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SANTEE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE NEWS
 Joanna Hayes, *Editor*
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SANTEE ELECTRIC IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY PROVIDER AND EMPLOYER.



A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



Meet Nicole Bennett

TO HELP CELEBRATE SUMMER, I want to spotlight another of Santee Electric’s awesome employees! This month, I introduce you to Nicole

Bennett, member service supervisor in our Georgetown Office.

Nicole, the daughter of Mildred and Willie, was born and raised in Trio, and she wants to make sure all our readers understand this is pronounced “try-oh.” Proud of her home community, she is quick to point out, “Today, I live one minute away from the home I grew up in.” She attended primary and middle school at Williamsburg-Blakeley, and she went to Andrews for high school.

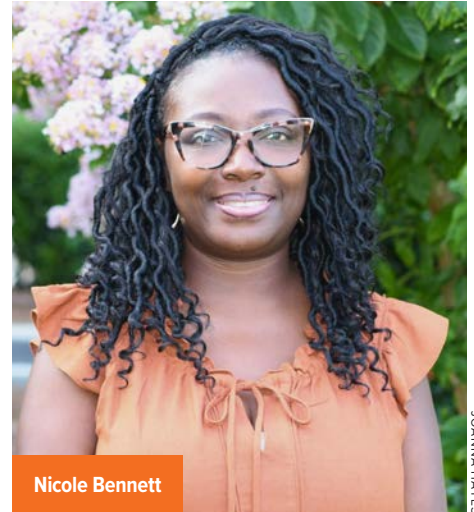
After high school, she did hair in Andrews for 10 years before deciding she wanted to try something new. Her career at SEC started in 2004, initially through a temp agency. She came to work for us in 2008. Though she started in Kingstree, she moved to our Georgetown office more than 10 years ago and has been in the manager position for the past 2 years.

I ask Nicole about her job here at SEC, and she immediately mentions her compassion for our folks.

“I love being able to help people,” she says. “Our members are a lot of fun, and I love getting to know them. I’ve been here for quite a while, so much so that I get sad when I read a name in an obituary.”

When asked about the hardest part of her job, Nicole says, “Seeing needs that are sometimes outside the boundaries of what we can do to help.”

Nicole also points out how much she likes the people she works with.



Nicole Bennett

JOANNA HAYES

“My coworkers are great,” she says. “I love working with them every day.”

She also wants to make sure our readers know, “We are not the bad guys. We can help you. Start off with that because it’s true.”

When I ask Nicole what she does outside of work, she mentions a few things.

“I enjoy planting flowers around my house. I love cooking and grilling—seafood, mostly—but I’ve also finally mastered perlo.” Naturally, I ask her which was her preferred spelling because all of us around here spell it differently!

Nicole’s true passion outside of work, however, is her daughter. Madison is 20 and a rising junior at Francis Marion University, studying business management. Nicole and Madison do a great deal together, but they love taking trips, shopping and checking out various restaurants.

If you see Nicole around Georgetown or Trio, say hello! If you see her this month, tell her Happy Birthday because Nicole was born in July. Great timing for this column!

SEC EXTRA

Check out pages 12A-12D for updates on the Cooperative LIGHT Fundraiser, a feature story on Embroidery Solutions and information on the Bright Ideas teacher grant.

ROBERT G. ARDIS III
 President and Chief Executive Officer

Representative Lucas Atkinson

Q&A with District 57 Representative

BY JOANNA HAYES

LUCAS ATKINSON has one primary goal: to be accessible and responsive to his constituents. He believes that accessibility is essential for anyone in public service. Since being elected to serve District 57 in 2016, Atkinson has been honored to represent his community.

Why did you go into public service?

Growing up in a family involved in public service, I always knew it was something I wanted to pursue. My grandfather served as mayor of Marion for 25 years and later in the House of Representatives. My father has been the probate judge in Marion County for 38 years. I was fortunate to have such strong examples to look up to.

After graduating from college, I went to work for (now) Senator Kent Williams, where I learned a great deal and further confirmed my passion for public service. In 2016, when our former representative retired, I felt the time was right to take a chance and run.

What's the most satisfying part of your job? The most challenging?

I enjoy staying involved in our community. I work closely with several local charities, helping organize back-to-school drives and food drives. One event that means a lot to me takes place on Thanksgiving Day, when I partner with a local sheriff's department to provide 500 meals to people who might not otherwise have one. It's a special opportunity to come together and support our neighbors.

As far as the most challenging, right now, the political climate at the national level feels very divided. I hope we don't see that same division take hold in our local communities. Regardless of whether someone is a Republican or a Democrat, we can still work together to do what's best for the people we serve.

What challenges do the rural communities you represent face?

I represent a diverse district, with rural areas in Williamsburg and Marion counties, as well as urban and suburban communities in Horry County. That gives me a broad perspective on the different needs across our region. One issue that impacts all three counties is road management. Improving and maintaining our infrastructure is critical to supporting our communities.

