



Connection

Communicating local energy news to Four County Electric members

A Touchstone Energy Cooperative 

inside
Four County
Connection

Rising 6th and 7th Graders, Get Ready for Camp!

Apply Today: The Deadline Is March 31



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The deadline to apply for the 2022 Touchstone Energy Sports Camp Scholarships is March 31. Rising sixth- and seventh-grade students are encouraged to apply for this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience life on a college campus and learn from college athletes.



- Boys will attend the Carolina Basketball School at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill June 18-22.
- Girls will attend the Wolfpack Women’s Basketball Camp held at North Carolina State University in Raleigh June 19-22.

Visit fourcty.org or ncelectriccooperatives.com/in-the-community/sports-camps for more information and to apply online.

Get the Scoop

When was your cooling system last serviced? Most manufacturers recommend an annual tune up for your home’s cooling system. March is a great time to schedule this service so you can beat the summer rush when the pros are busiest.

Source: Dept. of Energy



Co-Op Connections Contest Winner

Amber Hudson of Chinquapin was one of the winners of the Four County EMC Very Merry Co-op Connections contest. Amber won a beautiful lighted wreath from Westside Creations in Wallace. Like us on Facebook to stay in the know about upcoming contests and for all things Four County!

Safeguard Your Home Electronics with Surge Protection

Power surges are short electricity bursts, and the stronger they are, the more likely they are to cause damage to electronic devices. If not protected, some electronics can be immediately destroyed by surges, while others may sustain damage that will shorten their lifespan. While the damage to the electronics or appliances may not be visible, it can result in equipment failing to work properly over time.

Power surges can come from many sources, including overloaded electrical circuits, faulty or exposed wiring, or when electricity is being restored after power outages. The most common surge comes from lightning storms. Surges can enter your house through various avenues such as cable lines, telephone lines, satellite cables, even underground water pump lines.

“Any outdoor electrical lines running to your house can be an opening for a power surge to enter your home. No matter where they come from, surges are a danger to electronics and can cause expensive damage,” explains Chris Ingram, energy advisor at Four County EMC.

For guaranteed protection, unplug electronics when you first become aware of an approaching storm.

If you cannot unplug before the storm, surge protectors can help protect your electronic equipment by diverting surges away from sensitive devices.

Point-of-use surge protection devices, like power strips, can protect electronics during most surges. Look for the words surge protection, fused-strip, or inter-

rupter switch when making your purchase decision. These words ensure you are purchasing a surge protector and not just a power strip.

For maximum protection, a meter-based surge protector, which is only available through your utility, deflects a surge before it enters the house. While they provide a high degree of protection, even meter-based surge suppressors can only prevent a certain amount of energy from entering your home.

To learn more, visit us at fourcty.org/powerguard-surge-protection, call us at 888-368-7289 or email makaylakillens@fourcty.org.



SURGE PROTECTION
Keep your electronic equipment safe.

A power surge is typically caused by lightning, changes in electrical loads, faulty wiring or damaged power lines.

Install power strips with surge protection to protect sensitive equipment.

- Easy to use (just plug them in)
- Protect electronics plugged into the device
- Must be replaced over time or after a major surge event

REMEMBER:
Not all power strips offer surge protection. Carefully read the packaging labels when purchasing.



Four Ways to Save Energy When Working from Home

Today, more Americans are working from home than ever before. More time spent at home means more energy used throughout the day. If you're punching the clock from home, there are small steps you can take to reduce your energy use and save on electric bills. Here are four easy ways to save energy when working from home.

1 Use a smart power strip. Plugging in your most-used devices, like computers, monitors and routers, to a smart power strip ensures these devices aren't drawing power when they're not in use. Smart power strips also give you the option to select which devices should stay in "always on" mode.

2 Unplug your least-used equipment. If your home office includes equipment like printers and scanners, you're probably not using these electronics every day. In this case, go ahead and unplug your least-used electronics and devices, since many of these draw energy even when they're not being used.

