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**TO REPORT  
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Horry Electric Cooperative Inc. is a not-for-profit, member-owned organization providing information and energy-related services on a fair and equitable basis.



A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



## Protecting co-op employees

**POWER OUTAGES**, especially those that last multiple days, are stressful for everyone—our members, our lineworkers and the rest of our staff.

In the aftermath of a storm like Hurricane Helene, when the people we serve think enough of their cooperative to send notes of gratitude or offer words of encouragement to the men and women restoring their power, it means a lot to all of us at Horry Electric Cooperative.

We've seen this happen here in Horry County, but also when we send crews out of town to help sister co-ops. For example, we sent multiple crews to Little River Electric Cooperative in Abbeville to assist in power restoration following Hurricane Helene. Crews experienced an outpouring of kindness from community members donating food, water, laundry services and more.

The majority of people are kind and caring, and want to help the cooperative in any way they can. These acts of kindness sustain and energize us during the challenging days of rebuilding electrical infrastructure and providing support and information.

Unfortunately, not everyone responds so graciously to the stress of being without electricity. Across our state, co-op employees in the field and in the office have encountered harassment and threats of violence from frustrated members.

Aggressive phone calls to member service representatives or people threatening to harm lineworkers if power isn't restored are just some of things that have happened to our team.

This kind of behavior only serves to make a difficult job even harder. During any outage, major or minor, I assure you everyone at Horry Electric is doing everything they can to restore power to our members as quickly and as safely as possible. Our employees need to be able to focus 100% on power restoration and the hazards that come with it.

During this year's legislative session of the state General Assembly, Horry Electric will join other South Carolina cooperatives in calling for stronger protections for utility crews and employees. The legislation is designed to deter threats or violence against anyone repairing critical infrastructure during a declared emergency. Possible measures include stronger penalties and safeguards aimed at ensuring responders can do their jobs to get the state back in order after a disaster strikes.

The Legislature alone can't protect utility workers from harm and harassment. You can join your neighbors in helping. Here's how:

- ▶ Don't approach utility crews while they're working. The work they are doing could be hazardous to untrained personnel.
- ▶ Remain calm when speaking with co-op personnel.
- ▶ Ensure generators are installed and used properly to protect lineworkers.
- ▶ Stay out of restricted co-op areas.
- ▶ Secure pets while service personnel are on or near your property.
- ▶ Drive slowly and carefully around utility work zones.

We do everything we can to keep electricity flowing to your homes and businesses without interruption. Unfortunately, Mother Nature and the realities of power distribution prevent us from perfection.

On behalf of all of us at Horry Electric, I thank you for your patience, understanding and encouragement.

**J. REED COOPER, P.E.**

Executive Vice President and CEO

# Honoring a lifetime of service

## HEC board trustee awarded the Order of the Palmetto

**A MOMENT OF PURE SURPRISE** that still doesn't feel real. That's how Horry Electric Board Trustee for District 1 Elaine Gore described receiving South Carolina's highest civilian honor—the Order of the Palmetto.

Gore runs the Horry County Council on Aging (HCCOA), which she calls her "day job." With multiple locations throughout the county, the Council works to provide senior care services.

In October, HCCOA hosted its Golden Gala to commemorate 50 years of the agency serving senior adults. As the name of the event suggests, attendees got dressed up to celebrate a legacy of love. It was an evening full of entertainment, auctions and raffles to support Horry County seniors.

As HCCOA's Deputy Director, Gore took her place on stage to welcome everyone and thank them for attending. Only, she didn't know she was the guest of honor. The HCCOA board chairman told her that a young man in the crowd had a few words to say—her grandson, Ryland Allen.

"He started walking up to the stage with flowers and all I could think was 'Surely, they're not doing something to recognize me,'" says Gore.

Allen proudly took his spot on stage next to his grandmother as a second surprise guest, Sen. Luke Rankin walked up, carrying an oversized frame.

"At this time, I'm wondering what in the world is going on," says Gore. "Luke got up on stage and presented me with the Order of the Palmetto. He probably talked for 20 minutes about the work HCCOA is doing in Horry County."

Gore says she never expected an honor of this caliber.

"I was so shocked I thought I was going to pass out," she says. "Obviously, I cried because this is such an awesome honor."



Sen. Luke Rankin (left) encourages Elaine Gore to say a few words after surprising her with the Order of the Palmetto. Alongside Gore is her grandson Ryland (second from left) and Johnny Shelley (right), HCCOA Board Secretary/Treasurer and Horry Electric Board of Trustees President.



Elaine Gore celebrates receiving the Order of the Palmetto at the Horry County Council on Aging Golden Gala in October.

