



Connection

Communicating local energy news to Four County Electric members

A Touchstone Energy Cooperative 

inside
Four County
Connection

Four County EMC's New Outage Alert System



p. H

Increasing Our System Resiliency.....p. D

Touchstone Energy Sports Camp Time!.....p. F



Four County Electric Membership Corporation (FCEMC) rolled out its new outage text alert program in November. This program provides members with an easy and convenient way to stay informed during a power outage by sending text notifications if an outage is detected. Members will receive a text alert when an outage is detected, one when service is restored, and, if requested, members will receive a status update.

Members who have one account with Four County are automatically enrolled in the program using the mobile number on file with their account. Members with multiple accounts need to register each account on the cooperative's website.

“Our goal is to provide reliable, safe, affordable electricity to our members, but we also want to provide convenience,” explains FCEMC CEO Don Gatton. “This program provides another method for us to communicate quickly and effectively during power outages.”

FCEMC members are encouraged to visit the cooperative's website for program FAQs or call Four County EMC at 888-368-7289.

Happy New Year!

2022

In observance of the New Year's holiday, Four County offices will be closed on Monday, January 3.

Have a safe and blessed holiday!

TYPE **OUTAGE** TO REPORT, **STATUS** FOR UPDATES, OR **QUIT** TO OPT-OUT



Local Educators Receive Bright Ideas Grants

New creative learning projects are brightening this school year for students near you! Recently, Four County Electric Membership Corporation awarded \$26,308.33 in Bright Ideas education grants to 17 exceptional local teachers in Bladen, Duplin, Pender, and Sampson counties. These grants are awarded each year to K-12 educators for innovative projects that enhance student learning.

“Every year, Bright Ideas winners get more creative with cultivating various learning opportunities for young people,” says MaKayla Killens, communications specialist at Four County EMC. “The projects submitted this year have brought out innovative skills in teachers, as they continue to surpass the standard of educating students both through virtual and physical classrooms.”

Typically, these grants bring creative projects to life inside classrooms. However, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Four County EMC has been flexible with the types of projects awarded to ensure that all students can 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.

Since 1994, Four County Electric Membership Corporation has contributed more than \$500,000 for creative projects benefiting local students. Statewide, North Carolina’s 26 electric cooperatives have collectively awarded more than \$13.6 million for nearly 13,000 projects helping more than 2.7 million students.

Follow Four County Electric Membership Corporation on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn to see how programs such as Bright Ideas impact local students and communities. To learn more about Bright Ideas grants, visit ncbrightideas.com, and follow @NCBrightIdeas on Facebook and Twitter.

The 2021-22 Bright Ideas winners are listed below.

	Teacher	School	Grant Title	Amount
BLADEN	Becky Suzanne Davisson	Dublin Primary School	Chords Over Covid	\$1,603.80
	Brittney Hester	Emereau Bladen Charter School	Green is Everything	\$1,001.31
	Bruce Simonson	East Bladen High School	East Bladen HS Automated Greenhouse Irrigation System	\$1,818.00
	Ron Warren	East Bladen High School	Homage to Jasper Johns	\$2,000.00
DUPLIN	Misty Ross	Chinquapin Elementary	Secret Stories Superheros	\$1,047.50
	Britani W. Becher	Chinquapin Elementary	Safe Spaces, Conquering ACE's	\$1,855.31
	Tanya Novakowski	Rose Hill - Magnolia Elementary	Farming With Worms	\$1,845.34
	Victoria Newkirk	Rose Hill - Magnolia Elementary	Eagle News	\$1,979.00
PENDER	Dr. Chris Wirszyla	Cape Fear Elementary	Building a Better SELF (Self Esteem and Lifetime Fitness)	\$ 986.34
	Cindy Robinson	Malpass Corner Elementary	A WANDerful Experience	\$ 406.10
	Laura Black	Rocky Point Elementary School	Percussion with a Purpose	\$1,884.98
	Aariene Hansley	West Pender Middle	Warrior's Apparel	\$1,812.00
	Teresa Soles	West Pender Middle	Feeding Our Community: Seed to Supper	\$1,979.75
	Michael McHolland	Heide Trask High School	13 Colonies Card Game - SPOONS	\$ 99.90
SAMPSON	Matt Davis	Pender High School	Sports Casting and Immersive Journalism Experience	\$1,989.00
	Jared Pinkston	Pender High School	Team PHENix Robotics FIRST Forward: Full Speed Ahead Season	\$2,000.00
	Andrea Hunter	Union Intermediate School	I've Got A Feeling: Exploring Social Emotional Learning with Print	\$2,000.00



Pender High Principal Caroline Godwin and Matt Davis



Rose Hill-Magnolia Elementary Tanya Novakowski



Dublin Primary School Becky Davison and Principal Marcus Edge



Union Intermediate School Andrea Hunter

Winter Tips

- When cooking up your favorite dishes, stay near the stove. Unattended pots and pans can be a fire hazard.
- If something starts burning while you're baking, don't open the oven door. Stay calm and turn the oven off. The fire should go out on its own. If it doesn't, leave the house and call 911.
- Make sure space heaters have automatic shut-off switches that turn off the heater if it tips over. Space heaters should only be used in open, well-ventilated areas at least three feet from combustible



materials such as curtains and furniture.

