

South River EMC Communicator

February 2024

Project Not Forgotten

Studies show that the presence of flowers trigger happy emotions, heighten feelings of life satisfaction and affect social behavior in a positive manner far beyond what is normally believed.

Local Dunn florist Jeffrey Surlles might have suspected this when he began his pandemic era project, especially as it has adapted and carried on to bring smiles.

Project Not Forgotten (PNF) began as a way to get flowers to loved ones in nursing facilities when the pandemic wouldn't let anyone in, but people still needed cheer.



Putting together crafts for distribution.

"The goal is to give people in care a better day," said Sharon Stevens, secretary and treasurer of the PNF board.

Originally flowers, glass vases and water with cards were the route to go, with local youth from Triton High, Dunn Middle school Beta clubs, and Brookside school providing the artwork.

Over time, those glass vases filled with water become a liability.

"The facilities asked that we stop, so we've made a move to a seasonal craft for residents which can be displayed and then stored," said Stevens. "We make approximately

2,500 crafts to be distributed to people in 27 facilities across five

counties, and we are always accepting volunteers to prep them."

Crafts included turkey door hangers for Thanksgiving, mini trees decorated for Christmas, with plans for little weighted vases with silk flowers and bears or hearts for Valentine's Day.

"Everyone in these facilities receives a craft to let them know someone is thinking about them," said Stevens. "If you'd like to participate, please just call the shop at 910.891.7000 and we'll get you involved."

And the organization has spread from just nursing facilities into Meal-On-Wheels programs as well, so help is always welcome.



Mark Your Calendar!

South River EMC's annual meeting of members is set for Thursday, April 25.

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Cost of Service Study Completed – Rate Changes To Be Phased In

I am writing to provide you with an important update pertaining to electric rates. Since the 2021 Annual Meeting, I have been communicating that we were getting closer to the time when rates need to be adjusted. Our operating costs have gone up, some of them significantly, primarily due to the highest inflation experienced in 40 years. It is no different for you in your home or business, nearly everything that you buy has increased in price.

For your electric cooperative, items such as transformers and conductor have gone up 30%. This situation is compounded by the growing need for more facilities at higher cost and to maintain reliability, our Cooperative is currently constructing two new substations and is planning three more along with two upgrades. I have been told by our Engineering Department that we have the most expensive construction work plan (CWP) in our history. Our CWP has fluctuated somewhat but have steadily become more costly. In 2024, the CWP is projected to be \$22 million whereas just a few years ago our CWPs were less than \$14 million. Consequently, more money is being borrowed to fund construction and the cost to borrow money has increased as well since interest rates are higher. All of this adds to the pressure to make a rate adjustment to maintain the level of service that you expect and deserve.

A little over a year ago, I announced that we would be implementing the Equalizer, to offset shortfalls in revenue projected for 2023. The primary benefit of the Equalizer is that it can easily be adjusted up or down as needed. We implemented the Equalizer in April and adjusted it periodically as it has been reviewed each month. It started at \$3.75 per 1,000 kWh in April, dropped to \$3 in June and then to zero in July through September. We raised it to \$5 per 1,000 kWh in October and that is where it remains today. Considering that the last actual rate change took place in 2013, I consider our Cooperative to be blessed that a rate adjustment was avoided for such a long period of time. I know that during the last 10 years, cell phone bills, cable TV bills, video-streaming services and internet provider costs have all gone up in price. Because we are owned by those we serve, we have sought to be good stewards and that has helped in prolonging the rate adjustment until this time.

Recently, our third-party consultant, Booth and Associates, completed a Cost-of-Service Study (COSS) and rate design for South River EMC. The primary findings of the study confirmed that our Grid Access charges need to be adjusted along with an increase in energy charges, in most cases. To help minimize the impact on you, adjustments will be phased in over the next three years.

The COSS and rate design were first shared with the Board of Directors in November by our rate consultant. In December another meeting with our rate consultant took place and at that meeting, the Board approved an adjustment that will begin in April. The adjustment includes an increase to the residential Grid Access charge of \$6 per month. It is currently \$25 and will increase to \$31 per month. Once this change takes place, the Equalizer will drop to zero. Hopefully, an Equalizer assessment will not be needed afterward in 2024 but if it is, it should be minimal. Grid access charges cover fixed expenses necessary to connect to the grid and electricity availability, even if no energy is used. Grid access charges are associated with the operation, repair and maintenance of the distribution and transmission system, depreciation, property taxes and more. According to the COSS, grid access charges for residential accounts should be at least \$40. Since the Grid Access charge is not adequate, the deficiency is being made up in energy charges. Energy charges will remain the same in 2024. It should be noted that 12 of the 26 electric cooperatives in North Carolina are charging \$30 or more per month for grid access charges. Our rate consultant advised that grid access charges pertaining to other rate classes be adjusted as well with one exception. Regard-

ing large general service rates, a slight change in the demand charge was recommended and approved.