In our rural areas, access to jobs and resources is especially important. South Carolina is one of the fastest-growing states, and while growth is a good thing, it needs to be managed



District 57 Representative Lucas Atkinson (third from left) talks with Santee Electric employees at Co-op Day at the State House.

Representative Lucas Atkinson

District 57- Horry, Marion, and Williamsburg counties

Committee Assignments

- ▶ Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Environmental Affairs, Secretary
- ▶ Government Efficiency and Legislative Oversight

Education: Clemson University, B.S.

Occupation: Insurance agent

wisely. We need to make sure we don't overbuild or outpace our resources and energy capacity. I support our electric cooperatives and their efforts to expand generation where it's needed, but again, it must be done thoughtfully.

How is serving as Secretary on the Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Environmental Affairs Committee?

I asked to be on this committee when I was elected because it reflects what matters most to the communities I represent. I wanted to serve in a role where I could make an impact on the issues people care about every day.

How does Santee Electric help you to serve your constituents?

Santee Electric has always been supportive. They do a great job of keeping me informed, and they're active in the community. The cooperative model really makes a difference. There's strength in numbers, and the cooperatives of the state do a great job representing and serving their members.

I'm grateful to the residents of Williamsburg County for the opportunity to represent them. I always encourage folks to reach out if they have an issue or if there's anything I can help with. Please don't hesitate to call.

Together for change

Cooperative LIGHT Fundraiser raises \$48,000

THE 3RD ANNUAL Cooperative LIGHT Fundraiser was a day filled with fun, fellowship and purpose. Held at Backwoods Quail Club, the Sporting Clays Fundraiser welcomed more than 100 participants, all rallying behind Cooperative LIGHT's mission to uplift and empower children in need.

Thanks to the unwavering support of our dedicated attendees and the generosity of our incredible sponsors, the event raised an impressive \$48,000. These funds will directly support Cooperative LIGHT's ongoing efforts to provide essential resources to students across our service areas. From clothing, shoes and coats to hygiene products and AED machines, Cooperative LIGHT helps ensure that children facing economic hardships, and the schools that serve them, have access to the tools they need to thrive.

Founded by employees of Santee Electric Cooperative, Cooperative LIGHT is rooted in the seventh cooperative principle: Concern for Community. The program works closely with schools throughout SEC's service territory to identify students in need and provide meaningful support, helping ensure no child is held back by their circumstances. School representatives can also request assistance through the online donation request form at santee.org/cooperative-light.

We extend our sincere thanks to all our sponsors. Your generosity is a powerful reminder that when a community comes together, there is no limit to the impact we can make.



The more than 100 participants in the Cooperative LIGHT Sporting Clays Fundraiser enjoyed lunch together during the event.

PHOTOS BY JOANNA HAYES



Congratulations to Zach Davenport, Trip Jackson (left to right) and Michael Toemmes (not pictured) from Coastal Structures for taking 1st place. Coastal Structures was the proud Presenting Sponsor of the 2026 Fundraiser.

Thank you 2026 sponsors!

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Made in America

Embroidery Solutions produces star fields for American flags

BY JOANNA HAYES

THE AMERICAN FLAG is a source of pride for all Americans, especially during the 250th anniversary of the country's founding.

Being a part of making the American flag is an even bigger honor for Embroidery Solutions, its employees and owner Larry Severini.

"The American flag is the unifying symbol representing all the commitments and sacrifices that generations of our forefathers have made," says Severini. "They fought for it and died for it."

Embroidery Solutions specializes in producing star fields, the embroidered stars on the blue background of the American flag. If you have a porch flag, it's likely Embroidery Solutions had a part in making it. The company produces 3.5-million-star fields of all sizes per year. This represents up to 60% of the star fields for all American flags made in the United States.

The flags Embroidery Solutions helps produce fly over some of the nation's most important landmarks, including the White House, the U.S. Capitol, the Senate and House of Representatives,



Larry Severini (left), owner of Embroidery Solutions, and Ronald Carter, SEC manager economic development and government affairs.

PHOTOS BY JOANNA HAYES

and all government offices such as post offices and military bases around the world. The company sells its star fields to flag manufacturers, whose finished products are then distributed for commercial sales through a nationwide network of flag dealers, represented by the National Independent Flag Dealers Association (NIFDA) as well as to retailers such as Home Depot, Lowes, Target, Sam's Club and Costco.

A member of the Flag Manufacturing Association of America (FMAA), Severini is passionate about supporting the American-made flag industry.

Embroidery Solutions

- ▶ Schiffler embroidery manufacturer.
- ▶ Produces star fields for United States of America flags.
- ▶ Largest embroidery factory in America.
- ▶ Located in Kingstree.

"The product we make is deeply symbolic," says Severini. "I think Americans deserve to know where their flags were made."

The Flags Manufacturers Association of America represents over 90% of all American flag makers and provides a "FMAA Certification" label that is placed on flags made entirely in the United States. This helps distinguish flags made in the U.S. from foreign-made flags, which are often falsely advertised as American-made.

