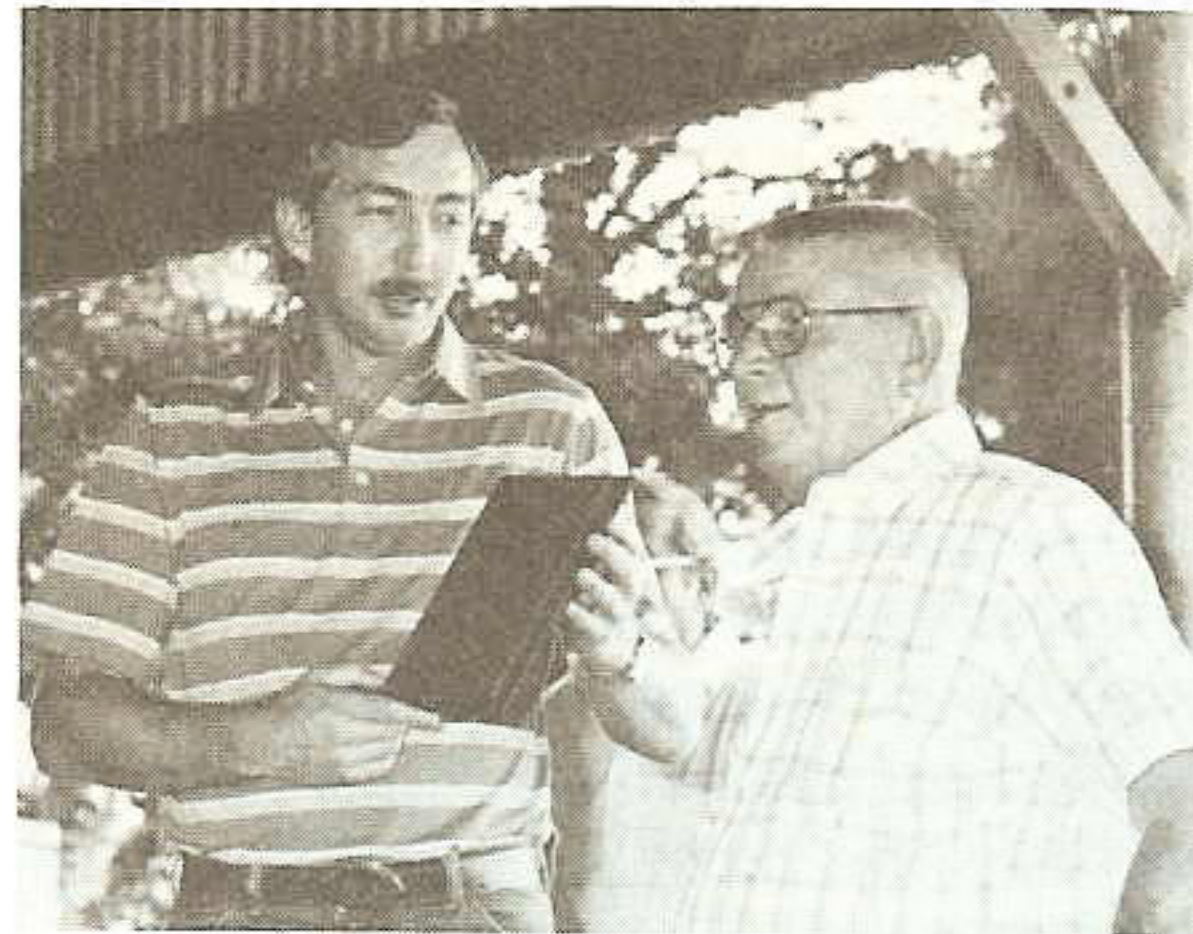
Friends held a reception in Port Arthur on May 15 in honor of Don Parker, retiring credit and collections supervisor in the Mid-County office.

Parker had worked in Port Arthur before transferring to Mid-County a few years ago, notes *Plain Talks*' correspondent Sue Simon.

Among those honoring Parker was Don Perio, supervisor-credit and collections in Port Arthur.



Don and Jane Parker, Don Perio



Mike Case, Mack McDaniel

## McDaniel earns safety recognition

Martin "Mack" McDaniel, former electrical maintenance foreman at Lewis Creek, earned recognition for his safety performance during the 38 years he worked for GSU.

