

Connection

Communicating local energy news to Four County Electric members

A Touchstone Energy Cooperative 

inside Four County Connection



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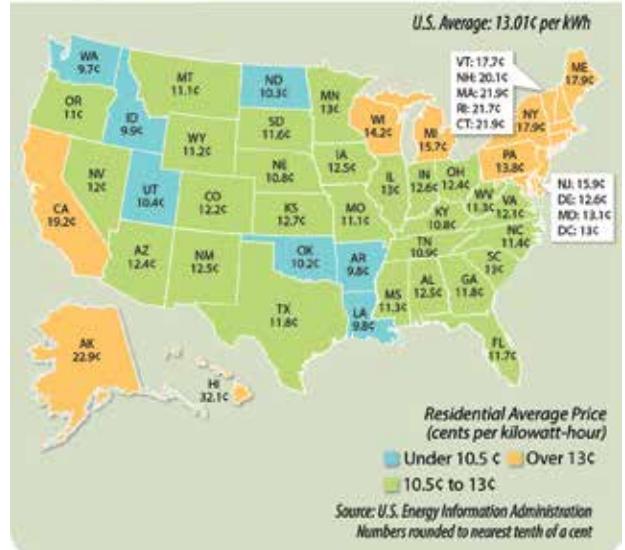
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No Rate Increase for 2021

In addition to awarding over \$2 million in Capital Credits to our members in December, Four County EMC will not seek a rate increase this year, marking the ninth consecutive year that the cooperative's rates have remained flat. "Keeping costs under control, careful budgeting, and managing interest have allowed us to keep your rates stable," says CEO Mitchell Keel. "Our goal has always been, and will continue to be, to provide superior service and to do so at the lowest possible cost."

Average Prices for Residential Electricity

2019 figures, in cents per kWh



Get the Scoop

Replace your HVAC or
furnace filter regularly
to help the system run
more efficiently.

Scholarship Opportunities

Four County EMC awards \$10,000 in scholarships to students through the scholarship foundations of four community colleges in our service area. For the full application process and eligibility requirements, interested students should contact one of the community colleges listed below:



Bladen County

Bladen Community College
910-879-5567
sbenson@bladenc.edu
Scholarship deadline: April 15

Pender County

Cape Fear Community College
910-362-7338
rcavenaugh@cfcc.edu
Scholarship deadline: May 1

Duplin County

James Sprunt Community College
910-275-6166
dstringfield@jamesprunt.edu
Scholarship deadline: April 30

Sampson County

Sampson Community College
910-592-8081
lturlington@sampsoncc.edu
Scholarship deadline: April 15

BOARD SPOTLIGHT by Janet Smith

Ronald J. Allen

Ronald J. Allen has been a Four County EMC board member since 2008 and is the director of the West Bladen district.



Born and raised in Bladenboro, Allen calls himself a true “homegrown tomato.” He grew up across the road from the house he lives in now with Kaye, his wife of 24 years. Allen has two grown children, a daughter who is a local nurse practitioner, and a son who is a professor in upstate New York. He also has two grandchildren attending colleges in NC.

Raised on Four County lines, Allen remembers watching his father read their own meter. Before the co-op had meter readers, bills included a space for members to record their readings, which they returned with their payment.

Allen’s father was a WWII veteran, wounded while fighting in the European theater. Allen says he still has the telegram that his grandparents received notifying them that their son was injured in combat. When Mr. Allen came home from the war, with the shrapnel still in his back, he began a career as a rural postal carrier and purchased 100 acres to



start his homestead. That land laid the foundation for what would someday become a thriving farm for Allen and his brother, Joe.

After graduating from Bladenboro High School, Allen attended Pembroke University and Selina Business College, pursuing a Business Administration degree. When the Vietnam War intensified, Allen left college and enlisted in the Army National Guard, where he served for six years as a company clerk.

During his service in the Guard, Allen began his career in the healthcare industry. He worked at Southeastern Regional Medical Center in Lumberton, where he was Director of Materials Management for 41 years.

