

Transcript

Bill Pollock

Welcome back in to Show Me Today. When storms knock out power here in Missouri, crews roll out with the tools and training to get the lights back on. But what happens when those same crews travel thousands of miles away to places where the challenges are bigger, the conditions are tougher, and the need just as urgent? Today we're talking with Craig Moeller and Jim McCarty about Missouri Electric Cooperative's international work and a program called Missouri on a Mission. They're here to tell us about their most recent project in Jamaica. Jim, how did Missouri Electric Cooperative get started with the international program?

Jim McCarty

Well, this kind of started back in the early 1960s when electric cooperatives were celebrating their 25th anniversary, and our national association came up with the idea of exporting the successful electric cooperative models to developing nations. So in 1962, which just happens to be the year I was born, President Kennedy signed an agreement between the electric cooperatives and USAID for International Development. And that was the beginning of these projects in developing countries.

Bill Pollock

Craig, how many trips have AMEC and Missouri Electric Cooperatives have made?

Craig Moeller

Yeah, we actually started back in 2016 with our first trip where we went to Bolivia and we went there two other times. So we've been three times to Bolivia, 4 times to Guatemala and now Jamaica is for our first time and this is our eighth trip overall.

Bill Pollock

Yeah, how did you end up doing the project in Jamaica?

Craig Moeller

So as everyone knows, Hurricane Melissa hit the island of Jamaica on October 28th as a category five. It was like the third largest landfall ever as far as a hurricane is concerned, with nearly 200 mile an hour winds that hit the kind of the southeastern part of the Jamaica island near a town called Black River, which is actually actually where we did a lot of our work restoring the power to the communities on the island. And how it kind of got put

together is I called Ingrid Hunsicker, and they were actually putting a trip together in December to send a group down from a national standpoint. And I think they got 10 linemen from 4 states to go down there. And actually one of them was from Missouri. that went down there and then three other states and went down there for a trip. And they went from December 1st to December 20th, about 19 to 20 days, something like that. And I think they had a little bit of a time getting 10 guys together on that short notice. So I called Ingrid after they left in December and offered for Missouri to go down and do a trip in January. So we put a team together real quick and brought eight guys down, 8 awesome guys down there to do the trip from January 12th to January 31st.

Bill Pollock

Do you have all of the bucket trucks and your normal equipment that you use on a day-by-day basis? Do you have that when you go overseas?

Craig Moeller

No, these trips, we do the old-fashioned way. We climb and do things, you know, it's kind of funny, our bird dog down there, Lester, he came up to us and we needed a wire reel to pick up a 3,500 pound reel of wire. And he said, shook his finger in front of me and said, no, He said, this is a third world country. You have to do it the hard way. So we actually flipped wire off the reel and for 14 spans and each span, you know, 250 feet, something like that. And this wire was probably about as round as a golf ball. So very heavy, very harsh conditions. But we do things the old-fashioned way.

Bill Pollock

That's Craig Moeller and Jim McCarty joining us. We're talking about Missouri on a mission. What kind of food and living conditions were there for the teams that do these projects?

Jim McCarty

I'll talk about the food a little bit. And first I have to stress that this was not a vacation. So we didn't have the normal food that you'd have if you made a trip to Jamaica. What we normally had were red beans and rice and then some kind of an entree such as chicken or I guess pork and that sort of thing. But we also saw things like chicken foot soup, pigtail soup, And one lunch actually was an entree that went to one of our helpers that consisted of cow hooves. But we did all right. I don't think anybody lost a whole lot of weight there. And there were two days where we did get to have some lobster that was caught right off the coast. And that was a real treat. And when we just couldn't take the red beans and rice anymore, we went to KFC. And that was actually very delicious. Yeah.

Bill Pollock

What are the living conditions like?

Craig Moeller

So yeah, some of the living conditions we We actually stayed in a hotel this time. It was about 45 minutes away. And the reason why we had to stay that far away was there was no power in the area that we were working on. So they put us in the next closest town, you know, because it was 85 to 90 degrees the whole time we were down there. So it was nice to kind of go back and have some air conditioning to sleep and cool down in the evenings and have good air conditioning to sleep in. Predominantly, when we go to Guatemala and Bolivia, we actually stay in the village and it's more like a glorified camping trip where you're staying on cots and air mattresses and stuff like that. But this trip, we actually kind of stayed in a hotel. So that was kind of nice to have a little bit better living conditions.

Bill Pollock

Yeah. What are some of the challenges that you face with a trip like this outside of the work that you're doing?

Craig Moeller

One of the biggest challenge we had was actually the traffic. And I think Jim can attest to that, we had traffic running right next to us 20, 30, 40 miles an hour within elbows reach. You know, it almost felt like sometimes their rearview mirrors on the side of the cars were brushing your elbows as you were going by. And obviously the heat being 85, 90 and humid, A shortage of materials was another big thing that we had to deal with and minimal equipment for the heavy type work that we were doing. So the guys really had to think outside the box. all of us together. But we had a good experience group that went down there where some of the past trips, what we've had to deal with was like altitude and the language barrier and rougher living conditions. You know, we didn't have to deal with some of that on this type of trip.

