



[aikenco-op.org](http://aikenco-op.org)

**AIKEN OFFICE**

2790 Wagener Road • P.O. Box 417  
Aiken, SC 29802  
(803) 649-6245 (800) 922-1262

**EDGEFIELD OFFICE**

1195 Bauskett Street • P.O. Box 583  
Edgefield, SC 29824  
(803) 637-3189

**NORTH OFFICE**

8381 North Road • P.O. Box 520  
North, SC 29112  
(803) 247-2121 (800) 453-1934

**NEW ELLENTON OFFICE**

315 Main Street  
New Ellenton, SC 29809  
(803) 652-2226

**LIGHTS ON**

(877) 264-5368

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

*President*

J. Strom Thurmond, Jr.

*Vice President*

Robert Curry

*Secretary/Treasurer*

Linda S. Bramlett

*Assistant Secretary/Treasurer*

Charles R. Sanders, Jr.

O. Frank Dorn

Vincent W. Furtick, Jr.

Adam Livingston

Dana H. Moseley

Scott B. Riddle

James E. Stewart, Jr.

The mission of Aiken Electric Cooperative, Inc. is to empower communities by providing reliable, competitively priced energy and other services desired by our membership.

**CO-OP NEWS EDITOR**

Jamacia McCray  
[jmccray@aikenco-op.org](mailto:jmccray@aikenco-op.org)

AEC is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



# Rate adjustment to address rising costs

**AS A MEMBER-OWNED**, not-for-profit cooperative, Aiken Electric Cooperative operates solely to serve you, our

members. Our commitment has always been to deliver dependable power at the lowest possible cost, and we know that any change to our electricity rate impacts your household.

After exhausting every possible option to avoid this step, we have reached a point where an adjustment is necessary. To continue delivering essential services while accounting for rising costs in our industry, a rate adjustment will take effect in January 2025. I'd like to explain why.

## Why is this rate adjustment necessary?

Over the past five years, we've seen the price of critical materials, equipment and supplies double. Wholesale power costs also have risen dramatically.

Because South Carolina cooperatives like ours purchase electricity from suppliers such as Duke Energy, Santee Cooper and the Southeastern Power Administration, our rates are driven in large part by the price of wholesale power from those suppliers.

Those wholesale prices are going up.

In particular, we will see significant cost increases arise due to the end of a court-agreed Santee Cooper rate freeze on Dec. 31, 2024.

Starting in 2025, Santee Cooper customers—including co-op members—will begin paying for the unbudgeted, extra costs that Santee Cooper incurred during its rate freeze period, when the utility wasn't allowed to raise its rates to cover those costs.

We don't yet know exactly how much co-op members will have to pay for these new costs, but we expect it to be substantial—into the hundreds of millions of dollars. These charges will come on top of Santee Cooper's other planned rate increases, which will help it meet the rising

prices for fuel and materials.

As a not-for-profit cooperative, we don't want to raise our electric rates any more than you do, but these rising supply and wholesale power costs are beyond our ability to absorb.

## What does this mean for you?

Below you will find a chart detailing our new residential rate. The specific impact will vary depending on your household's energy usage. We recognize how inflation continues to strain daily budgets, and this rate adjustment was not made lightly. We're making this change as a last resort after months of careful analysis and consideration.

▶ Service Availability Charge	<b>\$1.35/day</b>
▶ Energy Charge	<b>5.97% increase</b>

Please visit [aikenco-op.org](http://aikenco-op.org) for detailed information on rate adjustments.

## Programs to help you save

We're committed to helping ease this transition. On page 5, you'll find information about money-saving programs, such as Help My House, Smart Thermostat, Beat The Peak and H2O Select PLUS2, designed to help you manage your energy use and lower bills. Learn more at [aikenco-op.org](http://aikenco-op.org) or call us to see which program would be right for you.

As the adjusted rates go into effect, please know we're here to answer your questions and provide support. You can call us at (803) 649-6245. We will navigate these challenges as we always do—together.

Thank you for being a valued member of Aiken Electric Cooperative.



