

Connection

Communicating local energy news to Four County Electric members

A Touchstone Energy Cooperative 

inside Four County Connection



p. H

Member Spotlight:
ASAPp. D

Levelized Billing
Explainedp. F

Get the Scoop

Four County offices will be closed on Friday, April 15, for Good Friday. We wish everyone a happy and blessed Easter holiday.



The Power Behind Your Power *Lineworker Appreciation Day is April 11*

You've likely noticed Four County EMC crews out and about, working on power lines and other electrical equipment in our community. It's no secret that a lineworker's job is tough—but it's a job that's essential and must be done, often in challenging conditions. This month, as we celebrate Lineworker Appreciation Day on April 11, I thought I'd share some interesting facts about electric lineworkers with you.

The work can be heavy, in more ways than one. Did you know the equipment and tools that a lineworker carries while climbing a utility pole can weigh up to 50 pounds? That's the same as carrying six gallons of water. Speaking of utility poles, lineworkers are required to climb poles ranging anywhere from 30 to 120 feet tall. Needless to say, if you have a fear of heights, this likely isn't the career path for you.

Lineworkers must be committed to their career because it's not just a job, it's a lifestyle. The long hours and ever-present danger can truly take a toll. In fact, being a lineworker is listed in the top 10 most dangerous jobs in the U.S.

Lineworkers often work non-traditional hours, outdoors in difficult conditions. While the job does not require a college degree, it does require technical skills, years of training and hands-on learning. Did you know that to become

a journeyman lineworker can take more than 7,000 hours of training (or about five years)? That's because working with high-voltage equipment requires specialized skills, experience and an ongoing mental toughness. Shortcuts are not an option, and there is no room for error in this line of work.



LINWORKER APPRECIATION DAY

We thank lineworkers for their courage and commitment to powering our community.

Despite the many challenges, Four County EMC lineworkers are committed to powering our local community. During severe weather events that bring major power outages, lineworkers are among the first ones called. They must be ready to leave the comfort of their home and families unexpectedly, and they don't return until the job is done, often days later. That's why the lineworker's family is also dedicated to service. They understand the importance of the job to the community.

Nationwide, there are approximately 120,000 electric lineworkers. Here at

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Four County, we have 29 lineworkers responsible for keeping power flowing 24/7, 365 days a year. To do this, they maintain more than 5,000 miles of power lines across our counties. In addition to the highly visible tasks lineworkers perform, their job today goes far beyond climbing utility poles to repair a wire. Today's lineworkers are information experts who can pinpoint power outages from miles away. Line crews now use laptops, tablets, drones and other technologies to map outages, survey damage and troubleshoot problems.

Being a lineworker may not seem like a glamorous job, but it is absolutely essential to the life of our community. Without the exceptional dedication and commit-

ment of these hardworking men and women, we simply would not have the reliable electricity that we need for everyday life.

So, the next time you see a lineworker, please thank them for the work they do to keep power flowing, regardless of the time of day or weather conditions. After all, lineworkers are the power behind your power. Please join us as we recognize them on April 11, and follow “#ThankALineworker” on social media to see how others are recognizing lineworkers.

Don Gatton
CEO, Four County EMC

Teachers, Apply for a Bright Ideas Grant

Four County EMC is partnering with outstanding educators to bring creative learning to life! Starting this month, teachers can apply for a Bright Ideas education grant of up to \$2,000 to fund projects that enhance student success in K-12 classrooms and would otherwise not be possible.

Applications and more information about the program can be found at ncbrightideas.com.

Grants are available in all curriculum areas including art, science, history and mathematics, and Four County expects to award approximately 18 grants to local teachers during the 2022-2023 school year. Over the past 28 years, Four County EMC has issued more than \$500,000 for over 800 projects that have benefited over 3,000 students in Bladen, Duplin, Pender and Sampson counties.



Bright Ideas grant applications will be accepted through September 15, but teachers are encouraged to apply early. Those who submit their application by August 15 will be entered to win one of five \$100 Visa gift cards.

Supported by all 26 electric cooperatives in North Carolina, Bright Ideas grants have contributed \$14.3 million to N.C. classrooms, funding a total of 13,536 projects

that have benefited well over 2.8 million students statewide since 1994.

Support for youth and education is part of our continued commitment to building a brighter future for the communities we serve.

Visit fourcty.org/bright-ideas-grant-program or ncbrightideas.com to learn more.



Front row, left to right: Don Gatton (Four County CEO), Norman Bryson (Director of Onslow County Emergency Services), Prentice Madgar (Fire Marshall of Sampson County), Tommy Batson (Director of Pender County Emergency Services), Rick Sauer (Director of Sampson County Emergency Services), Nathan Dowless (Director of Bladen County Emergency Services), Greg Sager (Four County VP of Member Services). Back row, left to right: Jimmy Smith (Four County Director of Economic & Community Development), Brent Croom (Four County Director of Safety).

