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**SANTÉE ELECTRIC
COOPERATIVE NEWS**

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**SANTÉE ELECTRIC IS AN EQUAL
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Fall brings change

MY SEPTEMBER COLUMN IS usually one of the tougher ones to write, because the things that are top-of-mind right now are weather related and could easily change by

the time you receive this issue.

June and July were incredibly hot. July had one stretch of nearly a week with the actual temperature (not the heat index) in triple digits. In addition to these extremes, hurricane season is more than two months old, and we have barely heard a peep about storms. These two things, of course, can change a great deal as we enter the peak of hurricane season.

Now is a great time to check your emergency supplies and make sure your home is ready for whatever the season may bring. I am hoping, of course, that temperatures are milder and the hurricane forecast is still quiet as you read this.

I enjoy September because it does feel so much like a change. Though I do not love the fact that daylight decreases a bit each day, the temperatures in the morning and evening are quite nice. Also, school has started back, which brings me to my next topic. Please let our local teachers know about our Bright Ideas grant program. More information is below.

Another exciting school program coming up is our Christmas Card design competition, which is open to 4th and 5th grade students. It's a fun and creative way for young artists to showcase their talents, and we always look forward to seeing the wonderful designs they come up with.

We also offer a program called "Experts in the Classroom." Through this initiative, we're happy to send Santee Electric professionals into classrooms to talk about their careers.

These experts represent a wide range of fields, including linemen, accounting, substation operations, engineering, public relations and member services. It's a great opportunity for students to learn firsthand about different career paths. Reach out to us if your class is interested.

These are just a couple of examples of how your cooperative is passionate about students.

Fall is just around the corner, and I hope it treats you well. I also hope you are reading this with a clear storm forecast!

ROBERT G. ARDIS III
President and Chief Executive Officer

Bright Ideas applications due Sept. 22

TEACHERS IN Williamsburg, Georgetown, Clarendon and Florence counties—don't forget to submit your applications for a 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. A school may submit multiple applications, but a teacher is limited to one application per school year. 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, Sept. 22.

Investing in bright futures

A VISIT TO the governor's office, lessons in public speaking and a Q&A session with a state legislator seems like a jam-packed summer.

But thanks to Santee Electric Cooperative and South Carolina's electric cooperatives, three local high school students experienced those things and more in the span of just four days in July. Jerimiah Pendergrass of Kingstree High School, Matthew Taylor of Laurence Manning Academy and Akshith Vipin of Kingstree High School represented Santee Electric at Cooperative Youth Summit, an exploration of the state's capital, civic engagement and the cooperative business model. Joanna Arnsmeyer, manager of community relations for Santee Electric, served as a chaperone on the trip.

The students, 51 in all from across the state, learned about South Carolina's contribution to space exploration at the South Carolina State Museum, met with some of Gov. Henry McMaster's top advisers in his office at the State House, and were exposed to the importance of safety around electricity at the CEEUS facility in West Columbia. CEEUS is the materials supplier for the state's electric cooperatives.

"Coming here has been a wild experience, a very good learning experience," says Pendergrass. "We went on a bucket (truck) ride, and I got to see



Akshith Vipin, Jerimiah Pendergrass and Matthew Taylor (left to right) represented Santee Electric at Cooperative Youth Summit in July.

JOSH P. CROTZER

how dangerous and hard a lineworker's job is."

Cooperative Youth Summit isn't just about visiting interesting places and meeting interesting people. An important objective of the annual program is to develop students to be leaders in their community and to learn about the role co-ops play in those communities.

Guided by former television personality and co-op executive Lou Green, the students worked in teams to develop presentations related to current political and cultural debates such as regulating artificial intelligence and subsidizing electric vehicles. Each group took a stance on the issues in front of their peers and a panel of independent judges. The students on

the highest-scoring team were awarded \$1,000 each.

Youth Summit students also learned about civic engagement and government from John Frick, the vice president of government relations at the Electric Cooperatives of South Carolina. Frick taught them about how our government works. And state Rep. Micah Caskey answered questions from the students and encouraged them to consider public service in their futures.

WANT TO GO NEXT SUMMER? High school sophomores and juniors interested in participating in Cooperative Youth Summit or Washington Youth Tour in 2026 are encouraged to visit ecsc.org/youth. Washington Youth Tour takes place June 14–19, 2026, and Cooperative Youth Summit is July 13–16.

Important billing update

\$1 paper bill fee starts January 2026

Starting January 2026, a \$1 monthly fee will apply to members who receive paper bills. The \$1 fee will help cover the rising costs of printing and mailing paper bills while also helping reduce paper waste. As a member-owned cooperative, we're always looking for ways to reduce waste and save costs—because every dollar saved benefits you, our members.



The good news is you can avoid this \$1 fee by switching to paperless billing. It's fast, secure and convenient. You'll get your bill online, through the SmartHub app, and by email—no waiting for the mail. You can sign up for paperless billing through SmartHub or by calling us today.

We want to keep things easy and affordable for you, which is why we offer paperless billing. See a step-by-step guide on how to sign up for paperless billing by scanning the QR code.

