

APPLY NOW FOR SUMMER YOUTH TRIPS—PAGE 12A

South Carolina LIVING

A man in a Revolutionary War-era uniform, including a black bicorne hat with white stripes and a white jacket with red trim, is playing a black flute. He is wearing glasses and has a focused expression. In the background, another person in similar attire is also playing a flute. A red and white striped flag is visible on the right side of the image.

AIKEN ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

Happy 250th

Celebrating
South Carolina's
role in the founding
of our country

CEO COLUMN
2025 in review

MAKE NOTE
Annual
Meeting
May 15–16

SURVEY SAYS
AEC receives
high marks



**Aiken Electric
Cooperative, Inc.**

aikenco-op.org

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(803) 649-6245

EDGEFIELD OFFICE

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Edgefield, SC 29824

NORTH OFFICE

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North, SC 29112

NEW ELLENTON OFFICE

315 Main Street
New Ellenton, SC 29809

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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.



Happy New Year!

2025 review and a look ahead

IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE 2025 is in the rearview mirror, but it was certainly a year of growth and productivity. Our goal and

focus in 2026 remains on you, keeping costs low, your lights on and your voice heard.

Power generation

There's no doubt there is growth in our area. The need for more electric generation remains a top topic for our board and management team. That's why we are working closely with our lawmakers and with Central Electric Power Cooperative, our provider of wholesale generation and transmission solutions, to plan ahead.

This means negotiating new ways to provide power generation sources to our state and educating members on using electricity wisely.

Employee protection

During this year's legislative session of the state General Assembly, Aiken 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.

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

- ▶ Secure pets while service personnel are on or near your property.
- ▶ Ensure generators are installed and used properly.
- ▶ Stay out of restricted areas at our co-op offices.

Staying connected

We want to ensure you are informed about the co-op. Here's how:

- ▶ If you have questions about your bill or need advice on programs to save energy and money, call us at (803) 649-6245.
- ▶ Download our free mobile app to monitor and manage your usage.
- ▶ Visit **aikenco-op.org** for information on our services and programs and safety tips for storms and outages.
- ▶ Follow us on social media for the latest co-op news, major outages and more.
- ▶ Every month you receive *South Carolina Living* in your mailbox. We use the magazine to communicate important topics that affect our entire membership.

2025 was a great year, and we are looking forward to what 2026 has in store.

GARY L. STOOKSBURY
Chief Executive Officer

2025 by the numbers

- ▶ **116,492** member calls answered
- ▶ **888,000+** emails to inform our members
- ▶ **8,600+** poles inspected
- ▶ **615 miles** of right-of-way cut to ensure reliability
- ▶ **100%** of employees volunteered in 2025 for various community service events and programs
- ▶ **\$800,000** returned to members in Capital Credits
- ▶ **17,000+** AEC CarolinaConnect customers

PHOTOS BY JAMACIA MCCRAY



Goodwin stands beside boxes filled to the brim for distribution days at Christ Central Wagener.

A life of service

Iradell Goodwin continues giving at 97

BY JAMACIA MCCRAY

AT 97 YEARS OLD, Aiken native and retired Aiken Electric Cooperative employee Iradell Goodwin is still doing what he has always done—helping others the best way he can.

For almost two years, Goodwin has spent two days each week volunteering at Christ Central Ministries in Wagener, making the 50-minute drive from his home in Gloverville. He helps by filling food boxes with staples like cereal, beans, snack bars, canned goods, toilet paper and more, all to help families in need.

"I love it," he says with a smile.

Goodwin's introduction to Christ Central came through a friend's invitation. After witnessing the ministry's impact firsthand, he knew he wanted to be part of its mission. But not only does he volunteer with Christ Central, he routinely gives neighbors and friends rides to church and medical appointments, offering help wherever he sees a need.

Cynthia Gray, pantry director at Christ Central Wagener, shares how much his presence means.

"He sits and chats with people. He has a good sense of who just needs a friend and someone to talk to, and he's always happy to listen," Gray says. "He has a wonderful testimony. Hearing his story always leaves people feeling hopeful, and as Christians, we hope it brings them a little closer to God."



Iradell Gordon shares a laugh with Cynthia Gray, pantry director at Christ Central Wagener.

Goodwin joined Aiken Electric after a cancer diagnosis ended his welding career. He spent 16 years with the cooperative before retiring in 1991.

