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SANTEE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE NEWS
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SANTEE ELECTRIC IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY PROVIDER AND EMPLOYER.



A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



Protecting lives and power

I HOPE EVERYONE is off to a great New Year. Unfortunately, I need to address a relatively negative topic in my first column of the year—interfering with

the electric system. South Carolina's electric cooperatives are working with the General Assembly this legislative session to pass legislation to make the penalties for doing this much harsher. I want to explain why.

"Interference" can cover a range of issues, including entering our work zones, theft of materials, attempting to reconnect your own power and even threatening employees. I believe in the best of human nature, and I think people just do not realize the harm they could cause when they take such actions.

Regarding work zones, we simply need you to stay away. Electricity is hazardous when not handled properly, and so are poles, crossarms and the heavy equipment we use. To put things into perspective, I am an electrical engineer and have worked in the electric utility business for 25 years, and I still never enter one of our work zones unless I'm wearing the proper protective equipment and I have been given permission by the crew foreman. Members of the public are not going to have either of those things, so we just need you to stay clear. Even if your goal is to pay a compliment, please don't do it while the guys are working.

Theft is obviously wrong, but I believe the average thief has no idea how dangerous it is to steal from the utility system. People will occasionally see our ground conductors (on poles, equipment, substation fences, etc.) and think they have a quick way to get scrap value for the copper. First, we do not use copper

anymore—it's copper-clad steel which has no scrap value. Second, the system becomes very dangerous when not properly grounded. I have seen some terrible pictures of thieves who tried to cut the wrong conductor. Don't do it!

Reconnecting your own power (or attempting to) is illegal and can also kill you or others. Whether you have been disconnected for nonpayment or are out of power because of a storm or other outage, it is very dangerous to try to "fix" your own problem. Someone who sees a fuse hanging open might think, "All I need to do is close that, and I'll have lights." Trust me, though, that fuse is open for a reason. Either the fault that blew the fuse is still on the line or someone is working downline of it. Do not, under any circumstances, try to restore your own power.

I feel certain that no one who reads this magazine needs to hear what I just wrote. All of us probably know someone, however, who needs to hear this, so please pass it on to them. Promise me you'll stay safe out there, and I'll promise my February column will be much more light-hearted!

ROBERT G. ARDIS III

President and Chief Executive Officer

SANTEE EXTRA

Check out pages 12A-D to see who won a Bright Ideas grant in 2025, information on Washington Youth Tour and Cooperative Youth Summit and scholarship information!

Young artists shine

Christmas Card Contest highlights students' creativity

EVERY HOLIDAY SEASON, Santee Electric Cooperative loves giving local students a chance to show off their creativity in our Christmas card contest.

Open to 4th and 5th grade students across SEC's service territory, the contest celebrates the imagination and festive spirit of our community's youngest artists.

The 2025 entries were full of creativity and festive designs. After careful consideration, SEC announced five talented winners whose artwork captured the magic of the season:

- ▶ **Maggie McCrary**, 5th grade student of Lauren McCrary at Laurence Manning Academy.
- ▶ **Gracelynn Sanders**, 5th grade student of Lauren McCrary at Laurence Manning Academy.
- ▶ **Paislee McElveen**, 5th grade student of Jessie Welch at Walker Gamble Elementary School.
- ▶ **Heidi Poston**, 5th grade student of Britney Nobles at Scranton



Maggie McCrary's design.



Gracelynn Sanders's design.

Elementary STEAM Academy.

- ▶ **Leira Fivek**, 5th grade student of Kenley Thomas at Pleasant Hill Elementary STREAM Academy.

These young artists demonstrated incredible talent and creativity, making 2025's contest truly memorable.

Congratulations to Maggie, Gracelynn, Paislee, Heidi and Leira!



Paislee McElveen of Walker Gamble Elementary School.



Heidi Poston of Scranton Elementary STEAM Academy.



Leira Fivek of Pleasant Hill Elementary STREAM Academy.

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 the South Carolina State Museum. 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 14-19, 2026



Cooperative Youth Summit: July 13-16, 2026



Applications available: santee.org/youth

Application deadline: February 20, 2026



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Congratulations, teachers!

SEC awards Bright Ideas grants



Santee Electric was proud to award 16 Bright Ideas grants ranging from \$500-\$1,000 to local teachers in our community.

Bright Ideas provides funding for innovative classroom-based projects. Santee Electric is com-

mitted to its core principle of Concern for Community. That's why we love being able to support 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, and we're proud to be a part of that effort.

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 2025 projects.

Teachers, be on the lookout for the Bright Ideas application opening in July. You could be a 2026 Bright Ideas Grant winner!

Photos by Joanna Hayes

Clarendon County

EAST CLARENDON MIDDLE HIGH SCHOOL

Charlotte Driggers,
“Sculpted by Heat”



Georgetown County

GEORGETOWN HIGH SCHOOL

Tonya Todd, “Math in Motion: Finch Robots for Real-World STEM Learning”



WALKER GAMBLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Chelsie Cannon, “Digital Steam Learning”

Team Jessie Welch and Aunde Harrington, “Light up the Future! Creative Arts and Engineering”



KENSINGTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

DeAnne Shelley, “Firsties Sharing with Technology”

SAMPIT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Joni Alford, “Turning Struggling Readers into Lifelong Learners”



Florence County

DEWEY L. CARTER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Karen Coker, "Hands-On Learning, Minds-On Growth"



DEWEY L. CARTER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Shirlee Padgett, "Manipulate the Math"



HANNAH-PAMPICO ELEMENTARY MIDDLE SCHOOL

Crystal Kelly, "Sensory Needs for Classroom"



JOHNSONVILLE HIGH SCHOOL

Jen Hodges, "Capturing Community: En Plein Air Architectural Painting"



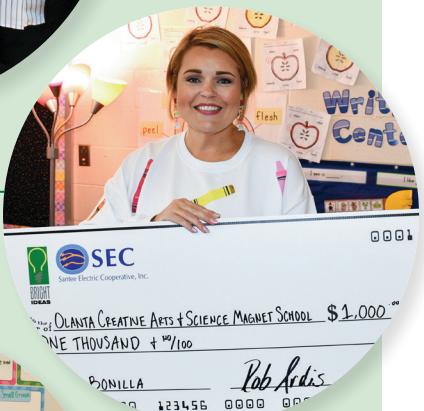
LAKE CITY EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER OF THE ARTS

Stacey Gambrell, "Lil Chickadee Farmers"



LAKE CITY EARLY COLLEGE HIGH

Team Deborah Wynter and Melissa Barr, "School Based Enterprise Expanding Horizons"



OLANTA CREATIVE ARTS & SCIENCE MAGNET SCHOOL

Ashley Bonilla, "Big Adventures for Little Learners: Expanding Horizons at EdVenture"



Williamsburg County

KENNETH GARDNER LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

Katie Floyd, "Storytelling Through Media"



WILLIAMSBURG ACADEMY

Rebecca Cox, "Authors in Action"



SEC

Santee Electric Cooperative Inc.

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Scholarships Available

Operation Round Up Scholarship **\$2,500**

The SEC Round Up Trust awards one \$2,500 scholarship to high school seniors in each of the four counties that we serve.

Empower the Future Scholarship **\$1,000**

Santee Electric Cooperative awards 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 during our Annual Meeting on April 14.

**Applications and scholarship guidelines are available at santee.org/sec-schools.
The deadline to apply is March 26.**