



James P. "Pat" Howle
CEO and Executive
Vice President

Grassroot effort needs member participation

Consumers of electric utilities all across the country are already well aware that natural gas prices and coal costs have skyrocketed, demand for electricity has increased, regulations on generating facilities are tighter and there are fewer places to find fuel. All of these factors have added up to higher electric bills for all of us.

While there is nothing we can do about the cost of electricity, we can all do something about the amount of electricity we consume. We might also be able to do something about the railroad situation.

Railroads add to the cost

This year, electric co-ops across the country are prepared to engage in a classic David-versus-Goliath legislative battle, fighting for fairness in how we are treated by the nation's railroads. Even as electric co-ops work hard to meet the growing demand for

electricity, we find ourselves increasingly dependent on railroad monopolies, which are exempt from federal antitrust laws, to deliver coal to generate power.

The cost of shipping coal by rail today can exceed the cost of the coal itself, increasing rates for electric co-ops and their consumers. Without federal action, this situation will hinder the need to meet the nation's growing appetite for affordable and dependable electricity. Electric co-ops, along with the rest of the electric utility industry, are not the only businesses affected by railroad monopolies. Grain farmers, steel manufacturers, wood and paper products industries, and chemical and fertilizer producers have had to deal with unfair pricing and unreliable service from the railroads for far too long.

Elimination from consolidation

A series of mergers in the railroad industry, following deregulation in 1980, cut competition from 40 major railroads to four. That consolidation left some shippers, like electric co-ops, captive to a single carrier with no alternative way to move coal and other supplies.

Today, at least one-fifth of all rail customers are held captive by a monopoly freight railroad. What started as just a regional captive shipper issue has now grown into a national economic concern that affects all Americans. When competition exists, railroads average a 6 percent profit. But without competition, shippers are held hostage by the railroads whose profits soar to an average of 400 percent or more.

Grassroots action for CURE

Over the years, the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), on behalf of member co-ops, has worked with other businesses and consumer groups to bring the anticompetitive rail practices to the attention of regulators and legislators. Working together, the coalition, Consumers United for Rail Equity (CURE), was formed to focus on congressional policies affecting railroad competition.

As a result, electric co-ops have their best opportunity in decades to push for congressional action aimed at forcing big railroads to offer better service and fair rates. Specifically, CURE is calling for a common rail carrier "obligation to serve" standard when it comes to delivering products, like coal, that are critical to the U.S. economy.

To succeed, all of our grassroots resources need to concentrate on this fight. The grassroots of electric cooperatives are our members, and each one of us can play an important role in this effort. I encourage you and your neighbors to get involved by contacting your U.S. legislators and asking them to reject the monopoly practices of America's freight railroads. It is time for our leaders on Capitol Hill to do something to fix this problem.

Annual Meeting info coming

The May edition of Living in South Carolina Magazine will be mailed a little bit earlier than usual. In it, you'll find all the details about the big event, which is scheduled for Tuesday, May 22, at the Myrtle Beach Convention Center.

The Official Notice of Annual Meeting will arrive a few days after the May magazine. It will be barcoded with your membership information, so it's very important that you bring it and some form of identification with you to the meeting. All members who take the time to come to the Convention Center to register to participate in the Annual Meeting will receive a \$25 credit on their electric bill. For your convenience, registration will open at noon and remain open until the beginning of the business meeting at 7 p.m.

We're looking forward to seeing all of you there!

Horry Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Your Touchstone Energy® Partner
The power of human connections



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money back!**



This month, Horry Electric is returning \$1 million to people who were member-owners in 1986 and 2006.

Capital Credits are remaining funds after expenses are paid.

And it's only one of the advantages of being an Horry Electric Cooperative member-owner.

Other member services include:

- Easy Payment Options
- H2O Select®
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It pays to be a member!

By Penelope Hinson

Not many businesses pay you for buying something you wouldn't want to live without — but electric cooperatives do.

