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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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Overhead versus underground



AS I'M PREPARING this report, our region is in the midst of the inevitable round of summer thunderstorms. These storms readily grab our attention at Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative because we understand they're liable to cause us, and numbers of

our members, some trouble.

The storm-accompanied high winds and lightning strikes represent a combination that can produce power outages. As I've noted before, the mountainous terrain that defines the majority (56%) of our service territory makes your cooperative especially vulnerable to these destructive visitations from Mother Nature.

Just part of the problem

The thunder-bumpers themselves are bad enough. They are, however, just a part of the problem. In South Carolina, we typically associate the damaging effects of hurricanes with our state's coastal areas. While that's largely true, intact hurricanes sometimes invade Blue Ridge territory, cutting a path of ruin across the countryside. The especially impactful Hurricane Zeta in October 2020 immediately comes to mind.

Then, there are the winter storm emergencies characterized by either heavy, wet snow or excessive coatings of ice brought on by freezing rain. Once again, our beloved mountains play a major role in the creation of those meteorological conditions.

The potential for weather-related outages often prompts questions about the wisdom of above-ground power lines. There's no question that outages are expensive. A recent estimate attached an annual price tag of \$150 billion to those service interruptions that occur across the United States. Without question, underground electric cables are generally protected from wind, fire, ice, falling

trees and auto accidents. On the other hand, finding and repairing a problem on an overhead line typically can be accomplished quicker and easier than would be the case with underground. The below-ground facilities are also sometimes vulnerable to both flooding and dig-ins.

The matter of cost

Moreover, what really settles the debate of overhead versus underground is the matter of cost. In 2012, the Edison Electric Institute released a study that projected that customers' power bills would have to double to pay for burying all those electrical lines. Furthermore, large numbers of ratepayers would face the considerable personal expense of converting from overhead to underground the facilities at their homes or other metered locations. Consequently, I don't believe we'd need to send out a survey to determine where our Blue Ridge membership might come down on that issue.

This report is not designed to bad-mouth underground. We have thousands of miles of subterranean cable now installed. At members' requests, we gladly provide them with underground connections at a price that helps to offset the additional costs involved in extending that service. My purpose in writing is simply to focus on the extra expense associated with underground, as compared to that of overhead facilities.

What I further can relate to you is that your co-op is continually building more strength into the system of facilities that brings electric power to your premises. We're intent upon our goal of getting better at what we do, and that holds the promise of greater service reliability in the years to come.

JIM LOVINGGOOD
 President and CEO

Local teens talk with state leaders

BREC sends students to Virtual Youth Experience

FOR STUDENTS who spent their school year transitioning from distance learning to the classroom, Virtual Youth Experience was an appropriate way to begin their summer.

In June, Abi Blankenship from Pendleton High School, Olivia Lee from Walhalla High School and Maggie Nolen from Wren High School were among 74 high-achieving students that participated in a week-long part web-conference, part in-person event sponsored by South Carolina's electric cooperatives.

The local teens selected by Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative used their laptops and smartphones to discuss issues of the day with four members of South Carolina's Congressional delegation—U.S. Representatives James Clyburn and Nancy Mace and U.S. Senators Tim Scott and Lindsey Graham. The students also got screen time with Rev. Charles Jackson of Brookland Baptist Church and State Epidemiologist Dr. Linda Bell.

To conclude the week, they gathered at Fairfield Electric Cooperative to hear inspiring messages from South Carolina



Maggie Nolen, Abi Blankenship and Olivia Lee (from left) finished their VYE at Fairfield Electric Cooperative where they had the opportunity to meet South Carolina Lt. Gov. Pamela Evette.

Lt. Gov. Pamela Evette and Chris Singleton—a former professional baseball player whose mother, Sharonda Coleman-Singleton, was one of nine killed in 2015's Emanuel AME Church shooting.

Blankenship commented on the week, "It was refreshing to meet with other like-minded students who love our country and are interested in making it better." For Lee, the VYE was an unforgettable experience. She said, "Meeting and conversing with these politicians is something that most people never get to experience. I am so thankful to be provided with this opportunity." A lesson on leadership was most valuable for Nolen, who said "I gained a lot of wisdom on how to not only be a leader, but a successful one."

The students also spent the week in teams learning how to create and produce audio podcasts that complete the sentence: "This is my country..."

A group of S.C. journalists will judge the podcasts and award \$5,000 scholarships to each student in the winning group. The student podcasts are available online at anchor.fm/ecsc.

The Virtual Youth Experience began last year when the risks of COVID-19 caused cooperative programs like the Rural Electric Youth Tour and the Cooperative Youth Summit to be cancelled. The programs allow high school students to learn about electric cooperatives and how their government works.

Charities receive donation from Blue Ridge Fest

Recipients of 2021 Blue Ridge Fest funds were treated to a celebration luncheon at the co-op's Oconee community room. Long-time fest sponsor Chick-fil-A provided lunch. Each charity chosen last fall by a co-op employee committee to receive funding was presented with a check for \$9,000.

Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative President and CEO Jim Lovinggood touched on the significance of Blue Ridge Fest over the past 24 years.

"More than \$3,000,000 has been raised since Blue Ridge Fest began in 1998," he said. "Those funds have been distributed to more than 80 charities in our service area and used to assist

countless individuals and families."

Lovinggood also announced that after 24 years, Blue Ridge Fest as it has been will end. "We will continue to provide for our communities," he said, "but we are uncertain of the platform that will take. Blue Ridge Electric Co-op has always invested in the areas we serve, and that will continue."

For the past two years, because of the COVID pandemic, there hasn't been an event associated with Blue Ridge Fest.

However, faithful sponsors continue to support the Fest and provide help to local charities. This year, \$108,000 was awarded to 12 charities representing donations from 36 corporate and individual sponsors.

Those receiving Blue Ridge Fest funds this year were Anderson Interfaith Ministries, Family Promise of Anderson, Feed a Hungry Child, Fostering Faithfully, Gleaning House Ministries, Golden Corner Food Pantry, Grace's Closet, North Greenville Crisis

Ministry, Oconee United Ministries, Samaritan Health Clinic, Service Dogs for Veterans and United Christian Ministries.

Thanks to the generosity of a number of sponsors, agency representatives each received a check for \$9,000 to assist with their charity's specific needs. BREC CEO Jim Lovinggood (center) presented the checks.

