

# Along these LINES

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2024



Cheerleaders rally the crowd as a \$5,000 check is presented to support East Feliciana High School's athletic program. PHOTO COURTESY OF DEMCO

## Friday Night Lights

DEMCO celebrates local teams, fans and families. **Page 21**

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# A Small-Town Christmas: Shop Local, Feel Home

There's something timeless and heartwarming about a small-town Christmas, where life slows down and the holiday season celebrates community, tradition and the beauty of simple pleasures. That quiet, sacred pause—where everything feels peaceful and full of possibilities—reminds us of what Christmas in a rural town is truly about.

It's when old friends and relatives come home for the holidays, gathering around kitchen tables for warm cups of coffee and conversation. Neighbors stop by with homemade cookies, and everyone knows everyone's name.

Your Louisiana electric cooperatives and local businesses are the backbone of your community. Electric cooperatives are more than just electric utility companies; local businesses are more than just stores—we're part of the social fabric.

When you step into a local shop, you're not just making a purchase—you're supporting a dream. The person behind the counter isn't a faceless corporation but someone who likely lives nearby, whose children might go to school with yours, and who has invested their heart and soul into creating something meaningful for the community.

There's a kind of magic that happens when you shop local during the holidays. The shops are often beautifully decorated, with window displays inviting you in with a warmth and charm you won't find in chain stores. Local shop owners take pride in curating unique, handcrafted items that reflect the town's personality. Whether it's artisan candles, locally made pottery or hand-knitted scarves, the gifts you find are often one-of-a-kind, with stories behind them that make them even more special.



Addie Armato

Farmers markets, craft fairs and pop-up shops spring up around the holidays, offering even more opportunities to find local treasures. These events make holiday shopping fun and give you a chance to support multiple small businesses in one place. They also showcase the incredible talent within your community, reminding us all that creativity and craftsmanship are right around the corner.

Your local electric cooperative and small-business owners together are the local economic drivers that strengthen and unite our communities. When our small businesses thrive, our entire community benefits.

No matter how far we've traveled or how long we've been away, the holidays pull us back to where it all began. For many, home isn't just a physical location—it's a feeling, a sense of belonging, a place where memories live and love never leaves.

This holiday season, I urge you to support local businesses to help create a thriving local economy. Your Louisiana electric cooperatives believe we can achieve great things by supporting each other and building a brighter future for everyone.

I wish you and your loved ones a joyful holiday season.



ADOBE STOCK ILLUSTRATION BY JOSEPH

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## Crafted With Care

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A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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## Volume 39, Issue 6

### Mission

DEMCO is focused on enhancing the quality of life for members by providing safe, reliable and competitively priced energy services.

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DEMCO is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



## Manager's Report

Randy Pierce  
CEO & General Manager

At DEMCO, we always look for innovative ways to serve you better.

As part of our commitment to exploring smarter, more efficient energy solutions, we're excited to invite each co-op member to take part in a new initiative that could help reduce your monthly energy costs and enhance the reliability of our service.

Traditionally, electricity comes from large power plants. However, thanks to new technologies and small distributed resources—such as rooftop solar panels—residential battery storage, smart thermostats and whole home generators can now play a role in meeting our energy needs.

These resources, known as distributed energy resources, allow members to contribute power to the grid or manage their energy use in a way that benefits them and the co-op.

To manage these resources effectively, utilities nationwide—including electric cooperatives like ours—are exploring distributed energy resource management systems. This advanced software helps balance power supply and demand, especially during peak times, which could lower energy costs and improve system reliability for everyone.

As we explore potential benefits of these technologies, your participation is crucial. We're conducting a survey to learn more about the devices you use and your interest in participating in programs designed to use member-owned resources.

Your feedback will help us determine how we can best implement these solutions to meet your needs and those of the entire DEMCO community.

Please take a few minutes to complete our survey. Your insights will play a key role in shaping the future of energy management at DEMCO.

Thank you for your time and for being an essential part of our cooperative.



## HOLIDAY CLOSURES

### THANKSGIVING

CLOSE AT NOON ON WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 27  
REOPEN MONDAY, DECEMBER 2

### CHRISTMAS

CLOSE AT NOON ON MONDAY, DECEMBER 23  
REOPEN THURSDAY, DECEMBER 26

### NEW YEAR'S

CLOSE AT NOON ON TUESDAY, DECEMBER 31  
REOPEN THURSDAY, JANUARY 2

# TAKE THE SURVEY

Help shape the future of smart energy!

