

## Looking back over the year



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This organization is an  
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“I honestly believe this corner of our state would be a poorer place if Blue Ridge were not a part of it.”

**THIS WILL BE THE LAST ISSUE** of *South Carolina Living* for the year and I want to use my column to review the many things that happened during 2024. Of course, we can't think about the year without focusing on Hurricane Helene. It was a storm event unlike anything we have ever experienced, and its effects will linger for years. However, many positive things will also mark this year.

I'll start by noting that, according to the latest report, it has been almost 500 days since our workforce last experienced a lost-time accident. When you consider the nature of our work combined with the number of miles our employees drive daily, this is to be celebrated. Safety continues to be number one at the co-op, and I commend everybody for this impressive record of working safely.

Next, I want to pay tribute to the continuing progress our Upcountry Fiber business is seeing. Last month, crews connected service to 622 new internet customers. Those additions took the number of locations now on our fiber network to well beyond 20,000! More of that kind of growth is awaiting us in our future, and, in any number of ways, that's positive news for Blue Ridge.

This year we established our first Days of Giving Campaign. Employees were given an opportunity to give monetarily to one or more charities of their choice. A total of \$82,000 has been raised through this campaign. Assisting local charities and causes reinforces our commitment to the communities we call home. I honestly believe this corner of our state would be a poorer place if Blue Ridge were not a part of it. With good reason, many folks around here recognize the unselfish character of our organization.

Finally, I'm excited to be a witness to the ongoing growth in the number of members locating on the Blue Ridge system. We're adding new members on a more-than-steady basis. I'm just glad that, simultaneously, substantial additions are being made to our system. Along with the strengthening of the transmission line that serves our Mountain Rest substation, we've seen the new Westminster, Dr. Johns, and the Exit 27 substations all come on line in the last two years. More of our existing Oconee substations are presently being rebuilt to be powered by an extensive network of new transmission lines. Several other substations will be completed soon to add to our capacity to deliver reliable service. This co-op is moving in a very good direction.

We are proud to be your cooperative. As the holiday season approaches, we will once again usher in Christmas with the lighting of the Blue Ridge Christmas tree on the front lawn of the Pickens office. We invite you to join us at 5:15 p.m. on Nov. 26 for this co-op tradition.

We wish you all the blessings this season brings. Happy Thanksgiving and Merry Christmas from all of us at Blue Ridge Co-op.

**JIM LOVINGGOOD**  
President and CEO

## Upcountry Fiber continues to grow

**SINCE THE FORMATION** of Upcountry Fiber in the fall of 2021, the goal of bringing fiber to the rural areas served by Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative has never changed. After months of grant applications and funding considerations, Upcountry Fiber was able to begin bringing internet service to the unserved and underserved areas of Pickens, Oconee, Anderson and Greenville counties. Members that have never enjoyed high speed internet have responded with resounding thanks to this partnership.

In 2024 alone, 284 miles of fiber were added. The majority of this work, most of it limited by grant constraints, was completed in the Golden Corner, Oakway, Westminster and Mountain Rest areas in Oconee County; the Six Mile and Pickens areas of Pickens County; and the Pendleton and Roberts Church areas

in Anderson County. More than 20,000 customers—3,200 added in 2024—are now enjoying high speed fiber internet.

Chief of Staff Zachary Hinton has spearheaded this project since its beginning. He says he is proud of the progress made so far.

“We’ve received over \$21 million in grants and contributions-in-aid since the beginning,” says Hinton. “While our construction is geared to the areas that are part of a grant completion, it still will allow us to reach our entire system in less time. The addition of fiber is bringing a valuable recurring revenue to the co-op each month that will benefit all our members.”

Plans have already been made for construction in 2025. The areas that are slated for fiber construction are Six Mile,



PHOTO BY DAVID HAYES

**Upcountry Fiber continues to expand in rural areas as Blue Ridge installs fiber in unserved and underserved portions of the Upstate.**

Liberty, Pickens, North Greenville, Pendleton, Ebenezer and Walhalla. For more information about construction in your area or to sign up for service visit [upcountryfiber.com](http://upcountryfiber.com).

*Happy Thanksgiving  
and Merry Christmas*

As the holiday season approaches, there are many things that we hold dear and are thankful for. This year, after experiencing Hurricane Helene, we realize more than ever how blessed we are to serve the members we have and to employ the men and women that met this disaster with a spirit of total dedication to getting the job done. Our thanks go out to you.

But there are so many more that will forever remain a part of this memory. There were people who came to help from across the state and from other states. We received well wishes, gifts of food and water, constant notes of thanks and encouragement and loving cards from children across our area. Our thanks go out to you.

May the warmth of this holiday season instill in you a heart filled with all the blessings we enjoy.

