



Connection

Communicating local energy news to Four County Electric members

A Touchstone Energy Cooperative 

inside
Four County
Connection

Four County EMC CEO Mitchell Keel Retires

After a 27-year career in the electric cooperative industry, Four County Electric Membership Corporation's (FCEMC) Chief Executive Officer Mitchell Keel will retire effective June 30, 2021.



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Get the Scoop

.....HAPPY.....

Father's Day



June 20 is Father's Day! Happy Father's Day to all the dads out there. We hope you have a great day.

Keel joined FCEMC as CEO in 2004. Prior to his role at Four County, he was General Manager of Lewis County Rural Electric Cooperative in Lewistown, Missouri. Keel is a U.S. Army Veteran and a native of Eastern North Carolina. He was an honor graduate of the U.S. Army's electrical engineering school, studied electrical engineering at NC State, and earned his business degree from Mt. Olive College.

"It has been an honor and privilege to serve Four County EMC and its membership for the past 17 years," said Keel. "It has been a rewarding career, made easier by the support of a talented and dedicated workforce and hard-working board. The cooperative is well-positioned to transition to new leadership."

During his time at the cooperative, Keel represented Four County EMC at the statewide level by serving as Secretary/Treasurer (2009-2011), Vice-President (2011-2013), and President (2013-2015) of the North Carolina Electric Membership Corporation (NCEMC), the power supply entity owned by the state's electric cooperatives.

Under Keel's leadership, there was a significant focus on innovation and

technology, assuring the cooperative's abilities to meet its members' needs for generations to come. Four County's advanced metering infrastructure (AMI) project was completed in 2012, allowing two-way communication between Four County and its meters. A fiber-optic loop of over 200 miles was installed, which connects the substations and offices for improved communication. The investment in a training annex and two new district offices allows Four County to meet its members and the industry's needs for years. These are just a few of the improvements accomplished with no rate increase for the last nine years, underlining Keel's focus on putting the members first.

Another shining legacy of his career has been Mr. Keel's dedication to giving back to the communities. With the development of Four County's REDLG Revolving Loan Fund, the cooperative has provided over \$8 million in zero-interest loans to local businesses for projects that create growth and increase employment in the area.

Franklin Williams, president of the FCEMC Board of Directors, says the cooperative appreciates the long list

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of accomplishments Keel achieved during his tenure. “He has paved the way for the cooperative’s future.” Williams continues, “It is with sincere gratitude from the board and membership that we thank Mitch Keel for 17 years of dedicated service to Four County and its members. He always put the members first with the goal of providing safe, reliable power at the lowest possible cost. Mitch was always concerned with how decisions would impact our members and whether those decisions were in the members’ best interest.

While we will miss his commitment and leadership, we are in a better position due to his many contributions.”

Keel and his wife, Cindy, have three children and nine grandchildren and he’s looking forward to spending more time with them, as well as tinkering with his mechanical and electrical projects.

From all of us at Four County EMC, we thank him for his years of vision, leadership and dedication and wish him all the best.

Local Students Participate in a Virtual Youth Tour Experience

The 2021 Electric Cooperative Youth Tour is happening this month! This annual event is coordinated by electric cooperatives nationwide, and in most years, sends high school students to Washington, D.C., to experience our government in action, build their network and learn about our country and cooperatives’ history.



This year’s Youth Tour will take place on an online platform, rather than in-person in Washington. Despite these changes, delegates will still receive an immersive learning and social experience, hearing from elected officials and keynote speakers while networking with peers from across North Carolina.

Four County EMC has chosen two outstanding students to represent our cooperative on the June 20–26 tour.

- **Ariana Romero**, Union High School, and lives in Duplin County
- **Forrester Spears**, Heide Trask High School, and lives in Pender County

“While this year’s tour looks a little different, students will still be able to participate in a rewarding experience that brings them together with other young leaders from across the country. We are proud to be able to continue this long-standing tradition

and learning opportunity,” said Jeremy Dewberry, marketing and economic development supervisor for Four County EMC.

On this year’s virtual Youth Tour, delegates will meet virtually to hear from congressional representatives and other leaders. They will gain an understanding of energy innovation during virtual visits to sites such as microgrids, discuss career building, and learn life skills with their peers from across the state.

Youth Tour delegates are also eligible to apply for several college scholarships and the opportunity to represent North Carolina on the Youth Leadership Council, which is a national cooperative program that seeks to develop strong leadership, presentation and advocacy skills in America’s most promising young leaders.

Interested in learning more about next year’s Youth Tour? Contact makaylakillens@fourcty.org or visit fourcty.org.



