



Berkeley Electric Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy Cooperative

TO REPORT OUTAGES
 Call: 1-888-253-4232

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Rising to the challenge

PRESSURE. It's something we are all dealing with these days, whether it's the pressure to find the right work-life balance, the pressure to stretch our budgets because of inflation or even the pressure to stay healthy as COVID-19 continues to linger. As I mentioned in my last column, Berkeley Electric has also been under pressure to control costs for our members and that pressure has become so strong that we are having to make our first significant rate adjustment in eight years.

Not only are we faced with the challenge of controlling rising costs, but we are doing so while growing at a rapid pace. We are also coping with increasing workforce turnover and losing institutional knowledge as employees retire in large numbers. All these factors make maintaining a highly skilled and engaged workforce one of the co-op's largest challenges.

It's true that the tight labor market and post-COVID demands for more flexible work agreements have made it more difficult to fill vacancies for both inside and outside positions; but Berkeley is rising to the challenge. We now survey employees to improve their work experience. I have started small, regular meetings with different groups of employees to get personal feedback, and we recently instituted flexible work hours and changed our paid time-off policies to assist with work-life balance.

Training has also become a key point. We expanded our training department to respond to specific training needs and to tailor career development plans for employees interested in growing with the cooperative. As you will read later in this edition, our lineman training program—launched 10 years ago in partnership with Trident Technical College—is still paying dividends and helping address turnover, as is building better relationships in the community through school outreach and career counseling with local students to educate them about job opportunities at the co-op.

They say pressure makes diamonds. At Berkeley Electric, we are using that to position ourselves as a shining example of employee engagement so we can continue to recruit and retain the best workforce dedicated to serving our members.

Sincerely,

MIKE FULLER
 President & CEO



High turnover rates and an increasing number of retirees makes maintaining a skilled and engaged workforce a challenge.

Power costs drive need for rate adjustment

RISING INFLATION RATES have impacted costs for both businesses and consumers nationwide. Unfortunately, Berkeley Electric is also feeling these effects even while it has worked to control rising costs. As a not-for-profit company, any significant increase in costs for the co-op also affects its members.

The main driver is rising power costs. Berkeley Electric will see a \$73 million increase in wholesale power costs in 2023. Due to the cooperative's efforts, Berkeley Electric will absorb a large portion of this 6% increase without passing it on to its members. However, the Board voted on and approved a 3.8% power cost adjustment, which will be effective for all members on March 1. The average residential member will see an increase of approximately \$6 on their monthly bill.

The cooperative is also facing rising costs in other areas. Material costs are expected to be up more than \$7 million for the equipment and supplies needed to build and maintain the co-op's system compared to pre-pandemic costs for similar amounts of materials. Berkeley's system is also continuing to grow at an accelerated pace with the co-op anticipating a nearly \$10 million increase in interest, depreciation and property tax costs for 2023.

In light of these increases, the Board approved additional budget cuts for the coming year, including putting a freeze on hiring and buying most new vehicles. Berkeley Electric realizes that any increase can impact its members and does not take rate adjustments lightly. This change is necessary to cover operating expenses and keep the cooperative financially sound.

Some members to receive settlement payment

IF YOU WERE A MEMBER of Berkeley Electric Cooperative for any period between Jan. 1, 2007–Jan. 31, 2020, you may receive an unexpected bill credit or check this month.

These credits (for amounts of \$50 or less) and checks (for amounts greater than \$50) are the result of a class-action settlement involving the failed nuclear construction project at V.C. Summer Nuclear Generating Station. The funds are being paid by Santee Cooper, a state-owned utility that partially owned the project. Berkeley Electric was neither a party to the case nor had any ownership in the project. However, our members were affected because some of the power we deliver to you is purchased from Santee Cooper. The co-op did not calculate the payments. They resulted from a court-approved process after the settlement agreement was reached. If you have any questions regarding the settlement process, you may contact the Settlement Administrator by calling toll free 1 (833) 947-0894 or emailing info@SanteeCooperClassAction.com.



BRIGHT IDEAS 5K

APRIL 22 • CYPRESS GARDENS

LACE UP YOUR SNEAKERS TO HELP LOCAL TEACHERS!

Join us again at beautiful Cypress Gardens for the 2nd Annual Bright Ideas 5K! This unique all-terrain race kicks off at 8 a.m. and winds through the park's trails against the backdrop of a blackwater cypress swamp in full bloom.

The best part is that the race helps raise money to directly benefit local teachers through our Bright Ideas educational grant program. So sign up today and let's romp in the swamp!

[SCAN ME]

REGISTER ONLINE:

\$40 PER PERSON

INCLUDES T-SHIRT & MEDAL





ROBERT JENKINS
Trustee, District 8

Working together to lower costs

AS AN ELECTRIC UTILITY, it is our job to provide you with power. As an electric cooperative, it is our job to provide you that power as affordably as possible. One of the primary ways we can do that is by living up to our name and working cooperatively to lower the overall cost of the energy we purchase.