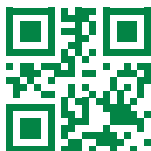


## INSPIRING YOUTH!

### Youth Cooperative Ambassador Program

DEMCO IS CALLING ALL 9<sup>TH</sup> & 10<sup>TH</sup> GRADERS.

DEMCO is now accepting applications to its Youth Cooperative Ambassador Program (YCAP), an all-expense-paid leadership and educational program for 9th and 10th-grade students.



**ENTRIES DUE BY NOV. 15, 2024**

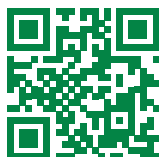
For more information, eligibility requirements and to apply, visit [DEMCO.org/YCAP](http://DEMCO.org/YCAP).



### 2025 DEMCO Essay Contest

DEMCO IS CALLING ALL JUNIORS!

High school juniors can enter the annual DEMCO Essay Contest. Winners will receive an all-expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C.! Accepting Essay entries Nov. 1, 2024 – Jan. 20, 2025.



**ENTRIES DUE BY JAN. 20, 2025.**

For eligibility and to apply, visit [DEMCO.org/Community/DEMCO-Essay-Contest](http://DEMCO.org/Community/DEMCO-Essay-Contest).

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I certify the statements made by me are correct and complete.  
Addie Armato, Editor

# 2024 Youth Tour

National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Youth Tour is a weeklong trip sightseeing, learning about the cooperative business model, meeting Louisiana legislators and making friends from across the state and country.

This year's delegates represent Beauregard Electric Cooperative Inc., DEMCO, Jeff Davis Electric Cooperative, South Louisiana Electric Cooperative Association and Washington-St. Tammany Electric Cooperative.

"This trip never fails to amaze me," says Conley Bourgeois, director of the Association of Louisiana Electric Cooperatives Youth Tour. "Watching the delegates experience the sights of our nation's capital and create lifelong memories is incredibly rewarding." ■

## 2024 Delegates:

- Andrew Nguyen, JDEC
- Anthony Plaisance, SLECA
- Brenna George, BECi
- Delasya Guinn, DEMCO
- Emily Doerr, DEMCO
- Halle Harrell, DEMCO
- Hudson Carter, JDEC
- Isabella Winter, DEMCO
- Jaden Lebo, WSTE
- Jaylon Stephens, BECi
- Lauren Malbrough, SLECA
- Lucian Gaspard, BECi
- Madelyn Bailey, BECi
- Nicholas Wadsack, DEMCO
- Remy Boudreaux, DEMCO
- Tuyen Helms, WSTE



**2025 Youth Tour  
June 14-21**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**  
[www.alec.coop/public-relations-education/youth-tour](http://www.alec.coop/public-relations-education/youth-tour)



## Some sights we saw:

- Albert Einstein Memorial
- Arlington National Cemetery
- Ford's Theatre
- Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
- U.S. Marine Corps War Memorial and Sunset Parade
- Lincoln Memorial
- Mount Vernon
- National Mall
- U.S. Capitol Tour

## Quotes From Delegates:

"The Youth Tour Trip was so impactful. I've made lifelong friends who are like-minded and similar to me. I got to come face-to-face with historic landmarks I have only dreamed of seeing in person. I'm so thankful to have been given this opportunity, and I hope many others experience this as well. It's such an incredible experience, and I will remember it forever!"

Isabella Winter, DEMCO

"Once-in-a-lifetime experience."

Brenna George, BECi

"My time in Washington, D.C., was nothing short of life-changing. I was given the opportunity to explore and collaborate with like-minded youth from all around the United States."

Anthony Plaisance, SLECA



QUIET  
RESPECT  
PLEASE

DEMCO



Deep in Maurepas, linemen work together to pull a span of line through a heavily weeded area. PHOTOS BY JAMES MACIAS

# Hurricane Francine Recap

At DEMCO, our cooperative spirit shines brightest during challenges.

The camaraderie seen in storm mode is a reminder we are more than just employees—we are a community dedicated to serving members.

Restoring power is no small task. It takes an entire team working together to make it happen. While our linemen may be the most visible, the combined efforts of countless others behind the scenes are what made our success possible.