During his years at the hospital, Allen and his brother acquired more land, and today, their farming business includes cattle, eight pig nurseries with Prestage Farms, and 12 poultry houses with

Mountaire Farms of NC. And with several hundred acres of woods, ponds, and fields, they added a hunting preserve to the list. The brothers had traveled around hunting at other preserves and realized they could create a bird hunting paradise back home in Bladenboro. This vision eventually became Allen Brothers Outdoors. Over the years, the preserve added tower shoots, guided Mallard duck hunts, upland guided quail hunts, lodging facilities, and their famous gun and ammunition shop called The Candy Store. Allen says the preserve has far exceeded their expectations, with hunters coming from all over, even Phil Robertson of Duck Dynasty fame, for a unique hunting experience and a dose of good ole southern hospitality.

After Allen retired from the hospital, community members urged him to run for a seat on the Four County EMC board of directors. As a “homegrown tomato,” he was well known in the area and residents felt he would be a good representative of the community. In 2008, Allen was elected to the board and continues to represent the western side of Bladen County.

When asked what makes him proud to be a member and director of Four County EMC, Allen says, “It’s the great job we do keeping the lights on. We’ve been able to provide reliable, affordable power with no rate increase in the last nine years. That’s almost unheard of in the utility industry. Four County has a great board, great CEO and the most dedicated employees, and I’d put us up against any co-op out there.” He says that people have stopped him and asked how they can get on Four County’s lines. He laughingly answers, “You gotta move.”



CO-OP CONNECTIONS BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

Carolina Sisters

Carolina Sisters is a staple in the downtown Burgaw shopping district. Located across from the courthouse, the shop offers women’s clothing, accessories, jewelry, and trendy T-shirts. But their claim to fame is embroidery. Carolina Sisters can monogram many of the items they carry and will gladly customize a piece with embroidery or screen printing.



Who are these sisters? They are Kelly and Angie Longley, life-long friends who became sisters-in-law.



They started Carolina Sisters as an embroidery shop and, in less than six months, became a ladies’ boutique when their loyal customers asked for clothing, jewelry, and bag lines.

Carolina Sisters is also a participating business in the Four County Co-op Connections program. Four County members save 15% on Tuesdays when using their Co-op Connections card or the mobile app.



Shop local and save!
In December, Mendy Bianco of Burgaw won a \$100 gift card to Carolina Sisters in our monthly Co-op Connections contest. Congratulations Mendy! Follow us on Facebook and get ready for our next contest!





What Happens Behind the Scenes During a Power Outage?

The year 2020 was unique, to say the least, thanks to the arrival of COVID-19. Contributing to the chaos was a record-breaking hurricane season, intense heat waves, lightning storms that sparked wildfires, and various other inclement weather concerns.

What do all these weather phenomena have in common? Unfortunately, they all had the potential to result in power outages.

Here in the U.S., we are fortunate to have an advanced power grid in place. Power transmission and distribution is reliable in our country, and we are proud to deliver the electricity you depend on each day. Excluding outage times attributed to major weather or other catastrophic events, electricity consumers in our country typically experience only about two hours of total power interruptions per year, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. When outages due to major events are taken into consideration, the EIA reports the total outage time at six hours a year.

What happens on our end when your power goes out? Rest assured we swing into action in a safe and efficient manner to ensure your power is restored. How long that takes depends on several factors: the extent of the storm's destruction, the number of outages, and how long it takes for our work crews to safely access the storm-damaged areas. We are careful to follow standard restoration procedures to ensure safety and to get the job done right by:

- Assessing damage to utility equipment.
- Addressing immediate safety risks, including downed power lines.
- Ensuring that essential public health and safety facilities are operational.

- Prioritizing repairs that will restore power to the greatest number of people first.
- Evaluating power plants for damage and restore them to working order.
- Repairing transmission lines that carry power to large areas.
- Assessing and repairing (in this order) substations, distribution lines, and service lines to properties.

Thank you for your patience during power outages. Know that in the event of an outage, we are working hard to restore it as safely and efficiently as possible, day and night.

For more information about preparing for outages or storms, or about electrical safety, go to [SafeElectricity.org](https://www.SafeElectricity.org).



Electricity Usage Monitors From FCEMC—Check One Out Today!

Ever wonder how much it costs to run one of your appliances? How much money does your refrigerator or television add to your power bill every month? Did you know that many consumer electronics use what’s called phantom power or energy vampires? These include phone chargers, cable boxes, and video games, and even when off, they continue to use energy and can account for up to 20% of your monthly electricity bill!