The 'payment' happens through something known as 'capital credits'. Capital credits come from the money a cooperative has left over after paying all of its expenses in a given year. At the end of the year, that money is allocated to each member's account, according to the amount of electricity the customer bought.

When finances allow, Horry Electric Cooperative returns capital credits to its member/owners in the form of a capital credit check. "Last year, the Cooperative disbursed more than \$750,000 from the capital credits account," said Jodi Hardee, manager of office services for the Cooperative. "This year, we're proud to announce we'll once again be distributing \$750,000."

A different way of doing business

Unlike other types of companies, cooperatives do not have shareholders who expect to make money from the profits generated by the company. Cooperatives are not-for-profit businesses that exist solely to provide their members with a particular service such as electricity.

"In a co-op, the net margins don't belong to the company; they belong to the consumers who paid their monthly electric bills," said Hardee.

In effect, the members of a cooperative are the stakeholders. Because of that, when the Cooperative takes in more money than is needed to run the business, the owners are entitled to a portion of it.

How do capital credits work?

A member's 'equity' in the Cooperative is based on the amount of power the customer has purchased during the year.

"The more electricity the customer buys, the higher their share of equity," says Ashley Anderson, secretary and treasurer of the board of trustees of Horry Electric Cooperative. "The Co-op sets up a credit account that shows on the books the share of the year's net margins belonging to each member."

Generally, the members don't receive a

Capital Credit Disbursement 2007

This year, member/owners will be receiving a portion of the capital credits assignment for 1986 and 2006. The allowable retirement this year is \$1,000,000 less \$250,000 in estate payments. The total amount being distributed is \$750,000.

If you were a member in 2006, you will receive 6% of your 2006 assignment. If you were a member in 1986, you will receive 36% of your assignment for that year.

Example of 2006 Allocation and Retirement

You can calculate the approximate amount of your 2006 allocation and disbursement by using this example. Capital credit disbursements are made in the form of a capital credit check, which will be mailed to you by the end of April.

If your 2006 electric bills totaled:	\$200	\$500	\$1,000	\$1,500
The 2006 assignment percent is: (multiply the percentage times your bills)	5.8%	5.8%	5.8%	5.8%
Your Capital Credit Assignment for 2006 would be:	\$11.60	\$29.00	\$58.00	\$87.00
We will be paying 6% of the 2006 margin assignment; your general retirement refund for 2006 would be approximately:	\$0.70	\$1.74	\$3.48	\$5.22

check the same year they earned the capital credits. "That's because electric cooperatives use their members' equity to fund system improvements," said Anderson.

"If we couldn't get the operating capital from member payments, we'd have to borrow from the bank or some other source, which would cause electric rates to go up," said Hardee.

As new member equity funds come in year after year, the Cooperative is able to 'retire' its older capital credits funds, issuing members their share in the form of a capital credit check.

Due to the expense of processing and issuing checks, capital credit refunds below \$10 will be credited to the individual's electric account. "So if you don't get a check, you'll see a credit on your electric bill," said Hardee.

Capital credit checks are expected to be delivered to members by the end of April. "It's an exciting time for us around here," said Hardee. "Being able to return capital credits is a direct reflection on the financial

strength and stability of your Cooperative and that's something in which we can all take pride.

"To help members calculate and estimate what their capital credit check might be, we created the chart at the top of the page," said Hardee. "If you still have questions, please don't hesitate to call us." ↑

Due to the expense of processing and issuing checks, capital credit refunds below \$10 will be credited to the member's electric account

New trustee knows well how county, co-op have grown

Building stronger communities is in the blood for Frankie Blanton, recently appointed to Henry McNeill's former seat

The newest member of Horry Electric Cooperative's Board of Trustees has observed the rapid growth in Horry County closely during his career.

