I have always approached the new year a little differently than most. For many, this is a time for resolutions to do something new: start a diet, travel somewhere they haven’t been, or exercise program.

But for me, an appreciation of what I’ve accomplished in the past year is just as important as looking toward what I can achieve in the one ahead. I take the things I have done, or even simply attempted to do, and figure out how I can continue to push them forward and improve the process I have been doing for years. I’m a slow learner, so I have to keep polishing the process for improvements. Men who are married, I think this outlook would help your marriage. I try to improve, but my wife may not agree with that statement.

That applies not only to achievements in my own life, but also to what we have accomplished together here at South Alabama Electric Cooperative. Two things our members should be particularly proud of over the last year are the launch of SAEC’s first smartphone app and a new prepaid billing program. Both of these have given us plenty to build on in the coming year.

Anyone with a smartphone these days knows it can take a few updates to get everything right. In the year ahead, we’ll continue working out any problems and making improvements to our app to ensure it’s the tool our members deserve. Likewise for prepaid billing. The flexibility that program offers is new to our members, and it’s also new to SAEC employees. In 2018, we will continue to find ways to make it better. That’s our goal in everything we do, to continue moving ahead and improving every service we offer.

Of course, January in Alabama comes with our own traditions. New Year’s Day football is always a highlight, as is enjoying the outdoors and the last days of deer-hunting season. But, while this may be peak time for football and hunting, it also tends to be the peak time for electric bills.

I want to encourage all our members to keep that in mind this month whenever they consider turning up the heat. Below, you can find a few helpful tips on how to conserve energy during the winter months and keep your electric bill low.

You might be wondering why an electric utility would discourage people from using energy, but that’s just part of the cooperative difference. We aren’t focused on profits; instead we’re focused on giving our members the most reliable and affordable electricity we can, whether that’s through lower rates or more efficient energy habits.

As we begin this new year, I am excited and honored to be able to lead such a strong cooperative in finding new and better ways to pursue that mission. I would like to conclude this column by wishing all of my fellow football fans and hunting partners the best of luck. Enjoy your events! Go Trojan’s!

Help conserve energy and keep your electric bill low this winter by...

» making sure your windows and doors are properly sealed with weatherstripping or caulk.

» setting ceiling fans to run clockwise, forcing warm air near the ceiling down to where you are sitting.

» changing out your air filter each month to ensure your heating system runs efficiently.

» installing a programmable thermostat and setting it to 68 degrees while you’re home, and lower when you are away from home.

» keeping blinds and curtains open during the day to let sunlight warm your home.

» wearing warm clothing around the house instead of turning the heat up.

» using energy-efficient LED lights.
SAEC recently made changes to ensure it is ready to meet the needs of its members. “The cooperative is positioning itself to be stronger than ever in the coming years,” says General Manager David Bailey. The cooperative recently made two changes to the management staff.

Bailey promoted longtime cooperative employee Andy Kimbro to manager of member services. He also hired Elizabeth Stough as manager of finance and accounting in March 2017. Both Kimbro and Stough received degrees in accounting from Troy University, and both got their start at the cooperative through internships.

“We have a wealth of experience in Andy, and Elizabeth brings fresh insight and knowledge to the position I once held,” Bailey says. “We’re truly fortunate to have both of these individuals.”

Serving the members
Kimbro says a career with SAEC has always been an easy choice.

“I can’t imagine anything else being more gratifying than what I do on a day-to-day basis,” says Kimbro, who has served the cooperative and its members for more than 20 years. “We’re owned by the members we serve, so every day we come to work with that attitude of serving them and making their lives easier and better.”

His experience in marketing and member services with SAEC started with a work-study program when he was finishing his degree at Troy University in 1993.

After graduating, he was hired to manage a subsidiary of the cooperative, South Alabama Marketing. When that entity was sold, he took on member services roles with SAEC, including work with the economic development of its service area.

Bailey says Kimbro’s knowledge and leadership experience are invaluable to the cooperative.

