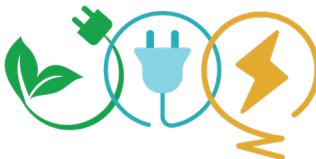


Pictured: As the sun sets, a Sussex REC lineman works to help restore power to Georgia co-op members in the wake of Hurricane Helene. (Photo by: Serviceman Scott Meyerriecks)



Sussex Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.
A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

SREC's Member Newsletter
2024, Volume 2, Issue 4

Currents

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NJ Crews in Georgia: Providing Aid After Hurricane Helene

By Claudia Raffay
craffay@sussexrec.com



This fall, two back-to-back major hurricanes, Helene and Milton, made landfall on the west coast of Florida. Hurricane Helene, the first of the two, hit the Big Bend area of Florida on September 26th as a Category 3 storm and lumbered north for several days, causing billions of dollars in wind and flooding damage. It took more than 200 lives before dissipating. Lineworkers responded from across the country to help restore power in the wake of one of the most consequential storms in the 87-year history of the region's electric cooperatives.

Helene knocked out electric service to an estimated 1.25 million co-op members as it passed from the Florida coast to southwest Virginia late Thursday into daylight on Friday. It destroyed homes and businesses along

with most of the area's infrastructure of high-voltage transmission structures, highways and powerlines.

The cooperative model is based on mutual support. Our territory has benefited from this support in the past. After Superstorm Sandy, co-ops from up and down the East Coast came to our aid. Within days of the 2024's hurricanes, linemen from Sussex REC were on the ground in Georgia where co-ops faced over 404,000 outages to offer whatever help they could.

Being a lineman is a noble endeavor, but it's not for the faint of heart, especially during mutual aid work. Seven of Sussex REC's linemen answered the call: Jeff, Brian, Tony, Tom, Scott, Jake, and Travis. I sat

>> Continued on pg. 4

2025 Rate Adjustment

By Chris Reese
President & CEO

Sussex Rural Electric Cooperative is proud of its efforts to serve your needs with competitively priced electricity and a high quality of service, as well as making proactive and necessary investments and upgrades to our grid. We strive to deliver safe, reliable, and affordable electricity all day, every day. In fact, SREC’s rates are one of the lowest in the state of New Jersey, only behind four small municipal systems.

Power supply costs, vegetation management services, and prices for materials and equipment have continued to rise, and power reliability is more challenging now than any other time in recent history. As a not-for-profit utility, rates are designed to simply cover the costs of providing reliable power. Our budget for 2025 reflects that, calling for only a 2% profit to generate just enough cash flow to run the utility. The Cooperative operates solely for the benefit of the people and businesses that receive electricity from it, not for any investors or stockholders.

In response to continued cost increases, we must inform you that the rates you pay will be increasing this year as of January 1, 2025. The energy rate (kWh) will increase by 7% for all members, residential and commercial. The System Connection Fee will also increase \$3.00 for residential members and \$5.00 for commercial members.

Please keep in mind that Sussex Rural Electric Cooperative’s mission is to provide the highest quality of electric service at the lowest cost possible. We certainly appreciate your business and strive to be responsive to your needs for reliable, affordable electric service.

For detailed information on Sussex REC’s rates and your bill, visit www.sussexrec.com/rates. 



Remembering a Friend Rest in Peace, Pete Gianattasio

It is with great regret and sadness that we report the passing of First Class Lineman and friend to all of us at Sussex REC, Pete Gianattasio.

Pete passed away at age 60 on November 1st, 2024 following an accident at home. News of his passing sent shockwaves through our cooperative community, which Pete has been a vital part of for 21 years.

Pete was an avid outdoorsman and passionate about electrical linework, taking pride in his 40 year-long career in the field. Many local students may remember him as “Lineman Pete.” He was always willing to share his knowledge and warmth with the community as a frequent participant in Sussex REC’s educational programs.

We were all lucky to have known Pete and will miss him dearly. Our hearts go out to his wife Marcy and his children, as well as his whole family. Please join us in wishing them the best during this difficult time.