Franklin C. (Frankie) Blanton, 62, was raised on a farm in the Mt. Olive community, where he still resides, but has made his living selling building supplies, hardware and farm supplies. The president and CEO of Blanton Supplies, Inc., says his business' focus has shifted dramatically over the last three dozen years. "In 1981, I'd say 65% of our sales were agriculture-related," he says. "Today, it's probably 5%. So much of our business is for bedroom communities."

That trend mirrors the change at Horry Electric, now one of the fastest-growing cooperatives in the nation. The co-op now serves a mix of established farming communities and, increasingly, new subdivisions and residential developments. Yet, Blanton says, Horry Electric has not lost touch with its rural heritage. "It's got a real history in our county. Helping rural lives, that's still a big mission," he notes. Neither has Blanton. "We still have a family farm that's in partnership," he says. "My heart's always in the soil and land out there."

Blanton was appointed to fill the position left vacant by the January death of Henry G. McNeill. "I realize I have some pretty big shoes to fill," Blanton says. "Mr. McNeill was as active and as engaged in the activities of the cooperative at the end of his 58-year career as a board member as he was in the beginning."

Community leaders

He notes that his father, the late James P. Blanton, was among those who worked with McNeill to help establish Horry Electric Cooperative more than 65 years ago. He grew up hearing his father talk about community leaders like V.M. Johnson, considered by many to be "the father of rural electrification in Horry County," Blanton notes.

Blanton has also followed the example of his father, who was one of the founders of Coastal Carolina University, by striving for success not only as a businessman but also as a community leader.

After graduating from Floyds High School in 1962, Blanton received a degree in business administration from Campbell University in 1968. That year, he began working with the W.F. Cox Co., in which his father had been a partner since 1953. In 1969, Blanton took over management of the company's building supply division. The companies were divided in 1981, when the building supply portion became known as Blanton Supplies. The new company built its own hardware store. Since then, Blanton Supplies has grown steadily, adding stores in Little River and Marion to the original Loris location.

Along the way, Blanton has helped Horry County progress. He was the organizing chairman of Horry County State Bank and served as its first chairman. Blanton still serves on the bank's board as well as those of Loris Healthcare System and the Coastal Education Foundation. He is a former chairman of the Horry County

Board of Education and a former president of the Independent Builders Supply of America in Smithfield, N.C.

Blanton has received several honors for his contributions to the community. In 1990, he was named to the All-State School Board by the S.C. School Board Association. In 1991, Blanton was honored as a Friend of Education by the Horry County Educational Association. Blanton Supplies, Inc., earned the Business of the Year Award from the Loris Chamber of Commerce in 1997.

Blanton and his wife, Nancy, are active members of Mt. Olive Baptist Church, where he has served as a deacon and trustee. They have four children, Gretta Stroud, Tammy Rogers, Franklin Blanton II and Eric Blanton, and four grandchildren.

Heart-warming mementos

Signs of the importance of family are hard to miss at Blanton Supplies in Loris. One wall has framed photos of his father at a ceremony in his honor at Coastal Carolina, which was just a few months before his death, Blanton notes. And near his office, Blanton proudly displays a framed photograph from the 1890s of Blanton homeplace, which was built in 1882. He and his wife live in the house, which he renovated at his father's request, in the Mt. Olive community. "That's my grandfather right there," he says, pointing to a young man in the photo. †



At Blanton Supplies, Frankie Blanton holds a framed photo from the 1890s of Blanton homeplace, which was built in 1882. He and his wife live in the house, which he renovated at his father's request, in the Mt. Olive community.

Walter Allread

Miss SC overcame father's cocaine, alcohol addictions

Florence native, one of seven children, lived in poverty for years but didn't give up

By **Walter Allread**

Many pageant winners champion causes they believe in, but Shelly Bryson Benthall, Miss South Carolina 2006, didn't have to look far for a platform. "It chose me," Benthall said.

