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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.

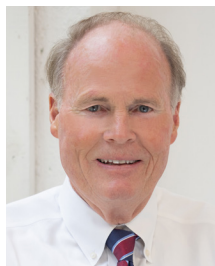
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This organization is an equal-opportunity provider.



A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



A new rate option, a simple rebate opportunity

COLD DAYS ARE BEHIND us, for the most part, and I know we all welcome this shift. It was undoubtedly a colder winter than the past few. Let me divulge one recent happening to bolster that.

On Thursday, Jan. 23, our system experienced its highest load demand since the Christmas Eve freeze in 2022. You'll recall that our cooperative never implemented rolling outages, and we avoided doing so once again this winter. Temperatures dipped into single digits almost three years ago and we were in the mid-teens this year for several hours of the day.

We stayed in regular contact with Duke Energy, who we receive almost all our power from, about what our regional grid was experiencing this January. It was beneficial to all to keep open lines of communication during this strenuous period.

When you read this column next month, our peak demand hours will have changed. We flip from 6–9 a.m. from November through March to **3–6 p.m. from April through October.**

To provide more educational insight into our new rate structure, our cooperative has developed a video series on saving money with little to no change in usage habits. Please consider scanning the QR code at left to view those. You will be directed to a YouTube playlist with member testimonials on how to beat the peak demand hours, calculate your energy bill and even modernize your water heater.



Flat use rate

Our EmPOWERment rate was designed to give members more control over their bills and ease the demand on our regional power grid. Since its initial launch, the cooperative has studied a new, pilot two-part rate (Flat Use) program similar to the old rate before

the introduction of EmPOWERment. We know our membership values options. Now, members can enroll in the two-part rate under certain agreed-upon conditions if they believe this format will benefit their household. Please go to blueridge.coop/flatuse for more information on this rate.

Smart thermostat program

In January, our cooperative launched a smart thermostat rebate program to encourage members to make their homes more efficient. There are no gimmicks behind this program. Purchase and install a smart thermostat in your home, fill out the rebate application online at blueridge.coop/smart and enjoy a \$100 rebate on your next billing cycle.

Not only are you reaping the immediate benefit of a bill credit, but you'll also save on future bills by efficiently programming your home's thermostat from anywhere using a smartphone. With our peak demand window about to shift, pre-cooling your home ahead of summer hours will save you money. I should add that our cooperative is in no way, shape or form taking control of a member's thermostat at any time.

Annual meeting

Before I close this piece, I want to remind you to review the information on the unique wrap for this month's magazine cover. It's time for Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative's 84th Annual Meeting of Members in April. Please join us on Thursday, April 10 for this important occasion. Last year, we registered a record crowd of 9,063 members. I hope to see you there.

JIM LOVINGGOOD
 President and CEO

Making your voice heard

South Carolina electric cooperatives rally at the State House

THE RELIABILITY of your electricity service is central to Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative's mission. The cooperative exists to provide all the power members need when they need it. That's why Blue Ridge works diligently to build and maintain the infrastructure that brings electricity to your homes and businesses.

Of course, not everything is in the co-op's hands. Acts of God such as hurricanes and ice storms can wreak havoc on the system that delivers that power, no matter how much we plan and prepare.

Another important factor is the availability of the electricity we generate as a state. For a long time, South Carolina has had plenty of electricity to meet members' needs. But availability could become a real challenge in the future.

"Our power supply isn't growing fast enough to keep up with our state's rapid growth," says Riley Morningstar, Blue Ridge's communications manager. "South Carolina needs more electricity, especially for frigid winter mornings and sweltering summer afternoons when the power grid strains to meet peak demands."

Government policies and regulations play an important role in deciding whether enough energy is available. They always have, from the legislation that allowed for the creation of electric cooperatives in the 1930s to the government's role in hydroelectric power plant construction to the recent regulations requiring the shutdown of coal-fired power plants.

"As a member-owned co-op, we believe our service to our members includes doing everything in our power to make sure our state and country's energy policies enable us to deliver you all the power you need, when you need it, and at a price you can afford," says Grayson Kelly, senior vice president of government and community relations. "That's why Blue Ridge is fortunate that

these elected officials are our friends and neighbors and that they understand the needs of the co-op members and the communities we serve."

That work is critical again this year as the S.C. General Assembly considers energy policies that will determine how we meet your power needs.

On Feb. 13, a day we call Co-op Day at the State House, our board members and employees joined other electric cooperatives in bringing your voice to policy makers. On behalf of the hundreds of

thousands of co-op members across our state, we expressed a vision for a future that keeps electricity safe, reliable and affordable.