In response to Hurricane Francine, more than 400 workers were mobilized alongside DEMCO's 150 crewmen to repair and restore power. We received assistance from construction, right-of-way, and distribution contractors from Texas, Mississippi and Louisiana. Mutual aid crews from electric cooperatives in Arkansas, Florida, Oklahoma and Texas also assisted.

At the peak, outages reached 39,000, affecting the seven parishes we serve. Our crews were strategically positioned to restore power quickly, and we are proud to say all power was fully restored by Saturday evening.

As restoration wrapped up, visiting crews shared a final meal and received a warm sendoff before heading home to their families.

Thank you, DEMCO members, for your unwavering support, prayers and patience. Together, we demonstrate our cooperative is truly stronger together. ■



Each morning, hundreds gather for a hearty breakfast before heading out for the day.



Linemen lean on each other to get the job done.



# Serving Up Savings

The holiday season is just around the corner. Festive music will soon flood the airwaves, sparkling lights and decorations will adorn homes and businesses, and good tidings will abound.

The holidays also bring a frenzy of decorating, cooking and family gatherings. Amid the hectic hustle and bustle, you may receive higher-than-usual energy bills.

Keeping this in mind, this month is a good time to remind co-op members of a few programs and efficiency tips to help lower their monthly energy use.

## Programs Designed to Help You Save

Winter months typically bring some of the highest energy bills of the year. Making minor, low-cost improvements, such as weatherstripping exterior doors and caulking around old, drafty windows, can make a positive impact on energy bills.

Your cooperative's team of member service representatives is available to help. We encourage you to call to learn about programs and services that can lower your bills.

## Be Festive Without Breaking the Bank

Some of us bring the Christmas decorations down from the attic faster than we can finish the Thanksgiving turkey. With holiday lights adorning our home for more than a month, it's a good time to make the switch to LEDs to save energy.

LED holiday lights use 88% less energy than incandescent holiday lights. To put that into perspective, the Department of Energy estimates, with standard holiday decorations, LED lights typically increase energy bills by \$5 to \$7. However, with incandescent lights, energy bills will typically increase by at least \$33.

For homes that go above and beyond with incandescent holiday lighting (think Clark Griswold), energy bills could

increase by as much as \$350. Beyond providing energy savings, LEDs are shock-resistant, shatterproof and cool to the touch, making them safer for the home.

You can also lower energy use by conveniently managing holiday lighting. Smart light timers can help you save energy by connecting to a smart phone app or voice assistant to program lights to turn on and off at set times. If you don't use smart home technology, you can still save energy by using traditional timers.

Additional easy ways to save during the holiday season include turning off overhead lights and using your Christmas tree to illuminate your home. If you have a fireplace, remember to close the flue when a fire isn't burning to ensure heat doesn't escape through the chimney.

## Cook Up Energy Savings in the Kitchen

If you plan to have family and friends over this holiday season, you can save energy by using small countertop appliances like microwaves, air fryers and slow cookers when possible, as they use much less energy than the stovetop or oven.

When using the oven, bake multiple dishes at once for maximum efficiency. It takes as much energy to cook one dish as it does to cook several.

Turn off the oven a few minutes before the recipe's end time and allow the residual heat to finish baking the dish. Once the food is done, leave the stove door ajar to allow the residual heat to warm the room.

When using the stovetop, match the pan size to the burner to maximize the stovetop's efficiency.



Try a few of these helpful tips as we approach the holiday season. With a little planning, you can find efficient ways to save on everything from holiday decor to your favorite soup recipes.

Best wishes for a wonderful holiday season. ■

# Mingling

Chef connects African, Southern and Creole cuisines



By Cheré Coen

Like many native-born Louisianans, chef Sheri L. Raleigh learned to cook by watching her mother and grandmother in the kitchen. The graduate of Boston High School in Lake Charles and Northwestern State University in Natchitoches went on to a professional career in child nutrition in Texas, but Sheri never forgot her roots.



**Sheri worked in public schools as an administrator and educator for 35 years.**

An administrator and educator in public schools for 35 years, she established Cast Iron Skillet Culinaire in 2012 to teach cooking classes for various educational, hospitality and health care organizations in Waco, Texas. When she began leading classes at a community college, her department head asked if she would include African cuisine.

