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Don't drive distracted

By David Bailey

We all want the best for the people in our lives – our family, friends, community and others. That includes you, our members.

It's why we make safety a top priority at South Alabama Electric and devote time and energy to making everyone aware of how to stay safe around electricity.

For instance, if you're working with tall ladders, cleaning gutters or trimming trees, or undertaking other projects outside, I urge you to look up and stay safely away from overhead power lines, especially those connected to your home.

If a project involves digging, be sure to call 8-1-1 to get underground utilities marked.

Help your children understand the importance of staying away from electric utility equipment, to never climb trees near power lines, and to fly kites in wide open spaces safely away from power lines.

You've probably heard these safety tips a thousand times. But it never hurts to be reminded.

Our employees hear me stress the importance of safety over and over. But did you know, you play a role in keeping our linemen safe as well? I need your help to make sure they arrive home safely each day.

We ask our crews to work in all kinds of conditions. Whether it's in the rain, the bitter cold, or the scorching heat of the summer. But perhaps the most dangerous place they can work is along the side of our roads.

The popularity of handheld mobile devices are making distracted driving a huge problem. Texting, watching videos, instant messages, and reading emails all take your attention away from the road. Not only is it a hazard to you, but it's a safety hazard to your passengers and the crews working along the side of the road.

Distracted driving can lead to an accident that could have been avoided.

Safety starts with awareness; not only of your surroundings, but what you do in the event something does go wrong.

We don't want anyone to take a chance that could end in tragedy, and to help, SAEC has partnered with the Safe Electricity program.

I would encourage you to visit our website, www.southaec.com and take a look at the information in our safety section. You'll find access to life-saving information. In our links section, you'll find access to SafeElectricity.org. You'll find even more information here, including: videos, interactive games for children, online teacher resources and much more.

We have the safest, most reliable electric system of any country in the world, but we aren't content to rest on those laurels. I value your safety and well-being and we'll continue working to educate everyone on important safety considerations.

After all, aren't you and the people you care about worth it? I think so.

Have a great, safe day! ■

David Bailey serves as the general manager of South Alabama Electric Cooperative. He is a resident of the New Hope Community in Coffee County and a graduate of Troy University.



Our office will be closed on July 4 to celebrate

Independence Day. In the event of an outage, please call 800-556-2060.

If you need account information, please call 877-566-0611.

We wish each of you a Happy 4th of July.



South Alabama Electric's Monthly Operating Report

KWH Sold 23,049,069	Average Use 1,397 kWh	Total Miles of Line 2,725
Average Utility Bill \$180.39	Total Accounts Billed 16,499	Consumers per mile of line 6.05

Information from March 2017

Utility workers ahead



Orange cones, flashing lights, and warning signs all indicate a work zone on the road ahead. Within these zones are men and women doing work like road construction, working on power lines, or trimming trees. Unfortunately, hundreds of these workers are injured every year from work and road hazards. Safe Electricity urges motorists to slow down and pay attention in work zones while driving.

"Keeping a safe distance between your car and the construction workers and equipment, driving the posted work zone speed limit, and using your four-way flashers when stopping or traveling slowly can help reduce accidents in work zones," says Molly Hall, executive director of the Energy Education Council's Safe Electricity program.

"Sometimes we have to put trucks and personnel in the roadways to make repairs or install new equipment that keeps power coming to your homes and businesses," Jeff Whatley, safety director for South Alabama Electric Cooperative, says. "Our line crews are already working in hazardous conditions dealing with high voltage. The risk is increased when they are working on the road way because of the many distracted drivers."

To help prevent fatalities and injuries, Safe Electricity recommends the following guidelines while driving:

- Keep a safe distance between your vehicle and traffic barriers, trucks, construction equipment, and utility workers.
- Be patient. Traffic delays are sometimes unavoidable, so try to

allow time for unexpected occurrences in your schedule.

- Obey all signs and road crew flag instructions.
- Merge early and be courteous to other drivers.
- Use your headlights at dusk and during inclement weather.
- Minimize distractions. Don't text and drive.

When you are making travel plans, keep in mind that many states also provide road construction information on their respective department of transportation websites that can be consulted before starting a trip. If you know that you are going to be traveling through a work zone, give yourself a little extra time to get to your destination, or you can find an alternate route.

Be aware of the legislation in your area. Many states have hefty fines or even jail time for violating traffic laws in work zones.