Take Steps to Operate a Generator Safely

When power goes out, it's handy to have a generator. However, using a generator should not be taken lightly. It can be dangerous or even life-threatening if used incorrectly.

Before purchasing a generator, the first step is to research the best option for your home and budget. The second, and more important, step is to educate yourself on how to use one safely.

You can choose from two types of generators: standby and portable. Standby generators are installed directly into the home's electrical system and are typically powered by natural gas or propane. These generators start automatically when the power goes out.

A portable generator is usually gas powered. Your generator should have more output than the wattage of the electronics plugged into it. Make sure there is nothing plugged into the generator when turning it on.

Safety Tips

When you refuel a portable generator, make sure the engine is cool. Keep children and pets away from the generator, as it could burn them.


Generators pose electrical risks, especially when operated during inclement weather. Use a generator only when necessary during wet conditions. Protect the generator by operating it under an open, canopy-like structure and on a dry surface where water cannot form puddles or drain under it.

Generators can be deadly

Carbon monoxide emitted by the gasoline engine on the generator can be deadly. Always operate your portable generator outdoors at least 20 feet from your home.

Misusing a portable generator or using a standby generator that is installed incorrectly can cause backfeed. Backfeed happens when a generator feeds electricity back through a home's electrical system and meter into the power lines. To prevent this dangerous scenario, standby generators should have a transfer switch installed by a licensed professional. Do not plug a portable generator directly into a home outlet or electrical system. Instead, use a properly rated extension cord to plug appliances into an outlet on the generator for power.

When not in use

Operate your generator once a month for 10 minutes to ensure it is running properly. Keep your generator well maintained and follow all manufacturer's instructions. Have a standby generator installed in an easily accessible, weatherproof area. 



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YOU, COUNT
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NJ Crews in Georgia << Continued from pg. 1

down with the some of them and discussed what it is like to work mutual aid during a catastrophic event such as Helene.

Our responding crews varied in age. Two had been to Louisiana for Hurricane Katrina 19 years earlier, while two were first time dads with little ones at home. One of our linemen had been married just the week before and canceled his honeymoon to get the experience, and paycheck, that comes with working mutual aid on a big storm.

The five-hour journey ended up taking our crews nine hours. Major highways were closed, so our linemen were diverted onto local roads through the Blue Ridge and then Smokey Mountains. In pitch black darkness, their bucket trucks lumbered up mountains at 15-20 miles-per-hour and then went straight down a hill on the other side. "It was Six Flags, pretty much." Lineman Brian Garvilla told me. "Without the guard rails."

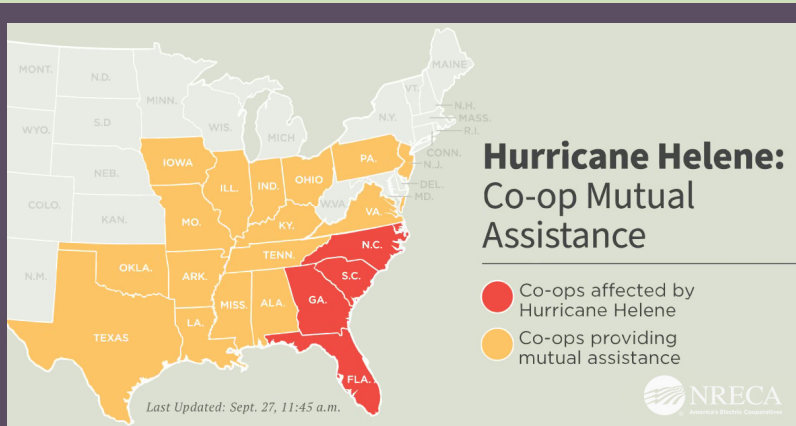
Calling the area of Georgia our crews worked in "remote" would be generous. On a single street, homes were separated by miles of peanut, cotton, blueberry, or tobacco fields. Even in our rural corner of New Jersey, our streets and power lines are more densely populated. There, our linemen could work an entire day to only restore a handful of homes.

