

70 years in 613 words

“It seems almost incredible but yet it is a fact... electricity can be useful... where power hitherto been supplied by coal, gas, or natural forces of wind or water”- The Port of Spain Gazette, 1885.

Back then, electricity seemed so unnatural that many described it as ‘magic’. When the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission (T&TEC) began operations on January 1, 1946, its mandate to electrify Trinidad and Tobago altered the course of the nation’s history forever. The wide spread electrification programme facilitated an improved quality of life for all and the exploitation of the nation’s oil and gas resources. Since then, T&TEC’s growth has been continuous and exponential. Its customer base grew from 6,613 in 1950 to over 462,000 in 2016, with corresponding peak demands for electricity moving from 10.4MW to 1396MW.

The success of the Commission is credited to the performance of its dedicated employees, both past and present, whose efforts ensure that its customers are kept on supply 24/7. This is in part a tribute to the focus on formal training programmes which were introduced and developed for craft trainees and engineers to ensure that technical competencies were always available to sustain the rapid growth. T&TEC is especially proud of this contribution to the national skills bank, which remains part of the Commission’s training plan to this day.

As demand steadily grew, further upgrades in generation capacity, and reliability, were facilitated by the divestment of the Commission’s generation assets in 1994.

Today, the demand for electricity to sustain everyday lifestyles and facilitate commercial and business development, continues to steadily climb, peaking in 2015, at 1,396MW with a projected generation requirement of 1,790MW by 2020. This pace of electricity



The building located at 63 Frederick Street prior to its demolition to give way to T&TEC’s Head Office.

demand has fast tracked future development works and challenged the Commission’s financial resources to maintain operations. Adding to the challenge is the comparatively cheap cost of electricity in Trinidad and Tobago. Based on T&TEC’s last rate adjustment for 2009-2010, the price of electricity is the second lowest rate per unit, among 28 countries in the Caribbean, where Suriname is the lowest.

On the other hand, Trinidad and Tobago’s electrification rate of 99%, places T&TEC as a leader in electrical energy in the Caribbean region and in the same rating category as countries such as Costa Rica, Chile and Brazil. T&TEC acknowledges however that to continue to provide a reliable quality service it must raise its efficiency standards. One initiative introduced is the acquisition of the ISO 9001:2008 Quality Management System. Already, four of five distribution areas have been accredited, with the fifth expected to be certified soon.

T&TEC’s commitment to a higher standard also extends to projects executed under the Government-funded National Street Lighting Programme and those behind the preservation and protection of the natural environment. T&TEC has become one of the few companies

in the Caribbean region to invest in renewable energy, with ongoing testing of wind and solar energy as an alternative to electricity. It is expected that Amendments to the T&TEC Act will be laid in Parliament before the end of 2016.

After 70 years, the progress of electricity has gone past what many had envisioned, but the words archived in the Port of Spain Gazette still hold true today, “What ten or a dozen years back was believed to be impossible is now to become a matter of common use and the world has given up on being surprised at each new development in science”.

As T&TEC celebrates another milestone as the sole supplier of electricity to the nation, it reaffirms its values of commitment, efficiency, safety and customer satisfaction that have brought the Commission to this time in its history, to guide the way to a brighter future.