If you look around your home, you likely have more devices and equipment that require electricity than ever before. At the same time, as demand for electricity rises, Berkeley Electric must deliver an uninterrupted 24/7 power supply—regardless of market conditions or other circumstances.

Based on your family's habits, it should be no surprise that electricity use fluctuates throughout the day with member demand. At Berkeley Electric, we must be able to provide enough electricity to meet the energy needs of all members during times of highest energy use or "peak hours," typically in the morning as people start their day and in the evening when they come home.

What you may not know is that electric utilities typically pay more for electricity—either from a power plant or from another utility with excess power—during those morning and evening "energy rush hours." The demand for electricity is even higher when it's especially cold outside and heating systems run longer to warm our homes.

If the idea of "peak times" is still confusing, here's the way that I think about it. If you want to go to a major concert, you know costs go up when there is strong demand for tickets (or electricity). And since there is a set amount of seating capacity (or electric capacity), this limits the available supply. When a lot of people want the same thing, it's more expensive. When they don't, it's cheaper—like a bargain matinee or electricity costs late at night when everyone is asleep. This is what we all know

Friday 5:38 PM

Thanks for helping Berkeley Electric "Beat the Peak." Reduce electricity use from 6 AM to 9 AM tomorrow. Reply WINTER for tips. Reply STOP to cancel.



Sign up for the Beat the Peak program for free alerts about when to reduce electric use to help lower costs.

as the law of supply and demand.

During winter months, those peak demand times are from 6–9 a.m. and switch to 3–7 p.m. during the summer. When costs are high during peak hours, we encourage you to take simple steps to save energy, such as turning your thermostat down a few degrees and waiting to use large appliances during off-peak times.

You can also save energy by plugging electronics and equipment such as computers, printers and TVs into a smart power strip which can automatically turn off those devices during peak hours. If you have a programmable thermostat, be sure to adjust the settings to sync up with off-peak rate periods.

We all lead busy lives, so we encourage you to take advantage of our free Beat the Peak alerts, which notify you in advance of an upcoming peak usage period. Berkeley also offers a separate Time-of-Day rate that rewards members with a lower electric rate for shifting those energy-intensive tasks away from peak hours.

Another benefit of this time-of-use approach to electricity use allows greater control over your bill. Reducing the peak impacts the power-supply cost to every co-op member. Collectively, everyone conserving energy and making small changes can truly make a difference, especially with energy prices rising.

Remember, taking simple steps to save energy throughout the day and shifting energy use to off-peak hours is a smart choice for you and our community. Be sure to visit our website to learn more about these and other energy saving programs.

Sincerely,

BERKELEY AT-A-GLANCE	NOVEMBER 2021	NOVEMBER 2022
Total kWh sold	319,668,531	315,158,496
No. meters served	115,753	120,840
Avg. residential kWh/meter	1,065	815
Avg. residential bill/meter	\$141.39	\$115.90
Miles of line	6094	6220
Avg. daily high temperature	67	72
Avg. daily low temperature	42	53

ARBOR DAY SALE



Get a whole tree for half price!



Your choice of an Eastern Redbud, Japanese Maple or Magnolia Jane!

At Berkeley Electric Cooperative we're committed to a greener, healthier world. That's why we're once again partnering with the Arbor Day Foundation to share the cost of these energy-saving trees to offer them to our members at half-price!

Berkeley Electric members can choose up to two tree species selected to thrive in the Lowcountry. These trees will be sourced from a reputable regional grower. They will also arrive potted and already be 3–5 feet tall for just **\$25 each**.

In addition to beautifying your home, trees can help lower energy use, increase your property value, improve air quality and reduce your carbon footprint as well. Reserve your trees at arborday.org/bec. Just enter your address, select your tree and the interactive planting guide will show you the best place to plant it on your property for maximum energy savings.

Trees will be available for pick-up on Saturday, May 6 for **ONE-DAY ONLY** at our Moncks Corner or Johns Island district office from 9 a.m. to noon.

Order now because supplies are limited!



“Genesis still lives”



After her son drowned, Jennifer Holmes decided to break a generational cycle of not knowing how to swim. She immediately signed up for swim lessons and eventually became a lifeguard.

SEA ISLAND MEDIA

After son's drowning, Holmes champions water education in her community

BY JOSH P. CROTZER

WHEN SHE IS at the West County Aquatic Center in Hollywood, Jennifer Holmes often takes a moment to talk to her son, Genesis.

She kneels down, gently places her hand upon his engraved name a few feet from the edge of the pool and connects with the boy who drowned in a nearby pond nine years ago.

“He used to tell me all the dreams he had about helping his community,” Holmes says of Genesis, who was 13 at the time of his death. “He still gets to do that through his Momma.”

Holmes's inspiration and efforts to make a difference in her community earned her Berkeley Electric Cooperative's 2022 Who Powers You Award and a \$1,000 prize.