3 Flip the switch and use natural light instead. It's still chilly out there, so take advantage of natural light and additional warmth from the sun. When you're working during the day, open blinds, curtains and other window coverings to let natural light in—and don't forget to turn off the lights to reduce energy use!

4 Lower the thermostat. Home heating makes up a significant portion of your energy bills. Turn the thermostat down a couple degrees during the day to reduce energy use and save money. The Department of Energy recommends setting the thermostat to 68 degrees or cooler during cooler months. You're more likely to stay focused and alert when it's cooler in your home, so all the more reason to mind the thermostat.

Working from home doesn't have to take a toll on your energy bills, and whether you're working remotely or not, these practical tips can help everyone reduce their energy use.

Contact Four County EMC at 888-368-7289 if you have questions about your bills or want additional information about saving energy at home.

Collin Herber, his girlfriend,
Phoebe, and the family cats



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: Collin Herber's Rooftop Solar Experience

Due diligence. It sounds like fancy legalese, but it's just another way to say "do your homework." It's the research you do before making a major decision, such as buying a house, car, or rooftop solar.

Whether you're considering solar to save on your electricity bill or combat climate change, it's an expensive decision worthy of thought and consideration.

Four County member and new solar customer Collin Herber knows all about due diligence. He's a tech enthusiast who spent four years consuming information about solar and then five months researching prices, materials, dealers and options before signing the dotted line. "Every time something would happen in the industry, I would read up on it. I think it's such a cool idea. I'm an eco-friendly person anyway and wanted to be a part of it. Solar technology has gone crazy over the last eight years, and I felt that the time was right—the technology is good, and the cost is coming down."

Herber says his due diligence paid off; he's pleased with the finished product and considered the whole process "flawless." So what are some considerations before going solar?

How energy conscious are you? To maximize your savings from solar, make sure your home and habits work for you, not against you. Herber says his programmable thermostat and energy-efficient appliances help keep his energy use down. Study your monthly use and, before spending money on solar, see if you can make some low-cost changes to lower your energy bill. Four County's energy advisors will be happy to meet with you to help identify savings opportunities.

Is your roof in good condition? Removing the solar

panels for a roof replacement costs money, so you may want to delay installing the panels if your roof may need replacing within the next five years. If you proceed with installing solar panels, your warranty should include a price to remove and replace the panels when your roof needs replacing. Anticipate a minimum of \$2,000 for that process. As a side note, the panels are much more durable than shingles, so the portion underneath the panels stays well-protected from weather, light and heat.

Is your house suitable for solar? Do you have a lot of shade? What direction does your roof face? For rooftop solar, vents and dormers can limit the amount of space for the panels. South or west-facing systems are optimal, while northward-facing panels won't produce as much electric-



ity. The less favorable your home's conditions are, the longer it takes to see a return on your investment. Herber's house proved textbook perfect — no shade trees around and a southern-facing roof — all of which helped keep his price down.

Google has a website called Project Sunroof (sunroof.withgoogle.com) that shows solar energy potential for an inputted address; however, it hasn't expanded to include many rural areas in its database.

Another consideration consumers may not think about is internet access. While solar panels do not require the internet to function, broadband internet is necessary to monitor the system and its efficiency. Without monitoring capabilities, the dealer may void the warranty.

Talk to your energy provider.

Four County's energy experts can provide you with kW sizing restrictions and the buy-back rate for extra energy produced. Consulting us is not required, but it will provide helpful information during the due diligence process.

Get several quotes. Websites such as energysage.com allow homeowners to estimate their energy savings and receive quotes, enabling users to comparison shop before contacting a dealer. Estimates from this website are very detailed, even including the hardware brand utilized.

By utilizing this site and directly contacting dealers, Herber received 12 quotes ranging in price from \$28,400 to \$44,000. Using a little math, he took these estimates and the current price per kilowatt (a little over \$2) to determine the various payback periods. With the quote Herber chose, he calculates it will take approximately eight years before seeing a return on invest-

ment. However, for Herber, the decision wasn't only about saving money. "It's great to save money, but for some, such as myself, the satisfaction of going green was definitely a huge driving force."

