



**Aiken Electric
Cooperative, Inc.**

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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
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AEC is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



We're doing all we can

IF YOU TRIED to build a home a few years back, you know rising material prices can take a painful chunk

out of your bottom line.

The COVID-19 pandemic drove demand for new homes skyward. Shortages of home-building supplies such as lumber and PVC pipe led to backlogs and price spikes, pushing construction costs through the roof. We're now seeing similar trends play out in the energy industry.

One of our most important jobs is to keep the price of electricity down. For the first time in nearly a decade, Aiken Electric had to make the difficult decision to adjust the cooperative's electric rates in January. We've trimmed expenses and saved money wherever we could. But not everything is in our control. Here are just a few challenges we're seeing:

Inflation

In last month's issue, we highlighted the rising cost of materials we face. Other inflation factors such as commodity prices (aluminum, copper and rubber), transportation and interest rates have a big impact as well. It all means high demand, short supply and rising costs for materials we can't do without.

V.C. Summer and the Cook case

A few years ago, two South Carolina utilities tried and failed to expand the V.C. Summer nuclear power plant. South Carolina's electric co-ops buy the bulk of our power from one of those utilities, Santee Cooper, and must share in the costs of their capital projects, successful or not.

In the wake of that project's cancellation, Santee Cooper settled a class-action lawsuit and agreed to a four-year rate freeze that kept our power costs stable. Since then, a series of unfortunate events—including major storms, a fire at a supplier's coal mine and global events that

drove up the price of fuel—have added about \$750 million to Santee Cooper's balance sheet. You can be confident that we are challenging their decisions and actions at every opportunity.

Those new expenses will get passed down to their consumers—including our co-op—after the rate freeze ends on Dec. 31. We are negotiating to spread those payments over a longer time, which will reduce their impact on power bills.

Energy policy

Recently, the federal government has pushed hard to reduce carbon emissions, requiring power providers to adopt unproven, unavailable and expensive technologies.

They may have good intentions, but those regulations will make the cost of producing power—and buying it—go up. When it comes to energy policy, we work diligently with our state legislators and congressional representatives to make sure our voices are heard.

What we're doing about it

We are doing everything we can to keep costs and expenses down.

Fortunately, we have an important partner, CEEUS, to help us during this inflation crisis. CEEUS is a member-owned materials and supply cooperative that allows us to purchase materials at a much lower price than if we had to do it alone.

Perhaps the next time you look at a power line, you'll see it a little differently—as the sum of parts that are increasingly expensive. If not, that's OK. Just know that Aiken Electric is doing everything it can to soften the impact of these rising costs.

GARY L. STOOKSBURY
Chief Executive Officer



Aiken Electric members Becca Bindewald and Braylon Smith (middle) were among a group of Youth Tour students who heard Holocaust survivor Esther Rosenfeld Starobin's (left) story at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.



While visiting the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Rayv'on Chandler etches the name of a fellow Wagener native, Linnell Butler, who was killed in the war in 1969. Each of the Washington Youth Tour students were given the biography and name panel location of a soldier from their area who is memorialized on the iconic wall.

Finding new perspectives

AEC sends local students on summer youth trips

BY JOSH P. CROTZER

THE VIEW FROM the bucket of a utility truck looking out over a rural horizon certainly looks different than the view from the steps of the U.S. Capitol. Both, though, are places where local high school students stood and gained new perspectives, along with peers from across the Palmetto State, on life-changing summer trips sponsored by Aiken Electric and South Carolina's electric cooperatives.

Ashtyn Poston of Windsor, Becca Bindewald of Aiken, Braylon Smith of Ridge Spring, Peyton King of Aiken, Rayv'on Chandler of Wagener, Karlee Holmes of Batesburg and Rheney Bates of Aiken were among the 57 South Carolina teens who traveled to the nation's capital in June through the co-ops' Washington Youth Tour. Poston also joined 44 other high school students for Cooperative Youth Summit in July in Columbia and Newberry.

Washington Youth Tourists spent six days visiting monuments, museums and memorials. They also went to the U.S. Capitol, where they met with congressional staff. Afterward, U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham and U.S. Sen. Tim Scott talked with the students and answered their questions on the Capitol steps.

"Seeing all the people showing their love for their country, touring Capitol Hill



During Cooperative Youth Summit, Ashtyn Poston visited the S.C. Statehouse, sat in Gov. Henry McMaster's chair and won \$1,000 for her team presentation about electric vehicles.

and taking it in, was very inspirational and healing to me," says Bindewald. "There is a lot of beauty in this country, and a lot of it is very clearly expressed at the Capitol."

In Columbia, Youth Summit students embarked on a four-day exploration of their state government, civic engagement and the cooperative business model. In addition to a visit to the S.C. Statehouse and Gov. Henry McMaster's office, they toured Newberry Electric Cooperative's headquarters, where many of them were lifted more than 100 feet in the air in a bucket truck. They also participated in a team competition in which they developed presentations arguing for and against current political and cultural issues, such as banning TikTok and subsidizing electric vehicles. Poston's team, which argued against EV subsidization, won the competition—and a \$1,000 prize apiece.

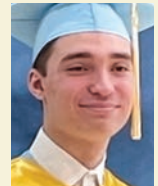
"When you're doing group presentations, you have to listen to the other people while making sure your input is included," says Poston. "The main thing is to ask questions."

2024 scholarship recipients

Ward Burger

Ridge Spring-Monetta High School

- ▶ Touchstone Energy Scholarship
- ▶ Plans to attend the University of South Carolina Aiken, majoring in Forensics and Criminology

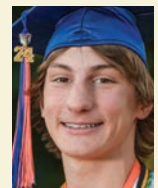


WARD BURGER

Trever Williams

Midland Valley High School

- ▶ Touchstone Energy Scholarship
- ▶ Plans to attend Aiken Technical College, majoring in Radiologic Technology

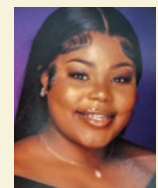


TREVER WILLIAMS

Tiera Valentine

Silver Bluff High School

- ▶ Trustee Scholarship (personally funded by AEC Board of Trustees)
- ▶ Plans to attend South Carolina State University, majoring in Speech Pathology



TIERA VALENTINE

2025 Youth Tour and Scholarship applications open Nov. 1.