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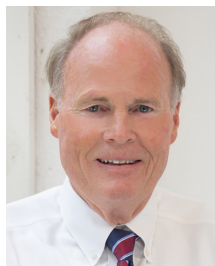
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## Resiliency in trying times

**IN LESS THAN 18 months**, Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative has responded to the worst hurricane our system has ever faced and

our second major ice storm since 2005. Hurricane Helene and Winter Storm Fern brought trying times for our entire community. But our employees and membership have responded to these natural disasters with resiliency.

Without question, Blue Ridge Electric sustained the most damage from Winter Storm Fern in the entire state of South Carolina. I'm happy to write that our storm response came to a close five days after outages began on Sunday, Jan. 25. Clean-up and patchwork will continue over the coming weeks.

I believe we were even better prepared for Fern's arrival, thanks to the valuable lessons learned from Helene. Our co-op mobilized reinforcements rapidly after the storm track spared other areas. We matched the manpower we had in the field during the two-week response to Helene in just three days. Thankfully, we saw more sleet accumulate initially. That shifted to freezing rain on Sunday afternoon. It was then that the outages rolled in. We were holding

**"It's important to highlight that no workers were injured in either the Helene or Fern recovery efforts."**

steady at around 3,000 members without service. That jumped to almost 27,000 in just three hours.

Significant portions of our service territory recorded from at least a half inch of ice to up to three-quarters of an inch. This matched or exceeded the ice storm of 2005, which took us seven days to address.

I want to thank all our employees for their dedication and hard work, and our membership for their patience and support. It's important for me to highlight that no workers were injured in either the Helene or Fern recovery efforts. That includes what could have been a tragic incident on the afternoon of Sunday, Jan. 25, when two of our linemen were on a call and a tree collapsed, crushing their service truck. It's a miracle they were unharmed. We were blessed to see these workers go home to their loved ones safely. Read more about their fortunate escape on page 5.

Finally, thank you to our numerous sister co-ops from across our state who rallied to restore power to the membership. This is the "cooperative advantage," a massive benefit that allows us to lean on other co-ops for mutual aid if they've been able to avoid the damage of natural disasters.

Here's to hoping for a quiet spring and summer.

**JIM LOVINGGOOD**  
 President and CEO



ANSON PERRY

Heavy icing and broken tree limbs caused damage across Blue Ridge Electric's service territory during Winter Storm Fern in January.

# Linemen escape close call

BY RILEY MORNINGSTAR

Braxton Bearden and Jacob Davis normally don't work on the same crew, but the two Blue Ridge Electric linemen were together on the afternoon of Sunday, Jan 25. It's a day they won't forget for a long time.

Bearden and Davis were driving on South Carolina Highway 8 during the response to Winter Storm Fern when—out of nowhere—a tree snapped and crushed the cab of their truck.

Somehow, they walked away unharmed.

"I was driving when the tree hit the truck," says Davis. "We saw it at the last second through the windshield. I jerked my head back real fast. I'm just happy we made it through it. I don't know how we did."

"I just laid down," Bearden recalls.

Xander Knight, one of the youngest linemen at the co-op, who was working his first major storm, was driving a bucket truck ahead of the two on the call.

"I was scared," says Knight, who saw everything happen from the side mirror.

After the accident, a BREC member who happened to be standing on the side of the road checked on Bearden and Davis. The two agreed it was the closest call to a serious injury they'd ever had on the job. Bearden and Davis say they were on high alert for crackling trees the rest of the week.

"We love doing this, but I was definitely more cautious driving and looking for trees," Davis says, who can laugh a little after the fact.

The incident drew millions of views online and on television and even caught the eye of co-op member U.S. Sen. Lindsey



BREC linemen Braxton Bearden and Jacob Davis were unharmed after a falling tree crushed the cab of their service truck during Winter Storm Fern.



PHOTOS BY RILEY MORNINGSTAR

Bearden (left) and Davis, who normally work on different crews, pose for a picture together before a weekly safety meeting.

Graham, who thanked Bearden, Davis and the other workers responding to Fern.

"We're all so fortunate that two Blue Ridge linemen escaped serious injury when a tree fell on the cab of their truck," Graham said in a social media post. "Being a lineman during a storm is one of the most dangerous jobs on the planet. God bless Blue Ridge Co-op linemen and all others who put their lives at risk during storms to make our lives more comfortable."

The two did take different approaches to informing their loved ones about what happened. Bearden sent his fiancée a picture minutes after they safely exited the truck. It took Davis a little longer to tell his wife.

"I was busy, she didn't have power and she was handling the kids," he says. "She sent me a picture of it from Facebook asking who it was. I had to make a call. I waited a little longer than I should have. She wasn't happy I waited so long, but she was glad I was alright."

Bearden and Davis say they were grateful for the constant prayers for protection from the community before and during the storm. They kept working, more cautiously, with hundreds of other linemen across the Blue Ridge territory to safely and quickly restore power that week.