



Connection

Communicating local energy news to Four County Electric members

A Touchstone Energy Cooperative 

Four County Electric Partners with Focus Broadband

Four County EMC announced a new partnership with Focus Broadband (focusbroadband.com) to bring fiber-optic high-speed internet service to unserved portions of Duplin County. Through the agreement, a portion of Four County EMC’s 295-mile fiber-optic network will be used to link FOCUS Broadband’s existing fiber-optic network in Columbus County to a new fiber-optic network currently under construction in Duplin County.

“This partnership is an example of cooperatives coming together and demonstrating their dedication to two cooperative principles: cooperation among cooperatives and concern for community, to improve the quality of life for our members in Duplin County,” commented Don Gatton, Four County EMC CEO. This cooperation eliminates the need for FOCUS Broadband to build 60 miles of infrastructure, greatly reducing the amount of time needed to begin turning up service to customers in Duplin County.



County,” commented Keith Holden, FOCUS Broadband CEO. “Many of the homes we will soon be serving in Duplin County are also Four County EMC cooperative members. By allowing us access to their fiber network, Four County EMC is playing a big role in bringing internet to their members.”

FOCUS Broadband is expected to begin offering high-speed internet service to its first group of Duplin County residents by the end of July. Additional areas will continue to come online as construction is completed. For more information on FOCUS Broadband’s progress in Duplin County, visit fasterduplin.com.

FOCUS Broadband is also partnering with Duplin County Government to seek additional grant funds to bring high-speed internet to more unserved areas of Duplin County.

In August 2020, FOCUS Broadband was awarded \$1.2 million through the North Carolina’s Growing Rural Economies through Access to Technology (GREAT) grant program to expand high-speed internet service to more than 400 homes in communities west of Magnolia, Rose Hill and Teachey. Later that year, FOCUS Broadband received another \$1.3 million in grant funds to expand service to an additional 625 addresses in communities east of Magnolia, Rose Hill and Teachey. FOCUS Broadband will also provide \$1.8 million in matching funds to complete these projects.

“We are thankful for Four County EMC’s assistance to help us bring fiber-optic delivered gigabit broadband service to over 1,000 homes in rural Duplin

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Get the Scoop

Did you know you can use the Home Energy Saver tool to conduct a do-it-yourself audit? Home Energy Saver can also help you plan next steps following your DIY energy audit. Visit hes.lbl.gov/consumer for more info.

Source: Dept. of Energy



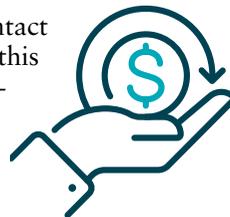
Four County Offers Comfort Loan Program for Members

Now is the time to ensure your home's temperature will be controlled during those hot summer days. With record highs of 102 degrees, it is essential to be prepared to beat the heat. Four County offers a comfort loan program that helps qualifying members make energy improvements to their homes.

The comfort loan program offers an affordable means to obtain a high-efficiency heat pump, central air conditioning, or insulation to the member's primary residence. Depending on improvements needed, the loan amount can go up to \$6,500 with a maximum of a five-year, low-interest loan.

Remember also that rebates are available for any member who installs a 16 SEER or greater heat pump. The rebate is \$100 per ton and applies to new construction or retrofits.

For more information on comfort loans or rebates, contact us at 1-888-368-7289. Four County EMC has offered this valuable program for 30 years and has provided countless necessary loans to members for home energy improvements. This program symbolizes how your co-op empowers our members and the communities we serve.



NEW WAY TO PAY

Through our new payment method, CheckOut, members can conveniently pay their utility bill at many CVS, Dollar General, Family Dollar, Walgreens, and Speedway stores while stopping to shop.

This option is easy to use. You take your bill to a participating store and scan the barcode on the back. You will need to tell the cashier how much money you wish to add to your account.

If you do not have your bill handy, you must download a barcode that is tied to your account. Visit FourCty.sedccheckout.com/, enter your Four County account number, and confirm your address. Retailers will not have access to your account information or your balance.

Please keep in mind that the payments must be cash-only, and there is a \$1.50 convenience fee per transaction.

After the payment is made, it will immediately post to your account. To find a location near you, visit paygodemo.checkoutbypaygo.com/map.