Our linemen found some of the most challenging aspects were not the repairs they were making in the field. The comforts you'd find at home were few and far between and, with thousands of linemen on hand to provide mutual aid, our crews suddenly had hundreds of new roommates. Alarms would start blaring at 4:00 am across a tent jam-packed with 400 linemen. At 4:15 am, for the fifth morning in a row, the jerk with Metallica's

"Enter Sandman" as his alarm AGAIN refused to wake up, sending waves of outrage across the cramped sleeping quarters.

In this tent, the sheets and blankets were likened to tissue paper. Towards the end of our crews' time there, Georgia grew colder, but the air conditioners kept cranking. Linemen would steal towels from the shower line to add just a little more warmth for the night. All of the linemen there grew accustomed to little sleep, getting ready in the dark, and standing in long lines for showers (often cold ones) and longer lines for breakfast. When the crew was ready each morning, our guys walked a half-mile in the dark to their trucks, carrying their gear along with cases of water and Gatorade.

They shared stories about large spiders, wild



Above: A U.S. map depicting states affected by Hurricane Helene and states from which lineworkers were sent by electric cooperatives to provide mutual aid, including New Jersey. (Source: NRECA)

lemon plants with huge thorns, mosquitoes, and “gators.” Of all the animals they encountered, the most numerous were dogs. “Everywhere we stopped the truck, a dog would come running up to you,” said Chief Lineman Jeff Rowen. “It’d make you think of your dogs at home.”

Days were long, but our crews pushed through. They explained that the work gets personal once you get to meet the people you’re helping. The linemen were amazed at the hospitality offered to them by the members of Georgia’s co-ops. Despite being out of power for almost four weeks, people would come out to thank the crews and bring them food and drink. One man drove to the nearest open gas station to buy our crews some iced tea. He apologized that they were warm, even though he hadn’t had power for weeks.

The kindness of these people, who had just faced disaster, was the thing that

stuck out most to our crews. “The biggest thing to take from the trip was just how generous and nice people still were,” Lineman Tony Salokas said.

The linemen were invited to barbecues at people’s homes. They were amazed to talk to members and learn about their stories. Local churches made meals, people from town lined up to do laundry for the linemen, and all expressed deep gratitude for the help they’d received.

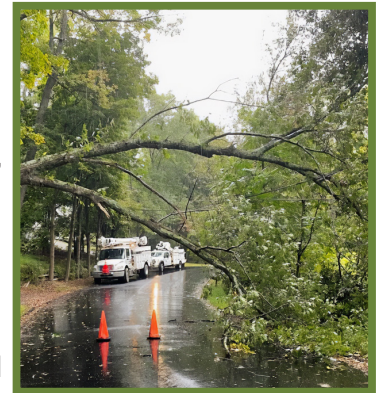
After hearing their stories, I asked if it was worth it. Was it worth talking to the babies on Facetime? Was it worth being away from home, missing your honeymoon?

They all agreed it was, indeed, worth it. These linemen represented our co-op and our state well. They have memories of people and places that they will never forget, and while they may never listen to “Enter Sandman” again, they are all better for the experience. ⚡

5 Thing To Know About Outage Restoration

By Steve Sokolowski, Marketing Associate

No matter the time or weather, when an outage strikes, Sussex REC’s crews leap into action. While our lineworkers, engineers, and office staff



each play their part in restoring power, members at home may not know what goes into outage restoration. Here are five facts about outages and outage restoration which many members may not be aware of:

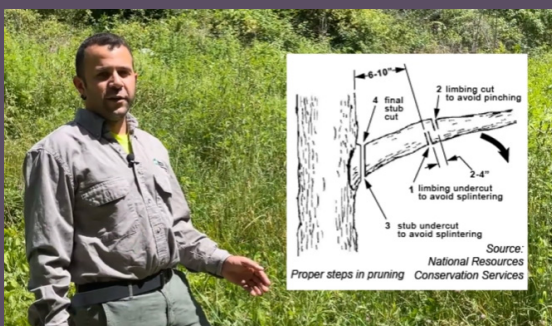
1. We Need Your Input: Our internal systems can detect when a possible outage has occurred, but member input is extremely helpful in identifying the exact location of a fault and the scope of the problem. Members can report that their power has gone out through our 24/7 outage reporting hotline at 877-504-6463.

