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## DJ Smith is dedicated to his job



**LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,** I hope your summer is treating you well. It has been a few months, so I am delighted to bring you another of SEC's stars. This month's featured employee is Derrick "DJ" Smith, one of our lead linemen.

DJ was born and raised in Pamplico and graduated from Hannah Pamplico High School in 1996. He has dedicated himself to cooperatives ever since then. He graduated high school on a Friday and started at Pee Dee Electric the following Monday! There, he worked in the warehouse and then moved to a construction crew. Santee Electric was fortunate to snag him in 2000 as a 3rd class lineman. Here, he worked his way up through 2nd and 1st class and has held the Lead Lineman position since 2015.

DJ and his wife Laura have been married since 2013, and they have two children. Their son, Bennie, turned five on Aug. 4 (Happy Birthday, Bennie!), and their daughter, Wren, is two. Both are in daycare, but Bennie starts 5k this

year. Laura, a native of Effingham, is a manager with Blue Cross Blue Shield—where she has worked for over 25 years.

As I do with all these interviews, I asked DJ what he likes best about his job. "New construction (of power lines) is nice," he said, "but I really like trouble calls. When you go out at night, you never know what you might find. It could be a chicken snake, lightning or a broken pole that made the lights go out."

"The toughest part of the job, well, all of it is tough," he followed up. "There is a lot to learn, and it's dangerous. I remember building the High Hill Substation one summer. That is a lot of hard, complex work and there's no shade in a substation!"

I asked DJ to tell our readers a little about Santee Electric and himself that they might otherwise not know. "The co-op is a good company. They look after the employees; it's like a family here," he answered. "For me, I want everyone to know this—If your lights go out, I will be there to get you on as soon as possible. We want to provide a quick response and good service. If you need help when you see me out there, I'm there for you."

DJ is dedicated to his job, but he does get to enjoy a little time away from his work. He loves any kind of fishing (fresh or salt water) and hunting (particularly, dove and deer). His primary passion, though, is spending time with his family. Bennie is playing tee ball, and Wren is just getting started in dance.

If you are fortunate enough to see DJ out there, at the ball field, at a dance recital, or on the job site, make sure to say, "Hey, DJ!" I can tell you from experience, he never meets a stranger!



Derrick "DJ" Smith

**ROBERT G. ARDIS III**  
 President and Chief Executive Officer

## Local teens talk with state leaders

### Santee Electric sends students to Virtual Youth Experience, Radcliff named Ambassador

**FOR STUDENTS** who spent their school year transitioning from distance learning to the classroom, Virtual Youth Experience (VYE) was an appropriate way to begin their summer.

In June, Payton Grant of Andrews, l'Yunla Huell of Salters, Brock Hundley of Kingstree, BryAna Munoz of Hemingway and Emma Radcliff of Pawleys Island were among 74 high-achieving students that participated in a week-long part web-conference, part in-person event sponsored by South Carolina's electric cooperatives.

Radcliff was elected by her VYE peers to be the South Carolina Youth Ambassador, an honor which allows her to speak with state-wide cooperative leadership from across the state about what the experience has meant to her and her fellow students.

The local teens selected by Santee Electric Cooperative used their laptops and smartphones to discuss issues of the day with four members of South Carolina's Congressional delegation—U.S. Representatives James Clyburn and Nancy Mace and U.S. Senators Tim Scott and Lindsey Graham.

"There are a lot of hurdles that we all face as Americans," Scott told the students. "I think the best way to address these issues is to focus on education. A good education is the closest

**High school students Peyton Grant, l'Yuna Huell, Brock Hundley, Emma Radcliff, Billy Price (from left) and BryAna Munoz (not pictured) concluded their Virtual Youth Experience at Fairfield Electric in Blythewood.**

thing to magic in America that I've ever seen."

The students also got screen time with Rev. Charles Jackson of Brookland Baptist Church and State Epidemiologist Dr. Linda Bell.

"I thank God for both the principle and the practice of love," Jackson shared. "We have to transcend these barriers that divide us, and we can do that through love."

To conclude the week, the students gathered at Fairfield Electric Cooperative where they heard inspiring messages from South Carolina Lt. Gov. Pamela Evette and Chris Singleton—a former professional baseball player whose mother, Sharonda Coleman-Singleton, was one of nine killed in 2015's Emanuel AME Church shooting.

Evette passed along advice she'd received from her grandmother, a Polish immigrant. "If you ever get the opportunity to serve, you should," said Evette.



**Inspirational speaker Chris Singleton delivered a message of hope and unity to the students.**

JOSH P. GROTZER

"Take your God-given talents and make the country an even better place."

Singleton travels the country speaking to sports teams, churches and corporate events about unity and overcoming adversity.

"People think forgiveness is letting the other person off the hook," he shared. "It's really letting yourself off the hook. It allows you to move forward. Forgiveness is freeing."

The students also spent the week in teams learning how to create and produce audio podcasts that complete the sentence: "This is my country...."

A group of S.C. journalists will judge the podcasts and award \$5,000 scholarships to each student in the winning group. The student podcasts are available online at [anchor.fm/ecsc](https://anchor.fm/ecsc).

The Virtual Youth Experience began last year when the risks of COVID-19 caused cooperative programs like the Rural Electric Youth Tour and the Cooperative Youth Summit to be cancelled. The programs allow high school students to learn about electric cooperatives and how their government works.

JOSH P. GROTZER