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**SANTÉE ELECTRIC
COOPERATIVE NEWS**
Joanna Arnsmeier, *Editor*
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**SANTÉE ELECTRIC IS AN EQUAL
OPPORTUNITY PROVIDER AND
EMPLOYER.**



A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

Buddy, it's cold outside!



“Gradual changes can mean a big financial difference for you.”

THE CHRISTMAS SEASON has just passed, but a comment I recently received from a member made me think of a popular Christmas song. His words, however, were, “Buddy, it’s cold outside!”

What he meant by that was, “Hey Buddy, it’s too cold to turn my heat off during the three-hour peak window.” Now, that is definitely **not** what we are asking anyone to do. However, his misconception is likely shared by others. My topic for this month’s column, therefore, is—we do not want anyone to be uncomfortable. We just want to offer a financial incentive for your flexibility.

I looked through my past columns, and it has been more than a year since I talked about “discretionary loads.” For most folks, doing laundry (particularly running the electric clothes dryer), running the dishwasher, setting your oven on clean mode, baking a cake, running a pool filter pump and many other everyday processes can be shifted by a couple of hours or so without causing major disruption to your life. Those are the kinds of things we encourage folks to move completely outside of the peak hours when possible.

Microwaves, toasters, an eye or two on the stove—use those whenever you want. They really don’t use enough electricity to matter in the long run. Don’t ever let a rate schedule tell you when to cook a meal.

What about hot showers? Some folks shower before bed, and some shower before work or school. That’s none of my business, and I certainly do not want to tell you to change that! It is true that a traditional water heater (electric, with a tank) offers an opportunity to save money on a three-part rate. Your water heater cycles on and off all day to maintain the temperature you set. It is true that it cycles on more when you use some of the hot water in your tank. However, it is also true that two to three people can take showers on 40 or 50 gallons of hot water, and your water heater can keep that water hot for three hours, even if it switches off during peak. If you are interested in a water heater switch, let us know.

Finally, let’s talk about the main subject—it’s cold outside! You need to run your heat during the winter, and your heat will almost certainly run during peak hours. All we are doing is giving a financial incentive to run your heat a little less during those three hours. Smart thermostats can preheat your home in that hour leading up to 6 a.m. Then, perhaps you lower your thermostat a few degrees during peak hours. Those gradual changes are often not noticed but can mean a big financial difference for you.

I hope this month’s column was helpful. If you have any questions, give us a call. There are a lot of smart and helpful folks here that I am blessed to work with. We can help!

ROBERT G. ARDIS III
President and Chief Executive Officer

Senator Mike Reichenbach

Q&A with District 31 Senator

BY JOANNA ARNSMEYER

MIKE REICHENBACH FELT CALLED to serve. In 2022, he and his wife, Charisse, had just become empty nesters and were looking for a new adventure. Owners of auto dealerships in Florence, the couple felt called to do something more. When the Senate seat for Florence County opened unexpectedly, Reichenbach knew he wanted to run.

“It was time for us to shift our focus from a life of success to a life of significance and how to help others,” Reichenbach says.

Reichenbach won the 2022 special election and was re-elected in 2024. He is fond of saying that Charisse is “half the senator for Florence County.”

“She is my life partner, and we make all decisions together,” he says.

Together, the Reichenbachs strive to live up to the promises they made to the constituents of District 31.

Why did you go into public service?

The short answer revolves around a belief that the government needs more businesspeople who understand budgets, limited spending, and the fact that the government has no money of its own; it is the taxpayer’s money.

When I ran in the special election in 2022, we created a “Contract with the Pee Dee.” It contained the most critical topics that we wanted to focus on, including term limits, giving away 100% of my Senate salary to Florence area non-profits, fighting for limited spending and voting for the largest tax reductions in the state’s history. We also support the second amendment, protecting the unborn, working for transparency in government and limiting government to its core functions.

Charisse and I hold “conversations with the community” at different restaurants in the district. We take this as



JOANNA ARNSMEYER

District 31 Senator Mike Reichenbach (right) with Ronald Carter, SEC manager of economic development and government affairs, says he is focusing on a life of significance and helping others.

our opportunity to hear from our constituents, and we ask them to hold us accountable.

What’s the most satisfying part of your role? The most challenging?

The most satisfying part is when you can help constituents navigate the challenges of government. When individuals reach out for assistance, it’s up to us to provide an answer or point them in the right direction. My goal as a public servant is to help instill confidence in the government, demonstrating that it truly serves the people.

As a people pleaser, I have to accept that when I make a decision or vote on a bill, not everyone will like the decision. There has never been a uniform decision where all our constituents want the same thing.

What challenges face the rural communities you represent?