The recommendations by our consultant also included lowering the on peak energy charges for time-of-day rates and changing the net Metering adder to avoid subsidization of solar accounts by other rate classes/members. It is anticipated that additional modifications to rates will be implemented in 2025 and 2026 but we want to further analyze our financial status and options later before final determinations are made.

As we continue to face inflation and higher costs, I want to encourage you to reach out to the Advise Guys. They can assist you with expert advice on how you may be able to reduce your electricity use, which will help lower your electric bill. Your local electric cooperative offers time-of-day rates, smart thermostats, water heater controls, rebates on energy-efficient appliances and HVAC equipment and more. There are several helpful online tools too, including videos.

As I close, I want to reaffirm my commitment to you. I sincerely believe it is all about the mem-

bers and I hope it is evident that we sought to avoid a rate change as long as possible and that we have attempted to limit adjustments and the impact on you. I want you to know that I am here to serve you and that I consider it a privilege and an honor to serve as your CEO. Therefore, if I can assist you, please call me at 910-230-2990 or send an email to CEO@sremc.com.

Change Is Coming

In April, you will see a difference in your electric bill. As costs are rising around us, it has become necessary for South River EMC to implement a change of rates.

There are several factors driving the change to include:

- ▶ Increases in all aspects of business, including materials.
- ▶ Growing need for more facilities at a higher cost.
- ▶ Tightening government regulations.
- ▶ Higher interest rates.

The changes will be primarily in the Grid Access charge. The Grid Access charge is a monthly fee that helps cover the cost of maintaining our electric utility system so we can deliver power to you whenever you need it. This includes the cost of transformers, power lines, poles, substations, loans, insurance, buildings, trucks, preparing and mailing bills, etc. The cost to operate and maintain our system exists even if no electricity is used — we must keep our system updated and energy available whenever it's needed.

Grid Access Changes

Residential

(standard)	\$25	to	\$31
Time of Use	\$27.50	to	\$34.10
w/Solar	\$25	to	\$39
w/Solar & Battery	\$25	to	\$48.09

Small General Service (SG)

Single Phase (1Ph)	\$30	to	\$37.20
Three Phase (3Ph)	\$54	to	\$66.96
Time of Use (1Ph)	\$33.75	to	\$41.85
Time of Use (3Ph)	\$60.75	to	\$75.33
w/Solar (1PH)	\$30	to	\$45.20

To help combat rising electricity costs, we have several ways for you to learn how to live more energy efficiently. Our Advise Guys are available to discuss energy improvements or to perform a home-energy analysis to determine where you might be able to save. Contact them at AdviseGuys@sremc.com. Also, you can visit sremc.com for a myriad of ideas for saving energy in your home. If you would like to discuss your options with someone, please feel free to contact us at 910.892.8071. We are looking out for you.

Last Chance For Report Cards

Are you a student with an A on your report card?

South River EMC offers the "Give Us An A" program to students who achieve at least one A on their most recent report card.

Simply make a copy of the report card and send it to:

South River EMC
"Give Us An A"
PO Box 931
Dunn, NC 28335

Or email it to: connections@sremc.com.

You must include the member's name, address, South River EMC account number and daytime telephone number. Report cards

will not be accepted without this information.

The drawing is held and 15 names will be drawn randomly to receive a \$25 gift card.

The program is open to students who are members, or children of members, of South River EMC.

Don't miss this opportunity to celebrate good grades.

Report cards should be submitted by 5 p.m., Feb. 6.



Nominations Made By Committee

The committee on nominations announced the submission of incumbent directors, as well as nominations of new directors for district 5 at a meeting of the board of directors on Jan. 2:

District 3: James "J.W." Simmons (*incumbent*)

District 5: Rhonda Autry and Dr. Ron Faircloth, both of Autryville.