**GARY L. STOOKSBURY**  
Chief Executive Officer

# Save Energy, Save Money: Programs for Aiken Electric Members

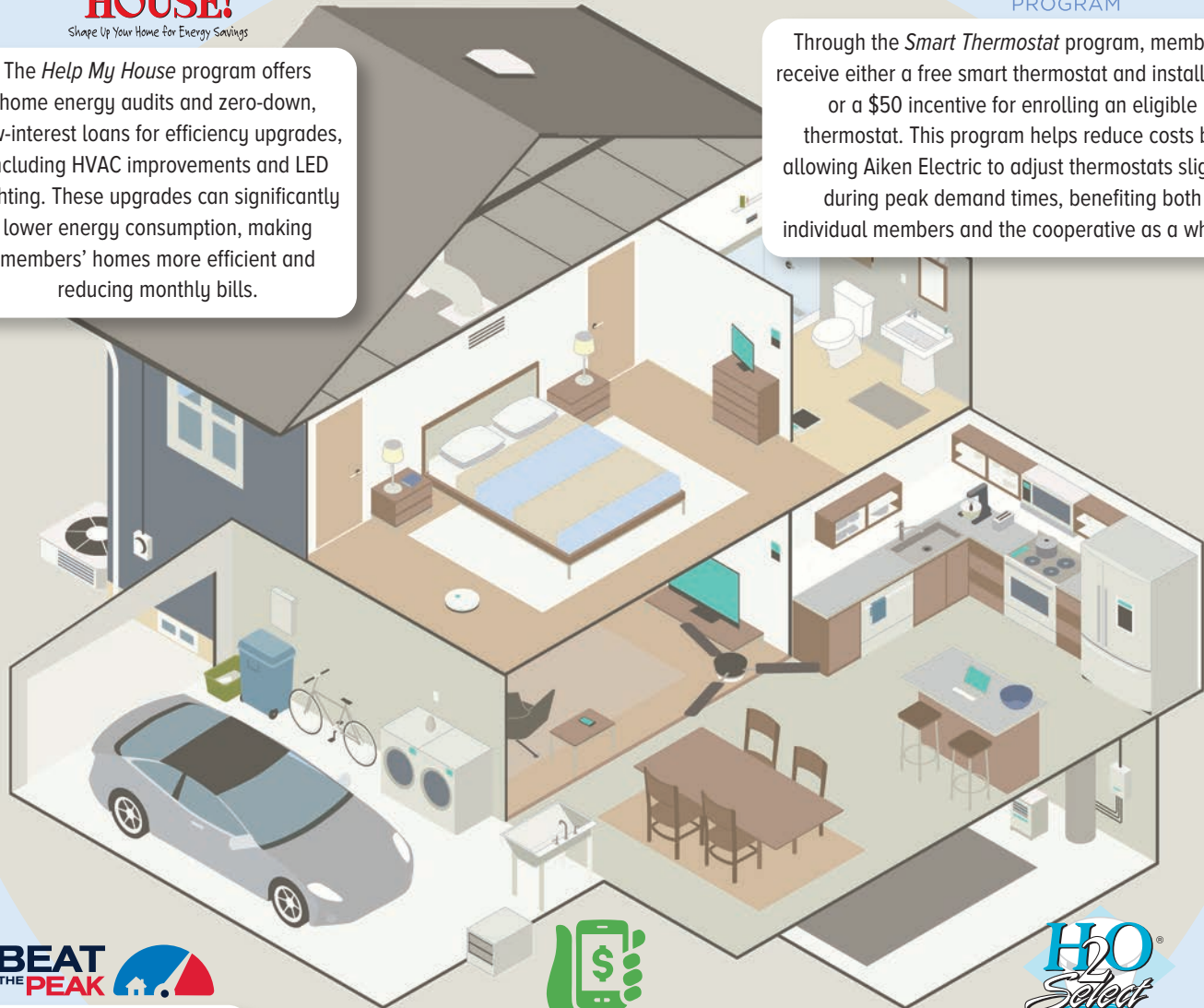
As a member-owned, not-for-profit cooperative, Aiken Electric Cooperative is committed to serving its members, not profit margins or outside interests. Many Aiken Electric employees are members themselves, reinforcing the cooperative's dedication to providing cost-effective, high-quality service to the community.