Alabama has a "Move Over" law, which states that: When an emergency vehicle using any visual signal is stopped or parked on or next to a roadway, drivers approaching the emergency vehicle should (1) make a lane change into an available lane not immediately adjacent to the emergency vehicle; or (2) if unable to safely make a lane change, slow down to a reasonable speed for existing weather, road, and vehicular or pedestrian traffic conditions. This applies to utility workers and their vehicles too, in addition to law enforcement and other first responders.

"Safety of our utility workers is vital," Sean Strickler, vice president of public affairs for Alabama Rural Electric Association, says. "We worked with the state legislature to make sure utility crews were included in this legislation because so much of their work takes place on roadsides. Power poles and electrical equipment line our streets and highways, and narrow roadways often require crews to place their equipment in traffic lanes. They deserve a safe workplace. It's important for drivers to be alert to utility crews and other work zone workers for their safety as well as yours."

Don't make the jobs of road workers, electric utility linemen, and tree trimmers more dangerous. Drive safely. ■

Youth Tour...an amazing journey

In March, South Alabama Electric Cooperative joined with other cooperatives from across the state and hosted more than 200 students in Montgomery as part of the Alabama Rural Electric Youth Tour. Eleven students representing our area high schools were selected to develop their leadership skills, meet new people and experience our state's history up close.

Before being chosen, students completed an application and essay, as well as an interview competition.

This year's participants were:

- **Brooklyn Norris**,
Zion Chapel High School
- **Dakarai Siler**,
Goshen High School
- **Anna May**,
Pike Liberal Arts School
- **Jace Baines**,
Luverne High School
- **Caroline Kirk**,
Pike Liberal Arts School
- **Eden Hipps**,
Pike Liberal Arts School
- **Joshua Hermeling**,
Luverne High School
- **Matthew Morrow**,
Pike County High School
- **An'Twaneciia Baxter**,
Pike County High School
- **Alexander Galloway**,
Goshen High School
- **Kaylan Martin**,
Highland Home High School.

This year's tour included stops at the State Capitol, Dexter Avenue King Memorial Church, and the Alabama Department of Archives and History. They also had a chance to spend the morning at the State House and visit with our state legislators.

"Our students always ask some of the best questions," Chellie Phillips, youth tour coordinator for SAEC, said. "This year they discussed the possible impeachment of our governor, budgets for schools, and so much more."

"My favorite part of the trip was getting to experience the way that our government really works," Jace Baines said.

"My time at Youth Tour was incredible," Anna May said. "My favorite part of the trip was getting to hear from our legislators and ask them questions. It was cool to hear them speak on topics we care about."



Eleven students representing high schools from across South Alabama Electric's service territory participated in the Alabama Rural Electric Association Youth Tour. Students developed leadership skills and toured historic sites while in Montgomery.

When they weren't touring, students participated in a variety of leadership building activities and of course had lots of time to build friendships with students representing all areas of our state.

"I had an awesome time meeting and interacting with different students from across Alabama," An'Twaneciia Baxter said. "I also had a great time learning about my state and how I can make living in Alabama better."

Motivational speaker Cea Cohen Elliot, a former school counselor, pushed students to be listening leaders and to not wait on someone else to change things that are not right. She stressed to these emerging leaders that if they see bullying and do nothing or help spread gossip, they are just as guilty as the person who instigated the action.

"No matter who a person is, they have a heart and a soul," Matthew Morrow said. "Treat them with respect and integrity.

Not everyone is the same."

"One thing I learned is that stepping out of your comfort zone can really help you in the long run," Dakarai Siler said. "I'm going to take this back to Goshen and go make a difference in a way that will benefit the community."

"I loved meeting all the new people," Brooklyn Norris said. "But I learned that you should always put yourself out there and greet everyone with the same respect as you'd want. Always be open to meeting new people. We're all different and you might learn something from them. It was great getting to know a variety of people and learn about the things they do in their lives."

"Before this trip, I was shy and nervous," Eden Hipps said. "So what I'll take back is that it pays to step out of your comfort zone."

"There are so many things I'm taking back with me," Caroline Kirk said. "But

one thing I will do is be more aware of those around me and treat them as they deserve to be treated regardless of our differences. I've always tried to do this, but some of the activities have really opened my mind. I will also take back the qualities of a leader and try to implement them every second of my life. I feel the need to be friends with everyone I meet now."

This month, two of these students will be going on to the next level and representing SAEC at the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Youth Tour held in Washington, DC.

Brooklyn Norris, from Zion Chapel High School, and Dakarai Siler, Goshen High School, will be joining over 50 other Alabama students for the week long trip.