Sheri says the request was timely since African culinary origins include Creole cuisine, and she had a side project.

“I was working on genealogy at the time with my cousin. She suggested putting the food recipes with the genealogy.”

Sheri reached out to chef Pierre Thiam from Senegal and other African culinary experts, and she examined the African influences in both Southern and Creole cuisines.

“And then I was able to build a curriculum from that,” she says. It also led to her Gifts from the Ancestors program, a 2022 project she developed that includes a five-part series on

**Sheri consulted with chef Pierre Thiam, a culinary expert from Senegal.**



ADOBE STOCK IMAGE BY DIZELEN

# Traditions

YouTube exploring West African culinary influences in American dishes. She taught a class at Shadows-on-the-Teche in New Iberia, sponsored by that city's African American Historical Society.

"There are a lot of crossover influences," Sheri says of West African foodways and Louisiana's cuisine. "They're very similar. You find a lot of recipes that I say are kissing cousins."

For example, a West African dish combines ginger shrimp with a tomato sauce made with palm nut oil and stewed tomatoes, similar to Louisiana shrimp Creole. A rice dish that resembles Louisiana-style jambalaya includes jollof rice. Louisiana gumbo, depending on how it's made, has its roots in West Africa—gumbo is Swahili for okra, a vegetable that's part of the hibiscus family and is used in Indian, African and Middle Eastern cuisine, Sheri says.

For her New Iberia class, Sheri prepared a sweet potato peanut soup popular in West Africa.

"They use peanut butter to thicken the soup like we use a roux to thicken," she says. "The texture's like velvet."

Sheri is compiling a digital cookbook of the African versions of Creole dishes.

The proceeds from the cookbook sales will help fund the Lawrence J. and Viola M. Raleigh Education Fund, benefiting aspiring Black female chefs in collaboration with the Texas Restaurant Association Foundation.

For more information on Sheri's work, visit [giftsfromtheancestors.com](https://giftsfromtheancestors.com). She can be heard as a featured guest on the "Freestyle Flavor" and "Cookbook Love" podcasts and is the founder of @blackwomenchefs on Instagram. ■

## Sheri's Jambalaya

### Ingredients

- 1 pound chicken breasts, boneless and skinless
- ½ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- Salt, to taste
- 3 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 cup onion, medium diced
- 1 cup green onion, small diced
- 1 cup celery, medium diced
- 1 cup bell pepper, finely diced
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 can tomato paste or 2 cans tomato sauce
- 1 cup chicken or seafood broth
- 1 can small-diced tomatoes
- 1 tablespoon creole seasoning
- 1 pound shrimp, peeled, deveined and rinsed
- 1 pound andouille sausage, cut in diagonal coins
- 3 cups dry rice, cooked

### Directions

Season chicken breast with salt and cayenne pepper. In a large skillet, heat olive oil and pan-fry chicken until lightly browned on each side. Remove from pan and cut into 2-inch cubes. Set aside.

Saute prepared onions, green onions, celery and bell pepper in pan drippings. Add butter and cook vegetables until clear and tender. Add tomato paste or tomato sauce, chicken or seafood stock, diced tomatoes, minced garlic, creole seasoning and additional salt, to taste. Stir and simmer for 15 minutes.

Gradually add shrimp, chicken and sausage. Cook until the shrimp are pink.

Spoon the jambalaya mixture onto cooked fluffy rice.

**Sheri's jambalaya is full of authentic flavors.**



# Crafted With

Louisiana artisans  
bring art to life

By Cheré Coen



Before Austin Clark moved to Baton Rouge from Atlanta, a member of his weavers' guild sent him off with a plant that would change his life.

"My parting gift from her was Acadian brown cotton," Austin says.

The cotton, used by early Cajuns, sent Austin on a research mission, which led to a mentorship by Cajun weaver Elaine Bourque, herself a student of award-winning weaver Gladys Clark. Austin now grows indigo as a traditional Louisiana dye and brown cotton to weave when he's not working as associate organist at Baton Rouge's St. James Episcopal Church.

Austin says historic Cajun weaving is a tradition that has been passed down to him.

"My goal is to continue that tradition," he says.

Austin's textiles have been included in art exhibits and won the craft category for the 2022 Made in the South awards by Garden and Gun magazine. He befriended Norman Kennedy, a master weaver who twice won the National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellow.

