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**MISSION STATEMENT**  
 Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative will operate as a competitive provider of energy services and a partner with local communities, with a focus on safety, service and integrity.

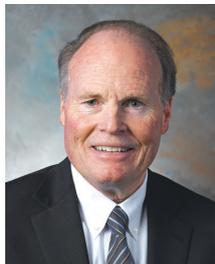
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This organization is an equal-opportunity provider.



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## Your water heater— convenience and savings

**ALTHOUGH I'VE SPENT** the better part of my life involved in the electric power business, it's still easy for me to take electricity for granted. When you take time to really think about all that electricity provides for us daily in our homes, it really is quite a list:

- ▶ Heating and cooling
- ▶ Meal preparation that includes refrigeration, use of the stove top, the oven and any number of small appliances
- ▶ Indoor and outdoor lighting
- ▶ Entertainment options such as television, radio and game devices
- ▶ Internet access and all that goes with that
- ▶ Vacuuming and cleaning
- ▶ Power tools and other electric motors
- ▶ Home security systems

No doubt, I could add plenty more items to that list. One of those that I believe belongs close to the top would be the water heater. Experiencing the convenience of instant hot water by simply turning on a faucet is a daily occurrence that we certainly miss when it doesn't work. If you think back over our history, providing hot water for bathing or washing clothes was probably one of the most laborious chores our ancestors had to contend with.

Today's appliance retailers feature a host of high-efficiency water heaters. If you're in the market for a new one, I'd invite you to contact our Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative member service center or stop by either of our offices to learn about our water heater rebate program.

The no-strings-attached cash rebate (\$200 or \$300) is available to members equipping a new home with an electric water heater or those who need to replace an electric unit in an existing dwelling.

For co-op members who are changing out a water heater, a \$500 or \$600 rebate could apply. That would be the case if a new electric model is to be installed in place of either a propane or natural gas appliance. Arranging for a rebate is a simple process. I encourage you to be in touch with us.

On a closing note, I want to offer you a cordial invitation to participate in the cooperative's upcoming annual meeting of members, which is scheduled for April 26 and 27. Once again, we'll use the drive-thru registration process that was pioneered by Blue Ridge at our 2020 annual meeting. The wrap that accompanies this month's edition of *South Carolina Living* contains the full details. In the meantime, I hope you'll mark your calendar and plan to join us.

**JIM LOVINGGOOD**  
 President and CEO

## Harlin wins Who Powers You award

**SINCE HE WAS** a relatively young retiree at 58, it was Mike Harlin's strong back that was initially of value. After moving to Mountain Rest from New Jersey, he was recruited by his wife Jane to help with loading and unloading food at the Golden Corner Food Pantry in Seneca.

But it was Harlin's acumen for logistics—he'd retired from Macy's as merchandise planner—that soon proved an even greater benefit to those struggling with food insecurities in Oconee County.

Since joining Golden Corner Food Pantry's board of directors in 2017, Harlin has helped the pantry reach more people and in new ways. That difference-making impact earned Harlin the 2022 Who Powers You Award and a \$1,000 prize from Blue Ridge Electric.

"I find it so admirable that someone who has moved into our community in retirement has given so generously to make such a positive impact for his neighbors," says Carolyn Keese of Seneca, who nominated Harlin for the award.

Under Harlin's leadership, Golden Corner Food Pantry began offering Client-Choice Shopping so their clients can fill their own carts with the food they need. Harlin says they also recognized the transportation difficulties that some face, so now a mobile food pantry travels to locations in Oconee County such as Salem, Mountain Rest and Long Creek.

"As you hear their stories, you want to help," says Harlin. "I'm inspired seeing the examples of the more than 200 people that



Mike Harlin guides a volunteer through the grocery store set-up the Golden Corner Food Pantry offers their clients twice per week.

volunteer here. What we do wouldn't be possible without their devotion and kindness."

To find out more or to support Golden Corner Food Pantry, visit [goldencornerpantry.org](http://goldencornerpantry.org).

**Are you inspired by someone making a difference in our community? Tell us their story and they could win a prize from Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative. We are now accepting nominations for the 2023 Who Powers You contest. Visit [ecsc.org/WhoPowersYou](http://ecsc.org/WhoPowersYou) for full contest rules and to nominate the person that inspires you.**

## Grant will aid broadband expansion

**UPCOUNTRY FIBER**, the internet service provider created by utility cooperatives Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative and WCFIBER, a subsidiary of West Carolina Rural Telephone Cooperative, has been awarded a \$24 million grant from American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funds Appropriation Bill to help bridge the "digital divide" where little to no access exists.

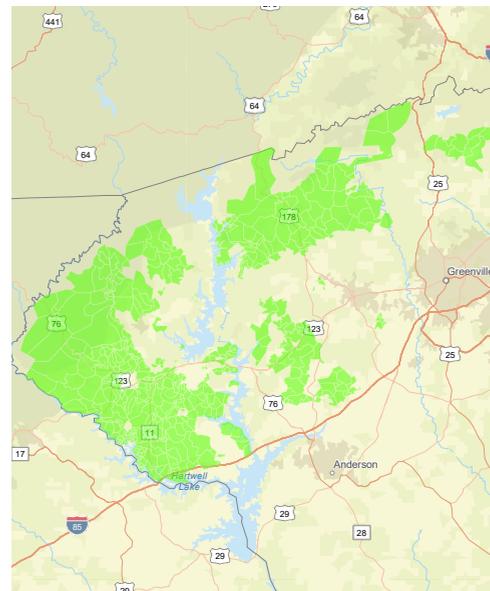
Approximately 8,200 new customers in rural and underserved areas of Oconee and Pickens counties will have access to high-speed fiber internet service by the end of 2023.

Specifically, Upcountry Fiber will build out its network in these areas:

- ▶ Oconee County—Coneross, Fair Play, Long Creek, Mountain Rest, Oakway and Toccoa Highway in Westminster
- ▶ Pickens County—Rocky Bottom area in Northern Pickens County above Highway 11 and Shady Grove area in Pickens

"We are very thankful that our legislators have ensured rural and underserved communities in Oconee and Pickens Counties have even more potential for competitive growth by allocating funds to build out this necessary utility service," said Jim Lovinggood, chief executive officer of BREC.

For more information visit [upcountryfiber.com](http://upcountryfiber.com).



Geographical areas in green will see broadband delivered in 2023.