Her platform, "Above the Influence," is about helping the children of substance-addicted parents overcome the challenges they face. It's something Benthall knows personally, she told the audience at the Rural Lady of the Year luncheon March 2 at Horry Electric Cooperative.

Her father, Benthall said, "created a disease for himself" by becoming addicted to alcohol and crack cocaine. He has now been clean and sober for seven months, she noted, but for many years his addictions wrecked life at home for Benthall, her six siblings and her mother.

Raised in Florence, Benthall said her mother, an elementary school teacher, struggled to pay the bills because her father spent all of the family's money. "We just made do," Benthall said. It was not uncommon to come home to find the electricity or water service had been cut off, she said. "At night, we would just talk to one another," she noted.

Dealing with it

Benthall found ways to cope. She would occasionally take showers at friends' houses. She became a lifeguard at the YWCA, partly to gain access to facilities for herself and her siblings. At one point, free school lunches became the central source of food for the

Benthall children. At age 17, Benthall noted, she dropped to 78 pounds. She'd tell herself, "This is my life and this is how it is, and I'll just deal with it."

The family faced foreclosure on the mortgage. To help, Benthall took three jobs. Her grades suffered, however. Her chemistry teacher noticed and approached Benthall, warning her that she risked flunking out of school, which would prevent her from obtaining the scholarships she'd need to attend college. Benthall replied, "Why should I even try?"

Neither the teacher nor her friends gave up on her, however. One friend approached Benthall and said, "Everybody expects you to fail. You have given up on your dreams and aspirations just because of circumstances in your life. But you have a choice."

Unfortunately, Benthall wasn't getting support from her father.

That night, her mother told him he'd have to leave the home to get help. Benthall told her father she prayed for him every day. But her father became angry, pushed her against the wall and raised his hand to hit her. She told him she wished he would hit her, since then he'd have to leave and get help. Her father stopped short, Benthall noted, saying, "You aren't worth it, and you never will be." He told her brothers and sisters they were worthless, too.

Sage advice

Dejected, Benthall wandered to downtown Florence at 2 a.m., where



Shelley Bryson Benthall, Miss South Carolina 2006, sings "Over the Rainbow" at the Rural Lady luncheon.

she said she saw drug deals taking place all around her. She wanted to give the drug dealers a piece of her mind. However, support came from an unlikely source—a bearded, disheveled man who told her that he had become an alcoholic, lost his family and his home. Benthall reminded him of a daughter, he said, and the last time he'd seen her, she was stripping in a nightclub. He didn't want her to wind up that way, he told Benthall.

He said, "Life is kind of like baseball. Sometimes you get thrown a curveball and you hit it but it goes foul." In other words, as Benthall later realized, you can't control what life throws at you,

but you can control your reaction.

'I knew I could control my life'

Benthall later realized, "I knew I could control my life." She told her mother she would succeed and one day help children in her situation. At school the next day, she approached the teacher for help. They arranged tutoring sessions for 45 minutes after school each day, and Benthall pulled her grades back up. She finished high school 13th in her class, in a class of 350 seniors. Benthall was awarded a scholarship that paid for her first year at Clemson University.

In college, she was approached by someone who suggested she enter pageants to earn scholarships. Benthall waited a year, and later transferred to a

college in Tennessee, where she decided to go for it. She still faced challenges, she said, but, by now, Benthall had learned to face them head-on.

The day of the Miss Florence competition, her car broke down. Undeterred, she bought a bus ticket and rode 14 hours to the competition. After winning, she rode back immediately. “I had a test the next day,” she noted.

Hitting a home run

Benthall’s fortunes changed as she prepared for the Miss South Carolina pageant. Gifts for gowns, swimwear and shoes appeared just when needed. Her family was able to attend the Miss America pageant, thanks to donations that paid for their travel. She won a \$3,000 talent scholarship. In seven months, she won about \$27,000 in scholarships, which will pay for her to finish college.