The other payment options Four County currently offers are located on the website fourcty.org.



Local Students Attend Youth Tour to D.C.

The 2022 Electric Cooperative Youth Tour is happening this month! This annual event coordinated by electric cooperatives nationwide allows high school students to go to Washington, D.C., experience our government in action, build their network, and learn about our country and cooperatives' history.



Timothy "Rylee" Mintz, Pender High School, and MaKayla Robertson, Pender Early College.

Four County EMC has chosen two outstanding students to represent our cooperative: Timothy "Rylee" Mintz, Pender High School, and MaKayla Robertson, Pender Early College.

"We're excited to have students network together with elected officials this year. We are proud to continue this long-standing tradition and learning opportunity for young leaders," said MaKayla

Killens, communications specialist for Four County EMC.

On this year's Youth Tour, delegates will hear from congressional representatives and other leaders. They will understand energy innovation, 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 programs@fourcty.org or visit fourcty.org for more information.

Teachers: Apply Now for Bright Ideas Funding

Four County EMC finds grants to help improve the rural communities we serve. Teachers are eligible to 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.

Last year, 17 teachers from our service area were awarded grants that totaled \$26,308.33. 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. This program is supported by all 26 electric cooperatives in North Carolina, and 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.

Grants are available in all curriculum areas and Four County expects to award approximately 18 grants to local teachers during the 2022-2023 school year.

Bright Ideas grant applications will be accepted through Sept. 15, but educators need not wait until the last minute to apply. Those who submit their application by Aug. 15 will be entered to win one of five \$100 Visa gift cards.

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 to learn more.





North Carolina's Severe Storm Season is Here, Are You Prepared?

Defend Your Home Against Harmful Surges



Electric Surge An electrical surge, also known as transient voltage, increases the voltage on an electrical circuit. The typical Four County residential household appliance voltage levels are approximately 110 to 120 volts. In the event of a surge, that number has the potential to escalate tremendously, resulting in loss or damaged appliances. Surges can be quick, lasting only 30 microseconds, but the damage they cause can significantly impact a member's everyday life. Some causes can be bad weather, animals, faulty wiring, poor grounding, downed powerlines, and even normal usage of large appliances.

Watch Out for Signs

Although it may be difficult to detect a surge, there are sometimes signs that can indicate one may be happening. Potential signs for power surges may include burning or fishy odors near outlets, discoloration of outlets, frayed wires, lights flickering on and off, warm outlets, and vibrating outlets.

Preventative Measures

What can you do to protect your home and expensive appliances from the dangers of a surge? You can unplug your appliances when storms are approaching to help prevent appliance damage. If that is inconvenient for you, then Four County is here to help! Four County offers four different packages to help defend your home against surges.

Meter Treater Device The Space Saving Meter Base Surge Protector can be purchased and installed by Four County EMC's trained technicians. This low-profile meter base surge protector provides the first line of



defense against incoming transient surges. This provides maximum protection by eliminating the risk of catastrophic failure under extended over-voltage occurrences. This device can withstand surges up to 50,000 amps and can increase the life of your appliances, such as the refrigerator, washer, and dryer. Another great thing about this device is it has a five-year manufacturer warranty.

Four County EMC Surge Protection Packages

PACKAGE #1
Meter Treater Device Only

PACKAGE #2
Computer System Protection and Meter Treater

PACKAGE #3
Entertainment System Protection and Meter Treater

PACKAGE #4
Entertainment System Protection, Computer System Protection and Meter Treater



Computer System Protection

The Plug-In Surge Protector is a universal suppressor with six receptacles to help power electronic devices and is mounted over an outlet. This surge protector will absorb and reroute the surge to the ground. It includes both video and phone adapters.

Entertainment System Protection The other Plug-In Surge Protector is a multimedia Power Strip with eight receptacles to help power electronic devices. This will also absorb and reroute the surge to the ground. This protector includes both video and phone adapters. This surge protector will even improve your devices' picture and sound quality.



Don't hesitate to contact your local Four County EMC office at 1-888-368-7289 for more information about these affordable protectors. Financing options are available.



June 19 is Father's Day!