- Please only use ovens for baking, not heating your house.
- If anyone in your household has difficulty hearing, make sure your smoke detectors provide a visual signal in addition as well as the audible alert.



New Way to Pay!

CheckOut is a new cash payment option available to Four County members. You can now make payments at **Dollar General, Family Dollar, CVS, Walgreens and Speedway** stores. It's as easy as 1, 2, 3!

1. Get your barcode at <https://fourcty.sedccheckout.com/>
2. Scan the barcode at participating stores.
3. Tell the cashier how much you'd like to add to your account.

Please note that payments are cash only and there is a \$1.50 convenience fee per transaction.



Four County EMC Continually Increases System Resiliency

Safe, reliable and affordable electricity is a phrase you often hear from us. It describes the commitment we make to you every day. Another term we want you to know is *resiliency*.

While reliability refers to keeping the power on, resiliency is how we plan for and recover from a major event. The more resilient our system, the fewer outages our members experience and the quicker we can recover. At Four County EMC, we are continually increasing the resiliency of our infrastructure with new technology, upgrading our system and improving efficiencies during storm restoration.

Like all electric cooperatives, Four County EMC is vulnerable to Mother Nature's destructive natural events — hurricanes, tornadoes, flooding and storms can wreak havoc on the system. Hurricanes such as Floyd, Matthew and Florence brought us catastrophic rainfall and flooding.



Kelly substation flooded after Florence

Three years later, the impact of Florence is still apparent in many areas. Recovery from a hurricane can be a long-term process. While there is hope that there will never be another Florence, Four County's goal has been to not just repair but to create resiliency against future events.

A resilient electric grid is designed and built to withstand hurricanes, tropical storms, flooding and other disruptions that could result in outages.

- **New Buildings** We incorporated this resiliency into our new district office buildings. In 2020, we replaced our two 50+-year-old buildings in Rose Hill and Elizabethtown with new, state-of-the-art offices on large tracks of land. When viewed from the outside, these buildings are modern and beautiful, but the most critical feature is the strength inside. Both buildings are designed with hardened shelter areas, and the acreage provides space for additional materials and vehicles needed during storm restoration. Additionally, the cooperative built dispatch centers in the new buildings so that, in a storm, all three offices could operate independently. Vice President of Engineering Gregg Cohn says, “Remember, Hurricane Florence was a Category 4 storm when it



Wallace POD transformers raised

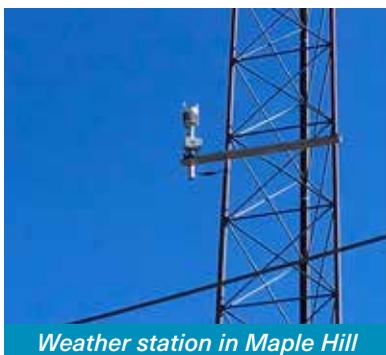
was just off our coast. That made us think – what would we do in a Cat 4 hurricane? These new buildings give us the flexibility to leave headquarters and still function. We built redundancy with the new offices, so we have the option to move operations to another district office if needed.”

- **New Outage Management System** The outage management system we had met our needs when we were a smaller cooperative. Vice President of Information Technology Anthony Kent says, “Florence made us realize we had outgrown the system. It worked fine under normal circumstances, but we needed a more robust system to handle the high volume of outages Florence brought us.” In addition, this new system supports an outage text notification program that automatically texts members when outages are detected and again once restored.