When asked what he did during his time at the co-op, he chuckles and replies, "Whatever they could get me to do."

That description is more accurate than modest. Goodwin operated bucket trucks, trimmed trees, handled plumbing tasks, completed timesheets and even led crews when needed. Whatever was asked of him, he was glad to step in and help.

What he remembers most about the co-op are "the good, friendly people" he worked alongside. He speaks highly of Aiken Electric as the only company he knows of that continues to care for its retirees, hosting quarterly lunches that allow former employees to reconnect and stay informed about what the co-op is doing today.

During the day of his interview, volunteers served boxes of food to more than 150 people. Christ Central also accepts clothing, offering all items at no cost to their clients. To learn more, visit christcentralministries.org/wagener-mission-station.



JOSH P. CROTZER

Lauren Walton, administrative assistant for Finance & IT (right), is one of many AEC employees who will be ready to help you navigate our drive-thru to register at our next annual meeting.

Mark your calendars!

Aiken Electric Cooperative's 88th Annual Meeting will be held Friday, May 15, 7 a.m.—7 p.m., and Saturday, May 16, 7 a.m.—12:30 p.m., at 2790 Wagener Road in Aiken. The Annual Meeting will be a drive-thru format.

Members can look forward to receiving fun items from CarolinaConnect, while supplies last, and a \$25 bill credit by registering and attending. Members will also be entered into the grand-prize drawing for a riding lawn mower.

Look for more information in upcoming issues of *South Carolina Living*, on our website and on our social media channels. Remember, your registration card will be on the cover of May's magazine.

This year, elections will be held for District 2, District 5 and District 7.

Let's run!

RUN UNITED, hosted by AEC, is scheduled for Saturday, April 25 in downtown Aiken. The race

event includes a 5K, 10K, half-marathon and a 1-mile kids' fun run. Signup at runsignup.com/rununited.



Top 10 reasons to send your student on Washington Youth Tour or Cooperative Youth Summit

AIKEN ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE is proud to continue the tradition of sending local students on Washington Youth Tour and Cooperative Youth Summit.

These programs are designed to give rising sophomores and juniors the chance to see our government in action, learn about cooperatives and gain experiences that will shape their futures. To qualify, students must live in a household served by Aiken Electric.

Here are the top 10 reasons your student should seize this incredible opportunity:

1. It's completely free! Aiken Electric covers all expenses, including flights, meals and activities.

2. Win scholarships. Students attending Washington Youth Tour can compete for the \$5,000 R.D. Bennett Community Service Scholarship. Cooperative Youth Summit participants will work together in teams in a public-speaking contest called the Orator's Arena for a chance to win \$1,000 each.



President for a day? Cimora Lawrence spent time at the Oval Office replica at Madame Tussauds Wax Museum during her once-in-a-lifetime experience through Washington Youth Tour.



Sophie Love crossed an item off her bucket list after getting a lift in a boom truck during Cooperative Youth Summit.

PHOTOS BY JOSH P. CROTZER

3. Build a stellar college application. This unique experience will make your student's application and resume stand out, showcasing their leadership, civic engagement and cooperative knowledge.

4. Explore our state and nation's history firsthand. From the monuments and museums in Washington, D.C., to the vibrant cultural experiences in Columbia, these trips bring history lessons to life.

5. Experience packed itineraries. From sightseeing to exclusive activities, students will stay busy and engaged every moment of the trip. Boredom is not an option!

6. Meet your lawmakers. Students get the chance to hear directly from elected officials and learn what it takes to shape South Carolina's and our nation's future.

7. Make lifelong friendships. Connect with peers from your area, South Carolina and across the nation. These friendships can last a lifetime!

8. Discover your voice. Both trips encourage students to speak up, share their perspectives and learn the value of their contributions.

Apply today!

Spaces are limited, so encourage your student to apply today before the Feb. 16 deadline by visiting aikenco-op.org/youth-programs/.

Washington Youth Tour will be held June 14–19.

Cooperative Youth Summit will be held July 13–16.

9. Learn about the power of cooperatives. Students will gain an understanding of how cooperatives operate and their vital role in communities, emphasizing teamwork and shared success.

10. Be inspired to serve your community. Seeing leadership and service in action often motivates students to return home and make a difference in their own communities.

Bonus: Gain leadership skills. Workshops, discussions and activities help students develop confidence, public speaking skills and leadership qualities they can use throughout their lives.

Thanks for the high marks!

