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**SANTEE ELECTRIC
 COOPERATIVE NEWS**

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A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

Preparing local students to replenish our workforce



I HAVE SOMETHING really exciting that I want to talk to you about this month. I'd like to refer to this as a technical education movement in our region.

We have been hearing—for quite some time, unfortunately—that we are

running out of skilled workers. Welders, electricians, machine technicians, plumbers, etc. are retiring and are not being replaced at the pace that we need. The push for children to get a four-year degree (regardless of the corresponding job market) has put us in a bind. We have wonderfully low unemployment right now, and your electric cooperative is doing all we can to promote economic development in our area. However, we can't bring jobs—and their corresponding infrastructure and investment—unless our region can supply the skilled labor to fill those jobs.

That concern has been looming like a dark cloud on the horizon, but I believe those clouds are breaking.

Santee Electric Cooperative is blessed to have four great technical college systems (Central Carolina Tech, Horry-Georgetown Tech, Florence-Darlington Tech, and our hometown neighbors, Williamsburg Tech) within our four-county footprint, and we are very proud of the advancements of all four. Today, I want to tell you some great news about one of these, in particular, and then brag on a similar program that does not fit so neatly into one category or the other.

Horry-Georgetown Tech just opened its Advanced Manufacturing System on their Georgetown Campus—a beautiful facility on Highway 17 heading towards Charleston. What an impressive campus! As a product of the Georgetown County

School District myself, I am thrilled that students from this region have such a wonderful asset available to them to get them ready for tomorrow's workforce. I had an opportunity to tour their facilities at their grand opening, and I was blown away. Never have I seen such an impressive learning lab. There is no question that students coming through their program will be well-versed in today's technology and will certainly make sure that our region is ready to fill the jobs that we hope to bring to this area.

The Lake City Continuum—also a beautiful structure—is a wonderful partnership between Florence-Darlington Technical College, Francis Marion University and The Darla Moore Foundation. The Continuum is able to reach and assist students from school districts all over the region with a wide range of ages and backgrounds. High school students from Florence and surrounding counties as well as adult education students can find what they need as they prepare for success at this great facility. AND—they have a business incubator!

I am thrilled that these wonderful organizations have seen the need and stepped up to fill the void. They have answered that concern I brought up at the beginning of this column. They have risen to the challenge. They have said, "You bring the jobs. We'll supply the talent." These are exciting times.

ROBERT G. ARDIS III

President and Chief Executive Officer