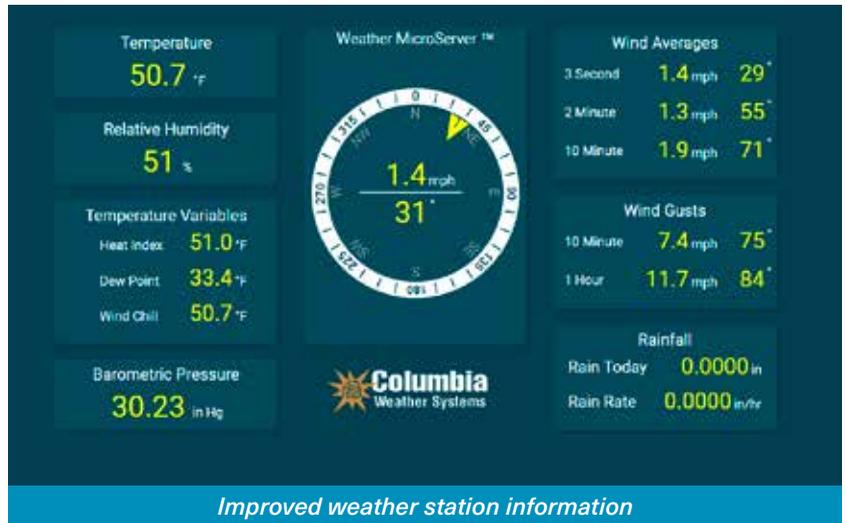


- **New Radio System** One of the critical components to living up to our mission of providing reliable electricity and outstanding service is having a dependable communications system and network. When outages occur, we need to get the correct information to our service technicians in the field to restore service as quickly as possible. During Florence, when we had a lot of traffic on the radios, we discovered dead zones in our area. Our I.T. department spearheaded a new system providing the reliable, innovative, engineered technology needed to ensure continued service to our members. We now have clear communication consistently throughout our coverage area.

- **Weather Stations** There are wind speed limits and conditions beyond which we cannot safely operate our utility vehicles and bucket trucks. If the wind speed reaches 35 mph, we must call in the crews. However, our wind data was coming from Wilmington, Fayetteville and local airports. We realized we could work more efficiently if we could accurately pinpoint wind speeds. Dangerous winds in Rocky Point do not necessarily mean windy conditions in Elizabethtown. We've installed weather stations



Weather station in Maple Hill



in strategic locations to provide us with current wind gusts, wind speeds, and temperatures to mitigate this problem. Ten weather gauges are installed, with six more to be added in 2022.

Resiliency is a 24/7, 365-days-a-year task. Whether it's the power poles, transformers, power lines or substations on our grid, it takes proactive maintenance and investment to keep them running smoothly.

- **Transmission System** Since Florence, we've updated transmission switches with more reliable switches that also allow for remote operation. Further, we have a long-range plan for upgrading our transmission system with stronger poles and larger wire. The upgraded system will allow operation even if more than one point of delivery (POD) station is out of service. A POD substation is where Duke Energy delivers high-voltage power to Four County.

- **Transmission Poles** Four County rarely has planned outages thanks to our ability to use alternate power feeds that keep

the power on during most maintenance work. However, those affected will remember the two planned outages we had late in 2021. While we realize the inconvenience, this work was critical in strengthening our system against future storms. We replaced stretches of wooden transmission poles at the N.E. Cape Fear River crossings - a one-mile section near Burgaw and a 1.5-mile section near Chinquapin - with sturdier engineered galvanized steel poles. Due to the high percentage of sand in the soil, we placed poles deeper than standard, some as deep as 18 feet in the ground.

- **Substations and (Point of Delivery Stations) PODs** Hurricane Florence brought historic flooding to several of our substations. Since the storm, we've taken critical steps to limit the impact future flooding would have on our infrastructure. Resiliency efforts include elevating substation equipment and relocating facilities to areas less prone to flooding. We installed permanent sump pumps at the

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Kelly POD and raised the communication building above flood levels. In Wallace, we elevated breakers in the POD station and installed water-resistant switching cabinets in the River Landing neighborhood.

- **Generators** At substations with communication buildings, we replaced portable gas generators with permanent propane generators. The large fuel tanks in these generators can keep the power running for at least a week. With automatic transfer switches, the communication buildings' electrical panels automatically switch from their grid connections to the generators when a loss of power is detected.

A resilient grid is also flexible and adaptable. Lessons learned from Hurricane Florence provided opportunities to improve our storm preparation, response planning and readiness exercises.

- **Materials** As we discovered with Florence, some of our areas can become isolated during massive flooding events. While we can bring in crews by boat, large



Old Kelly POD com building (left), raised building (right)



Changing out the poles

or heavy materials are another issue. To mitigate that problem, we developed a plan to pre-stage materials for easier access in vulnerable locations.

- **Host Sites** While there is no more welcome sight than a convoy of lineworkers coming to the rescue, housing them can be challenging. The logistics of providing lodging, food, and laundry services while dealing with major power outages and historic flooding is not an easy task. The solution is self-contained host sites. We partnered with strategically located organizations that can satisfy these logistical challenges. In addition, with these multiple sites already defined, we can locate crews where the most restoration efforts are needed.
- **Disaster Response Plan** We've not only updated our disaster response plan, we've also practiced it. We conducted simulated disaster scenarios to assess our



plan and help identify improvements. The goal is for everyone to know their roles and responsibilities when Mother Nature strikes.

