



Berkeley Electric Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

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Grant funds reliability upgrades

WHEN IT COMES to providing electric service to our members, we do

everything we can to make sure it is safe, affordable and reliable. Reliability is especially challenging since we live in the Lowcountry where we contend with hurricanes and fast-growing vegetation. As a cooperative, we devote significant resources to improving service reliability for our members and we are seeing the results reflected by our efforts.

We recently set goals to lower both the average number of interruptions a member experiences in a year and the average duration of an outage. We not only met those goals but exceeded both of them. Our members now experience an average of less than 1.25 outages per year and the average duration of an outage is under 100 minutes, far better than the federal “satisfactory” rating of 200 minutes.

Extreme weather reliability

Even though we exceeded our goals, we aren’t stopping there. Berkeley Electric is among a group of South Carolina electric cooperatives that will receive more than \$7 million in federal funding for projects dedicated to making the state’s power grid more resilient to extreme weather.

The cooperative will receive \$982,228 to install a fault location, isolation and service restoration system. This “self-healing” system will include fiber communication and advanced sectionalizing equipment on utility poles that serve disadvantaged communities and those with less reliable service in our Johns Island district.

After widespread outages, these devices can automatically restore power to affected members within seconds, not hours. The devices will be installed in areas that are difficult and time-consuming for line crews to access. These areas consistently experience lower electric reliability and longer outage times after severe storms.

The self-healing devices also will ensure a stable power supply for a range of facilities, including an elementary school, multiple EMS and medical buildings, grocery stores, restaurants, traffic signals and several large and small communities in the Ravenel and Stono areas.

In the case of severe storms, as well as everyday outages, this project will best serve our members on feeders with weaker reliability. The grant will cover two-thirds of the cost for the self-healing system.

Statewide efforts

Our project is one of 18 approved in South Carolina with the goal of reducing sustained power outages and improving restoration times. South Carolina’s electric cooperatives and other electric utilities applied to the U.S. Department of Energy for the grants, which are funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Collectively, they will make South Carolina’s electric grid stronger in the face of hurricanes and other extreme weather.

Ongoing upgrades

These improvements come on the heels of another reliability project we are currently working on. If you recall from last month’s magazine, we recently began upgrading our underground equipment with advanced faulted circuit indicators to also improve restoration times. Although delivering safe, reliable and affordable power will continue to be a challenge, Berkeley Electric will also continue to be driven to provide the best service possible to its members.

MIKE FULLER
President & CEO



MEADE AGENCY

EV charging just got easier

MEMBERS CONSIDERING purchasing an electric vehicle can now install a Level 2 EV charger at their home or business with the help of Berkeley Electric's new loan program. The co-op can finance up to \$10,000 for up to five years at 5% APR with on-bill financing. Members may also qualify for a tax credit for 30% of the cost up to \$1,000 and the co-op can provide a list of qualified installers for the project as well.

To sign up for the program, members can visit the newly redesigned Choose EV electric vehicles page on the co-op's website at berkeleyelectric.coop. In addition to information on chargers, members can explore and compare EV models, learn about potential savings and charge times when switching from gas with an online savings calculator, research current EV incentives and tax credits as well as view co-op rate plans available to EV owners. If you don't have the ability to install a charger at home, the Choose EV site also maintains a list of available public charging stations.

BERKELEY AT-A-GLANCE	APRIL 2023	APRIL 2024
Total kWh sold	350,094,741	365,560,749
No. meters served	123,063	129,009
Avg. residential kWh/meter	894	865
Avg. residential bill/meter	\$129.18	\$136.54
Miles of line	6270	6400
Avg. daily high temperature	80	79
Avg. daily low temperature	57	56



PIXELS.COM

CALLING ALL local artists! We want to see your original masterpieces—paintings, sketches, mixed media, watercolors and more. Send a digital copy of your artwork our way and, if it is chosen, it will be featured in our 2025 calendar **plus you win \$100**.

The contest runs from July 1 through Sept. 30. All submissions must be landscape orientation (horizontal) and print quality, so send us the **highest resolution** image possible. Please note that cell phone shots are typically not print quality. E-mail all submissions to micahp@bec.coop with the subject line "Calendar Contest."

You must be a BEC member to enter and win!



PEYTON DRESS

Scholarship recipients announced

EACH YEAR, the Berkeley Electric Trust Board awards ten scholarships to graduating seniors in the co-op's service territory. The \$2,500 scholarship is awarded based on grades and financial need through Operation Round-Up, a voluntary program where participating members help fund worthy projects and help those in need in our service area. This year's recipients are Aniya Ravenell (Berkeley High); Mercy Fletcher (Goose Creek High); Denzel Jefferson (Odyssey Online Learning); River Young and K'Layah Maxwell (St. Johns High); Serenity Pearson (Stratford High); Paisley Dever (Summerville High); and Makayla Hampton, Israel Robinson and Talon Lee (Timberland High).