The domestic industry sells millions of sewn American flags each year. However, unfortunately, a similar number of flags are imported, mostly from China. Severini serves as the Washington liaison for the Flags Manufacturers Association



Employees, like Yorlenis Gomez, are dedicated to precision in their work.



Embroidery Solutions specializes in star fields, the embroidered stars on the blue background of the American flag.

of America, advocating for transparency and domestic manufacturing.

Embroidery Solutions' commitment to quality and reliability is rooted in its history. The company specializes in schiffl embroidery, a precise, machine-made embroidery technique, which dates back over 150 years to hand-operated machines. The equipment the company uses today to produce star fields was originally developed to make lace.

Embroidery Solutions was created in 2008 when Severini and business partner Victor Gorlaski combined forces. Before joining together, each owned his own business. Severini started in lace embroidery within home furnishings and the women's fashion industries, founding his company in New Jersey. During the 1980s and 1990s, as much of the industry moved offshore, domestic demand for women's fashion and home furnishing embroidery declined significantly. In response, Severini's company pivoted to star fields, an area in which Gorlaski was already working.

When operations in Kingstree began in 2008, the company had about 20 employees and was running six older model schiffl machines. Today Embroidery Solutions has 95 full-time employees and 12 of the most technologically advanced schiffl machines in the world, running 24 hours a day. The company is now the largest schiffl embroidery factory in America.

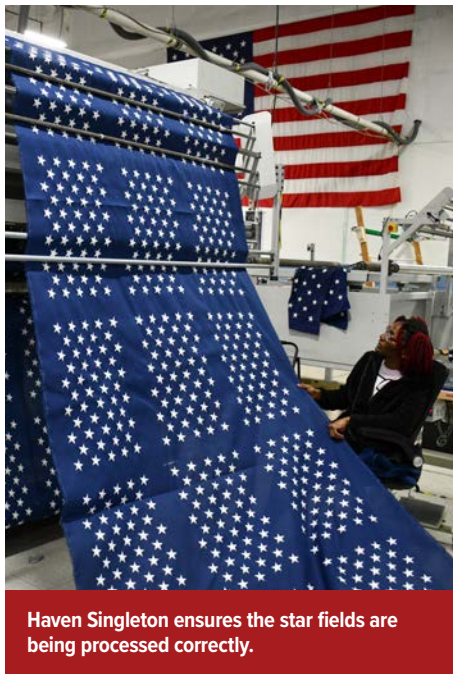
"The state of South Carolina has been tremendously supportive of manufacturing and our small business," says Severini. "The Department of Commerce, local government, the Williamsburg Economic Development Group, SC Manufacturing Extension Partnership and Santee Electric have all helped us thrive. Santee Electric has been a great champion of our company."

Beyond manufacturing, Embroidery Solutions is dedicated to giving back. The company has provided support to Quilts of Valor, an organization dedicated to making quilts for military members, for almost 15 years. The quilts made are awarded to living U.S. military service



Ashley Burrows is involved in one of the last steps of making the star fields.

PHOTOS BY JOANNA HAYES



Haven Singleton ensures the star fields are being processed correctly.



Embroidery Solutions is helping create a special edition Betsy Ross flag in honor of 250 years of the United States of America.

members or veterans who served from 1910 to the present. Eligible individuals include those with honorable or general discharge, active-duty personnel, National Guard and Reservists.

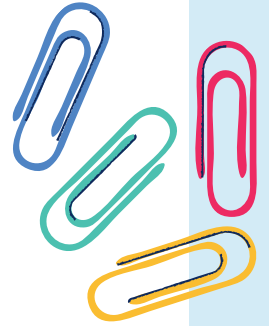
Embroidery Solutions donates leftover fabric and star fields to help the organization with its initiative.

"Quilts of Valor was something I came across watching the news 15 years ago," says Severini. "When I saw what they were doing, I knew it aligned with what

we are passionate about and that we could help. Instead of throwing away leftover fabric, we give it to them to help with their quilts."

Supporting Quilts of Valor is another way Embroidery Solutions demonstrates its commitment to America and those who have served their country.

The next time you see an American flag flying high, there's a good chance Embroidery Solutions had a hand in making it.



**TEACHERS IN WILLIAMSBURG, GEORGETOWN,
CLARENDON AND FLORENCE COUNTIES**

**APPLICATIONS ARE OPEN FOR
THE BRIGHT IDEAS GRANT!**

Bright Ideas grants are intended to fund projects outside normal school funding parameters and are available to all disciplines in grades K-12. Grants are awarded for up to \$1,000 each. The Bright Ideas Grant is a fantastic opportunity to bring creative and engaging projects to your school, take advantage of it!

For more information about the Bright Ideas grant program and the application, visit santee.org/bright-ideas. Completed applications are due by **Monday, September 21, 2026**.



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