Continued on page 7 >>

Questions About Trees? We Have Answers!

At Sussex REC, the most common questions we receive have to do with trees - our tree trimming schedule, their impact on outages, and member concerns about their own trees.

Our in-house tree expert, Forester Rob Guevara, answers some of our most commonly received questions in our new video interview! Watch it at www.sussexrec.com/videos/forester or by scanning the QR code here!



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The Most Wonderful Time of the Year

By Claudia Raffay

Director of Marketing & Member Services

One of my fondest holiday traditions began in 2021. I was called upon to help a member with an unusual request. At the front desk, I encountered a little lady with a pretty purse. "Purse Lady," as I came to call her, wanted to do something special for the holiday season. She wanted to pay someone's electric bill, someone who needed the help.

She did not want their names or any personal information. She just wanted to pay the bill of someone in need. She didn't even want any credit, only for me to call them and tell them that a "Christmas Angel" paid their bill and to wish them a Merry Christmas. It was important to her that we use the word "Christmas," not "happy holidays."

Our front office staff identified a single mom who had fallen on hard times that year. I remember calling her with the news, her tears over the phone, and how grateful she was. I relayed this to Purse Lady, which warmed both our hearts and made our Christmases a little merrier.

Next December, that same purse was again in our lobby. We were more prepared this time, providing three members to choose from. Rather than choosing, our angel paid for all three!

Our Member Services and Billing associates hear a lot of stories of hardship. This is never easy, but sometimes they make note of a certain



someone who might just need extra help. Last year, each of them presented stories of members who they felt needed some support. Our Christmas Angel listened to each story and paid for all four.

Laughter, joy, and tears filled the front office as each associate got to call their choice and tell them the news. We chose our first veteran that year, and he was so thankful he had his nurse drive him to get us a pie from Clove Brook Market. We called the Christmas Angel to see if she wanted the pie, but she insisted her helpers in the office should enjoy it instead.

The tradition continued this year. It's now a special day for all of us in Member Services and Billing. We picked up some gingerbread men from Holland American Bakery and swapped stories of members who needed and deserved a helping hand, knowing our Christmas Angel could gift them peace of mind during a stressful time of year.

While we can't reveal her secret identity, to us and those she's helped, she is truly an angel. The kindness and generosity she's shown has inspired many of us at Sussex REC to make donations and help others around the holidays. Our Christmas Angel truly embodies the "Concern for Community" which is one of our cooperative's guiding principles, and helps make our community and our Christmas better. 🍀

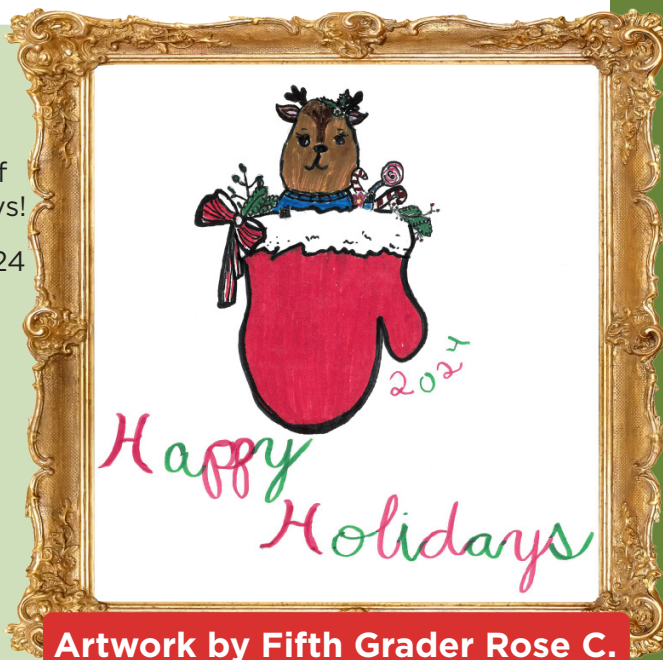
Holiday Card Art Contest

We are proud to announce the winner of our 2024 Holiday Card Art Contest! Fifth grader Rose C., granddaughter of Sussex REC members Jack and Emily, submitted this piece of artwork depicting a reindeer wishing everyone happy holidays!