“Andy is a person who will set a positive direction as head of the member services department,” he says. “He can help the organization apply new programs for our members and new options, like prepaid billing.”

Changing industry
Stough is in the right position at the right time, Bailey says.

While finishing her master’s degree in business administration at Troy University in 2008, Stough worked part time at SAEC. Afterwards, she moved to Montgomery to work in public accounting for about nine years with the CPA firm of Jackson Thornton. There, she specialized in utility audits.

When the position became available at SAEC, she was excited to take it.

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Questions?
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When the temperature drops during winter months, our heating systems start working overtime. Even for the most energy-minded among us, cold temperatures can mean using the heat pump for longer, and getting higher electric bills than we’d like.

For many members, space heaters are a convenient solution for warming the drafty corners of their home or just providing a little extra comfort. But is using a space heater really more energy-efficient than using your HVAC system?

The answer is: It depends. According to the Department of Energy, factors like how much energy your space heater uses, as well as the age and efficiency of your heating system, can vary greatly and have a big impact on what’s best for your home.

That said, a good rule of thumb is that space heaters can be an efficient choice for heating a single room or small space. If one part of your home never seems to get warm enough, or if you just need a little supplemental heat, a space heater can be an efficient alternative to raising the temperature throughout the entire house.

Replacing your central heating system with space heaters in each room, on the other hand, is far less efficient and will cost you extra money. In fact, the Department of Energy estimates that the average HVAC system costs less than half of what it would take to heat a home or business using portable heaters.

Before turning to a space heater to solve your heating problems, consider looking into more permanent fixes that can keep your home’s heat in while saving you money. Look for areas where warm air may be escaping in cold parts of the house and plug them with weatherstripping, or consider upgrading your heating system if it isn’t functioning properly.

If you do decide to use a space heater, keep in mind a few small actions that can lead to big savings on your electric bill:

- Buy a space heater that is made to heat a room about the size of the one where you plan to use it so you aren’t using more energy than you need.
- Compare wattages between similar models to see which one is more efficient.
- Look for a thermostat or timer setting that can save energy while keeping the room from becoming overheated.
- If you’re using the space heater, turn down the thermostat to avoid doubling up on your heating costs.
- Follow all safety instructions associated with your space heater, and never leave your heater unattended.
When winter comes around, everyone has their own tricks for staying warm without racking up an unmanageable electric bill. Some members pull out the quilts and sweatpants while others lock their thermostat at a hard 68 degrees.

But did you know there are steps you can take to prepare your home for the winter months that will help keep the cold out and the heat in without changing your daily habits? Run through this checklist to see how well your home is winterized — and what else you can do to be energy efficient when the temperature drops.

**Seal ducts** — Whether you’re trying to raise the temperature or cool things off, as much as 30 percent of your home’s energy can escape from ducts. Hiring a professional to test your duct system and make sure it’s properly sealed can save $140 each year, according to the American Solar Energy Society.

**Schedule a tuneup** — You already know your car needs regular maintenance to run at its best, and your heating system is no different. Having a qualified technician make sure your furnace is clean, lubricated and properly adjusted can save you 5 percent on heating costs.

**Block the draft** — Cold drafts underneath doors can waste nearly a third of your home’s electricity use, according to the Department of Energy. Block up those leaks with a draft snake. You can easily make one yourself with some sand and old pieces of fabric, or even a rolled up bath towel can do the job.

**Insulate** — It can be easy to forget since you don’t see it behind the walls, but better insulation is one of the best ways to save on your electric bill in all weather. In particular, make sure any attic floors or basement ceilings are covered to keep heat from escaping.

**Upgrade your furnace** — Replacing an inefficient furnace can be expensive, but it will save you money every time you use it during the winter season. Federal tax credits for new furnaces can even cut down on the cost. And don’t forget to replace the filter each month for max efficiency.