"It was a great day of collective action by South Carolina's electric co-ops," says Kelly. "But it is far from the end of our efforts to help shape our state's energy policies for the better. As we move forward, rest assured Blue Ridge is doing everything in our power to safeguard South Carolina's energy future."



Linemen from electric cooperatives across South Carolina joined Gov. Henry McMaster on the staircase in the State House.

TRAVIS BELL

A member's point of view

Dunson family saves with new EmPOWERment rate

CB DUNSON HAS been a member of Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative all his life. As a local business owner, husband and father to four children, Dunson doesn't want to spend his time poring over power bills every month. The Dunson household regularly received high power bills for years leading up to the summer of 2024. Dunson wanted that to change.

Learn more about how the Dunson family has saved hundreds of dollars on the new EmPOWERment rate in this member spotlight feature.

“I've been a part of the Blue Ridge Electric co-op pretty much all my

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

life, with my family and then on my own. For the past 20 years, we have had some high power bills. We contacted Blue Ridge about coming out and doing an analysis to see what was consuming a lot of our power. Upon the gentleman coming out, we found out that our above-ground pool takes a lot of power even though it's not pulling a lot. But it does add up through the day because it's consistent power. We decided, after they came out and did the analysis, to put our pool on a timer so it doesn't run during the peak hours.

The next thing was getting our HVAC system under control. We installed the ecobee smart thermostats through the co-op. They came out and installed two of those thermostats for us, which I can control with my phone.

With the peak hours, you're only talking about a three-hour change each day. I was hesitant about it, but it has ended up working out well. Part of beating the peak is we pre-cool our home. In pre-cooling ahead of the peak time, we'll run the thermostat down to 68-67 degrees. As that timer changes for those three peak hours, the temp does rise a little bit.

But as soon as 6 p.m. comes, I've got it programmed to go back down.

What was neat about it is I could run it as low as I wanted to at that point because it's off-peak hours, and the rates are great during off-peak, so you just modify your schedule based upon those three hours and make those adjustments.

Being on it for the past three or four months, we were able to save anywhere from \$100 to \$150 a month by just adjusting those items for those three hours and monitoring how we use other power, because a lot of the small appliances don't pull a lot of power. So, you can continue as normal. It's just your major appliances that do pull the power. You've just got to adjust those for three hours. We've liked it.

With six people in the house, and four kids that take a lot of money, we just looked for the bottom line where we could save some money, and this has helped. That was just adjusting three items, and who knows what I could save if it was a lot more. It's just been a great program for me so far.”



BREC member CB Dunson says being aware of his family's energy use during peak hours has produced savings.

“We looked for the bottom line where we could save money, and this has helped.”

Still have questions about the EmPOWERment rate structure? Visit blueridge.coop/empowerment-faqs.



WINTER PEAK HOURS:
Nov. 1 to March 31
6 a.m. to 9 a.m.



SUMMER PEAK HOURS:
April 1 to Oct. 31
3 p.m. to 6 p.m.



Smart savings start here

Install a smart thermostat, get a \$100 bill credit

IN JANUARY, the Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative Board of Directors unanimously voted to create a program to help members save money and offset the initial cost of a new smart thermostat.

Now, when you install a smart thermostat, you'll receive a \$100 bill credit as part of our energy-saving program. A smart thermostat will help you manage your energy use, lower your bills and keep your home comfortable year-round—just apply today!

"This rebate program allows members to save money on their next utility bill with this credit, and all future bills to come by efficiently programming their home's temperature every season," President and CEO Jim Lovinggood says. "We believe Blue Ridge members will be eager to take advantage of this opportunity."

By investing in your home and wallet by simply installing a smart thermostat, members have complete control from their phones to pre-heat and pre-cool their homes ahead of peak demand windows.

Through efficiently programming your thermostat, you can extend the longevity of your HVAC system and capture monthly energy savings.

Manage your home's thermostat from anywhere using your smartphone or voice commands through compatible smart home devices. These devices help reduce inefficient energy consumption, delay the need for new power plants and transmission lines and lessen the electric load on the grid.

Here are answers to questions members may have about the new Smart Thermostat program.

Q: How do I claim my rebate?

A: It's simple! Just fill out the form online at blueridge.coop/smart and provide the requested information, such as the receipt showing purchase details of the thermostat. There are no gimmicks.

Q: When will I see my \$100 credit?

A: The \$100 smart thermostat rebate will be applied to



your next billing cycle. To ensure proper application, it could take 4–6 weeks. You will see it on your bill!

avoiding any self-installation hiccups and having a professional install a smart thermostat.