Quotes should include the following information:

- **Cost.** The price should include the total cost for getting the system up and running, including hardware, installation, connection to the grid, permitting, sales tax, and warranty. Herber was thrilled when the least expensive quote was for the LG brand panels he requested and was from a local dealer, which he admits is a benefit. While installation times vary between companies, Herber says his entire installation process took only one day.
- **Offset.** Offset is the amount of electrical consumption provided by the solar panels. Any savings estimates should be in writing, guaranteed, and included in the proposal and the contract. These savings should be a range rather than a specific percentage due to the variables involved.
- **Return.** How many years it will take to see a return on your investment.

What do you know about the dealer? When you have your list narrowed down, do a little background search on the companies. How long have they been in business? Do they have references? Are there any pending lawsuits from unhappy customers? Before signing on the dotted line, verify your dealer is insured and has the proper certification—the solar industry standard is from the North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners (nabcep.org).

What tax incentives may you receive? While state tax credit programs have expired, there are still federal incentives available.

Understand your warranty. Warranties typically don't include "Acts of God" but are designed to cover efficiency depreciation. On day one, solar panels should have at least 98% efficiency. Herber received a 30-year panel warranty by using an LG-recommended dealer. His warranty states that, if within the next 20 years, his panels lose more than 1% efficiency per year, the dealer will replace the panels. A different calculation is used for the remaining ten years of the warranty. Please note this example was for LG brand panels, and guarantees may differ by brand.

So what advice does Herber have for others considering rooftop solar? "Do your homework. Learn about the different panel brands and get at least two quotes for comparison. Know what you're buying before signing on the dotted line, and don't let anyone pressure you into deciding before you're ready." His personal preference is to avoid door-to-door sales since people feel pressured to purchase. He laughs and says, "Hey, I know first hand about that — I have a Kirby vacuum cleaner sitting in my closet right now. It's a great product, but I use a robot vacuum!"

Herber's outcome is very positive thanks, in large part, to his time spent learning and researching the solar industry. Solar customers and FCEMC members who had a different experience shared their biggest frustrations, and here's what they had to say:

— *continued on next page*



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- “I was not told I had to have an internet connection. Now I have to spend more money every month to keep from voiding my solar panel warranty.”
- “The savings on my electricity bill they promised me isn’t happening. Unfortunately, I didn’t get it in writing.”
- “The installation took much longer than I expected. From the time I signed my contract, it took the company three months to install my panels.”
- “Once I signed my contract, I had trouble getting anyone from the company to return my calls.”

While it’s possible to save on your electricity bills over the life of

your solar system, adding solar to your home is a significant decision requiring careful consideration. Consider Four County EMC a trusted resource when considering solar. While not affiliated with any solar developer, FCEMC is here to help. We can answer questions, provide information and review your energy usage to help you size your system and evaluate potential savings. Call us at 888-368-7289, and we’ll connect you to one of our experienced energy advisors.

CO-OP CONNECTIONS BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

DigitalGlitch IT Solutions

Did you know that March 31 is World Backup Day? Crashes happen more often than you think and recovering everything you’ve stored on your computer is not guaranteed. Do you know what to do to prevent data loss and data theft? DigitalGlitch IT Solutions can help.

Dave Rowe, the owner of DigitalGlitch, started his IT support company in 2014 as 910Geeks. Rowe had worked in the IT field for over 30 years and finally decided to start his own business. The business expanded to the point where a new name was required. “No one outside of the 910 area code understood the business name,” Rowe laughs, “so DigitalGlitch was born.”

DigitalGlitch provides general computer support, virus removal, backup and data recovery solutions, networks, camera installs and more to residential and commercial clients. While there’s not a brick-and-mortar storefront, Rowe has six employees located throughout southeast North Carolina and can provide on-site or pick-up service to customers living in Pender, New Hanover, Brunswick, Onslow and Columbus counties.