"More than 1,500 students from all over the U.S. gather in Washington, DC for the annual tour," Phillips said. "The goal of the program is to increase their understanding of rural electric cooperatives, show them firsthand the historical and political environment of our nation's Capitol, and to prepare them to be leaders in their own communities when they return home."

If you are interested in competing for a slot in the 2018 Youth Tour, information will be available at local schools or on our website, www.southaec.com in January 2018.

"I loved absolutely everything about Youth Tour," Kirk said. "The activities. All of my new friends. Even the food. I wish I could do it all over again."

"I was so happy to have been a part of this," Alex Galloway said. "I was sad that it ended but I'm happy that so many more kids will be able to experience what I did. It was an amazing journey."

"I will definitely tell people about this program," Joshua Hermeling said. "It was truly amazing. You all knocked it out of the park!" ■



Pike County High School student An'Twanecia Baxter left her mark on the interactive display at the State Archives.



Representative Barry Moore stopped by and answered questions from the youth tour delegation.

What makes electric co-ops different from other businesses?

Each year, students participating in the youth tour program are asked to write essays on different topics. This year, students had to answer the question: What makes electric cooperatives different from other businesses? How does South Alabama Electric Cooperative exemplify this?

This year's winner is Caroline Kirk. Caroline is a student at Pike Liberal Arts School and the daughter of Roger Kirk and Shanna May. Below is her winning essay.

Has your house ever lost power, causing you to halt all activities that require power, yet the house next door has complete power? Before electrical cooperatives were created, rural America was the house without power, unable to complete tasks requiring power; non-rural America was the house with complete power, able to carry out activities that required



Caroline Kirk

power. People take power, something that is necessary for one to carry out most daily activities, for granted. They do not realize how much they need it until it is lost. Even if power is lost for only thirty minutes, businesses can come to a complete halt, traffic can become chaotic, and daily activities can be hindered. Most businesses are created with a profit in mind, but, with no profit being earned, electrical cooperatives provide power to citizens of rural America. South Alabama Electric Cooperative has been providing these reliable services to rural South Alabama for over seventy years.

Imagine living in rural America with no access to the utilities that those in non-rural areas were given. Before electrical cooperatives' advent in the 1930's, rural homes did not have the electrical power needed because no one was interested in servicing a home or business without a large profit. Through President Franklin D. Roosevelt's creation of the Rural Electrification Administration in 1935, groups of people willing to provide power to rural America were granted money to do so. Since their creation, electrical cooperatives have been in the hands of their customers, not investors. An electrical cooperative is run by its customers, for its customers. Because these electrical cooperatives provide power to rural areas without a profit, more homes across America have been supplied with power since the 1930's.

The South Alabama Electric Cooperative has been exempli-

Caroline joined over 200 other students from around the state on this year's Alabama Rural Electric Youth Tour.

fying service and excellence since its creation on June 17, 1937. Through the years since its creation, the membership fee has remained five dollars. The South Alabama Electric Cooperative has established over 2,600 miles of electrical line in seven Alabama counties: Bullock, Butler, Coffee, Crenshaw, Dale, Pike, and Montgomery. It has over 16,200 active accounts and grows by two to three percent each year.

For over sixty years, people have worked together to make SAEC the best it can be. Teamwork was key in its creation, and it remains key as the business continues to grow and prosper. Through teamwork between SAEC's employees and a board of directors consisting of member owners, the needs of the customers are met. The board members live and work in the service areas, so they know what is most needed for the community. The SAEC is always looking for ways to expand its services and work with other people outside of Alabama by joining with other electrical cooperatives across the United States.

Though SAEC works with others across the country, its responsibilities remain to its local customers. A large part of South Alabama Electric Cooperative's success is its local, dedicated, experienced employees. Service employees help their customers whenever there are problems, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. South Alabama Electric Cooperative cares about its customers, so much that the employees are willing to sacrifice their time. South Alabama Electric can always be counted on for great, reliable service.

Electric cooperatives provide service to communities in which most people know each other. Electric cooperatives' employees and board members know their customers, so a personal relationship is made and maintained in business. This makes for a more personal job for the employees and a more personal and inviting experience for the customer. One can always find reliable, friendly service at an electrical cooperative.

With the desire to earn money aside, electrical cooperatives have provided reliable services since the 1930's. Without their creation then, rural America could have been without power for longer than it was. With the satisfaction of customers' in mind, electrical cooperatives are big enough to provide great service but small enough to know its customers!