While electric rates are a factor in members' monthly bills, their energy usage plays an equally important role. Aiken Electric offers several programs focused on energy savings and efficiency to support members in managing these costs.



The *Help My House* program offers home energy audits and zero-down, low-interest loans for efficiency upgrades, including HVAC improvements and LED lighting. These upgrades can significantly lower energy consumption, making members' homes more efficient and reducing monthly bills.

Through the *Smart Thermostat* program, members receive either a free smart thermostat and installation or a \$50 incentive for enrolling an eligible thermostat. This program helps reduce costs by allowing Aiken Electric to adjust thermostats slightly during peak demand times, benefiting both individual members and the cooperative as a whole.



With *Beat the Peak*, members receive notifications during times of high electricity demand, allowing them to reduce usage, save on costs, and ease the strain on the power grid.



The *Go Green, Save Green* initiative rewards environmentally-conscious members who choose both E-billing and Bank Draft with a \$2 bill credit each month for 12 months. By opting for E-billing, members receive their bill via email, saving paper and reducing environmental impact.



The *H2O Select® PLUS2* program allows members to upgrade to a high-efficiency electric water heater at no cost, with cash incentives included. This program offers a 10-year worry-free maintenance warranty, ideal for members seeking energy efficiency and peace of mind.

**For more information about these programs,  
please call 803-649-6245 or visit [aikenco-op.org](http://aikenco-op.org).**

# AEC Annual Meeting May 16–17



THE 87TH ANNUAL MEETING of Aiken Electric Cooperative will be held at 2790 Wagener Road in Aiken on **Friday, May 16, 7 a.m.–7 p.m.**, and **Saturday, May 17, 7 a.m.–12:30 p.m.** The business meeting will be held virtually and streamed on the cooperative’s Facebook page.

Under bylaw provisions, the 2025 elections are as follows:

- ▶ District 1
- ▶ District 3
- ▶ District 4

In addition, one proposed bylaw amendment will be on the ballot:

## ARTICLE IV - TRUSTEES

### Section 4. Qualifications

(d) The Board of Trustees is authorized to adopt a policy requiring all candidates for Board Trustee positions to disclose campaign donations, relationships with all non-members and/or non-member organizations, conflict of interests to the business interest of the Cooperative, and/or a statement of economic interests. Such disclosures shall be on forms as adopted by the Board of Trustees and shall be available to the membership of the Cooperative for inspection. A policy so adopted may contain a requirement that failure to make the required disclosures in a timely

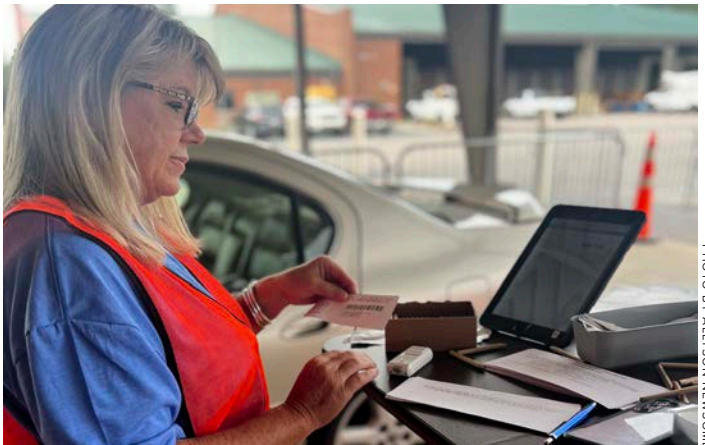


PHOTO BY ALLYSON NEWSOME

AEC will once again hold drive-thru registration and voting, designed to be quick yet informative, on **Friday, May 16, 7 a.m.–7 p.m.**, and **Saturday, May 17, 7 a.m.–12:30 p.m.** at the cooperative’s headquarters in Aiken.

manner will be cause for disqualification of a candidate and/or if a candidate is elected without making accurate disclosures such as Trustee can be removed for cause from the Board upon a majority vote of the Board of Trustees.

