

South Carolina Living

AIKEN ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

Main Street revival

SC downtowns
are experiencing
a reawakening

CEO MESSAGE

Celebrating
88 years

IT'S MAGIC!

AEC programs
inspire students

GO GREEN

Sign up for E-Bill,
bank draft



**Aiken Electric
Cooperative, Inc.**

aikenco-op.org

AIKEN OFFICE

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

EDGEFIELD OFFICE

1195 Bauskett Street • P.O. Box 583
Edgefield, SC 29824

NORTH OFFICE

8381 North Road • P.O. Box 520
North, SC 29112

NEW ELLENTON OFFICE

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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.



Celebrating 88 years

I AM EXCITED about Aiken Electric's upcoming annual meeting. The annual meeting is a celebration of the cooperative difference and the

relationships we share with members.

When Aiken Electric was established 88 years ago, rural farmers and workers banded together to provide electricity for their community. In those early days, annual meetings were a one-day event. Clipboards and pens were used to register members and cars parked in nearby fields.

Today, members enjoy the convenience of a drive-thru registration process using iPads, making participation quick and easy. At this year's annual meeting, we invite you to take part in our cooperative's history while also looking forward to the future.

Stop by our headquarters at 2790 Wagener Road in Aiken on Friday, May 15, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., or Saturday, May 16, 7 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Members who register will automatically receive a \$25 bill credit on their next billing cycle and will be entered to win our grand prize drawing for a John Deere riding mower, provided by Blanchard Equipment. Be sure to bring the registration ticket located on the front of this issue.

If you have questions about registering your account, please review the procedures listed on the cover wrap of this issue.

You'll also find important updates and helpful information from your cooperative in this month's magazine.

As spring turns into summer, many of our members begin outdoor projects such as planting gardens, installing fences or tackling home improvements. **Before you dig, please remember to call 811.** Hitting an electric or fiber line can cause dangerous outages and costly repairs. Those who damage Aiken Electric or CarolinaConnect fiber lines will be responsible for those

repair costs, so a quick call to 811 can help keep everyone safe and prevent unnecessary expenses.

You'll also read about the important work our **right-of-way crews perform**. Keeping trees and vegetation safely trimmed away from power lines helps prevent outages and ensures reliable service for our members.

Our commitment to **education and community** continues as well. This month we're highlighting our Electrical Safety Magic Show, which teaches children how to stay safe around electricity, and our Children's Book Challenge, where young authors creatively connect storytelling with energy and cooperatives.

As temperatures rise, it's also a good time to be mindful of **energy use**.

Heating and cooling typically account for about half of a home's electric bill, so small adjustments such as raising your thermostat a few degrees, using ceiling fans and sealing air leaks can help manage energy costs during warmer weather.

Finally, we encourage members to consider enrolling in **E-Bill and bank draft**. Signing up means you'll never miss a bill due to delayed or misplaced mail, and members who enroll in both programs can receive a \$2 monthly bill credit for 12 months.

We hope you'll join us for the annual meeting and take advantage of the many resources and programs your cooperative offers. At Aiken Electric, we remain committed to providing safe, reliable and competitively priced service while continuing to serve the communities we proudly call home.

APRIL M. COLLINS
Chief Executive Officer

Plant the right way for right-of-way

Keeping the power on means keeping vegetation out of the way

BY JOSH P. CROTZER

SPRING IS PLANTING SEASON, but before you dig that first hole, do you know the rules for planting trees or shrubs near Aiken Electric Cooperative's rights-of-way?

Trees, limbs and bushes growing too close to power lines are a leading cause of outages, especially during storms. Understanding a few simple guidelines can help members avoid the frustration of finding out too late that something they've planted is in the wrong place.

"If we know ahead of time, we can show members where they can plant outside the easement or give them time to relocate smaller trees and shrubs, if possible," says Lee Love, manager of Aiken Electric's right-of-way program. "We want to give members every opportunity to preserve what they can."

Aiken Electric maintains a 20-foot easement—10 feet on each side of a power pole—along its power lines. Keeping this right-of-way clear of trees and encroaching vegetation is one of the most effective ways the cooperative prevents power outages. It also allows crews to access

equipment, maintain the lines and restore power quickly when outages occur.