WILLIS SANDERS
Trustee, District 5

Electricity provides powerful value

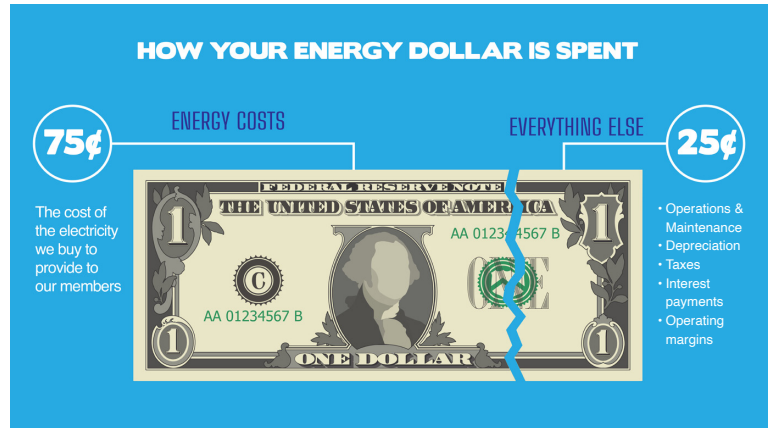
FOR MOST OF US, there are aspects of life that become sort of a daily routine. You get ready for work, get in your car and drive to the coffee shop on the way to the office. At lunchtime, you might drive to the nearest fast-food location and get lunch. And once you finally end the day at home, you probably stream an episode or two of your favorite show before bed.

As we all look for ways to save money in this age of increasing inflation, it's important to think about this daily routine and how much value it provides you compared to the money you spend. A fancy cup of coffee costs about \$6, a fast-food combo with a burger, fries and a drink might set you back \$10 and a Netflix subscription is about \$16 each month. All these daily expenses total around \$85 a week, or about \$340 monthly. And what was the real value—short-term satisfaction and a larger waistline? Even if you started packing your own lunch, a daily latte could still cost you about \$180 a month. I am guilty of this type of spending too, but this got me thinking—is this the best value for my money?

The average daily cost of electricity is about \$5.55, and the average monthly electric bill for members of Berkeley Electric is \$168.61. That means you could basically power your entire home every day for the price of your daily Starbucks. With a few simple changes to my daily routine, I could brew my own coffee, cook my own meals, binge a series and run on a treadmill for less than the cost of that drink. Now to me, that's real value.

As a member-owned cooperative, Berkeley Electric does everything in its power to ensure your costs stay reasonable and that electricity remains a great value for our members. It's not always easy, as there are several factors beyond inflation that impact the price of electricity—some within our control but most beyond it.

The cost of electricity can fluctuate due to wholesale supplier power cost, infrastructure investment, maintenance and operational expenses. Weather patterns also contribute, affecting both demand and generation capabilities, with extreme conditions leading to heightened energy use or



disruptions. Government policies, such as subsidies for renewable energy or taxes and regulations on emissions, shape electricity costs as well. Your electric co-op considers all these aspects when adjusting rates, and because we're a cooperative, we consider the impact of those costs on our members as well.

One of the most effective ways to control rates and rising costs is to lower electricity demand. You may not realize it, but Berkeley Electric doesn't generate its own electricity. Instead, we buy wholesale power from other utilities such as Santee Cooper and Duke Energy. The price we pay fluctuates over the time of day and costs the most during the peak times when everyone is using electricity simultaneously, like just before or after the workday.

In fact, around seventy-five cents of every dollar members pay the cooperative goes toward buying the electricity we provide to you. The more we control demand and shift it away from the peak times, the more we can save and keep rates stable which is why we offer programs like Beat The Peak and our Time-of-Day rate. With the Time-of-Day rate, you can modify using major appliances during peak hours and lower the monthly bill.

As our community continues to rely on electricity for nearly everything in our homes, schools and businesses, we need it to be reliable and affordable. You can be assured; Berkeley Electric always puts you top of mind and works each day to ensure electricity remains the best value for your money.

Willis Sanders

Going solar? Let's talk.

KEY POINTS

- Berkeley Electric supports members considering solar but advises them to focus first on energy efficiency upgrades and consult with the co-op before making a decision.
- Berkeley offers energy credits for excess solar generation and free consultations to ensure members are not oversold and get the full value from their solar system.
- Berkeley does not sell solar systems or partner with any solar companies and urges members to get multiple bids.