"He does a road trip every winter through the U.S.," Austin says. "He would end up in Louisiana because he loved the Cajuns and loved their traditions."

Norman opened the world of teaching to Austin, who now instructs weavers at Vermont's Marshfield School of Weaving and the John C.

**Austin Clark learned traditional Cajun weaving from Elaine Bourque.** PHOTOS COURTESY OF AUSTIN CLARK



# Care

Campbell Folk School of North Carolina.

Austin's blankets and other textiles made in the Louisiana tradition are in hot demand. He sells his wares through his website, but he says they go fast, usually right after he announces the available item in his newsletter. They're not cheap, but the price tag reflects the hours that go into weaving: 100 hours per blanket. His process includes picking the cotton, then ginning, cording and spinning the cotton into thread. He must set up the loom, weave the blanket and then sew.

"Hand weaving is slow," he says. "It's a lot of steps."

Elaine and Austin are collaborating on a book about Cajun textiles, painstakingly researching the Cajun weaving tradition dating back 250 years.

And it all started with a gift from a friend.

"There's not a drop of Cajun in my blood, but once it found me, I couldn't let it go," Austin says. "It's all because of brown cotton."

## Louisiana Artisans

Austin is one of many Louisiana artisans producing unique pieces, many of which require skills passed down through generations. Some craftspeople produce instruments similar to the accordions and fiddles used in Cajun and Creole music.

Others, like Iota's Jackie Miller, began making costumes and capuchons, the tall conical hats worn by riders on horseback for the annual Cajun Courir de Mardi Gras. Jackie took up the art when her children were young and participated in the nearby Egan Mardi Gras. She later began sewing for adult members of regional krewes.

Some artisans lean toward modern designs, such as Mandeville woodworker Robert Johnson, who specializes in wooden kitchen utensils, or Betsy Meyers' "art to wear" handcrafted jewelry.

There are about 250 members of the Louisiana Crafts Guild, according to board member and mixed media artist Terry Palmer.



ABOVE AND BELOW: Austin incorporates brown cotton and indigo blues to create his traditional Cajun blankets.





**Terry Palmer's signature piece, "A Case of Coke Heads," features miniature ceramic heads displayed in a Coca-Cola case. PHOTOS COURTESY OF TERRY PALMER**



**Terry's artwork incorporates burned and painted wood and raku ceramics.**

Around 150 of them exhibit at the flagship store Sans Souci Fine Crafts Gallery in Lafayette and La Guild in Canal Place shopping center in downtown New Orleans. Art ranges from paintings and photography to Catherine Myers transforming Louisiana mud and clay—occasionally from crawfish chimneys—into bowls, vases and ceramic animals. A jury must approve members to participate.

Sometimes it's a family affair. Pat and André Juneau create vibrant folk art aluminum metal pieces seen all over Acadiana. The family, residents of Scott, includes Suzanne and Angélique Juneau, a mother-daughter team working in whimsical metal jewelry. André is president of the Louisiana Crafts Guild.

Marc Savoy is an artisan honoring his roots. The Eunice native began building Cajun-style accordions as a hobby in 1960, back when he says Cajun wasn't cool. That didn't dissuade Marc from taking out a loan to build Savoy Music Center on his grandfather's property in Eunice. It opened in 1966, but even the loan officer, along with his friends, doubted Marc would succeed.

Since those early days, musicians from around the world have bought Marc's instruments and traveled to perform at his weekly jam sessions at Savoy Music Center. Marc has traveled the globe performing with numerous Cajun musicians and with Savoy Family Band, which includes his wife, Ann, and sons, Joel and Wilson. Marc is a recipient of a 1992 National Heritage Fellowship by the National Endowment for the Arts, has appeared on the Public Broadcasting Service documentary series "American Roots" and is a proud promoter of Cajun culture.

On the contemporary side, Terry's artwork blends painted and burned woodwork accented by raku-fired ceramics. His work was recently exhibited at Acadiana Center for the Arts, including the signature piece "Case of Coke Heads," featuring a Coca-Cola case full of miniature ceramic heads.

"It's hard to describe because you'll not see anything like it," Terry says of his contemporary artwork, adding that he sometimes adds coyote or sheep skulls to the pieces. "They're kind of dark sometimes."