According to *Plain Talks*' correspondent D.W. Rutherford, McDaniel received a safety plaque from Mike Case, safety and health representative-production, shortly before he retired on Aug. 1.

McDaniel began working for Gulf States on July 3, 1948.



From left, Judice, Dugas and Trahan display their safety plaques.

## Chicken dinner honors three men

About 150 well-wishers attended

a Sept. 12 retirement party held in honor of Edwin Judice, Denis Dugas and Horace Trahan, reports *Plain Talks*' correspondent Helen Kennedy.

Each of the men received a watch, while each wife was given a jewelry box. Guests were served chicken and the fixings.

According to Kennedy, the three men represented 105 accident-free years on the job.

Judice, who began working for GSU in 1952, was a substation mechanic-1st class; Dugas, who began work in 1955, was a right-of-way representative; and Trahan, who came to work for GSU in 1946, was a substation mechanic-1st class.



Among those wishing Sally Dowden (far right) a happy retirement were Butch Franklin, director-division accounting services, and Camilla Courts, supervisor-system billing.

## Dowden retires last summer

Sally Dowden retired July 1, ending a 33-year GSU career.

Dowden, who was a senior billing clerk, began working for Gulf States on June 1, 1943.

## Chan reports big catch

An Inside GSU item in the November issue of *Plain Talks* entitled, "Meche reports big fish," incorrectly identified the man in the accompanying photograph as Mike Meche. It was actually Bill Chan, staff accountant I at Nelson Coal.

Also, Meche, a staff accountant I at Willow Glen, and Mark Wilson, a staff accountant I in Plant Accounting in Beaumont, were not on that particular trip.



by Dr. Paul Murrill  
Chairman of the Board

Most of us, before we set off on a trip to a place we've never visited before, find it necessary to have a road map handy. It shows us how to reach our destination and reveals the progress we've made along the way. Reaching that destination, then, becomes our goal. Without a map to guide the way, we will very likely get lost and end up in chaos.

Earlier this year, the company established GSU's Five-Year Corporate Objectives and 1986 Goals. Our destination is the 1990s; the goals are the road map we use to get there. After one year of journeying under stresses and pressures we know what to do and there will be no chaos.

People sometimes ask me, "What have we learned about ourselves and our company after one year?" My answer is simply, "A great deal!" I was delighted, for example, when improving the quality of customer service was placed on the list of goals. The customer, after all, is the ultimate boss. We have focused on such matters as reducing the number and length of service interruptions. Our periodic progress reports indicate that we are improving our performance noticeably.