BERKELEY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE realizes that today's members expect options, including the type of energy powering their homes. Many homeowners are looking for a less expensive form of energy with ongoing savings. Some are looking for a green energy source. These two motives are why many homeowners are exploring rooftop solar panels.

Solar panels offer many benefits to members, but they also come with considerations that need to be made before purchasing them. Are you installing them to lower your electric bill or to be green? What incentives or tax credits will you actually receive based on your financial status? Is your home ready to install panels and what will they do to your home's value? To figure all this out, members need to do their homework but, don't worry, you're not on your own.

Step 1—Energy efficiency

The first step to any residential solar project is to focus on energy efficiency first. It's important to remember that solar energy is just another way to produce power for your home. It doesn't matter if the energy is generated by traditional fossil fuels or by renewables if it is wasted by an inefficient heat pump, insufficient insulation or if the conditioned air leaks out through your doors, windows or ductwork.

"We encourage our members to start with what we call energy engineering," says Eddie Plowden, director of energy services. "Energy efficiency improvements have a quicker payback than investing in solar straightaway and will also make your home more comfortable. We recommend focusing on your heating and air conditioning (HVAC) system first as it can account for up to half of your total energy bill."

These recommendations include servicing your HVAC systems at least once a year and preferably before the start of each heating or cooling season. Make sure your home is sealed properly to keep moisture from leaking in and conditioned air from leaking out. Consider installing a smart thermostat that can be programmed to help manage your home's heating and cooling load.

"Once you have addressed your heating and cooling,



Berkeley Electric energy advisors will provide a fact-based analysis of your system.

MICAH PONCE

don't forget to look into upgrading to more energy efficient appliances and even changing out your most used light bulbs with LEDs," recommends Plowden. "The benefit of making these upgrades is both a quicker payback and they reduce the amount of electricity your home uses which also reduces the size of the solar system you will need to install."

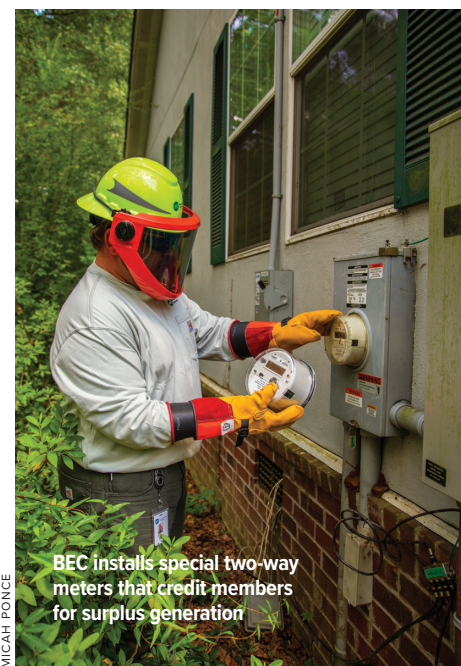
Step 2—Consult with the co-op

Berkeley Electric supports members considering solar through its solar interconnection program and by offering practical, cost-effective advice to its members.

"We actually have the largest rooftop solar program out of all the electric cooperatives in the state," says Tim Swicord, manager of energy services. "In fact, our members produce more solar energy than the entire 10,000-panel Colleton Solar Farm in Walterboro."

One of the key services the co-op offers to members is a free evaluation of any solar system proposal. The co-op can help assess whether a solar PV system is suitable for a member's specific situation and help determine the appropriate system size based on the member's energy needs and energy use patterns.

"One of the things we try to ensure is that you don't pay for an oversized system. Ideally, your home should use the majority of the energy generated by your solar system," says Swicord.



BEC installs special two-way meters that credit members for surplus generation

MICAH PONCE

The cooperative will also walk members through determining what incentives and tax credits for which they qualify. The current federal and state tax credits are around 30% and 25% each.

"There are some conditions to receive those tax credits however," says Swicord. "You have to have a taxable income large enough to cover the tax credit or you won't qualify for the full amount."

South Carolina is limited to 50% of the tax burden up to a maximum of \$3,500 per year with up to 5 years to claim the credit.

"Also, it is important to remember that this is a credit on your taxes at the end of the year. You will not be receiving money that can be used toward the purchase of the solar system," Swicord says.