Terry grew up in Prairieville and received his degree in graphic design from the University of Southwestern Louisiana, now the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. He and his wife, Simone, own and operate Palmer Graphics.

Over in Sunset, the quaint town breathes antiques and artists, its streets lined with shops offering one-of-a-kind items, whether recycled or newly created.

Stepping inside Jerilyn's Fused Glass Art Gallery & Studio on the main street of Sunset is like walking through a rainbow with colorful glass creations hanging from the ceiling, decorating the walls and quaint small items such as garden stakes and fused glass pieces resting on shelves. It's difficult not to smile at the glass art of Jerilyn Guidry LaVergne, especially when the glass chimes are set into motion and a symphony ensues. Don't hesitate to do so, because Jerilyn swears each piece is indestructible.

These are just a few of the state's talented artisans producing both historic and contemporary artwork. To view a few of the members' works at the Louisiana Crafts Guild, visit [louisianacrafts.org](http://louisianacrafts.org). ■



**LEFT:** Jerilyn Guidry LaVergne's glass chimes create beautiful sounds.

**BELOW:** Jerilyn's Fused Glass Art Gallery & Studio brings a splash of color to Sunset. PHOTOS COURTESY OF JERILYN GUIDRY LAVERGNE



## Where to Find Louisiana Artisans

### Baton Rouge Arts Market, ongoing

The Baton Rouge Arts Market, also called BRAM, is open from 8 a.m. to noon on the first Saturday of each month, with the Red Stick Farmers Market at Fifth and Main streets in downtown Baton Rouge.

[artsbr.org/arts-market](http://artsbr.org/arts-market)

### New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, last weekend in April, first weekend in May

Jazz Fest offers three markets for curated artists: Congo Square African Marketplace, Contemporary Crafts and Louisiana Marketplace.

[nojazzfest.com/crafts](http://nojazzfest.com/crafts)

### Festival International de Louisiane, last weekend in April

Festival International takes over downtown Lafayette for five days and includes visual arts displays and vendors in addition to its musical stages.

[festivalinternational.org](http://festivalinternational.org)

### Lake Charles Arts & Humanities Council's Spring Art Walk

Spring Art Walk through downtown Lake Charles features more than 60 local artists and artisans.

[artscouncilswla.org/events/gallery-promenade](http://artscouncilswla.org/events/gallery-promenade)

### Natchitoches-NSU Folk Festival, July

Louisiana traditional artists and musicians are honored every July in Natchitoches, plus the festival offers the annual Louisiana State Fiddle Championship and traditional material culture demonstrations.

[nsula.edu](http://nsula.edu)

### Lake Charles Arts & Humanities Council's Gallery Promenade, August

Downtown Lake Charles businesses are paired with local artists showcasing their work.

[artscouncilswla.org/events/gallery-promenade](http://artscouncilswla.org/events/gallery-promenade)

### Festivals Acadiens et Créole, October

This Lafayette festival is plural for a reason—the event combines several festivals into one, including the Louisiana Craft Fair, which features local artists and artisans.

[festivalsacadiens.com](http://festivalsacadiens.com)

### Washington Parish Free Fair, October

In addition to all that a parish fair typically offers are nods to artists and artisans.

[freefair.com](http://freefair.com)

### Covington Three Rivers Art Festival, Nov. 9-10

A juried event featuring 200 artists and artisans takes over several city blocks in downtown Covington every fall. Works in every medium are represented.

[covingtonthreeriversartfestival.com](http://covingtonthreeriversartfestival.com)

# AVOID UTILITY SCAMS



## Learn how to avoid common phone utility scams

According to the FTC, fraud complaints were received from more than 2.8 million people in 2021, showing a total loss of \$5.8 billion, \$2.3 billion of which were from impostor scams. Many of these scams are utility scams where scammers pretend to be representatives of utility companies and demand immediate payment to avoid service disconnects.