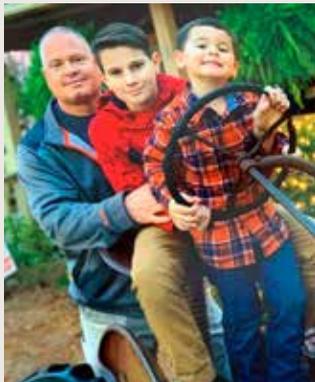
Happy Father's Day to all the dads out there. Thank you for all that you do. We hope you enjoy your day! Here are a few of the hardworking Four County EMC dads that we hope enjoy their special day!



Mike Delacerda (Rose Hill Staking Technician) and his kids enjoy time together.



Cameron Ramsey (Burgaw Warehouse Coordinator) with his beautiful family.



Brent Croom (Director of Safety, Training, & Loss Control) and sons Blake and Jace enjoy the outdoors.



Proud Dad Eduardo Gonzales (Burgaw District Lineman) supports his son in receiving a school award.



Greg Sager (Vice President of Member Services) and family celebrated this Easter with a new puppy.



Noah Whaley (Rose Hill Lineman) and his family enjoy boating on the river.



Nathan McMillan (Rose Hill Warehouse Coordinator) volunteers with his daughter and son at the local fire department.



Charles Lewis' (Elizabethtown Operations Supervisor) boys were excited to see him after a hard day's work.



Three generations: Father Jay Willoughby (Four County EMC's System Maintenance Supervisor), son Craven Blansett (Duke Journeyman Lineman) & Future Lineman Caison Blansett attend the 1st Annual Penderlea Day.



Nick Herring (IT Specialist) with his daughter.



Ethan Canady (Elizabethtown Member Service Representative) and his baby girl.



Anthony Kent (Vice President of Information Technology) and his family.



CO-OP CONNECTIONS BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

Gregory Farms & Vineyard



Gregory Farms & Vineyard, located off the main highway in Currie, is a great Carolina getaway. Owners Alan and Pam Gregory have been married for 28 years and they live the American dream. Alan is a contractor and Pam is a real estate agent. When they are not working their day jobs, they spend time taking care of 251 acres consisting of blueberry plants and operate their exclusive vineyard.

The land that holds the vineyard has been a blueberry farm since the 1940s. Alan’s parents, Paul and Martha Gregory, purchased the property back in 1987. Alan’s dad loved the place’s old southern charm. In 2012, Alan’s 89-year-old father passed away. Alan and Pam knew they wanted the farm, as it meant so much to their family and they had shared countless fond memories there. In 2016, Alan and Pam purchased the farm. At this point, the land had grown up a good bit. They spent a reasonable



amount of time returning it to working farmland, disked up the land and planted new blueberries.

The Gregorlys wanted to share their experience with others. They established the vineyard to provide their community with an elegant, but laid-back experience. Gregory Farms & Vineyards offers the perfect place to spend time with friends and family. The beautiful pond view and rustic wine shop offers a great location for events such as weddings, fundraisers, cookouts, reunions and more. The winery often offers live music and other events on scheduled Saturdays for everyone to enjoy.

Once your tires leave the pavement and hit the dirt road, you get a sense of peace on the land the Gregorlys have made their own. The scenery is beautiful. From the luscious blueberry plants to the gazebo overlooking the large pond and the vivid sign entering the vineyard area that one of their daughters and a close friend painted, the place holds a peaceful, majestic feel.

Hard Work Pays Off

While the Gregorlys enjoy the place, hard work also takes dedication. Planting, spraying, replacing plants, and pruning are all a part of the process. Every individual plant on the farm is touched by a human hand to help with the plant’s success. Pam helps with the planting, Alan does all the spraying himself, and a group comes in to prune the blueberry plants.

The Gregorlys also have a bee enthusiast who delivers bees to pollinate their blueberries. Without those bees, no crops would grow. A plant cannot be successful without pollination. The berry season usually runs from April to July. When asked what they do in the off-season, the answer is there is no off-season. The Gregorlys take a break from December to January and then get back to work. Constant maintenance is required to keep the farm in pristine condition and to plant the following season.

The biggest struggle is watching out for frost. Last Easter weekend, they lost a lot of their crop due to the late frost. So far this year, they have been blessed.