Keep in mind

The key to a rooftop solar system is your roof. Before installing solar, members need to make sure their roof is in good repair and that the shingles will not need to be replaced before the panels, which are typically guaranteed for 20 years. The orientation of your roof is also critical with due south allowing the sun to shine on the panels all day long. Shading from trees or buildings is also an important consideration because it can reduce the amount of power generated by your system. Berkeley Electric offers an online rooftop assessment tool that helps estimate your solar generation potential, ongoing utility costs and estimated payback period.

Do the math

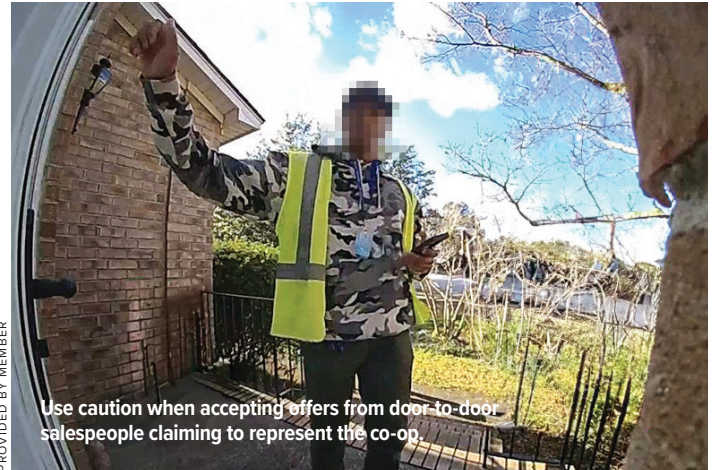
Most members consider installing solar to reduce or eliminate their electricity bill, which is possible but takes careful planning.

"It typically takes 12 to 14 years to pay off a solar system after which the member starts seeing the benefit," says Plowden. "That's why it is important to size the unit correctly based on real historical data because we have seen undersized units installed where the member is still paying an electric bill on top of a loan payment for the panels."

Berkeley Electric requires an interconnection agreement with a renewable surplus rider that must be signed before a solar system is installed. Energy that is produced by the solar system and used by the home is credited at the regular retail rate, approximately \$0.12 per kilowatt hour.

Excess generation returned to the co-op is credited at \$0.0552 per kilowatt hour, based on actual system costs as a three-year average. Residential members can install up to their maximum monthly kilowatt hour use (less than 20 kilowatts). Commercial members have a 100 kilowatt maximum.

"That is one of the reasons why it is important to size your system correctly for your needs because excess generation only has about 45% of the retail rate value to the cooperative," says Swicord. "This could increase a member's payback period if they were anticipating earning a higher rate."



PROVIDED BY MEMBER

Additionally, if a member is still connected to the co-op's distribution system, they will be charged a service availability fee which covers part of the cost of system construction and maintenance.

Step 3—Buyer beware

While the cooperative supports the use of renewable energy and our members' right to pursue alternative means of generation, Berkeley Electric does not partner with any solar companies on the sale of solar panels, nor does it offer special promotional programs through any solar vendor. These companies are independent businesses selling directly to members and do not represent Berkeley Electric in any capacity.

"It is extremely important to fully read and understand any solar contract before signing," says Plowden. "Some companies will promise a free solar system, but it requires members to surrender all tax credits and incentives to the solar vendor. Also, make sure anything a vendor promises is spelled out clearly in the contract."

Berkeley Electric urges members to solicit multiple proposals and avoid "special one-time only" deals offered by door-to-door salespersons. Whenever possible, use reputable, local installers that can warranty and service your system in a timely manner.

OTHER OFFERINGS

- **HomeAdvantage Loan** A whole-home 5% interest loan designed to make your home more comfortable and energy efficient with improvements that pay for themselves.
- **Rooftop Assessment tool** An online tool that helps estimate your solar generation potential, ongoing utility costs and estimated payback period. Available for free online at berkeleyelectric.coop.
- **Listen up** Tune in to our podcast where our energy experts discuss residential solar in-depth. Visit our YouTube page and look for Season 2/Episode 11 on the "Power Talk" playlist titled "Let the sun shine in with solar."

Local students make connections on Youth Tour

BY JOSH P. CROTZER

Nicholas Brown had a lot he wanted to see on his trip to Washington, D.C. but one item on his agenda superseded them all.

"My family has ties to the Point of Pines cabin," says Brown. "My parents really wanted me to get a picture with it and get a sense of my family's history."

Brown did just that when he visited the National Museum of African American History and Culture on his Washington Youth Tour experience, an all-expenses paid trip to the nation's capital.

Originally a slave cabin on Edisto Island's Point of Pines plantation, the Point of Pines Cabin was moved to the museum as one its inaugural exhibits when it opened in 2016. Brown is a descendent of a former slave who lived in either the cabin or one of the other eight like it after the Civil War as part of a liberated African American community.