In 2014, Genesis and a friend attempted to swim to an island in the pond. But Genesis didn't know how to swim. No one in his family knew how to swim and Hollywood had no public pool for them to learn.

Jennifer Holmes immediately set out to change that.

“It gets passed down from one generation to the next—we were told to stay away from water because it can be harmful,” explains Holmes. “I didn't want another family to fall into the same situation that my family did, not knowing how to swim.”

For Holmes, that mission began with herself. Just two nights after Genesis drowned, she signed up for swimming lessons in St. Andrews, nearly 30 minutes away. She then partnered with

Support swim safety

Through the Charleston County Parks Foundation, the Genesis Swim Safety Fund supports aquatic safety programs in the Johns Island, Awendaw, McClellanville, Ravenel and Hollywood areas. You can make donations to the fund at Charleston County waterparks, the West County Aquatic Center or concessions at Charleston County beach parks. To make an online donation or to find out more, visit ccprc.com.

the Charleston County Parks Foundation to establish the Genesis Swim Safety Fund for aquatic programs in Charleston County's rural communities. That initiative became known as The Genesis Project and led to the 2019 opening of West County Aquatic Center. The pool there, named in Genesis Holmes's memory, is the first public pool serving a rural community in Charleston County.

It's also a place where children and adults take swimming lessons. The fund, which has raised nearly \$30,000, provides scholarships to families to take those lessons. Holmes says about 300 people participate in West County Aquatic Center's education programs each season. When the facility opens this May, they'll



JOSH P. CROTZER

The Genesis Pool, named in memory of Jennifer Holmes's son, reopens in May. It is the first public pool serving one of Charleston County's rural communities.

field their first competitive swim team and Holmes says there are plans to open another community pool in Awendaw.

Holmes believes her son made a sacrifice for his community, just as he had dreamed he would do.

“Genesis still lives in this community,” says Holmes. “So many have learned to swim because of the Genesis Swim Safety Fund and knowing how to swim saves lives.”

Who Powers You?

ARE YOU INSPIRED by someone making a difference in our community? Let's celebrate them! Tell us their story and they could win a prize from Berkeley Electric Cooperative.

We are now accepting nominations for the 2023 Who Power You contest. One hero from our community will win \$1,000

and have a chance at the statewide grand prize of \$2,500. Winners will be selected by a panel of judges based on the impact they have on our community.

Visit ecsc.org/WhoPowersYou for full contest rules and to nominate the person that inspires you.

All entries must be submitted by July 31.

ELW program helps fill open roles

MORE THAN A DECADE after it was launched, the Electrical Lineworker Program is still proving its worth by helping to fill critical roles at the co-op. Five graduates from the most recent class are now full-time apprentices with Berkeley Electric Cooperative. This is the largest number of graduates the co-op has hired from a single class.

In partnership with Trident Technical College, the 14-week program provides the knowledge and skills necessary to begin a career as an electrical lineworker. Combining classroom and hands-on training, students graduate with an associate degree and participate in a showcase that puts their skills on display in front of potential employers.

Two of the apprentices, Bryce Robinson and Brandon Wise, were assigned to crews in Johns Island while apprentices Austin Hewette, Stephen Graham and Cody Kinard will work out of the Goose Creek district. As part of their apprenticeship, all five candidates spent one day a week in the field with Berkeley crews.

"It was really a win-win. They gained a tremendous amount of knowledge working with the crews and they had a working interview," says Director of Safety & Technical Training Patrick Gailey. "They gained real-life experience working with the crews that would be hard to get in the classroom. The jobs are there, and they need to be filled. There was a 90% hire rate out of the last class."

Gailey hopes to expand the program even further through outreach to local schools and by offering a scholarship which covers the full cost of tuition, books and tools for the course. To learn more visit "My Co-op/Careers" at berkeleyelectric.coop.



Brandon Wise (right) and Bryce Robinson were part of the largest hiring class for Berkeley Electric through the Electrical Lineworker (ELW) Program.



ELW graduate, Austin Hewette, tackles an underground job in Goose Creek during his apprenticeship.



Students from Cross Middle and High Schools were treated to a drone demonstration during a career day field trip to the co-op.

Cross career day at the co-op

COLLEGE ISN'T THE ANSWER for everyone. So, when Coach Bryan DeMonte reached out to the co-op on behalf of his students, Berkeley Electric was glad to showcase a variety of careers that don't require a college degree.

The group of students from Cross Middle and High Schools toured Berkeley Electric's new headquarters facility and met with several department heads to learn about potential careers after graduation. The tour included an inside look at the co-op's system control and contact center and the job opportunities in those departments. Students also learned about the co-op's electrical lineworker program and the pay ranges and positions available to qualified candidates.

The highlight of the tour was a drone demonstration and race where students learned about the capabilities of the co-op's fleet and the potential career opportunities for a licensed drone pilot.