PHOTOS BY NIKKI WRIGHT

### An unspoken connection

During the celebration, Gore's mind went to her father, Mr. Lester Drew of Fair Bluff, North Carolina. Drew served 17 years on the Fair Bluff Town Council and was presented the Order of the Long Leaf Pine—North Carolina's highest civilian honor—in May 2023.

Drew sadly passed away in November at the age of 92.

"Receiving this award was really an honor because my father received his just two years prior," says Gore. "It was a moment I felt connected to him and like this was meant to be."

### Continuing the legacy

For decades, Gore has prioritized caring for others. HCCOA's mission statement is to allow senior adults to live at home with as much independence and dignity as possible.

The agency takes pride in connecting with others, whether that's by checking on someone who lives alone or providing a meal.

"The Order of the Palmetto by definition recognizes those who have selflessly given their time, resources and goodwill to benefit their neighbors and fellow citizens," says Horry Electric Executive Vice President and CEO Reed Cooper.

"Gore has devoted her life to doing just that, serving others and the seniors across Horry County. She has been a blessing to have on the Horry Electric board of trustees for the past 24 years. We're grateful for her knowledge, compassion and commitment to service."

Recently, Gore celebrated her 70th birthday but she has no intention of slowing down. When asked what inspires her to keep going, her answer was simple—the seniors do.

"The thing I'm most proud of is the legacy we're creating. It's about the needs of the seniors and a reminder about our need to care."

# Johnson receives high honor

## HEC employee named Conservation Farmer of the Year

**LONG BEFORE** the sun rises, Brian Johnson is already hard at work in the fields—farming with purpose, passion and sustainability in mind. His dedication has earned him the title of Horry Soil and Water Conservation District's 2025 Conservation Farmer of the Year. Horry Electric could not be more proud to celebrate one of our own.

Johnson is a substation and apparatus technician who has worked for Horry Electric for 23 years. He was honored as Conservation Farmer of the Year at a special celebration in October. As the highest annual award, it's presented to an outstanding farmer for his or her progressive integration of conservation practices.

The Johnson family has been farming in the Bayboro area for multiple generations. Johnson has spent his life working alongside his father and grandfather, which has

**"The Johnson family has been farming in the Bayboro area for multiple generations."**

contributed to his work ethic. He's hardworking and works to leave his land in better condition than when the season started. From corn and sweet potatoes to watermelons and mustard greens, Johnson's farm operates year-round.

"We use crop rotation, soil testing, cover crops, drip irrigation and greenhouses to maximize efficiency and productivity," says Johnson. "This helps us conserve the land we farm."

As a local farmer, Johnson prides himself on being able to give back to his community. Each year, he donates a portion of his goods to local food pantries to help others in need. Concern for community is one of the seven cooperative principles, and it makes this award even more special for Johnson as a co-op employee. Congratulations to Brian on this outstanding award!



Brian Johnson received the Conservation Farmer of the Year award at a banquet in October.

CHRISTIAN GRAHAM

## Have you tried our payment kiosk yet?



**PAYMENT KIOSKS** are available 24/7 in the drive-thru lanes of the Conway and Socastee offices.

Cash, check and card payments are accepted. When making a cash payment, please insert the dollar amount you wish to pay. The kiosk does not give back change.

There is no transaction fee for cash payments but check and credit/debit card payments will be charged transaction

fees consistent with the current fees for online and mobile app payments. Checks have a \$0.50 transaction fee. Card payments will be charged a transaction fee of \$2.95 per \$200 paid.

If you have questions, or need help using one of our kiosks, please call **(843) 369-2211**.

The payment kiosks are a great way to pay your bill if you're not able to visit one of our offices during regular business hours.

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# Creativity shines bright

## Aynor Elementary student wins Christmas card contest

**ONCE A BLANK CANVAS**, now a framed masterpiece. In December, Harper Richardson, a kindergartner at Aynor Elementary School, was named the winner of the annual Horry Electric Christmas Card Contest. Her artwork was featured on the co-op's 2025 Christmas card and will be displayed at her school for the next year.

Students across Horry County submitted more than 250 cards for the contest. A panel of co-op employees reviewed every card. After looking at the cards anonymously, the panel picked the top five to present to Reed Cooper, executive vice president and CEO, and the leadership team.

"Harper's card immediately captured our attention with its vibrant colors, details and festive theme," says Moneek Stevenson, an accountant for Horry Electric.

Cooper adds, "For anyone who knows me, especially the team at Horry Electric, they know I love Willie Wiredhand. When we redesigned our logo last year, it was important to me to include Willie Wiredhand because he has always represented the promise of the electric co-op caring about the community. This is one of the many reasons we hold this contest. We care about our students and love to see them shine."