Economic development opportunities are a big deal in our rural communities. Several towns in our district have minimal job opportunities. We need to figure out how to approach workforce development, as well as economic development, not just in the City of Florence. The city wouldn’t survive without workers coming in from the county’s small towns; likewise, the rural areas wouldn’t survive without the opportunities in the city. South Carolina is growing, but we also need growth in the Pee Dee region.

Senator Mike Reichenbach

DISTRICT 31—FLORENCE COUNTY

COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

- ▶ Labor, Commerce and Industry
- ▶ Transportation
- ▶ Banking and Insurance
- ▶ Judiciary
- ▶ Family and Veteran’s Services

EDUCATION: Bowling Green State University 1994; University of Michigan, 2000, MBA

OCCUPATION: President & Owner, Mike Reichenbach Ford, Chevy & Volkswagen of Florence

FAMILY: Wife, Charisse Alexandra Reichenbach, and two children, Olivia and Isaiah

How are you encouraging economic development in Santee’s service territory?

Rural communities deserve opportunities for job growth. We have supported the Scranton Industrial Park served by Santee Electric Cooperative and the potential opportunities it will bring to the area.

I am grateful for Santee Electric because they work to raise the quality of life for residents in both rural and urban communities.

What is the most important issue that could affect the co-op?

South Carolina needs more energy production. This issue is something we must focus on. Our constituents deserve that. We can’t kick this can down the road.



MEGAN BLACKBURN

Eighteen SEC employees helped with the clean-up efforts at Lynch River County Park.



JOANNA ARNSMEYER

SEC employees Kevin Myers (left) and Chris Williams helped chop trees during the cleanup at Kingstree Cemetery.

Brightening our community

SEC employees take part in clean-up projects

On a warm day in November, Santee Electric employees Greg Beckum and Jay Kirby were hard at work raking up old pine straw and trimming overgrown shrubbery in a flower bed at Lynch River County Park. The two were among a team of SEC employees who took part in a clean-up project that enhanced the natural beauty of the park grounds.

“One of our core principles at Santee Electric is Concern for Community, which drives us to give back through meaningful projects,” says Jay Kirby, vice president of Public Affairs. “Over the years, we

have completed various ‘Christmas in...’ initiatives aimed at supporting our membership. We take pride in strengthening our community and supporting those in need.”

In late 2024, Santee Electric employees completed two community projects that reflect the cooperative’s commitment to making a positive impact.

Lynch River County Park cleanup

Lynch River County Park is located on the Lynch River in Coward, between Florence and Santee. The 676-acre park offers a range of activities, ranging from canoeing and kayaking to hiking, fishing and geocaching. Santee Electric employees recently completed a project focused on enhancing the beauty of the flower and garden beds around the Environmental Discovery Center and clearing debris from the nature trails. This cleanup effort helped to restore the park’s natural charm.

Historical Kingstree Cemetery

Dating back to 1876, the Historical Kingstree Cemetery is one of the oldest public African American cemeteries in Williamsburg County. Numerous World War II veterans and more than 100 Fulton family graves are on the site. SEC was proud to participate in a community initiative aimed at cleaning up the cemetery.

As part of this effort, the co-op made a monetary donation to contribute to the construction of a new fence around the cemetery. In addition, SEC employees and contract crews dedicated their time and effort to help clear away debris and clean up the grounds to improve the historic cemetery’s appearance.



MEGAN BLACKBURN

Greg Beckum (left) and Jay Kirby work on clearing out the flower beds around the Environmental Discovery Center.



MEGAN BLACKBURN

Lineman Chad Miles works on heavy duty clean-up efforts.



JOANNA ARNSMEYER

Contract tree trimming crews help SEC employees with the clean clean-up efforts at the Kingstree Cemetery.

TEXT US! SEC HAS A FREE texting service for members that allows you to report outages, check the status of your outage, receive restoration notices and important updates by text message. Members may also receive notifications from SEC concerning planned service interruptions in your area and/or other emergency information pertinent to potential service interruptions.

THE NUMBER IS CHANGING!
Opt into our texting service by texting **SECIN** to (843) 355-6187. Your mobile number must be on file to use this option; if not, call us to update your contact information. For more information visit [santee.org/text](https://www.santee.org/text).
Message and data rates may apply. Please check with your carrier if you aren’t sure about your text messaging plan.

Congratulations, teachers!

SEC awards Bright Ideas grants



Santee Electric was proud to award 15 Bright Ideas grants for \$1,000 each in 2024. Bright Ideas provides funding for innovative classroom-based projects. Santee Electric is committed to its core principle of Concern for Community. That's why the cooperative supports local teachers who are doing important work in our communities. Santee Electric believes that investing in our teachers and students is an investment in the future of our community.