**What you need to know** This amendment allows the Board to require Trustee candidates to disclose campaign donations, conflicts of interest and economic interests. Disclosures will be on board-approved forms and will be accessible to cooperative members. Failure to disclose may disqualify a candidate or result in removal if elected. This amendment is an addition and does not change any existing bylaw provisions.

Look for more annual meeting details in upcoming issues of *South Carolina Living*.

Sign up for **RUN UNITED** and run with your family and friends through historic downtown Aiken April 26. All runners receive a medal regardless of finish time, while supplies last. Proceeds from the event benefit the United Way of Aiken County.



PHOTOS PROVIDED BY AIKEN ELECTRIC



## Get ready for RUN UNITED April 26

**RUN UNITED**, hosted by Aiken Electric, is scheduled for April 26 in historic downtown Aiken.

The race event includes a 5K, 10K and half marathon, as well as a 1-mile kids’ fun run. Race participants will see charming homes and architecture downtown, horse trails and the iconic South Boundary.

Proceeds from RUN UNITED benefit the United Way of Aiken County.

Here’s how you can participate:

- ▶ Run or walk in the 5K, 10K, or half-marathon
- ▶ Sign up your little ones to run in the 1-mile kids’ fun run (first 500 kids are FREE)
- ▶ Volunteer to help cheer runners on along the course or pass out water
- ▶ Make a donation on our website or become a sponsor

Sign up to participate or to volunteer at [runsignup.com/Race/SC/Aiken/AikenRunUnited](https://runsignup.com/Race/SC/Aiken/AikenRunUnited)



PHOTO BY JAMACIA MCCRAY

Ty Burke (left, with trophy) and Corey Tillman Jr. (right, with trophy) of North Augusta High School with Rebecca Ogbuefi, Marketing intern.



PHOTO BY QUENTIN EVANS

Briston Matthews of Ridge Spring-Monetta High School with Daniele Ligon, Marketing & Strategic Services manager.



PHOTO BY SOUTH AIKEN STAFF MEMBER

Jevon Edwards of South Aiken High School with Jamacia McCray, marketing & communications coordinator.

## Local athletes chosen for Touchstone Energy Cooperatives Bowl

AEC recently presented trophies to six local high school football stars in recognition of their selection to play in the 2024 Touchstone Energy Cooperatives Bowl. Receiving trophies were:

- ▶ **Jay Sewell** and **Josh Merriweather**, Strom Thurmond High School
- ▶ **Ty Burke** and **Corey Tillman, Jr.**, North Augusta High School
- ▶ **Briston Matthews**, Ridge-Spring Monetta High School
- ▶ **Jevon Edwards**, South Aiken High School

These players took the field for the annual high school all-star game on Dec. 21 in Myrtle Beach. Aiken Electric is proud to recognize these all-stars and proud to support one of the nation's premier all-star games.



PHOTO BY STROM THURMOND STAFF MEMBER

Jay Sewell and Josh Merriweather (holding trophies) of Strom Thurmond High School with Tucker Miller, Aiken Electric Edgefield area director.

# POWER UP YOUR EDUCATION



## Scholarships

Graduating seniors served by Aiken Electric are eligible.

\$2,000 Trustee Scholarship

\$1,000 Touchstone Energy Scholarship to a 4-year institution

\$1,000 Touchstone Energy Scholarship to a 2-year institution

## Youth Programs

Rising sophomores and juniors served by Aiken Electric are eligible.

Visit Washington, D.C.



Visit State Capital



Scan here to apply or visit [aikenco-op.org](http://aikenco-op.org).



Applications Open: November 1  
Deadline: February 25

## Fun on the farm

### Sara's Farm Adventure stays connected with high-speed internet

BY REBECCA OGBUEFI

**SARA'S FARM ADVENTURE** is more than just a farm—it's a family-friendly outdoor park packed with fun for all ages. The new agritourism park in Trenton, opened in September, offers hayrides, corn mazes, a petting zoo, light shows, food trucks, live concerts and more. Designed with families in mind, Sara's Farm Adventure is built around one simple idea: to provide a fun, educational space for the community to enjoy together.

To make it all happen, they're using high-speed internet service from CarolinaConnect.