Richardson's artistic ability is already impressive for her age and her love for creativity is clear. When Cooper asked what she hoped to find under the Christmas tree, her wishes fit her creative personality perfectly—an art set to continue exploring her passion for drawing and coloring. More fitting, when asked what she wants to be when she grows up, her answer came with confidence—an artist. Winning this contest is a special step forward on that journey and an encouraging reminder that big dreams can begin at any age.



PHOTOS BY JENNIFER CUMMINGS

Harper Richardson proudly shows off her Christmas card alongside (from left) Horry Electric Executive Vice President and CEO Reed Cooper, AES Art Teacher Christian Rabon, AES Teacher Michelle Richardson (also known as Harper's Mimi), her mom Sydney Richardson and Horry Electric District 2 Trustee Aaron Johnson.

**"Harper's card captured our attention with its vibrant colors, details and festive theme."**

—MONEEK STEVENSON

As part of her prize, Richardson received \$100 cash, which her mom says will be "going straight into her savings account."

Horry Electric is proud to recognize this young artist and grateful to all the students who participated in this year's contest. Their artwork continues to brighten this joyous season and highlights the wonderful talent in the community.



Reed Cooper surprises Harper Richardson with a framed copy of her winning Christmas card and a \$100 award.

## Winter safety for outdoor workers

**WHEN THE TEMPERATURE** drops, so does your body's ability to stay safe. Outdoor workers—and those who enjoy outdoor sports like hunting, fishing or hiking—face added risks and must take extra steps to ensure they stay warm.

Follow these tips and have a plan to stay safe when working outdoors:

- ▶ **Watch the weather.** Monitor the temperature and wind chill. Take frequent breaks indoors to help prevent cold stress.
- ▶ **Stay warm and dry.** Dress in loose, warm layers. Wear a moisture-wicking base, an insulating mid-layer, and a protective outer layer (flame-resistant/arc-rated if required for your work). Use warm socks and waterproof boots. Remove any wet clothing as quickly as possible.
- ▶ **Protect your head and face.** Use a hat, hood, or hard-hat liner. When required for your job, choose FR/AR-rated liners. Avoid bulky hats or loose scarves.
- ▶ **Keep your hands safe.** Wear insulated gloves or mittens to guard against frostbite. If working with electricity, always use voltage-rated protective gloves with approved

liners—never substitute regular winter gloves in place of necessary personal protective equipment (PPE).

- ▶ **Fuel your body.** Drink warm fluids, stay hydrated and eat high-energy foods.
- ▶ **Know the warning signs.** Watch for frostbite (numbness, skin color changes) and hypothermia (shivering, confusion, slurred speech).
- ▶ **Be prepared on the road.** Keep an emergency kit in your vehicle with blankets, hand and foot warmers and jumper cables.

Cold weather brings unique challenges that make outdoor work even more hazardous. Lineworkers and other outdoor professionals face these risks daily to keep essential services running.

When temperatures drop, look out for one another and take steps to stay safe. Prevention matters—limit your time in the elements, wear proper protective clothing and stay alert. Working smart in the cold helps ensure everyone makes it home safely.

## IN THE NEXT EDITION OF SOUTH CAROLINA LIVING...

### 2025 Touchstone Energy Cooperatives Bowl



High school football players across South Carolina trade in their shoulder pads and helmets for rubber gloves and hard hats and try their hand at being an electric lineman. It's just one of the many events during game week in December.

Read about their experiences and how these players are making a difference.

Don't miss the next issue!



# Ready for an experience you won't forget?

Your co-op has two amazing trips planned this summer. Juniors: Apply for the Washington Youth Tour. Sophomores: Apply for the Cooperative Youth Summit.

**Juniors:** Experience Washington, D.C., with hundreds of students from across South Carolina and the country, meeting lawmakers and touring all the sights. Your electric co-op will cover your round-trip plane ticket, tours and meals. In other words, it's all free!

**Sophomores:** Experience South Carolina's capital like never before. Tour the Statehouse, meet lawmakers and see how co-ops are preparing for our state's energy future. Plus, there's plenty of fun with visits to popular Columbia attractions like the South Carolina State Museum. Your electric co-op will cover all your expenses.

We've made it easy to apply for either FREE trip. Apply today!



ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES  
OF SOUTH CAROLINA



**Washington Youth Tour: June 14-19, 2026**



**Cooperative Youth Summit: July 13-16, 2026**



Applications available: [horryec.info/trips](http://horryec.info/trips)  
Application deadline: January 31, 2026

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