Members who are landscaping near a power line have options. Low-growing shrubs kept below six feet are generally a good fit. However, taller growing specials, such as pines, oaks and Leyland cypresses must be removed because of the risk of them growing into the overhead line.

"We understand it's the member's property," says Love, "but those easements are necessary for us to provide safe, reliable power. We take that responsibility seriously."

Love oversees contractor crews that maintain the co-op's 3,600 miles of overhead line. Proactive vegetation management throughout the year helps prevent outages and allows crews to restore power more quickly when severe weather occurs.

Love says it takes six years for Aiken Electric to perform right-of-way maintenance throughout its entire electric system. New property owners may not know what the previous owner planted or where the easement line is located. Members are encouraged to call Aiken Electric if they

have questions or concerns.

When right-of-way crews are scheduled to work in your area, Aiken Electric sends a robocall notification to the number associated with your account to let you know crews may be working on your property.

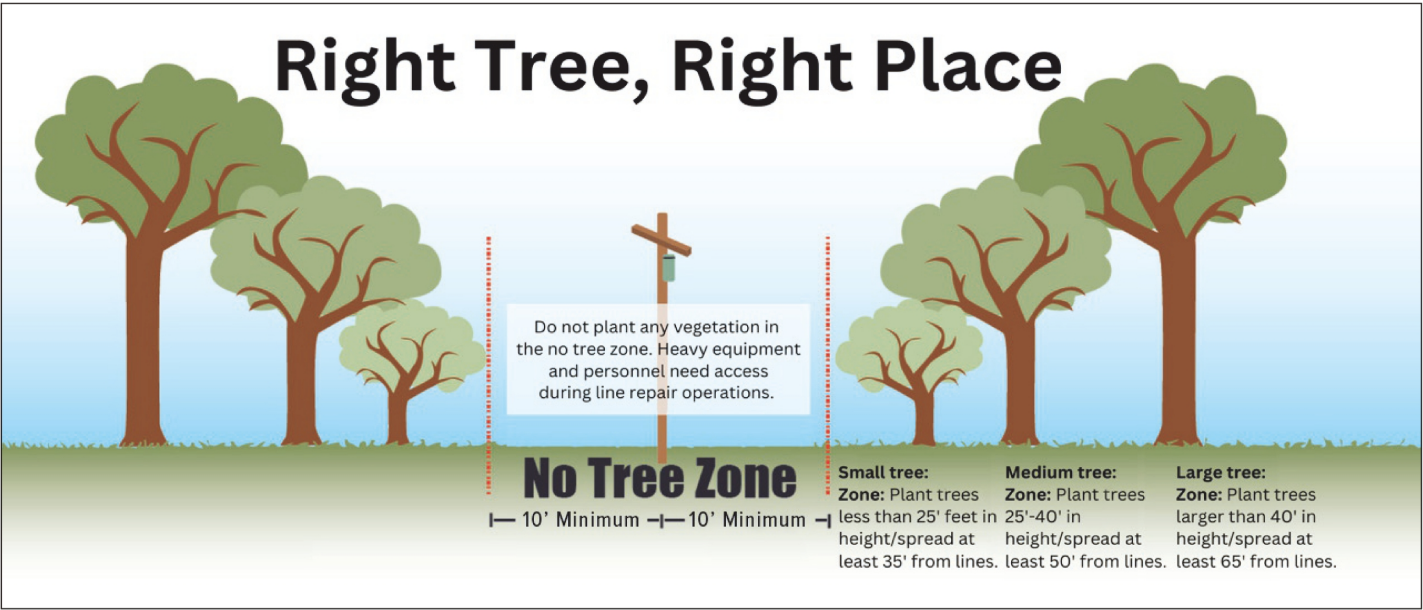
"It's very important that members update that contact information so that we can let them know when we're in their area," says Love.

Keeping your number current means you'll be reached quickly during outages. Members can update their contact information by calling Aiken Electric at (803) 649-6245 or through the AEC mobile app.

"There's a reason behind the work we do," says Love. "It all comes back to keeping the power on for our members."

Coming your way

Right-of-way crews will be working in the Swansea and North Augusta areas throughout the remainder of the year.