To get specifics regarding your energy consumption, Four County offers an electricity usage monitor that shows you exactly how many kilowatt-hours (kWh) a device or appliance is drawing and how much it costs. To use, simply plug the meter into the wall and then plug your appliance into the meter. The device easily measures the power consumption and cost of your electrical appliances. These monitors can measure kWh for most household devices, including TVs, refrigerators, microwaves, space heaters, computers, and washing machines. Any appliance or device that runs on 110 volts can be tested.

If you are interested in measuring your usage, Four County EMC can help! We have electricity usage monitors available for our members to use free-of-charge for 45 days. To request a device, simply call MaKayla Killens at 888-368-7289 or email makaylakillens@fourcty.org. One of our energy auditors will deliver the monitor and provide instruction on its use.

Four County is here to serve you, our members. Because of that, we’re focused on finding ways to help you manage your energy use and budget.

Shop for your Valentine and Save!

Support your local businesses, save money, and shop for your Valentine—all at the same time with the Co-op Connections Program!

Four County has over 30 local businesses in our service area that provide discounts to Four County members. And did you know that Co-op Connections is a national program which means you are also eligible for other cooperative’s local discounts?

Visit connections.coop for the current list of discounts or download the Co-op Connections app to see available discounts anywhere you go! Simply show your Co-op Connections card or use the digital card on the app to start saving.





Member Spotlight:
**Johnson Nursery & The Gardens
of Southeastern North Carolina**

by Janet Smith

Author Jonathan Swift said, “Vision is the art of seeing what is invisible to others.” Most of us look at acres of land and see just that, but a visionary sees what could be: a destination spot, an experience, and a boost to the local economy. Most of us look at a ditch and see just that, but a man with a dream sees “the river of endless possibilities.” A visionary sees not only the land but what that land could provide to the community.

The man with the plan is David Johnson, president of Johnson Nursery Corporation in Willard. The plan is a nonprofit off-shoot of Johnson Nursery called The Gardens of Southeastern North Carolina. The Garden’s preliminary designs include a music venue, café and restaurant, conference center, a flower cutting garden, nature trails, a lake, and hundreds of varieties of plants.

In his project narrative, Johnson writes, “I believe this development will enhance the character of western Pender County and will have a positive effect on our health, morals, and welfare.” Right now, though, Johnson laughs and says, “I’m a man with a big hat and no cattle,” but he is a man of faith and is letting God lead the way. His goal is that he walks behind the Lord, not ahead.

Johnson grew up in Chapel Hill, the son of a cardiovascular surgeon and the grandson of a well-known Wilmington physician, Dr. George Johnson. His grandfather purchased 600 acres in Willard, and that’s where the Johnson clan spent their weekends. Growing up, Johnson loved the family farm and spent as much time there as he could. Following in the family’s footsteps of medicine was never his passion. His passion was for the farm, which led to his love of horticulture.

A Dream Comes to Life

In 1981, at the age of 26, Johnson moved to the farm and began Johnson Nursery, a wholesale supplier of over 1,500 varieties of annuals, perennials, ornamental shrubs, grasses, vines, and tropical plants. Johnson Family Farm Holdings covers approximately 193 acres of land for the wholesale nursery and the public nursery, The Garden Center at Johnson Nursery.



Johnson opened The Garden Center two years ago, with an eye on the future. With his vision in mind, he wanted to use The Garden Center to learn more about running a retail business. Johnson says the expansion idea started with the plants, but it will be much more.

His expansion idea has met its first test on the path to becoming a reality. Last summer, Pender County approved a special use permit for The Gardens. With permits approved, Johnson must now submit a master plan and phasing schedule for the site. Landscape architects Cole Jenest & Stone of Raleigh should have the final rendering by the fall of this year. Now begins the search for capital as the Johnson family begins raising funds, securing sponsors, and applying for grants. At the same time, they must also search for partners to run the café, restaurant, and event center, which will not be part of the non-profit organization.

The focal point of The Gardens will be Lake Marian, named after Johnson's mother. Surrounding the lake will be a full-service café and restaurant serving lunch and dinner; an event center used for conferences, classes, and rentals; a 6-acre walking trail; a small music venue; a gift shop; and, of course, the plants. The Gardens will showcase the diversity of the hundreds of plant varieties grown by Johnson Nursery. The plants will have QR codes that provide information about the plant, but Johnson is taking this one step further. Using the code, customers can place orders which will be ready and waiting as the customer exits. Johnson wants The Gardens to provide visitors a unique shopping experience.