Q: How does a smart thermostat contribute to energy savings?

A: Smart thermostats optimize heating and cooling based on your behavior and preferences, thus reducing energy waste, lowering utility bills and lessening environmental impact. Periodic software updates ensure your smart thermostat is using the latest algorithms and energy-saving features available.

Q: Do I need to install the thermostat myself?

A: You certainly can if you want to. However, to ensure optimal performance, we recommend

Q: Is BREC taking control of my smart thermostat through this program?

A: No, Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative has no control over your smart thermostat at any time. You are in complete control of your smart thermostat.



Want to make your HVAC system work smarter and not harder? Save money by scanning this QR code and watching this video!

High honor

BREC lineman among 10 honored by Gov. Henry McMaster

THE LAST TIME CLAY JONES visited the South Carolina State House, he was on a third-grade field trip. But he returned to Columbia this January for a drastically different—and unique—occasion. The trip also included a visit to the South Carolina Governor's Mansion.

Jones was one of 10 linemen honored by Gov. Henry McMaster during his annual State of the State address on Jan. 29 for their response to Hurricane Helene, the deadliest storm ever to hit South Carolina.

"The damage from Helene was devastating," McMaster said halfway through his address. "But we responded magnificently. Joining us here tonight are a few of the men and women who worked day and night—some for weeks—at dangerous heights and around high-voltage electricity to get the power back on."

The governor then asked the group seated in the chamber's balcony to stand and be recognized. The linemen were greeted with a standing ovation.

"It was really cool. It was an honor to represent Blue Ridge," Jones says, adding he made the trip with his wife, Kadalynn.

"She had been to the State House before and helped me work my way around there this time. Kadalynn

handled the outage great. She was able to wash my clothes and bring hot meals to our crew. I didn't get to see her much then, and that was the roughest thing. It was special to go with her on this trip."

McMaster privately expressed his thanks to Jones and others, and the state's longest serving governor gifted each of them a special coin.

Blue Ridge's system suffered extensive damage due to Helene, resulting in more than 1,000 broken poles and nearly 65,000 members without power at the time of peak outages.

Jones, a line foreman, says he was grateful to have his crew of linemen, Cole Roper, Grant Winchester and Garrett Smith, working alongside him during the restoration process.

"We had over 800 linemen here at one time, and no one got hurt," he says. "We followed every safety protocol and did everything we could to restore power."

Jones has known co-op life since he was 16. His family worked for Blue Ridge before he was born. Dianne Lyles, his aunt, retired in December after 35 years of service.

Through the summer and winter help program, Jones worked as a groundman



Clay and Kadalynn Jones, pictured in the South Carolina State House ahead of Gov. Henry McMaster's State of the State address on Wednesday, Jan. 29.

"This is like a family organization in that everybody is good to each other and the people we serve daily."

when school was out at West-Oak High School. The job came together thanks to a friendship between his father, Terry Jones, and former Senior Vice President of Operations Sam McMillan.

"Sam was the main reason I got a job here. We were always good friends, and he gave me the opportunity to work and get to know people at Blue Ridge when I was in high school."

In October 2012, Jones became a full-time employee at Blue Ridge. A sense of community and service to others is what has made him feel right at home with the co-op.

"Everybody has everybody's back here," Jones says. "It never falls on one person. This is like a family organization in that everybody is good to each other and the people we serve daily. It's been a great company to work for."



Clay and Kadalynn Jones, far right, pose for a picture with South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster, First Lady Peggy McMaster and other linemen from throughout the state. The Joneses visited the South Carolina Governor's Mansion briefly after the address.

EVERY WILKS

SURGE ARRESTORS
COST INCREASE
+88.85%
WAIT TIME
12-20 weeks

CROSSARMS
COST INCREASE
+119.03%
WAIT TIME
4-6 weeks

PRIMARY WIRE
COST INCREASE
+61.78%
WAIT TIME
16-20 weeks

TRANSFORMERS
COST INCREASE
+101.62%
WAIT TIME
30-36 weeks

Rising material costs

January 2020 to January 2025

These cost-increase percentages are a general representation modeled after a typically designed South Carolina electric cooperative distribution system. Wait times are an average for the product listed. Information provided by CEEUS, the materials supplier for South Carolina's electric cooperatives.

GUY WIRE
COST INCREASE
+89.07%
WAIT TIME
3-4 weeks

PAD MOUNT TRANSFORMER
COST INCREASE
+87%
WAIT TIME
52+ weeks