Inspiring young minds

PROFESSIONAL MAGICIAN Chris “Doc” Dixon is an expert at combining sleight of hand tricks, humor and audience participation to teach young students about electrical safety. Through his interactive magic show, “Making Accidents Disappear,” children learn practical safety tips and how to prevent electrical accidents.

More than 500 first-grade students from across Aiken Electric’s service area recently participated in “Making Accidents Disappear,” one of the cooperative’s most beloved traditions. Aiken Electric continues to bring the cooperative principles of Education, Training and Information and Concern for Community to life through programs that inspire and invest in local elementary students.

“Not only is the magic show entertaining for students and adults,” says April Collins, Aiken Electric’s new CEO, “but it gives a simple explanation for all audiences to know and learn the importance of electrical safety.”

This year’s performances of “Making Accidents Disappear” were attended by students from East Aiken, Warrenville, J.D. Lever, Greendale, Oakwood Windsor, Merriwether and Dover elementary schools.

Aiken Electric also participates in the Children’s Book Challenge, sponsored by EnlightenSC, an educational initiative of South Carolina’s electric cooperatives. The competition encourages fourth and fifth-grade students to write and illustrate stories that meet multiple state standards and involve science, art, english and language arts, technology and social studies. This year’s theme was “A Day in the Life of a Lineworker.”

Ankh Gordon, a fourth-grade student, was this year’s local winner. Her book, *Bring Your Daughter to Work Day*, earned top scores locally and was entered into the statewide competition. Gordon



First-grade students at Dover Elementary School in North learn from magician Chris “Doc” Dixon’s friend, Sparky, a talking electrical outlet, about three important words—stop, look, think.

PHOTOS BY JAMACIA MCCRAY

“It’s about educating young minds, supporting local schools and strengthening the communities AEC proudly serves.”

will have the chance to win \$500 and have her book published and distributed to elementary schools across South Carolina.

“This was a fun project for her,” says Gordon’s mom, Jessica Felix. “She enjoys reading and having the chance to write and draw her very own book is very special.”

Through initiatives like the safety magic show and Children’s Book Challenge, Aiken Electric continues to empower the next generation, demonstrating that the cooperative’s mission goes beyond delivering power—it’s about educating young minds, supporting local schools and strengthening the communities it proudly serves.



Fourth-grade student, Ankh Gordon, Aiken Electric’s local Children’s Book Challenge winner, took home a \$25 gift card, an LED fan, candy and bragging rights.

INTERESTED IN EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUR CLASS OR STUDENT? Submit an inquiry at cognitoforms.com/AikenElectricCooperative/EventParticipationRequest.

Summer savings tips

Lowering your energy costs is easier than you think

MANY OF US have a love-hate relationship with the South Carolina heat. As temperatures rise, we typically turn down the thermostat to keep our homes comfortable. Unfortunately, this habit can lead to higher electric bills.

Keeping energy costs down can be easier than you think. Here are practical, simple and inexpensive tips to help lower your bill through the spring and summer.

Adjust your thermostat

- ▶ Did you know your air conditioning and space heating make up about half of your monthly bill? For every degree you raise your thermostat, you'll save 1-3% on your next bill.



For every degree you raise your thermostat, you'll save 1-3% on your next bill.

- ▶ Turn your thermostat up a few degrees before you leave to use less energy and save while you're away.

- ▶ Set your thermostat to 78 degrees in summer. While it may feel warm inside, it's much cooler than South Carolina's outdoor temperatures. A smaller difference between indoor and outdoor temperatures can help lower your energy bill.

- ▶ Consider AEC's Smart Thermostat program, which will sync with your thermostat to make small automatic adjustments based on

peak times. You'll stay comfortable while helping hold down power costs. Visit aikenco-op.org to learn more.

Use fans

- ▶ While ceiling fans don't actually cool the air, they can help you feel more comfortable by moving air around. During warmer months, make sure ceiling fans are set to rotate counterclockwise. Turn off ceiling fans when you leave the room.

Lower your water heating costs

- ▶ Water heating accounts for about 22% of the energy consumed in your home. Lowering the temperature of your water heater can help save energy.

- ▶ Laundry can also be optimized in the summer. Make sure you maximize your loads. This not only gets you more for your money but also helps you do laundry less often. Doing laundry in cold water and hang-drying are other ways to save even more on your energy bills.