As this year's winner, Rose's artwork was featured on our 2024 holiday card and sent to friends and associates of the Co-op. Rose also received 30 prints of the card and a \$25 Amazon gift card!

Our second place winner, fourth grader Caitlyn H., received a \$20 Amazon gift card and our third place winner, third grader Harper F., received a \$15 Amazon gift card. All of our wonderful entries are available to view on our website at sussexrec.com/holiday-card.

Thanks for participating and for sharing your artwork! We hope you all have a happy holiday season!



Artwork by Fifth Grader Rose C.

5 Things To Know About Outage Restoration

<<Continued from page 5

2. Preparation is Key to Safety: Because every outage is different, we need to take time to prepare and diagnose the situation before repairs can begin. Before hitting the road, crews take the time to perform safety checks and make sure they have all the equipment needed for the job.

3. It's a Numbers Game: In any outage, especially large ones, we prioritize restoring power to the largest group of members first. After this, we move on to situations that are affecting fewer members. For example, if a tree fell on the service wire to your home, crews may not be available to help until after they've handled larger-scale situations, like damaged transmission lines.

4. Blinks Aren't Always a Bad Thing: Power blinks can be annoying, but they're a sign that our system's protective equipment is working. Reclosers temporarily shut off power when they detect a disturbance on our lines, usually a branch or small animal, to protect our equipment and prevent possible outages.

5. It's Good to Have a Backup Plan: We do our best to restore power in a timely manner, but we can only work as fast as safety allows. It's best to have a plan in place for extended outages. Having a generator is extremely helpful, especially for those who rely on electric-powered medical equipment. To cover all your basic needs, we recommend you put together an "outage preparedness kit," which you can find a guide for at www.sussexrec.com/outages. ⚡



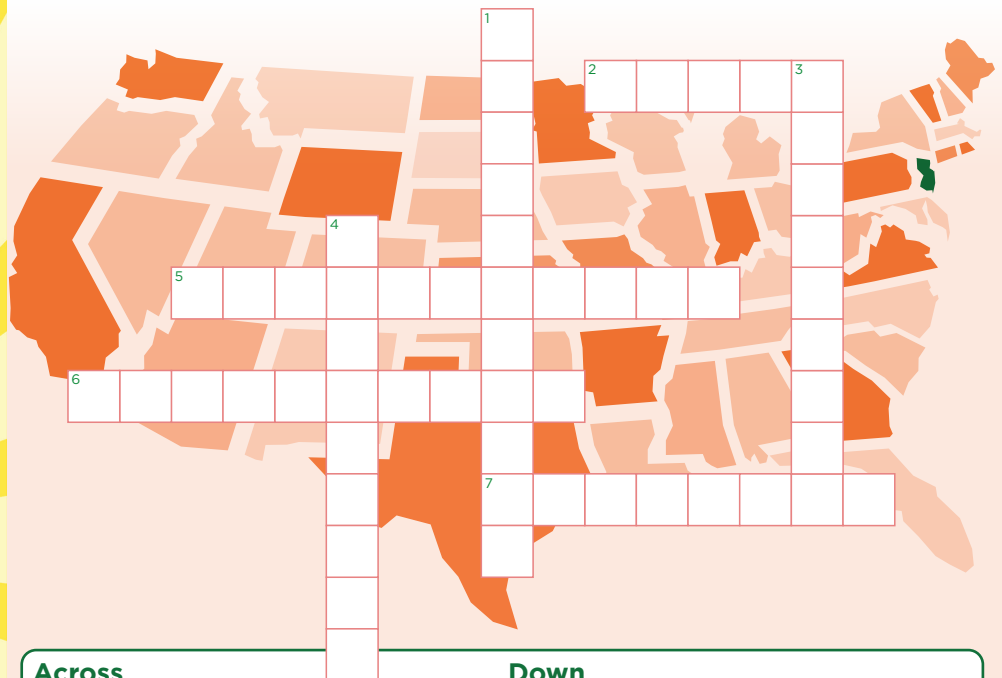
with Pluggy the Pug

Rural electric cooperatives like Sussex Rural Electric Cooperative are different than other electric companies. They are set apart by the "Seven Cooperative Principles," which guide them while they work every day to provide their members with reliable electricity.