Bright Ideas Winner Spotlight

by MaKayla Killens

Four County EMC honors teachers and celebrates innovation in education by awarding Bright Ideas grants to educators in Bladen, Duplin, Pender, and Sampson counties. The education grants fund engaging classroom learning projects that benefit more than 3,000 students.



Typically, these grants bring creative projects to life inside classrooms. However, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Four County EMC was flexible with the type of projects awarded this past year to ensure that all students could benefit, whether in the classroom or learning remotely. Grants are awarded for projects in all subject areas, such as music, art, history, reading, science, math, and more.

One educator who went above and beyond is Ron Warren, a 2020–2021 Bright Ideas grant recipient. Ron is from Fayetteville and teaches visual arts at East Bladen High School. Ron is a graduate of East Carolina University, where he received his degree in fine arts. Ron began teaching theatre and visual arts after being a graphic designer for 17 years. He explained that he found his passion for teaching the arts to students when a student’s grandmother approached him one day and told him that the mentorship he enacted towards her grandson completely changed his life. Since then, Ron knew that his purpose was to share the knowledge that art is not compartmentalized to just a classroom.

Ron’s project is entitled “Classroom Mosaic Mural,” and grades 9–12 participated. Ron’s project is a photographic image

of the Statue of Liberty that was divided into squares. He said, “Each student received one square to draw larger on a piece of illustration board and color using various media.” Students emailed their finished artwork, and Ron created a digital mural. “The variety of mediums and types of drawing styles creates a vibrant and interesting mosaic feel mural.”

The goal of Ron’s Bright Idea project was to show the importance of teamwork and to inform students they can contribute to something

bigger than themselves. Ron explained how art is everywhere and in everything that we do. Art is more than just drawing, and Ron believes that students have gained a sense of self-esteem when they see that they were a part of something so special.

The mosaic mural is symbolic of the classroom, our nation, and the world. Ron said, “No one square is more important than another. All squares come together to create a dynamic and interesting piece of artwork.”



STATUE OF LIBERTY CLASSROOM MOSAIC MURAL
EAST BLADEN HIGH SCHOOL ART DEPARTMENT
RON WARREN - INSTRUCTOR

BOARD SPOTLIGHT:

Dr. Steve Matthis

East Sampson District

“Just let me tell you about Four County...” When given the opportunity, that’s precisely what Four County EMC Director Dr. Steve Matthis will do. Director of the East Sampson district since 2013, he is proud of all the cooperative does for its community and members. Matthis’ wife Paula laughs and says if electricity comes up in a conversation, her husband is delighted to shine the spotlight on Four County.



started working at Prestage Farms the next week!”

Matthis says he loves consulting at Prestage, where he develops training materials, trains new hires and writes procedures. He says it’s one of the best jobs he’s ever had. “Such a great company and great people. Just like Four County,” he adds, smiling.

Helping Community Through the Co-op

While Matthis was still teaching, Four County EMC invited him to interview and finish the term for another director. He says, “It was an honor to be asked. I wanted to serve our community and what a great way to do that.” He says many people may not realize how much training and continuing education is involved with the position. “We are very proud of our Director Gold Certification and work hard to maintain that status. We continue learning so we can do our best to serve our members, keep the value high and rates down.”

With his passion for education, it’s no surprise that some of his favorite Four County programs are youth-related. “The Bright Ideas Education grants that fund creative ideas in the classroom are phenomenal, and I can’t say enough about the youth leadership programs and the impact they have on students.”

As a farmer, Matthis is aware of the importance of keeping the power on and says Four County has an outstanding outage management system. He knows the farmers on our system can count on crews restoring power as safely and quickly as possible.

Matthis and his wife attend Rose Hill Baptist Church, where he is a

Dr. Matthis was born and raised in Clinton. When he was in the eighth grade, his family moved from town to the family farm. His father had been a full-time mechanic and part-time farmer, but decided it was time to go full-time with the family’s cattle and hog farm.

After graduating from Union High School, Matthis attended NC State University for agricultural education, eventually earning his doctorate in education with a minor in animal science. Growing up a farmer’s son, he always had an interest in cattle and swine production and

suspected he might one day be a farmer himself.

Teaching the Next Generation

While at his first teaching position at Brevard High School, Matthis met Paula, who was attending college in the area. He returned to Clinton, and after he and Paula married, they built a house across the street from his parents and next door to his grandparents. Matthis taught animal science at Sampson County Community College (SCCC) for the next few years until the farming bug hit. He left teaching and farmed full-time with his father for the next 13 years. In 1993, Sampson County Community College wooed him back, and he taught animal science and swine production for the next 20 years.