Bill Pollock

This segment of Show Me Today is brought to you by Missouri Electric Cooperative. And we're talking about Missouri on a mission. And you've taken several trips. Jim, what effect do these trips have on the volunteers who help?

Jim McCarty

I think Craig would agree with me that everybody that goes on these trips return better people than when they left. You end up seeing people living in what we would consider

poverty, but they got the biggest smiles on their faces. they've learned to make the most of their situation and having electricity is going to be a huge improvement for them. And you can't just help but feel good about what was accomplished. And then when you get home, you certainly appreciate the United States and your own home a whole lot more.

Bill Pollock

Craig, how are these trips funded?

Craig Moeller

So how we fund these trips, we actually do a rodeo here at the association and it will be in October of this year. We do that and we have sponsors that donate money to it. We usually make about \$35,000 each year. And Missouri goes on a trip every other year. So that's about \$70,000 that we make on the two rodeos during that time period. And also like to give a big shout out to CFC. They also give us money towards these trip in a matching grant type deal up to \$70,000. So a lot of the funds and stuff, there's all brought to you by those things. And sometimes the co-ops will also put in additional funds if we need more money to do a trip.

Bill Pollock

Craig, describe some of the damage that you saw there.

Craig Moeller

Well, as I said, you know, earlier, this hurricane came on land right in the town that we were in. So it was complete and utter destruction. You know, nearly 200 mile an hour winds were recorded. down there. They had 15 foot to 18 foot water surge come on land there. So it was complete utter destruction. Everything damaged and was being rebuilt for new. And you know, they'll be rebuilding structures and cleaning up for years to come.

Bill Pollock

Yeah, Jim and the people that the native people there, I'm assuming very pleased to see you and greeted you with open arms.

Jim McCarty

They were wonderful people. all these trips, we probably had more fun talking with the people, especially the kids. when you're through working and you got a little free time, didn't get to see the kids as much as we normally would, because, they were in school for the most part. However, the people that we would see, that in the homes that we were helping, just wonderful. And they would come out and visit with us. They're beautiful

people. They're strong-willed. They've been living without electricity for three months. And I didn't hear a lot of complaints. it was just, thank you guys so much for what you're doing. And then sometimes it was really cool to see them. They'd come up and just touch their heart and they'd say one word, respect. And that really gets you in the fields.

Bill Pollock

Oh, I bet. Yeah. that's got to affect all of you from all the volunteers that go down there. And you also had some help from Canadian linemen too, didn't you, Craig?

Craig Moeller

Some of the Canadians were actually working down there on contract. Several of them had been down there since the first part of December and we show up around January, mid January. So a lot of them had already been down there a month. working on the hurricane and being down there. And I think a lot of them worked there till nearly March. But they were very good to work with, work alongside. They had bucket trucks and stuff down there. And we waved them over to help us every once in a while if we needed a bucket truck where we couldn't get up a concrete pole or something.

Bill Pollock

We've been talking about Missouri on a mission through Missouri Electric Cooperatives. and they've taken trips to Guatemala, Bolivia, Jamaica, the latest trip. A lot of work. Jim, how long were you guys there? How long did this project take?

Jim McCarty

It was close to three weeks, which is pretty typical for all of these projects. So away from home for quite a bit of time. And like I said, it was no vacation. these guys worked every day except for two Sundays. They were able to take a day and go to the beach and kind of see the sights a little bit around the areas where we're working.

Bill Pollock

Yeah.

Jim McCarty

But it was mostly work. A lot of sore muscles at the end of the day for these guys.

Bill Pollock

You didn't run into any crocodiles or scorpions or any other crazy wildlife or.

Craig Moeller

Yeah. We were in our hotel room, we ran into a couple scorpions and then a couple big spiders in the room, but you just learn to live with them and move on. But we actually got to take a crocodile tour one afternoon. I think we saw six to seven crocodiles. One was close to 14 feet and that was one of the Sundays that we took off to where the guys got a chance to unwind like Jim was talking about and do something a little bit different and see the culture and the area down around where we were working.

Bill Pollock

An experience for you guys. So what's next for Missouri on a mission?

Craig Moeller

So right now, we'll be doing our next trip December of 2028, probably in Guatemala, unless something comes up like this again, where we kind of go in a different direction, like we went to Jamaica. But One of the things I want to do is thank all the guys that have been on these previous trips. We had a great group that went this time. We've had eight great groups that went on all these trips, but I also want to thank the families of the volunteers that sacrificed, you know, back at the home front, taking care of everything, you know, for the 2 1/2, three weeks that these guys are gone. You know, that's also something that, you know, they need to be thanked for as well.

Bill Pollock

These trips are amazing. AMEC and Missouri Electric Cooperatives are doing some great work. Craig Moeller and Jim McCarty, thank you for sharing about Missouri on a mission.

Craig Moeller

Thank you. Thank you.

Bill Pollock

This is Show Me Today, the voice of Missouri.