



SEC celebrates National Co-op Month



Jeffrey S. Edwards
SEC President & CEO

Being part of a cooperative means being part of something special. At Southside Electric Cooperative (SEC), we celebrate National Cooperative Month in October, along with 40,000 other cooperative businesses serving more than 120 million people nationwide.

“Cooperatives Build” is the theme of this year’s National Cooperative Month. For SEC, this year’s theme aligns perfectly with a number of initiatives we’ve been involved in over the past year. Rural America is made stronger by cooperatives, and SEC has been working hard to create opportunities right here in Southside Virginia. From launching a new scholarship fund, to advancing workforce development and volunteering in our communities, SEC is making waves and we hope you’ve noticed.

Cooperatives Build Trust

Most co-ops strive to adhere to seven key cooperative principles, which combine to help build trust between the co-op, its members and the community. For example, the first principle is *Voluntary and Open Membership*, which means that we are a voluntary organization open to all people to use our services and willing to accept the responsibility of membership. The second principle, *Democratic Member Control*, gives members a voice in the cooperative’s policies and decisions. Through the fifth principle, *Education, Training and Information*, we enable members to contribute to the development of our cooperative. That is why we launched our Member Advocacy Committee (MAC) earlier this year, for the purpose of connecting with, and listening to, those we serve. It is also why we’re conducting regular member-satisfaction surveys, which help us understand what we’re doing right and where we may need to improve. We care what our members think and we are mindful that SEC would not even exist without YOU, our most important asset.

Cooperatives Build Jobs

Cooperatives generate jobs in their communities, return capital credits back to members and pay local taxes that help support community services. Cooperatives often take part in civic improvement programs, ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to benefit from the cooperative experience. SEC is no exception, and has been intricately involved in the recent launch of Virginia’s first Power Line Worker Training School at Fort Pickett near Blackstone. Through a partnership with Southside Virginia

Community College (SVCC) and our fellow electric co-ops from around the state, the new school has already graduated two classes since March, with a third class now underway. This exciting endeavor would not have been possible without the willingness of electric co-ops to come together for a higher purpose: to help our young people pursue meaningful careers as electric line workers. I am excited to report that no less than 100 percent of the students who graduated from the first class in May received job offers from co-ops and utility contractors. Innovative workforce development is happening in our region, and SEC is proud to be at the forefront.

Cooperatives Build Community

The seventh cooperative principle is *Concern for Community*. Cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through employee involvement in local organizations, through charitable contributions to community efforts and through support for schools. This spring, SEC held its second annual Scholarship Fund Golf Classic at the Manor Golf Club in Farmville. The event raised over \$14,000 for our scholarship fund, and we look forward to holding this and other fundraisers again next year. From this fund, SEC awarded \$11,000 in scholarships to 11 students (from co-op families) pursuing education beyond high school. And I'm excited to report that we're now in the process of applying for 501(c)(3) non-profit status to establish the **Southside Opportunity Fund**, an organization that will accept tax-deductible donations.

At Southside Electric Cooperative, we have much to celebrate during National Cooperative Month, yet we will not pause long before moving ahead. Helping our members build a brighter and better future is why we're here, and we thank you for the opportunity to serve.



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