Winery

While the blueberries keep them busy, the winery allows for creativity. They take pride in the quality of the products they distribute. It involves a thoughtful process for this line of work, as some wines have been aged in French oak barrels for up to 10 months to provide quality and taste. They also utilize stainless steel fermentation on other varieties. They must watch their timing and inventory to keep up with the needed supply of wine. They even offer a blueberry wine option. The eye-catching windmill on their merchandise is a beautiful icon of the property. His dad's company made that windmill, and it is signified on most of their inventory.

The Gregorys take pride in their hard work. They love spending time in the tranquil environment, meeting new people, and bonding with their community. Their family motto is "take time, make time, there may not be another time," which has been a saying in their family for generations.

When using the Co-op Connections card or mobile app, Four County members receive 10% off a cheese and cracker plate or 10% off their wine slushie mix! Check out their Facebook page

[facebook.com/gregoryfarmsandvineyard](https://www.facebook.com/gregoryfarmsandvineyard) to experience the farm, Vineyard, and meet Alan and Pam Gregory.



The Gregory's host a Blueberry Harvest Celebration annually, and they would love to see you there on June 11! For more information, visit the website at [gregoryfarmsandvineyard.com](https://www.gregoryfarmsandvineyard.com).

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT: HEATHER HORNE

As a human resources generalist in the Burgaw corporate office, Heather regularly interacts with all Four County Electric's departments. FCEMC welcomed Heather to the team in January. She has over 15 years of human resources experience and a bachelor's degree in Human Resource Management from the University of Mount Olive.

Born and raised in Wallace, she grew up playing softball, volleyball and basketball. She continues her love for competition by playing in Wallace's recreational adult volleyball league. Her favorite position is playing as an outside hitter. The thrill of staying active keeps her motivated to do great things.



It was a no-brainer when asked about her favorite place. She responded quickly by saying, "the place I got engaged to my husband, Tony. "The Pretty Place" is Symmes Chapel in Greenville, South Carolina, which overlooks the the Piedmont mountain region. Aside from that place, Heather also loves to visit the beach and other mountain areas.

In Heather's free time, you will catch her at any sporting event her two daughters attend. Annsley (9) and Analise (15) keep Tony and Heather busy with travel volleyball and softball. When they aren't attending a sporting event, you can find the crew at the beach or the lake. The entire family has a love for the water. They also have a beloved long-haired dachshund, Gracie.

As a newer employee of Four County Electric, you may be interested to know what her favorite thing is about her job. She stated, "there is nothing like working for a co-op," and added that every person she works with is so kind and helpful. The atmosphere is like no other. She loves the challenge working for a cooperative brings, as she learns something new each day.

Winning
from the editor
Recipe



Ingredients:

- 2 racks baby back pork ribs
- 2 tbsp light brown sugar
- 1 tbsp cayenne pepper
- 1½ tsp salt
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- ½ tsp cinnamon
- 1 tsp chili powder
- 1 tsp onion powder
- 1 tsp ground mustard
- ½ tsp black pepper
- 2 tsp smoked paprika
- ¾ cup apple juice
- ¼ cup apple cider vinegar
- large foil pan
- aluminum foil
- favorite BBQ sauce (such as Sweet Baby Ray's)

Heat your gas grill to 300 degrees. Remove the silver skin off the back of the ribs. Mix all the dry spices together in a small bowl. Rub the spice blend over both sides of the ribs. Add the apple juice and apple cider vinegar to the foil pan. Lay the ribs in the

Grant's Grilled BBQ Ribs



pan and cover tightly with foil. Place the pan on the grill and close the grill cover. Grill the ribs for 60-90 minutes at 300 degrees with the grill closed the entire time. Once the internal temperature reads 165-170 degrees, the ribs are done.

Carefully bring the foil pan inside. Remove the ribs and transfer them to a large baking sheet. Slather each side of the ribs with your favorite sauce. Increase the heat on each burner to medium/high. I usually keep the two outside burners on high and the middle one low/medium. Grill each rack for about 5-7 minutes per side, adding more sauce as needed. When the ribs start to slightly char, they are done.

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

Reminder: Don't forget to submit your scenery, structure, or power line equipment photos that you have taken for the 2023 Four County EMS Calendar Photo Contest. Please submit entries **no later than August 1** to marketing@fourcty.org. The 12 selected submissions will win a prize. Be sure to use the following submission guidelines:

- 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).
- Up to three entries per member.

*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.

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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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