You might be familiar with Sara's Fresh Market, a favorite local peach stand in Edgefield County. Sara's Farm Adventure is an expansion of the Market, offering hands-on experiences that educate people about agricultural life. Guests learn about the vital role farms play in America while getting up close to animals in the petting zoo and purchasing produce grown on-site, alongside other locally grown food, artwork and home goods.

Running a successful agritourism farm park requires reliable high-speed internet, according to Raymond Ruth, IT director for Sara's Farm Adventure.

"If it wasn't for Aiken Electric getting Carolina Connect in here, we would be behind," Ruth says.

The outdoor park uses CarolinaConnect to run all its operations, including point-of-sale systems, marketing efforts, ticket sales and check-in, music and sound and internet service for an average of 3,500 to 4,000 guests and vendors.

Kay Wiley Kaltz, Sara's Farm marketing specialist, says CarolinaConnect allows her to inform customers about upcoming events, inclement weather delays and other relevant updates through social media. In addition, guests are able to snap photos and easily upload them to social media, sharing their



Kaltz uses a point-of-sale system powered by CarolinaConnect, which provides quick and convenient payment options such as cash, credit and ApplePay, to check out a customer, Mackenzie Lee.



Marketing Specialist Kay Wiley Kaltz and Director of Retail Sales Karisa D. Ruth in front of the Sara's Farm Adventure store and gift shop where visitors can find produce grown on-site, locally sourced food, crafts, pottery, home goods, games, toys and much more.

experiences while at the farm. The team also connects in an even more personal way through livestreaming. Thanks to CarolinaConnect's high speeds, the team can chat with guests live without fear of buffering or lagging.

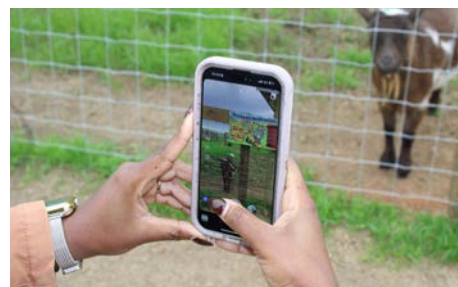
Sara's Farm Adventure needed reliable, high-speed internet to power its large operation within one month of its grand opening. Thanks to the efforts of Broadband Sales Specialist Marshall Myers Sara's Farm Adventure was up and running on schedule and has plans to expand its internet usage in the future to support the farm's additions.

"We've had a good experience," Ruth says.

Reliable internet service in today's business environment is more than a perk. It is a necessity. CarolinaConnect is woven into the success of Sara's Farm Adventure as it sustains and powers its mission to provide a fun and educational place for the community.

"We're here to stay," says Ruth.

**IF YOU'RE GOING** Sara's Farm Adventure is located at 100 Greenhouse Road in Trenton. Stay up to date with the Farm on Instagram at @sarasfarmadventure or Facebook at @sarasfarmadventure. Visit their website at [sarasfarmadventure.com](http://sarasfarmadventure.com).



As they learn about farm life, guests capture photos of the animals—goats, ponies, alpacas, donkeys, pigs, chickens and cows—and post their images to social media using CarolinaConnect's high-speed internet.

PHOTOS BY REBECCA OGBUEFI

**Need CarolinaConnect?** If you're looking for fast, reliable internet for your home or business, visit [carolinaconnect.com](http://carolinaconnect.com) or call (803) 785-3455. Plans start at \$49.95.



Join hundreds of **satisfied** Help My House participants



Yvonne Smith saves 10% monthly through the Help My House program.

**How it works:**

1. Arrange for a HMH energy audit.
2. An AEC-qualified contractor will make your energy improvements.
3. Finance your improvements with a zero-down, low interest loan with no credit check.
4. Pay for your improvements on your monthly electric bill.
5. Enjoy the benefits of a more energy-efficient home.

Call today

**803-649-6245**

or visit [aikenco-op.org](http://aikenco-op.org) to learn more



Have a smart thermostat?



Enroll your eligible thermostat, and you could get \$50 now and \$50 a year!

Call 803-649-6245, scan the QR code, or visit [energysmartsc.org/enroll-a-smart-thermostat](http://energysmartsc.org/enroll-a-smart-thermostat) to learn more.