Four County EMC Participates in Local Emergency Management Meeting

On February 4, Four County EMC met with emergency management personnel from five counties within its service territory. The focus of the meeting was to simplify the line of communication between county emergency management agencies/personnel in emergencies/life safety events.

When analyzing outage data that has occurred on Four County's system, vehicle accidents damaging poles and equipment are on the rise. Four County understands that having an efficient method to report these life safety events is crucial. Improving the efficiency of reporting these events shortens response times, reduces the public's exposure to downed lines and poles, and lessens the duration of power outages.

Four County is committed to maintaining a clear avenue of com-

munication between first responders and its daytime and after-hour dispatchers. Don Gatton, CEO for Four County EMC, states: "We are focused on being accessible, responding quickly, and providing valid ETAs to emergency personnel. We value our relationships with the counties that we serve and will continue to improve our communication strategies as we provide sustainable, affordable and reliable electricity to our counties' infrastructure and our members."



“I am different, not less.”
 Temple Grandin, American scientist, author, speaker and professor, diagnosed with autism.

Member Spotlight:
Autism Support & Programs (ASAP)
 by Janet Smith

Happy, healthy, and safe. It’s what every parent wants for their child or loved one. Chris Mitchell of Autism Support & Programs (ASAP), an independent living program for adults with autism, has this same goal for his residents. While his official title is Programs Director, his role encompasses so much more. He laughs and says, “My head isn’t big enough for all the hats I wear!”

ASAP was unofficially started back in the ‘90s when Judy Clark realized there was a hole in the system—outside of school, there weren’t many programs or services available for her two sons with severe autism. So she converted her garage into a summer center where a few other parents facing the same challenges could bring their autistic children during the summer. There were no fees; it was simply a collaborative effort to provide care and support for their children. The

small gathering of families thrived and quickly outgrew Judy’s garage. Next, they pooled their resources and rented out space in a church to continue supporting those in need.

As her sons grew into adults, the hole in the system grew larger. Judy and her partner Deena decided to transition from a free summer program to a licensed residential agency. They purchased a house in Rocky Point next to a standalone garage Judy already owned. The garage was converted into a

day program, and eventually, they added a second house to their community. Chris joined the team, and with his help, ASAP became a government-funded residential center.

The two houses provide a home for six men, and the residents, ranging in age from 18–57, learn skillsets to become independent in essential areas of life such as cooking, cleaning, social skills, and daily hygiene. A separate building houses the day program where the residents and community individuals can come for activities and field trips, including eating in restaurants, shopping, a day at the beach or taking in the latest movie.

The goal is to have fun, practice social skills, and be a part of the community. Chris says, “Anything



S’mores by the fire.



the rest of us would do for leisure activities, we want to provide these opportunities and experiences to our residents.”

Providing Support and Teaching Skills

As far as agencies go, ASAP is relatively small, but they like it that way. The executive team comprising of Executive Director Kimberly Hill, Programs Director Chris Mitchell, Associate Professional Shannon Mitchell, and Administrative Assistant Dionya Hawkins, pride themselves on quality of care for their residents over quantity of residents in their program.

The size enables the staff to provide more individualized care and allows each resident to have their own private bedroom. That’s not an industry standard, but Chris states the residents are much happier having a space to call their own. ASAP’s caretaker ratio sets them apart from other agencies as well. They have 25 staff members and, while not industry-mandated, their daytime ratio is 1:1. This ratio allows residents for more personal choices. For example, if a resident would rather go to the gym instead of bowling, Chris says that’s ok, and the resident’s preferred activity choice is honored.

Chris says there are so many families in need of the kind of care and structure ASAP provides, and he receives inquiries from all over the world. Since ASAP is the residents’ forever home, openings rarely occur.

Change and transition can be difficult for everyone, but people with autism tend to be happier and excel with a very routine-based, structured life. Chris recalls in 2018 when Hurricane Florence disrupted schedules and caused monumental anxiety for them all. As the storm approached, Chris and Kimberly had to make a decision: do they ride it out or evacuate?

Chris explains that by the time they chose evacuation, the closest hotel with availability for their group was 5½ hours away in Savannah, Georgia. Evacuating was the correct decision; however, this was uncharted territory for the agency. Chris recalls the two weeks in Georgia ran smoother than he could have ever hoped. They called the trip a vacation rather than an evacuation. The residents had opportunities to swim in the hotel pool, go sightseeing, eat out at restaurants, all while sticking to their daily routines as much as possible.

Not surprisingly, the challenges and uncertainty brought on by the COVID pandemic caused major disruptions to schedules and routines at ASAP. No longer was Monday bowling day. Gone were field trips and group activities. Like it did for all of us, the world shrank. The agency lost daytime participants and 45% of its staff during the pandemic, and Chris states they still haven’t fully recovered.