Providing Job Opportunities

Beech Tree Farms, owned by David and Jill Johnson, recently purchased another 268 acres for The Gardens. Plans for this land include nature trails, a wildlife food plot, observation stands, and eventually cabins for overnight stays. There's also room for a hedge maze and an orchard, and at some point, Johnson would like to add an organic produce garden that can supply the café with farm-to-table produce.

Johnson knows this big dream will take a lot of hard work and a lot of money. Step one was getting the permits and now it's time for the second step: the big clean-up. Over the next two years, the undesirable trees, shrubs, and vines must be removed before construction can begin. This clean-up phase is where Johnson's non-profit organization, Shoulder to Shoulder (S2S), comes in.

With S2S, Johnson wants to provide work training and job placement for unemployed workers in Pender and surrounding counties. There are people in our communities who want to work, Johnson says, but may have difficulty due to their past mistakes or lack of experience. S2S intends to give these people a chance. Applicants accepted into the program will earn \$10 an hour and must adhere to its core values: be reliable and diligent, be a team player, and be humbly confident. Once they've completed 160 hours with no infractions of the core values, S2S will reach out to corporate sponsors to set up interviews for the graduates.

Johnson hopes to hire the first field supervisor for S2S in early 2021 and anticipates bringing on crew members within the next few months. If all goes well, construction for The Gardens can begin in 2023, with an opening projected for 2024. Big plans indeed, but Johnson quotes one of his favorite Bible verses, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13 NKJV)."



Johnson Nursery Plans

For further information on the diversity offered by Johnson Nursery and to view initial designs, please visit thegardensofsenc.com. The Garden Center at Johnson Nursery is selling firewood produced by removing some of the damaged hardwoods from The Gardens. Fifty percent of these sales are donated to The Gardens of Southeastern North Carolina to help support the project during the slower winter season.

For a glimpse of the diversity that Johnson Nursery offers, visit their website at johnson-nursery.com.

Winning
from the editor
Recipe



Ingredients

- 1 cup sugar for filling
- 8 tablespoons sugar for meringue
- ½ cup self-rising flour
- 4 egg yolks, save whites for meringue
- Cocoa...add enough to make it a milk chocolate color
- 2 cups milk
- ¾ stick unsalted butter
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

Pie Filling

Mix sugar, flour and egg yolks together. Add cocoa. The mixture will be a little stiff, add either water or milk to get it to a thick consistency.

Pour milk into saucepan over medium heat and when it becomes foamy around the edges, add the sugar, flour and cocoa mixture, stirring continuously to keep it from sticking to the bottom. Continue stirring until you get a thick consistency for pie filling. Remove from heat and

Sue's Chocolate Pie

Provided by Four County employee Sue Rivenbark



add the butter and vanilla. Once the butter has melted, stir and mix well. Then pour into baked pie crust. This will make 2 regular pies.

Meringue

Using mixer, beat egg whites on medium-low speed, then increase to medium speed. Once peaks start to form, gradually add 2 tablespoons of sugar per egg white very gradually, about 1 tablespoon at a time. Continue to beat until eggs whites are glossy and hold a firm peak.

Pour over hot pie filling. Bake at 350 degrees until light brown.

Watch "Cooking with Cam" on our Facebook page to see how this dish is made.

Four County Connection

Janet Smith, Editor

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Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Use wool or rubber dryer balls in the clothes dryer to reduce drying time and static. Wool dryer balls can also absorb extra moisture. These are an efficient alternative to dryer sheets, which can create buildup on the dryer's filter and reduce air circulation. If you prefer dryer sheets, scrub the filter once a month to remove buildup.

Source: energy.gov

Four County Electric

Our Mission

To provide highly reliable electric service, innovative energy solutions and outstanding service to our Members and Communities.

Our Values

- Respect
- Integrity
- Trust
- Teamwork
- Commitment
- Excellence

Our Vision

To be an advocate for our Members by:

- Exceeding members' expectations
- Utilizing well trained, motivated employees
- Achieving excellence
- Operating efficiently
- Maintaining hometown values

A Touchstone Energy Cooperative

We believe in the Power of Human Connections

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