District 7: C. Wayne Collier (*incumbent*)

Terms of office for directors are staggered so only three expire each year.

The ways in which directors may be elected:

1. By petition. Any 100 members of the Cooperative, acting together, may make nominations in writing, listing the nominees separately with respect to the particular term and the particular directorate district from which they are nominated, not less than 40 business days prior to the meeting.



2. From nominations by a committee on nominations.

Keep your eyes open for a ballot in the April newsletter or a letter in the mail. You can vote online or by mail. More information soon.

2024 Nominating Committee Members:

District 1 - Glenda Taylor
District 2 - Raylon Wood
District 3 - Joseph Anders
District 4 - Johnnie Baggett
District 5- Anthony "Tony" Warren
District 6 - Carol Hudson
District 7 - Warren Paul Jones
District 8 - Glenn Riddle
At Large - Robert Earl Butler Jr.

Big Plans For Summer Break

This summer, South River EMC is offering an opportunity to current high school freshman, sophomores, or juniors.

Join other students for Cooperative Leadership Camp in Laurel Hill.

The week-long camp offers high school students an opportunity to discover more about the cooperative business model, develop leadership and team-building skills, meet students from across the state and have fun.

The objectives are to educate, connect and promote the cooperative way of doing business and provide a fun learning experience for the students that are selected to attend. Workshops include:

- A Day in the Life of a Line Worker
- Coastal's Reality Series
- Farming & Sustainability: Cabot Co-op
- Build Worker/Owner T-shirt Cooperative
- The Food Co-op's Living Wage

In addition to hands-on learning about the big world of cooperatives, students get a fun overnight camp experience, including swimming, lake activities, canoeing, hiking trails, archery, bonfires and more.

All meals are included, and lodging is in air-conditioned bunk houses. Bus transportation

to and from designated locations across the state is also available and included for attendees.

For more information or to apply, visit sremc.com/cooperative-leadership-camp.

Students attending are eligible to apply for the \$1,000 Jim Graham college scholarship during their senior year of high school.



Take It To The Hoop This Summer

South River EMC will send two current fifth or sixth graders to the Touchstone Energy Basketball camps offered at NC State and UNC-Chapel Hill.

This opportunity gives boys and girls a unique experience to attend basketball camp on one of two of the state's largest college campuses.

Students statewide are encouraged to apply for one of 50 all-expenses-paid scholarships to attend the Carolina Basketball Camp at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (June 22-26) and the Wolfpack Women's Basketball Academy at North Carolina State University in Raleigh (date TBA).

At the overnight camps, campers work closely with coaches and players to develop fundamental skills, helping them perform and excel both on and off the court.

The Cooperative funds one scholarship to each camp and in 2023, we were able to send Taylor Thornton and Lathan Middleton.

Campers must:

- ▶ Be a rising sixth or seventh grader. This means currently in fifth or sixth grade.
- ▶ Attend a school in the Cooperative service area.
- ▶ Have a parent or guardian's permission to attend. An

information sheet must be signed.

- ▶ Provide their own transportation to and from camp.

Winners will attend the camps courtesy of South River EMC.

Applications will be scored on academics, extracurricular activities and an essay that must accompany the application.

The application period closes March 31.

Eligible students interested in the scholarships can get more information and access the applications through sremc.com/basketball-camps.





Reaping Weatherization Savings

Interested in improving the comfort of your home?

The Weatherization Assistance Program helps low-income North Carolinians save energy, and reduce utility bills at home.

With a mission to keep North Carolina citizens warm in the winter, cool in the summer, and safe all year long; the program's focus is homes of the elderly, the

disabled, families with children, high energy users, and the energy burdened.

In having weatherization work completed by Community Action, members are eligible for a rebate. However, the weatherization package for single family or manufactured low-income homes must be completed, which includes: air/duct sealing,

improved insulation, an HVAC tune-up or replacement, and a programmable thermostat in a home with a heat pump or an electric furnace/ central AC.

South River EMC offers a rebate for homeowners who have weatherization work performed by Community Action.

For details visit sremc.com/weatherization.

Window Replacement Could Net Savings

New windows can make your home quieter and less drafty.

Newer, double-hung windows are easier to clean and maintain, and moreover, can also enhance your home's curb appeal. Installing replacement windows is a common way for homeowners to achieve those benefits.