When he retired from SCCC in 2013, Matthis said he would miss the students and his work. His wife, Paula, said, laughing, “I told him he’d get over it, but he





CO-OP CONNECTIONS BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

Cape Fear Heating & Cooling

Cape Fear Heating & Cooling is a family-owned and operated company and one of the top-rated contractors in Southeastern North Carolina. The company has years of experience serving North Carolina. Committed to customer satisfaction, they know that being comfortable in your home is a must.

deacon chair and Paula teaches Sunday school. They have one daughter and two granddaughters who live in Minnesota. They enjoy visits from them and are preparing for a trip there when their third grandchild is born. They also enjoy boating and hopping in their RV and heading for the mountains. They said the camper comes in handy when they do mission/relief work with the Baptist Men's Association. Matthis laughs and says, "We're too old to sleep on air mattresses on the floor." He and his wife also enjoy working with stained glass. Matthis says, the first year they were married, they wanted an activity they could do together. So they took a stained-glass class, and now their house contains beautiful windows, lamps, cabinetry, and other pieces they've made.

Another hobby is his antique sawmill. He says his grandfather operated a mill for many years and helping him as a young boy sparked an interest which has continued throughout his life.



"Sawdust is in my blood," he says. Matthis even used his grandfather's sawmill to cut lumber to build his and Paula's house. With

his grandfather's help, Matthis found an old, dilapidated sawmill that had been languishing in a field for years. He purchased it and restored the rotting mill to its former glory just like Johnny Cash said—one piece at a time.

Whether you are in the market for a new air conditioning system or are planning to upgrade your heating system, they can take care of you. The knowledgeable team at Cape Fear Heating & Cooling can accomplish any job, from simple repairs and maintenance to complete installations.

Cape Fear Heating & Cooling is a participating member in the Co-op Connections Program. Four County members save 10% on service calls when using your Co-op Connections Card or the mobile app.



Congratulations to Wanda Costin of Watha and Gloria Harvey of Burgaw! They both won a free maintenance check-up from Cape Fear Heating & Cooling in our April Facebook contest! Follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter and get ready for our next contest!

Follow us on Facebook and get ready for the next contest!



The capable team of Cape Fear Heating & Cooling



Preparation and Awareness are Keys for Farm Electric Safety

Farm operators, family members and farm employees are urged to take these measures:

- Use a spotter when moving tall loads near lines
- Inspect farm equipment for transport height, and determine clearance with any power lines under which the equipment must pass.
- Start each morning by planning your day's work. Know what jobs will happen near power lines and have a plan to keep the assigned workers safe.
- Use care when raising augers or the bed of a grain truck. It can be difficult to estimate distance, and sometimes, a power line is closer than it looks. Use a spotter to make certain you stay far away from power lines.
- Always lower equipment extensions, portable augers, or elevators to their lowest possible level, under 14 feet, before moving or transporting



- them. Wind, uneven ground, shifting weight, or other conditions can cause you to lose control of equipment and make contact with power lines.
- Never attempt to raise or move a power line to clear a path. If power lines near your property have sagged over time, call your utility to repair them.
- Don't use metal poles when breaking up bridged grain inside and around bins.

Board Directors Honored

Two officers from the Four County Electric Membership Corporation Board of Directors were recently recognized for 35 years of service to the electric cooperative. Recipients of the commendable service awards were S. Franklin Williams, president; and Bertice Lanier, vice-president.



S. Franklin Williams, president



Bertice Lanier, vice president

The awards were presented virtually at the 2021 Statewide Annual Meeting of N.C. Electric Membership Corporation (NCEMC), N.C. Association of Electric Cooperatives (NCAEC) and the Tarheel Electric Membership Association (TEMA). Collectively, the 26 cooperatives belonging to