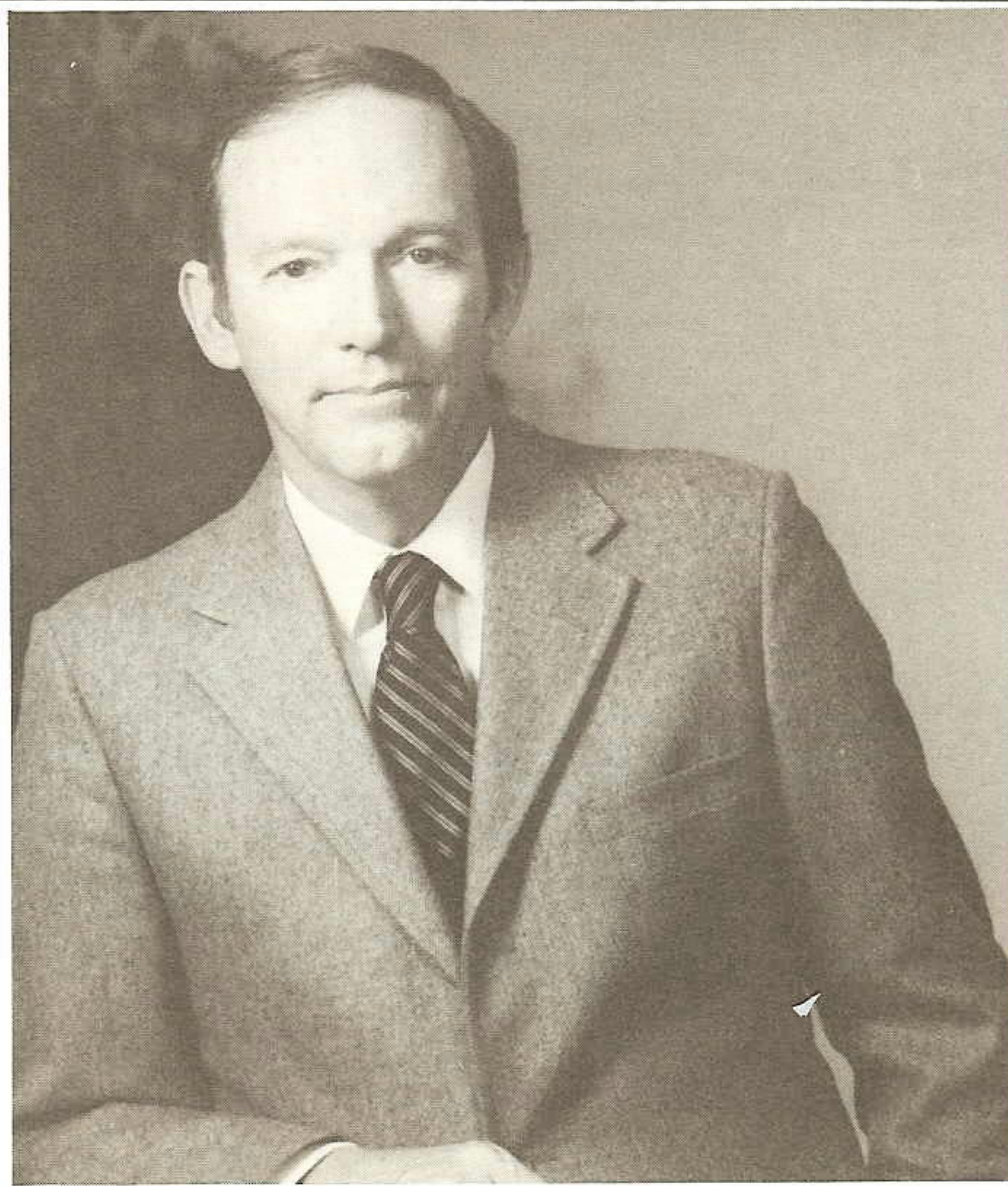
As a result of our goal-setting, we are all more conscious of taking care of company resources. To put it another way, we've done a better job of accomplishing goals simply because we've set them as goals. We all need goals, whether they be for work, family or in our spiritual lives. They give us direction and purpose. GSU's corporate goals are shifting us in the direction of dealing with important matters.

Our financial crisis is a well-documented fact. While we face many negatives in the months ahead, we are also finding positives along the way. Frequent checks

on our progress show that our difficulties are bringing out the best in every one of us. There is evidence that we are all working harder, are more serious about our work and that we all realize it is in our own best interests that GSU be successful. We are all trying to do our jobs better. This is proof of the truth of the old adage that tough times bring out the best in people.

River Bend remains much in the news these days, with regulatory agencies among the external forces holding the key to the financial future of the plant and ultimately of Gulf States. But the operational goals set for River Bend are under our control. The plant must be soundly and safely operated. If it is, that is the most important thing we can do to influence those external forces.

I am often reminded of a story about Andrew Carnegie. According to the story, a man once went to see Carnegie with an idea which he claimed could improve his business. The caller asked the millionaire to try it for six months, and if it worked, all he would ask for was a bonus. When



Carnegie agreed, the caller instructed him to call in all his employees and ask them to write down the four most serious problems they faced in their jobs. The employees were then ordered to spend half their time solving those very same problems. Carnegie must have been pleased with the results — he gave the man an \$85,000 bonus. Like Carnegie in that story, we are also learning the value of thinking clearly about the most important things confronting us, finding solutions and implementing them.

Last April, in this same space in *Plain Talks*, I noted that meeting these goals would not be easy, but that they would focus our attention and keep our various work groups from operating at cross purposes. After looking over our periodic report cards, I realize now that meeting many of these goals is even more challenging than I anticipated at the time. Nonetheless, we are doing it. We have our road map and we know our destination. We won't always enjoy the journey, but let's do what we can to make the trip successful.



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## Glad Sidings



*Children love the refurbished antique sleigh at his Christmas tree farm, reveals Doug Watkins (seated in sleigh). The GSU employee tells more about his business in the article on page 12.*