Arts and crafts at the day center.

Primary funding for the agency comes from Medicaid. Chris adds that, by the grace of God, they manage to cover everything from salaries, repairs, monthly expenses, electricity, and supplies needed for the programs. Of course, ASAP’s mission is to ensure their residents are happy, healthy, and safe, but that’s just the beginning.

They also want the residents to become as independent as possible. Chris adds: “To see my guys happy and learning and thriving and gaining some independence. You can’t put a price tag on that.”



Jonathan making pizza.

Jonathan making pizza.

While they enjoy remaining small, they do hope to expand someday.



Top: Judy Clark and her youngest son, Dylan. Bottom: Chris Mitchell (left) and Remly Clark, Judy’s oldest son.



Take the Surprise Out of Your Electric Bill with Levelized Billing

We recognize that the temperature outside plays a significant role in our electric bills. In the winter and summer months, energy usage is generally higher—usually noticeably so. During what we call the “shoulder months” (April-May and October-November), household power use usually drops off quite noticeably.

Our levelized billing program is a great way to plan your budget and maintain predictable monthly power bills. Under this program, each monthly bill is the rolling average of your electric usage for the most recent 12 months. Your bill will change only slightly from month to month, and the 12-month rolling average guards against drastic changes in your statement, even during the coldest and hottest months.

Levelized billing is FREE! There are no sign-up charges or monthly fees. To be eligible, members must meet the following requirements:

- Your account has had service for at least 12 months.
- Your current account balance is \$0.00 (zero dollars).
- You pay on time. To remain on the levelized payment plan, we must receive payments by the due date. If your account becomes delinquent, traditional billing will resume.

For more information or to sign up, contact us at 886-368-7289.



Help Us Create the 2023 Four County EMC Calendar

It's time to show off your photography skills and participate in our 2nd Annual Member Photo Contest! Photos can be scenery, buildings, power line equipment—anything you find interesting in our beautiful service area.

Prizes will be awarded for the 12 photos selected for our 2023 calendar. First place receives a \$100 bill credit, the calendar cover page and the photo will be used in the calendar. The other 11 winners receive a \$50 bill credit and their photos will be in the calendar.

Please submit your photos to marketing@fourcty.org. The deadline to enter is August 1 and a panel of judges will choose the winners.

- Photos must be taken in the Four County service area by a Four County member.
- Submitted photos must be a high-quality JPEG image.
- Only landscape (horizontal) photos will be considered.



- Scenic or nature photos only (no individuals in the photo).
- Employees of FCEMC are not eligible to enter.
- Up to three entries per member.
- Photo submissions should include the following information:
 - Name
 - Account number
 - Address
 - Phone
 - Email
 - Description of the photo, title, and who took the photo

Email any questions you may have to ashleydavis@fourcty.org.

**By submitting a photo entry to this contest, you are granting FCEMC permission to use the image in any and all of its publications, including internal and external newsletters and website entries, without payment. However, photo credit will be given. FCEMC reserves the right to disqualify any photo deemed inappropriate or offensive.*



Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

When streaming content, use the smallest device that makes sense for the number of people watching. Avoid streaming on game consoles, which use 10 times more power than streaming through a tablet or laptop. Streaming content with electronic equipment that has earned the ENERGY STAR® rating will use 25% to 30% less energy than standard equipment.

Source: Dept. of Energy

Winning
from the editor
Recipe



Ingredients:

- 1 large loaf of bread, cubed (need up to 12 cups)
- 8 eggs
- 2 cups milk
- ½ cup heavy cream
- 1 Tbsp vanilla extract
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- ⅔ cup brown sugar
- 1 cup strawberries, sliced
- ½ cup blueberries
- Powdered sugar
- Maple syrup

Grease a 9x13 casserole dish. Add cubed bread into casserole dish. In a large bowl, whisk together eggs, milk, vanilla extract, cinnamon, and brown sugar until thoroughly combined.

Berry French Toast Casserole



Pour mixture on top of bread cubes. Top casserole with strawberries and blueberries. Cover casserole with foil and place in the refrigerator for at least 4 hours, or up to overnight.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Bake for 40-50 minutes. Sprinkle with powdered sugar and serve with maple syrup. Enjoy!

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

Four County Connection

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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We ♥ Trees, Too.

We know everyone in our community enjoys the beauty and shade trees provide. But trees and power lines can be a dangerous mix without regular trimming during the growing season.

If you see us out in the community trimming, remember the many benefits it brings:

- Keeps power lines clear of tree limbs
- Helps us restore power outages more quickly
- Keeps crews and members of our community safe
- Reduces unexpected costs for repairs

Trimming improves service reliability for you, the members we serve.



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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