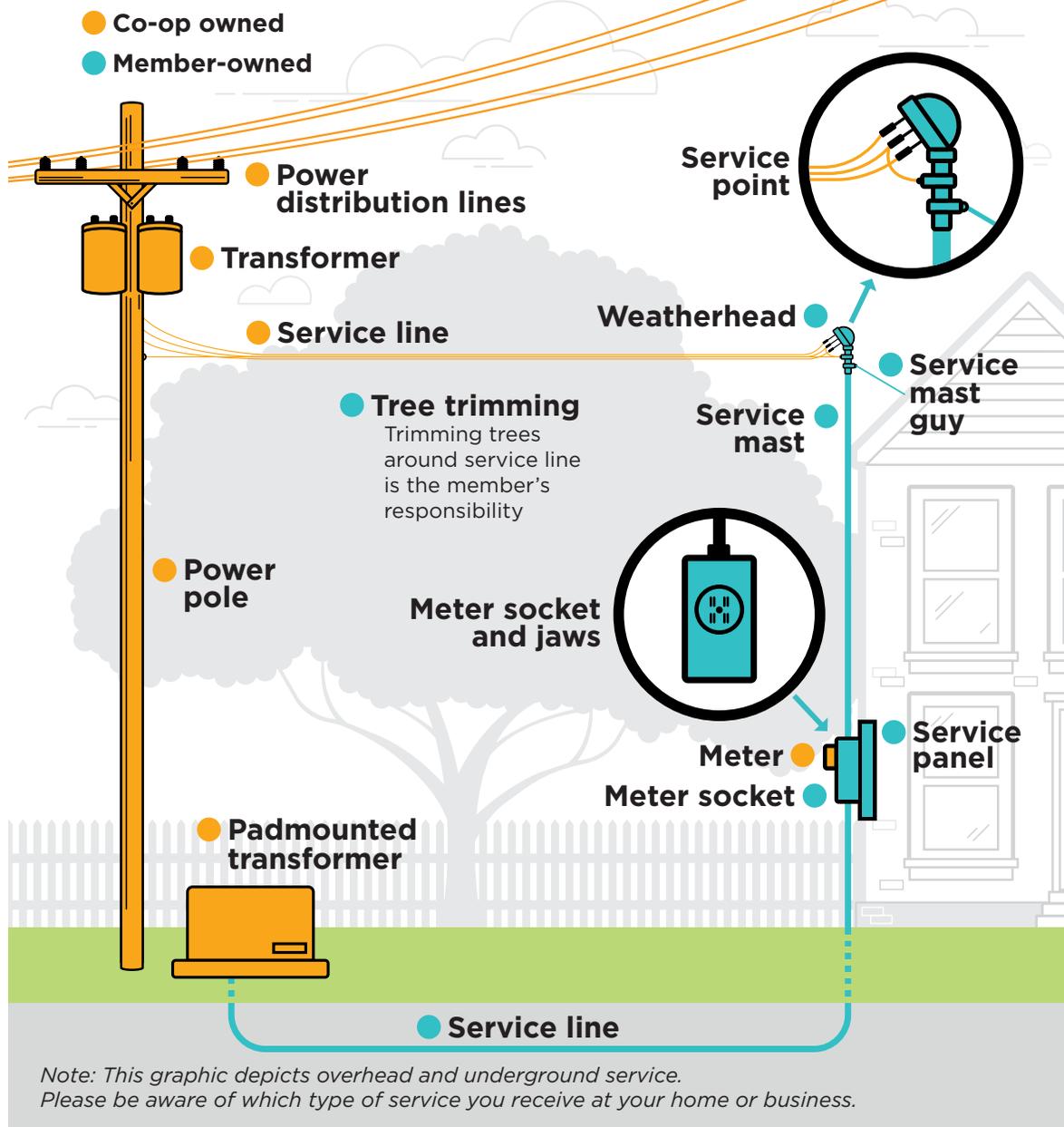
these associations provide reliable, safe and affordable electricity to more than one million homes, farms and businesses in North Carolina. The co-ops are not-for-profit organizations that are member-owned and overseen by a board of directors elected by the membership.



Who Owns What?

Electric Co-op Owned Equipment vs Member-Owned Equipment

This graphic depicts equipment owned by the co-op (in gold) and the member (in blue). If a storm damages any equipment owned by the co-op, we are responsible for repairs. If a storm damages any member-owned equipment, the member is responsible for repairs. Members should hire a licensed electrician when making any repairs to member-owned equipment.



Winning
from the editor
Recipe



- Approx. 4 lb. pork loin
- 2 tablespoons oil
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- ½ teaspoon paprika
- 2 cups broth or stock

FOR GRAVY

- 4 tablespoons butter (½ stick)
- 4 tablespoons flour
- 2 cups pork loin drippings from crockpot
- Salt and pepper to taste

Pork Loin Directions

On cutting board or plate, dry off outside of pork loin with a paper towel. Drizzle desired choice of oil onto pork loin. Sprinkle garlic pow-

Simple Crockpot Pork Loin & Gravy



der, onion powder, salt, pepper, and paprika onto pork loin. Rub all over until evenly coated. Place pork loin in crockpot, fat side up. Pour in 2 cups broth. Place lid on top and set crockpot on high for 4 hours.

Gravy Directions

In a large sauté pan, melt butter over medium heat. Slowly add flour and thoroughly combine. Cook for one minute or until thickened. Slowly add drippings, making sure it is combined before adding more. Once you're done, add salt and pepper if needed to taste and cook until desired thickness is reached.

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

Four County Connection

Janet Smith, Editor

Published monthly by Four County Electric Membership Corporation, P.O. Box 667, Burgaw, NC 28425, as a service to our members.

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Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

The No. 1 way to prepare your house for hot summer months is to have a licensed heating and air professional service your unit to ensure it works at maximum efficiency. Ideally, you should have a check-up twice a year—once in the spring and again in the fall.

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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