Replacing old windows with any newer, better-designed model is likely to save you some on energy costs, but if you want to ensure savings, buy Energy

Star certified models. How much you save will vary based on where you live as well as what type of window you're replacing.

You could save more by installing a replacement window from Energy Star's Most Efficient Window list found on energystar.gov.

Through 2032, you can claim a 30 percent federal tax credit on that expenditure, up to \$600 a year, thanks to the Inflation Reduction Act passed in 2022.

To maximize the credit, you could stagger your window replacements over several years and get the credit each time.

South River EMC offers a rebate on window replacements, but only one rebate per 20 year period.

For details on the rebate offered by South River EMC, visit sremc.com/energy-star-windows.

Heating More Efficiently

If you're in the market for a new heating and cooling unit, remember, South River EMC offers rebates on high-efficiency heating and cooling units.

The higher the seasonal energy efficiency ratio, or SEER, rating the more efficient the system is at cooling. Like an air conditioner such as central air, a heat pump can cool your home, but it's also

capable of providing heat. In cooler months, it pulls heat from the cold outdoor air and transfers it indoors, and in warmer months, it pulls heat out of indoor air to cool your home.

Powered by electricity, heat pumps transfer heat using refrigerant to provide comfort all year round. Because they handle both cooling and heating, additional

systems are not necessary.

Looking at installing a new heating and cooling system? Find a 16 SEER or greater and replace with a little more efficiency in mind.

For details on the rebate, visit sremc.com/energy-star-heating-cooling.

Water Heating For Less

Water heating accounts for about 18% of your home's energy use and is typically the second largest energy expense in any home.

The water heater you have is one way to cut down on electric costs, so if you're in the market for a new unit, consider your options. While a heat pump water heater and a solar water heater are eligible for rebates from South River EMC, they are also two of

the more efficient options for heating your water each day.

Solar water heaters use the sun to heat water and while they are efficient, they do have requirements. Solar systems need to be roof-mounted, and to be truly efficient, you'll want to make sure you have a good solar resource before you commit.

Meanwhile, a heat pump water heater uses the heat surrounding

the system to warm water for use. Requiring 1,000 cu. ft of space, as well as being located in an area that remains in the 40-90 degree range year round, these units are typically 2-3 times more efficient.

For details on the rebates offered by South River EMC, visit sremc.com/energy-efficient-water-heating.



Message from Advise Guy Aaron Jackson



We are in the midst of the winter season so I'm sure you've noticed your heating system running quite a bit over the last couple of months. If you have electric heat, the increased runtime has produced a noticeable change in your bill. This is normal, but there are several actions the average homeowner can take to lessen the impact of winter heating costs on their budget.

Best Practices

Maintaining a proper thermostat setting is the most important action you can take to mitigate the cold weathers impact on your bill. The recommended thermostat setting for heat is 68 degrees and it's best to set it and forget it. Moving the thermostat up and down causes the heating unit to use more electricity, especially if the system is a heat pump. Instead of increasing the thermostat setting dress warmly, use a blanket or quilt, or utilize another heating method like a fireplace or gas heater to warm the space you are using.

Air circulation is vital when it comes to heating or cooling

a home. When using your heat pump or other type of central heating system it is important that all of the vents in all rooms are fully open. Also, every door to every room in the home should be open at least two inches. Lastly, the return filter(s) for your unit should be checked and changed out regularly. With all vents open, interior doors cracked, and a clean return filter, the heat being produced by your system will be able to flow from the registers in the various rooms back to the return, warming the entire home uniformly. This free flow of heat helps the system satisfy the thermostat sooner, lessening runtime and lowering your bill.

Heating system preventative maintenance is a must for combating high electricity bills and avoiding costly repairs. Have your heating and cooling system serviced at least once per year by a qualified technician. It's best to have this done in the spring or fall each year so that the unit is in good working order during the winter and summer; ready for the more extreme temperatures we can experience during those

seasons. Times of prolonged cold weather tend to amplify issues with poor performing heating systems. If you have a heat pump and notice on your thermostat that the auxiliary heat is frequently operating when the outdoor temperature is over about 40 degrees, this could indicate a problem which could significantly increase your electric bill.

Lastly, keep exterior doors closed during the winter months. It's also a good idea to check over all of your windows to ensure that they are tightly closed. And speaking of windows, utilize the warm rays of the sun during the day by opening blinds or curtains.

With these simple tips you can lessen the impact the winter weather has on your electric bill.



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