Grants are available to all kindergarten through 12th grade teachers in Santee Electric's service territory. Each applicant is judged anonymously. There is no limit to creativity in the Bright Ideas grant, and there was a wide range of initiatives in the 2024 projects.

PLAN TO APPLY Teachers, be on the lookout for the Bright Ideas application opening in July. You could be a 2025 Bright Ideas Grant winner!

Photos provided by Joanna Arnsmeayer

Florence County

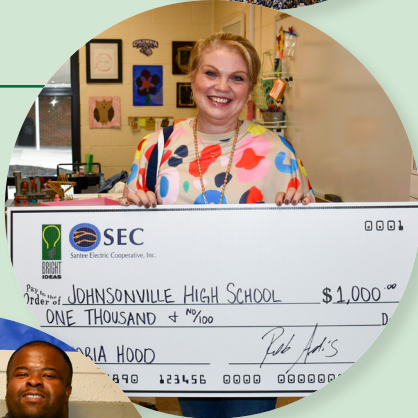
JOHNSONVILLE MIDDLE SCHOOL

Angie McClellan received a grant for her project, "Hanging in the Balance."



JOHNSONVILLE HIGH SCHOOL

Victoria Hood received a grant for her project, "Sweet Success with Life Skills."



Georgetown County

CARVERS BAY EARLY COLLEGE & CAREER HIGH SCHOOL

Tiffany McCullough and Nicole Tucker-Young (not pictured) received a grant for their project, "Drone Dash Deliveries."



GEORGETOWN HIGH SCHOOL

Tonya Todd received a grant for her project, "Bringing Virtual Reality into Math and Computer Science."



Williamsburg County

WILLIAMSBURG ACADEMY

Rebecca Cox received a grant for her project, "Growing...Growing... Grown!"



DR. RONALD E. MCNAIR SCHOOL OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATION AND LEADERSHIP

Amanda Collars-White and Dorrell Benjamin received a grant for their project, "Beautiful Waste: Earth and Life Sciences into Practice."



KENNETH GARDNER LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

Emmanuel Sampeny received a grant for his project, "Light It Up: Understanding Circuits and Energy Use."



KINGSTREE MIDDLE MAGNET SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

Rejee Kezia Arul Jose received a grant for her project, "Lab Journal Using LCD Display Microscope."



HEMINGWAY M.B. LEE MIDDLE SCHOOL

Amanda Barron received a grant for her project, "Beginner's Book Publishing."



HEMINGWAY HIGH SCHOOL

Chakaris Thomas received a grant for her project, "Wearing My Art."

Clarendon County

WALKER GAMBLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Chelsie Cannon received a grant for her project, "Full STEAM Ahead."



WALKER GAMBLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Jessie Welch received a grant for his project, "Creating, Presenting, Responding, and Connecting through Puppetry!"



EAST CLARENDON MIDDLE-HIGH SCHOOL

Brandi Baker received a grant for her project, "Next Stop: HOLLYWOOD!"



EAST CLARENDON MIDDLE-HIGH SCHOOL

Charlotte Driggers received a grant for her project, "Where Imagination Meets Creations in Printmaking."



EAST CLARENDON MIDDLE-HIGH SCHOOL

Sheri Sims received a grant for her project, "Another Look."

Scholarships Available



Operation Round Up Scholarship (\$2,500)

The SEC Round Up Trust will provide one \$2,500 scholarship in each of the four counties that we serve.

Empower the Future Scholarship (\$1,000)

Santee Electric Cooperative offers multiple \$1,000 scholarships to seniors from the high schools in our service territory.

Annual Meeting Scholarship (\$500)

Eight \$500 scholarships will be awarded to high school seniors at our Annual Meeting on April 15.

Applications and scholarship guidelines are available at santee.org/sec-schools.

The deadline to apply is April 1.



Ready for an experience you won't forget?

Your co-op has two amazing trips planned this summer. Juniors: Apply for the Washington Youth Tour. Sophomores: Apply for the Cooperative Youth Summit.

Juniors: Experience Washington, D.C., with hundreds of students from across South Carolina and the country, meeting lawmakers and touring all the sights. Your electric co-op will cover your round-trip plane ticket, tours and meals. In other words, it's all free!

Sophomores: Experience South Carolina's capital like never before. Tour the Statehouse, meet lawmakers and see how co-ops are preparing for our state's energy future. Plus, there's plenty of fun with visits to popular Columbia attractions like Riverbanks Zoo & Garden. Your electric co-op will cover all your expenses.

We've made it easy to apply for either FREE trip. Apply today!



Washington Youth Tour: June 15-20, 2025



ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES OF SOUTH CAROLINA



Cooperative Youth Summit: July 14-17, 2025



Applications available: santee.org/youth
Application deadline: February 21, 2025