Hurricane Florence happened three years ago and we're still working to harden our system. We continue to ask: what else can we do, how can we improve, and what are the lessons learned? No matter how long it takes, Four County is committed to doing everything we can to keep the lights on and protect the communities we serve.



End the Call. End the Scam.

Many North Carolina electric cooperative members have reported receiving phone calls from imposters, claiming to be cooperative representatives, demanding payment to prevent service interruptions.

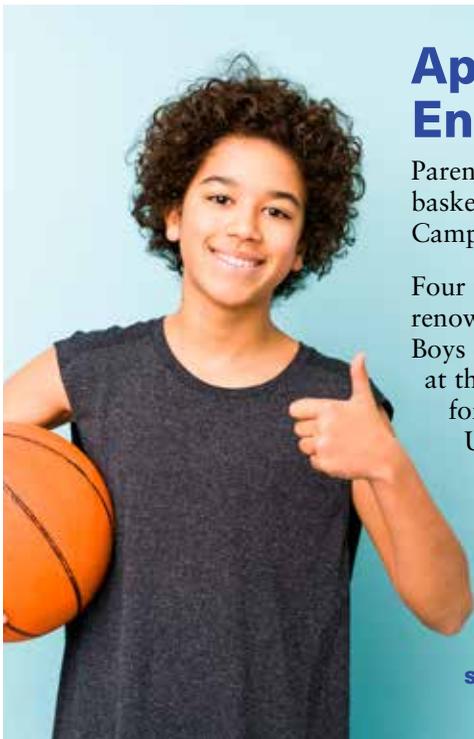


Scammers ask for personal account information and threaten to disconnect service if the member does not make immediate payment by pre-paid credit or debit card. In some cases, scammers have even falsified their caller ID to reflect a utility company's name. In other cases, they claim the number on the caller ID does not match the utility's phone number due to its remote work policies. Members beware!

Four County EMC will never call members to demand immediate payment or ask for account or personal information. Never give out your banking or credit card information to someone who has contacted you regarding your account. If you receive a suspicious call from someone claiming to represent your electric cooperative, hang up and call Four County EMC directly at 1-888-368-7289.

Scammers typically try to rush customers. It's okay to slow down the call. Think about the information the caller is asking of you. If it seems unsafe, it probably is. While scammers' techniques continually shift, the easiest way to defuse the pressure is to stop before you act.

End the Call. End the Scam.



Apply Now for the 2022 Touchstone Energy Sports Camps

Parents, if you have a rising sixth- or seventh-grade student who loves basketball, we have great news for you! The Touchstone Energy Sports Camp Scholarships are back!

Four County EMC is now accepting applications for full scholarships to renowned basketball camps at two North Carolina universities this summer. Boys can apply for a scholarship to attend the Carolina Basketball School at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and girls can apply for a spot at the Wolfpack Women's Basketball Camp held at NC State University in Raleigh. Both camps will take place in June 2022.

To be eligible, applicants must be a rising sixth- or seventh-grade student in a qualifying school. Applicants will be judged on their academics, extracurricular activities and an essay. The application period runs from January 1 – March 31.

To learn more or to download an application, visit fourcty.org/sports-camp-scholarships or ncelectriccooperatives.com/sports-camps.

Winning
from the editor
Recipe



Ingredients:

- 2 tbsp oil
- 1 small onion, diced
- 1 bell pepper, diced
- 1 cup ham, diced
- 2 cups hash browns or diced potatoes
- 4 eggs
- ½ cup shredded cheese
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ tsp pepper
- ½ tsp paprika
- ¼ tsp garlic powder
- Hot sauce for garnish

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Heat oil in an ovenproof or cast-iron skillet over medium heat. Add in onion and cook until translucent. Add green peppers and ham. Cook for at least 1 minute or until warm. In a

Breakfast Ham Hash



bowl, mix salt, pepper, paprika and garlic powder with your potatoes until combined. Add to skillet and cook until potatoes are lightly browned. Create four wells in your hash and crack an egg into each well. Top with cheese. Place in the oven and bake for 10-15 minutes or until the eggs are cooked to your preference.

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



Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Maximize your heating system's performance by inspecting, cleaning or replacing air filters once a month or as needed to reduce energy costs and prevent potential damage to your system. Make sure radiators, baseboard heaters and warm-air registers aren't blocked so air can flow freely.

Source: energy.gov

Four County Connection

Janet Smith, Editor

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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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