"That was powerful to be able to make that personal connection," says Brown.

The rising senior at James Island Charter High School was among eight local students sponsored by Berkeley Electric Cooperative, including Arya Imani Glover, Jared Bazzle, Kelsey McBee, Gia Miller, Brielle Vanhannegeyn, Grady Redmond and Jordan Smith. Jason Smith of Goose Creek was also selected as a local youth tourist and was sponsored by Central Electric Power Cooperative. Berkeley Electric public relations specialist Dana Jenkins joined the students as a sponsored chaperone.

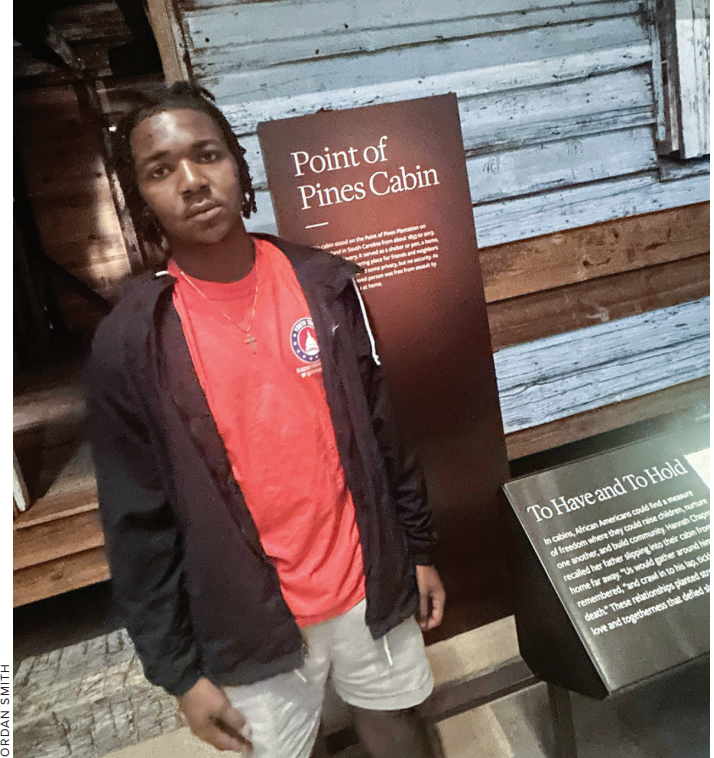
A total of 57 students representing cooperatives across South Carolina spent six days in the nation's capital area visiting historical and educational sites, including George Washington's Mount Vernon, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the National Mall and the National Pentagon 9/11 Memorial.

Smith also fulfilled family obligations when he saw the changing of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery.

"My dad has always wanted to see that," says Smith. "I recorded it for him, but it was a privilege just to witness it myself."

In addition to the museums, memorials and monuments, the youth tourists also spent a day at the U.S. Capitol where they toured the complex, visited Congressional offices and met with staff members. Afterwards, U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham and U.S. Sen. Tim Scott spent time talking with the students and answering their questions on the Capitol steps.

Throughout the trip, the students participated in the Soda Pop Co-op, a student-run market that sold snacks and beverages to their fellow youth tourists. Summerville's Miller



JORDAN SMITH

Nicholas Brown of Summerville in front of the Point of Pines Cabin exhibit at the National Museum of African American History and Culture. The cabin came from Edisto Island where one of Brown's ancestors lived in a liberated African American community after the Civil War.



JOSH P. CROTZER

Members of the Berkeley Electric youth tour delegation, (front, from left) Brielle Vanhannegeyn, Gia Miller, Arya Imani Glover, (back) Jordan Smith, Grady Redmond, Jared Bazzle, Jason Smith and Kelsey McBee, has one of the best views of nation's capital behind them at Arlington National Cemetery's Arlington House.

was one of the students who served as a cooperative board member. The students each received \$7 in capital credits, their share of the co-op's end-of-trip margins. The students donated a portion of their capital credits, a total of more than \$250, to Kid's Closet, a co-op affiliated outreach program that provides essential items to temporarily homeless youth throughout South Carolina.

"It's a good thing for us to learn about cooperatives," says Bazzle, a rising senior at Timberland High School. "They do a lot for people and I'm proud to be a part of that."

South Carolina's youth tourists were not the only student delegates in Washington. They were among more than 1,600 students representing electric cooperatives across the nation. The students traded their state pins with one another and went on a riverboat dinner cruise along the Potomac River.