AIKEN ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE completed its annual member-wide customer satisfaction survey, with over 2,310 members participating. Member responses were sent to the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI®), a company that measures customer satisfaction across multiple industries throughout the entire United States.

For 2025, Aiken Electric Cooperative received an ACSI score of 92 on a 100-point scale.

Aiken Electric Cooperative's score is higher when compared to publicly measured investor-owned utility scores and cooperative utility scores reported in the syndicated 2025 ACSI Energy Utility Study and places Aiken Electric Cooperative 12 points higher than the average cooperative utility score.*

"We're proud to be ranked high by our members," says Gary Stooksbury, CEO. "Aiken Electric's board of trustees, management and employees remain united in one purpose: making life better for our members and communities."

**Compared to publicly measured energy utilities in the ACSI® survey of customers rating their own energy utility. Results based on data provided by Aiken Electric Cooperative, collected between October 1, 2025-October 31, 2025. ACSI did not regulate the survey administration or sample size. ACSI and its logo are registered trademarks of the American Customer Satisfaction Index LLC. For more about the ACSI, visit www.theacsi.org.*



EMILY WORKMAN

At Aiken Electric, we take your feedback seriously. That is why every member survey we receive is reviewed and documented, and if there is a concern listed, we call to address it. Thank you for your feedback.



Deonte Phillips



Kaleb Simpkins



Santos Whitt-Hernandez



Davion McKinnis

PHOTOS BY CANYON DURHAM

Local players shine in bowl game

SOUTH CAROLINA'S top high school football players faced off one last time at the 2025 Touchstone Energy Cooperatives Bowl (North vs. South) in Myrtle Beach on Dec. 13.

The 2025 Touchstone Energy

Cooperatives Bowl, sponsored by South Carolina's Touchstone Energy Cooperatives and organized by the S.C. Athletic Coaches Association, recognizes 88 of the state's top high school football players for their performance on and off the field.

Aiken Electric is proud to recognize four students from the area who took the field:

Davion McKinnis of North Augusta High School, Deonte Phillips and Kaleb Simpkins of Strom Thurmond High School and Santos Whitt-Hernandez of South Aiken High School.



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16 is the average Net Promoter Score among internet service providers. CarolinaConnect's score is 90.



9/10 CUSTOMERS RECOMMEND



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CarolinaConnect.com 803.785.3455



North District Apprentice Lineperson Braley Wallace loads a participant's box into his vehicle for the Turkey in a Box initiative.



Kirkline Fallen, member services representative, Joel Williams, Toys for Tots box coordinator and Star Jordan, member services representative (left to right), stand among four overfilled boxes of toys and goodies collected for the 2025 Toys for Tots program.

Making spirits bright

THE HOLIDAY SEASON is traditionally all about giving. For Aiken Electric, the co-op principle of concern for community is just that. It brings joy to our employees to give back to the communities they serve.

Here are the activities AEC employees took part in during the past holiday season:

► **Toys for Tots** Together with our membership, four overfilled boxes of toys were collected to ensure no child would be without this Christmas.

► **Turkey in a Box** North District employees spent a Saturday morning providing Thanksgiving meals for families.

► **Project Power** Line crews from Aiken, Edgefield and North donated their time and skills to build wheelchair ramps for three homes in our community, giving families the peace and comfort in their homes.

► **Johnston Food Bank** Employees from our Edgefield office spent a day sorting and prepping bags for families.

► **Toy Drive** North District employees collectively donated toys and bikes for

children in the area.

► **Bell ringing** Members from our Strategic Services department donated their time to bell ringing in support of The Salvation Army.

► **WIRE** Aiken Electric's W.I.R.E (Women In Rural Electrification) collectively donated 20 large pans of stuffing for the Salvation Army's annual Thanksgiving dinner to the community.

In 2025, 100% of Aiken Electric employees participated in various community service events and projects by donating, volunteering, supporting various fundraisers and more.

"It's important to us to give during the holiday season; it is always a rewarding experience for all of us here at the co-op," says Keyatta Priester, community development manager.

Aiken Electric employees exemplify the cooperative principle of Concern for Community, using their skills, time and resources to engage members and neighbors in meaningful, uplifting initiatives that make a positive difference in the lives of others.



Edgefield District First-Class Lineperson Kord Williams (left) and Apprentice Lineperson Nate Quarles drill a hole for a fence post for a wheelchair ramp for Project Power.