Seal your home

- ▶ According to ENERGY STAR, about 20% of heated or cooled air that moves through a home is lost due to lack of proper insulation and air leaks. Ensure your home has sufficient insulation levels and seal air leaks with caulk and weatherstripping. This is a simple, effective way to lower energy and improve indoor comfort.

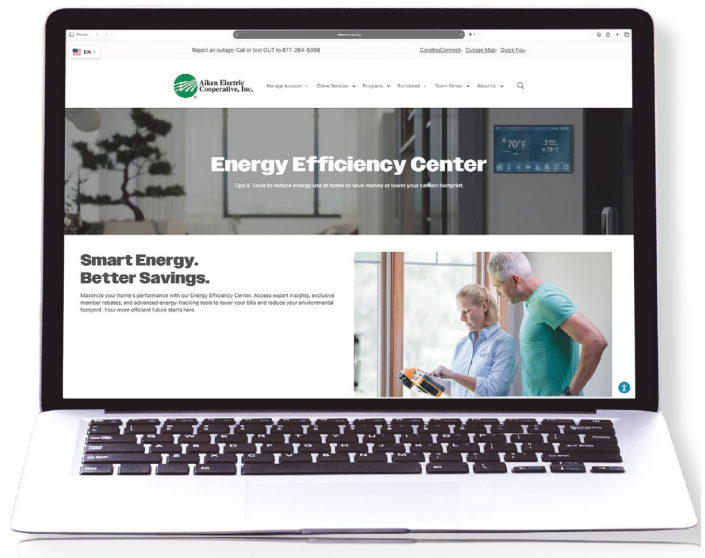
Close doors and vents

- ▶ Closing doors and air conditioning vents in unused rooms helps your cooling system work efficiently and reduces energy use.

Bonus: Ask about programs and savings

Aiken Electric offers many money-saving programs—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 or call us to find out which program is right for you. For additional tips, check out our energy efficiency center at aikenco-op.org/energy-efficiency-center.



GO GREEN, \$SAVE GREEN

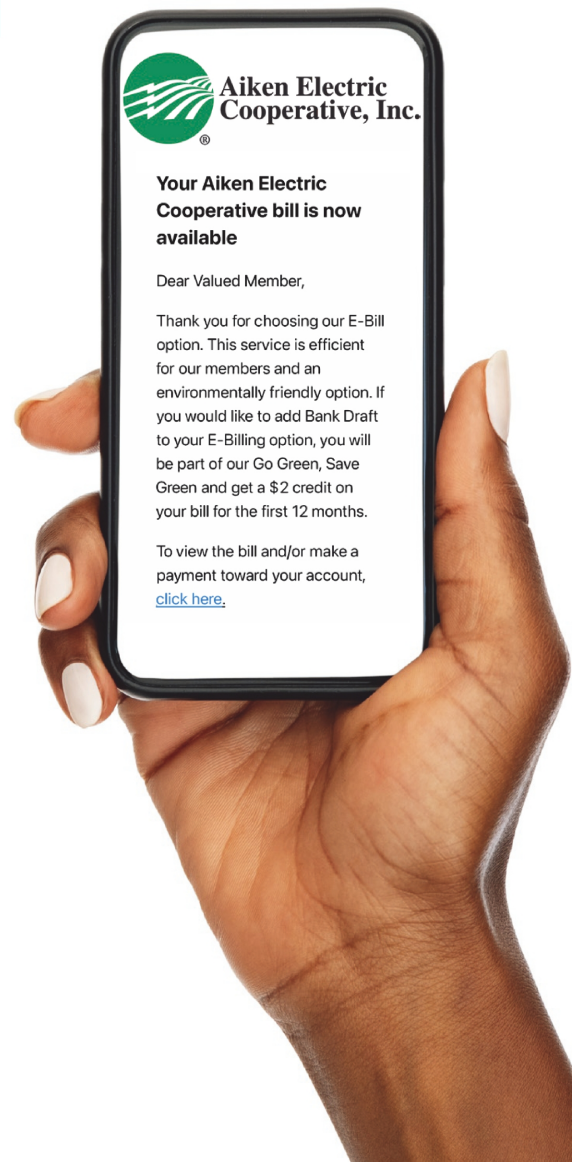
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Get step-by-step, how-
to instructions by
scanning the QR
code.



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