**Turn down your water heater** — Most conventional water heaters are set to 140 degrees Fahrenheit when they’re installed, but odds are you don’t need all that heat. Simply lowering your water heater temperature to 120 degrees can save 6 to 10 percent on your water heating costs, or more if you lower it even further.
Be smart about generator safety

When storms strike and the power goes out, many members turn to portable generators as a reliable backup while cooperative crews work on restoring electric service. While it’s nice to have the modern convenience of electric-powered devices during service interruptions, it’s also important to remember generators can be dangerous if used incorrectly.

Carbon monoxide poisoning from engine exhaust, electric shock and fire are all hazards people should consider when using a generator. Members should always keep the following safety tips in mind to make sure they and their family are safe when using a backup generator:

» **Keep the generator in a dry place at all times.** Using a generator in the rain, on a wet surface or with wet hands can lead to electrocution. If you have to use a generator when rain is a risk, make sure to operate it on a dry surface under an open, covered structure like a tarp.

» **Before refueling, turn the generator off and give it time to cool.** Spilling gasoline on hot engine parts could ignite and start a fire. Only use the type of fuel recommended in the generator’s instructions, and always store fuel in an approved container.

» **Plug appliances directly into the generator, or use a heavy-duty extension cord rated for outdoor use and at least as much wattage as the connected appliance load.** Connecting multiple appliances to a generator via a power strip can overload it, leading to hazards like fire or electrocution.

» **NEVER attempt to power your home’s wiring by plugging a generator into a wall outlet.** This is known as “backfeeding” and can lead to electrocution for linemen, your neighbors and even members of your own household.

» **Make sure you’ve read the instructions for your generator carefully and in their entirety.** A generator can still become overloaded even if connected properly, causing it to overheat or fail.

» **If you have several pieces of equipment you want to power on a single generator, stagger the times when you run each one to prevent an overload.**

» **Only operate a generator outside and away from doors, windows or vents that could let dangerous carbon monoxide fumes inside.** Never run a generator in an enclosed space like a garage or basement. Even opening doors and windows will not prevent carbon monoxide buildup in your home.
From our families to yours, all of us at City Hall wish you a safe and prosperous new year! Thank you for making our community a great place to live and a wonderful place to call home.

We’d like to take moment to think about the year past and welcome 2018 with blessings and good will. We hope your new year is the best so far!

Happy New Year from Mayor Isabell Boyd and the Brundidge City Council!
SAEC is offering high school juniors a chance to improve their leadership skills and meet with lawmakers at the 2018 Montgomery Youth Tour. The all-expense-paid trip offers students an amazing tour of the state capital and the chance to attend the national youth tour in Washington, D.C.

The competition is open to all high school juniors who attend school in Pike, Coffee or Crenshaw counties or who have parents who are members of SAEC. Applications will be sent to all area schools in the coming weeks and will also be available online at www.southaec.com. **Application deadline is Jan. 15 at 5 p.m.**

Applications will be reviewed by an independent panel of judges who will select participants based on application, essay and interviews. Winning students will be invited to attend the 2018 Alabama Rural Electric Association's Montgomery Youth Tour March 6-8. From that group, two outstanding students from the region will be selected to represent SAEC at the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's Washington D.C. Youth Tour June 8-14.

Don't miss out on this experience to meet with leaders and thousands of other students from across the state and country.

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**Looking for college money?**

**SAEC’s got it!**

South Alabama Electric Cooperative is excited to offer $1,000 scholarships to 10 seniors from high schools within our service area. The Electric Cooperative Foundation scholarships are offered through the national Electric Cooperative Foundation, which awards scholarships annually to deserving high school seniors from each of the cooperatives it represents.

Applications for the scholarship are open to graduating high school seniors continuing their education at either a four-year college or a two-year college or technical trade program. To qualify, the student’s parent or legal guardian must be a member of South Alabama Electric Cooperative. Applications for 2018 are available at www.southaec.com or from your school guidance counselor. **The deadline for this scholarship application is Feb. 16.**

SAEC is committed to serving our community and preparing for the future of the region. One of the ways we do this is by making sure local students get the help they need to become informed leaders and strong citizens. Together, we can do so much to make our region an even better place to live and work.