Benthall said she has also been rewarded by the chance to make a difference in the lives of other children who suffer with substance-abusing parents. In her time as Miss South Carolina, she has traveled the state to help other young people realize they are “Above the Influence.”

At one rehabilitation center, Benthall met a five-year-old girl named Sarah, the daughter to two alcoholics. Sarah asked Benthall, “Is your daddy just like my mommy and daddy?” When she told Sarah yes, the girl ran to tell her grandfather, “Did you hear that? I’m just like Miss South Carolina! I’m just like Miss South Carolina!” She then turned around to Benthall and said “Well, that must mean I can be somebody real big one day.” Benthall said she told Sarah, “That’s right, you can.”

“I never would have realized the power that one person’s voice has,” Benthall noted. She later entertained the luncheon group with a rendition of “Over the Rainbow,” a song Benthall said her mother sometimes quoted to inspire her. †

Edge wins Rural Lady honor in a ‘shocker’

“Wow! This is a total shock,” said the 2007 Rural Lady of the Year, Alice Roberts Edge upon receiving the honor. Edge, known to many around Horry County as the former executive assistant at Horry Electric Cooperative, became the 29th recipient of the Rural Lady award at a luncheon March 2 at the co-op. Keeping the winner’s name a secret until the luncheon was a challenge Edge herself had faced throughout her 16-year co-op career, when she served on the award selection committee.

Her successor as executive assistant, Susan Brown, said keeping Edge in the dark wasn’t easy “because she knows how it works. I had to change the order of the program so Alice wouldn’t catch on!”

Bruce Johnson, another member of the selection committee, noted in announcing the award that Edge has been involved in farming most of her life. She was born into a farming family in the Jordanville community and been married 45 years to a farmer, Jerry Edge.

The Edge family farm on Hwy. 501 has long been served by Horry Electric, he noted. Alice worked alongside Jerry on the farm for many years while raising their three children, sons Edsel and Steven Edge and daughter Christy Shain. “She could always be counted on to do whatever was needed, to drive a truck or a tractor, to pick up workers, to pick up parts, bring the drinks and Nabs at break time in the field.”

She returned to work once the children were grown, Johnson noted, and has become more involved in the farm since retiring from the co-op in 2005, helping check on the barns, livestock, or mowing grass and gardening at home.

Edge is a member of Brown Swamp United Methodist Church, where she served as a church pianist and organist for decades, as well as Sunday school teacher and youth leader when her children were younger. “She is a loving and caring wife, mother and grandmother,” he said. The Edges have five grandchildren and Johnson noted that, “It’s not usual to see her sitting on the floor, painting little toenails and fingernails, drawing flowers with crayons and even helping the little ones learn how to use their Heely’s roller shoes. She also learned how to swim as an adult so that she could help any child



Alice Edge, the Rural Lady of the Year, with the plaque Rep. Liston Barfield presented her. It includes a recent S.C. House resolution honoring Edge for her accomplishments.

who may get in trouble in their swimming pool.

“This lady is committed to helping make Horry County a better place,” Johnson continued. Edge is a member of the Horry County Shelter Home board of directors. At Horry Electric, Edge helped run fund-raising efforts by Women Involved in Rural Electrification (WIRE), the co-op’s community outreach organization. Johnson, who is with Clemson Extension Service, called Edge “a lady whose efforts have made a significant difference in the farming community of Horry County.”

State Rep. Liston Barfield later presented Edge with a plaque of a resolution passed by the S.C. House in her honor. “We are proud to recognize her many accomplishments,” it read.

The Rural Lady of the Year honor is formally known as the Miss Leo G. Knauff Leadership Award. It was named for a long-time co-op employee who, like Edge, invested significant energy and time in helping make Horry County a better place. In addition to Johnson and Brown, other members of the selection committee include Sheldon Dawsey, a retiree of the ASCS (presently the Farm Service Agency), and Willie Sansbury of State Farm Insurance.