Check out this crossword puzzle to learn more about the Cooperative Principles!

ANSWER KEY

2 ACROSS: SHARE 5 ACROSS: INDEPENDENT
6 ACROSS: CONTRIBUTE 7 ACROSS: EVERYONE
1 DOWN: COMMUNITIES 3 DOWN: EDUCATION
4 DOWN: DECISIONS



Across

2. Cooperation Among Cooperatives: Co-ops _____ with other co-ops.

5. Autonomy & Independence: Co-ops are _____ and can operate on their own.

6. Member Economic Participation:

Members _____ money to ensure the co-op runs smoothly, and may also receive money through capital credits.

7. Open & Voluntary Membership: Co-op membership is open to _____.

Down

1. Concern for Community: Co-ops give back to their local _____ to help them thrive and grow.

3. Education, Information, & Training: Continual _____ is crucial to ensure employees and members have the info they need to contribute to and benefit from its success.

4. Democratic Member Control: Members get to make the _____ about the co-op.

IN THIS ISSUE OF Currents

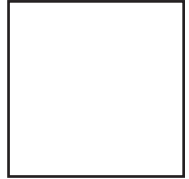


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-  **2025 Rate Adjustment**
-  **Remembering a Friend**
-  **Take Steps to Operate a Generator Safely**
-  **5 Things To Know About Outage Restoration**
-  **The Most Wonderful Time of the Year**
-  **Holiday Card Art Contest Winner**
-  **Pluggy the Pug's Kids Corner**
-  **Supporting Students in 2025**

Supporting Students in 2025

With the 2024-2025 school year in full swing, we want to remind students, parents, and educators about the opportunities available to them through their electric co-op!


Educational Presentations & Field Trips

Sussex REC offers guest instruction opportunities on power generation, electric safety, and energy efficiency to all grade levels. Teachers who want to schedule a free field trip or presentation can reach us at info@sussexrec.com!

Youth Tour - www.njyouthtour.com

This free trip to Washington, D.C. is available to high school juniors who live in homes powered by Sussex REC. Joining over 1,800 of their peers from across the country, Youth Tour is guaranteed to offer an unforgettable experience to local students.

Scholarships - www.sussexrec.com/scholarships

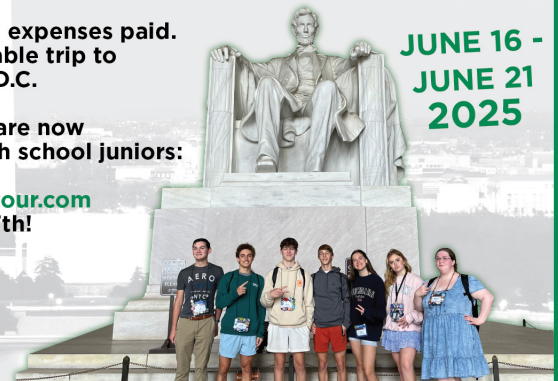
High school seniors living in Sussex REC-powered homes have access to exclusive scholarships to power their education, no matter what path they take! \$2,000 scholarships are available now for both college and trade school. We also offer a \$500 award to support students' community service efforts. 

YOUTH TOUR 2025

One week. All expenses paid.
An unforgettable trip to
Washington, D.C.

**JUNE 16 -
JUNE 21
2025**

Applications are now
available. High school juniors:
Apply at
www.njyouthtour.com
by February 7th!



Our suite of scholarships is available exclusively to students who live in homes powered by Sussex REC. We offer scholarships to students seeking either a college or trade school education, plus an award for students dedicated to community service.

Apply by March 7th at www.sussexrec.com/scholarships!



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