However, Rowe points out that 95% of computer issues can be resolved remotely, so their customer base is not limited to those counties. Rowe says, “If you have an active computer connection, we can help.



Consider us your own remote IT department.” Rowe adds that eliminating the storefront business helps him keep his prices down.

DigitalGlitch is a participating Co-op Connections business, which means you can save money on their already low prices! As a Four County member, you receive \$20 off your first hour of IT service; just ask for the Co-op Connections discount when you contact the company.

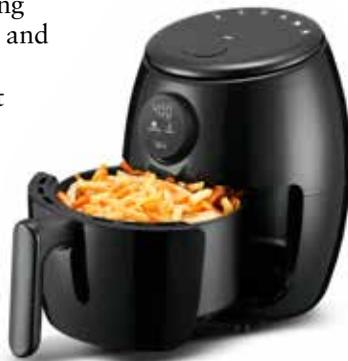


Three Electrifying Kitchen Appliances to Save Time and Energy

Whether your oven and stove top are powered by gas or electricity, it's no secret that they consume more energy than smaller countertop appliances, like slow cookers and toaster ovens. In addition to efficiency, smaller kitchen appliances can provide faster cooking times and less hassle with cleanup.

If you're looking for convenient cooking methods with the added bonus of energy efficiency, here are three electrifying appliances for your kitchen:

1 Air fryers are becoming increasingly popular, and consumers have a lot of good things to say about these handy little appliances. Air fryers use convection to circulate hot air and cook the food—this means little to no oil is required, resulting in healthier meals than those from traditional fryers. Air fryers are fairly small, so they won't take up much of your counter space, and with everything cooked in the fryer, cleanup will be a breeze. Air fryers are available in a variety of sizes, and prices range from \$40 to \$200-plus.



2 Electric griddles have certainly been around for a while, and they offer several benefits for any home chef (beyond bacon and eggs!). Griddles are convenient because you can cook everything at once—like a “one-pan” meal, and they satisfy any taste buds. They consume small amounts of energy and provide quick cooking times, so your energy bill will thank you. Prices and sizes for griddles vary, but you can typically find one for about \$30 at your local retail stores.



3 Multi-cookers such as the popular Instant Pot are fast and efficient appliances that cook just about everything from pot roast to yogurt. Pressure cookers work by creating heat under a tight seal, so the temperature is much higher than the boiling point of water and the steam can't escape. The steam cooks food much more quickly than traditional cooking methods and is more energy efficient. Instant Pots come in a variety of options and sizes and prices range from \$60 to over \$100.



These are just a few electrifying appliance options for your kitchen. Remember, when you're cooking a smaller meal, countertop appliances can save time and energy.

To learn about additional ways to save energy at home, visit our website at fourcty.org or call us at 888-368-7289 and ask to speak to one of our energy advisors.

Winning
from the editor
Recipe



Ingredients:

- 1 lb. shrimp, peeled & deveined
- 1 stick of butter (8 Tbsp.)
- 2 Tbsp minced garlic
- Juice of 1 lemon (2-3 Tbsp)
- ½ tsp crushed red pepper flakes
- Salt & pepper to taste
- Parsley for garnish
- Cooked pasta of your choice
- Grated parmesan cheese
- Olive oil

Pour your desired amount of olive oil in a large skillet or pan over medium heat.

Once the pan is hot, add in your shrimp. Season with salt, pepper, and red pepper

Lemon Butter Shrimp Pasta



flakes. When you are ready to flip your shrimp, add the butter and garlic to the pan.

Once shrimp is cooked, remove from heat. Add your lemon juice and cooked pasta and combine thoroughly. Top with parsley and parmesan cheese.

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



**Photo Contest
Coming Soon!**

**Help us Create our 2023
Four County EMC Calendar**

We hope everyone is enjoying the 2022 FCEMC calendar, created by you, our members! We'll start accepting photo submissions for our 2023 calendar in April, so start brushing up on those photography skills now. Remember, the photos need to be high-quality landscape/horizontal images. More details next month!

**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

We believe in the

Power of Human Connections

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