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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
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A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



Member, customer growth

JUST AS LAST October was drawing to a close, Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative connected service to member number 72,000. That number obviously represents a milestone; however, what makes it even more remarkable is how quickly the member count climbed to that new plateau. I share that observation because the co-op reached 71,000 members only seven months earlier, in March!

In previous columns, I've called attention to the rapid population growth that's occurring across South Carolina. By various reports, the state is cited as being anywhere from the third-fastest to the fifth-fastest-growing state in America. It seems more and more folks are discovering what the Palmetto State has to offer.

Among the top four

I believe it's safe to say that much of that appreciation is directed toward the territory where Blue Ridge is privileged to serve. Current statistics indicate that we rank among the top four of the state's 20 electric cooperatives when it comes to adding new members. Let's face it—this northwestern corner of South Carolina is a wonderful place to live, work and retire.

In response to this influx of newcomers, Blue Ridge has designed work plans for both the near and long term. We're intent upon having well-functioning facilities to meet the burgeoning demand for quality electric service. In a nutshell, when it comes to supplying dependable electricity at the distribution level, Blue Ridge is more than doing its part.

Serious ground covered

To end this column on a positive note, I want to mention that Upcountry Fiber extended high-speed internet service to its 17,000th customer account in January. We connected service to customer number one barely three years ago, in February 2021. That represents some serious ground that our crews have covered.

What's more, the responses we've received from these new clients have been nothing short of tremendous. It's truly heartwarming to be on the receiving end of so many enthusiastic comments from subscribers regarding our quality fiber-to-the-premises broadband. Our Upcountry Fiber team is committed to continuing down the path toward total saturation of our service area. You have our commitment that if you want high-speed internet, we're determined—sooner or later—to deliver.

This month's magazine highlights Senator Thomas Alexander, who is the first recipient of the Electric Cooperatives Outstanding Public Service Award. We're proud to call Senator Alexander one of our own with a relationship that spans his entire career. Blue Ridge is fortunate to have someone that knows and understands cooperatives just a call away. We especially are thankful for the assistance he has given us in assuring that broadband funding has been awarded in our area. He is certainly deserving of this recognition, and we applaud all the contributions he has made to our state.

JIM LOVINGGOOD
President and CEO

Local all-stars help kids at bowl game

BY JOSH P. CROTZER

AS A LINEBACKER for T.L. Hanna High School, Jake Curtis knows how to pick up on the tendencies of opposing offenses. He applied a similar skill while guiding nine-year-old Ramya Stephens through the aisles of a Target store a few weeks before Christmas.

"It was a little hard, but she kind of did her own thing," Curtis says of assisting a young girl to find the things on her wish list. "We just followed her around. She got everything she wanted, for sure."

Stephens was one of 44 deserving students from Myrtle Beach Elementary School treated to a Christmas shopping spree at a Target store in Myrtle Beach. She was matched up with all-star football players from both the North and South squads, who were set to face off in the annual Touchstone Energy Cooperatives Bowl later that week. Curtis, Jamie Downing of Bamberg-Ehrhardt High School and Jack Stevens of North Augusta High School ushered Stephens around the store, making sure she could find most of the items on her list—leggings, jeans, a purple jacket and some Nike shoes. The shopping squads were equipped with a \$150 gift card provided by South Carolina's electric cooperatives, including Blue Ridge Electric.

"It makes you feel good to hopefully make some kids' Christmases," says Curtis. "It really gives you an insight into someone else's life and helps you connect with younger kids that don't have as much."

The shopping spree was part of a full week of experiences for the 88 players participating in the annual all-star game at Doug Shaw Memorial Stadium on Dec. 9. The night before, the players were given the opportunity to take a tethered ride in the Touchstone Energy Cooperatives hot air balloon. They also got to explore careers as lineworkers



PHOTOS BY TRAVIS BELL

T.L. Hanna offensive lineman Chase Gregorek (number 54) tries to break through the line during a practice before the Touchstone Energy Cooperatives Bowl in December.



Ramya Stephens picks out socks to match her braids during the Target store Christmas shopping spree.

through hands-on demonstrations presented by a crew from Horry Electric Cooperative.

For Curtis' T.L. Hanna teammate, offensive lineman Chase Gregorek, the Lineman Demo experience was unfamiliar, but intriguing.

"I didn't know what to expect and didn't know anything about it," says Gregorek of the type of work electric cooperative linemen do. "But it was

definitely cool and after seeing it, it's something I might want to look into."

Other local players participating in the game included Daniel High School defensive lineman Jaedyn Young and Westside High School wide receiver Josh Williams, who caught two passes for 14 yards for the North.

The South won the game at Doug Shaw Memorial Stadium in Myrtle Beach 28-8.