## LEARN HOW TO SPOT A UTILITY SCAM WITH THESE TIPS:

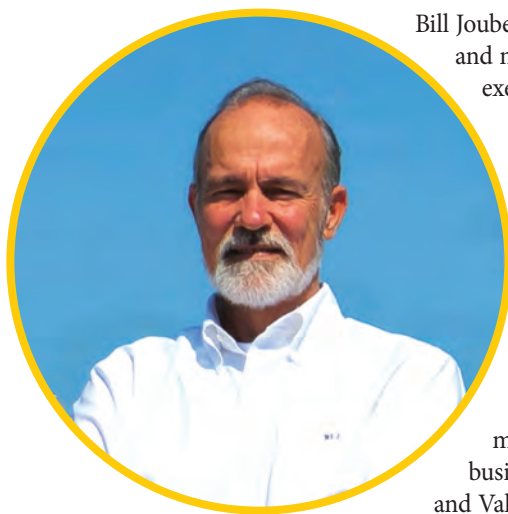
-  **1** Utility companies **do not request payment, or other personal information, over the phone or through email.**
-  **2** Utilities **do not ask for gift cards, prepaid cards, or money transfers as forms of payment.**
-  **3** Utilities **will not contact you threatening to disconnect service or ask for immediate payment over the phone or email.**
-  **4** Scammers can fake emails or phone numbers. If you have any questions about your account, **contact the utility directly** using the phone number or email listed on your bill.
-  **5** Have you noticed a scam? **Let your utility know. This can happen to you, your loved ones, and your neighbors.**

Please **share this resource** with **vulnerable populations** as they are likely to be **targeted as victims.**



# Coaching Business to Success

**BILL JOUBERT** | Dixie Business Development Center Executive Director



Bill Joubert helped cut the ribbon when the Dixie Business Development Center opened in 1992, and now he's at the helm to help the center grow. Bill replaced John Ware, who retired as executive director in early September.

Bill's experience includes 20-plus years at the Southeastern Small Business Development Center, where he helped secure more than \$1 billion in capital for businesses, assisted 603 startups and conducted 1,364 training events.

Bill has been on the DBDC board, so when he decided to leave Southeastern, he says he was an "easy recruit" for the job.

"I've been here from the beginning as a board member, so it wasn't hard to convert me," Bill says. "Coming into this incubator, my vision is to bring some new services and make the Dixie board proud of the fact that the incubator is helping more companies."

His background in business development goes back to the neighborhood lawn mowing service he started in high school. Bill went on to start a furniture building business while he was in college in Baton Rouge and was also part-owner of Gulf Fitting and Valve Technologies in the 1990s.

"My claim to fame is creating business models that raise capital and loans," he says. "I've done that most of my career through the center (at Southeastern) or privately. I want to sit people down and help them understand how to get those bank loans and what they need to do to be successful, both in a startup or an expansion."

In his new role at the center, Bill would like to offer short educational seminars that take clients through the conversation of starting a business, expanding a business and how to raise capital. He envisions coaching in person and online. Topics include how to start a business; understanding and using financial statements to grow a company; importing and exporting; and market research.

DBDC's incubator has graduated 57 tenants and has relationships with Southeastern, Louisiana State University, the Louisiana Business Incubation Association and Louisiana Economic Development. It was founded by DEMCO as part of a regional alliance in response to the economic downturn of the oil industry in the 1980s and became one of the state's first business incubators.

An open resource for entrepreneurs, DBDC offers a fee-for-service rental model where companies qualify for space and pay below-market rent until they are ready to graduate or move on. Counseling, shared administrative services, market research, consulting and more are available to tenants.

The current facility in Denham Springs consists of four buildings, including the original DEMCO payment building and old barn.

Additional buildings have been added over the years to house tenants like cabinet maker Jacobs' Custom Woodworks and J. Allan's Home Furniture. Other tenants include C&A Associates, Car Keys Express, Employer Resource Center, Fontenot Insurance Agency, The Glass Guru, Kingdom Insurance LLC, Landmar Security Corp., Mattress Express LLC, Second Chances, Sego Services LLC and Realtor Shaun Ramos.

Dixie's incubator has two open spots, but Bill's mission is to grow and add services to allow more companies to achieve success in the regional market.

"I want to help more companies looking to grow and expand," he says. "If a business is interested, they can contact the center and we will have a conversation to see what their needs are. We want businesses that complement each other, so that we can all help each other grow." ■



## STATEWIDE NEWS

# Melancon Becomes Certified Loss Control Professional

Ricky Melancon, safety and training coordinator for the Association of Louisiana Electric Cooperatives, has completed an intensive electric utility safety and loss control program.

The Certified Loss Control Program is a series of workshops offered by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association in conjunction with the National Utility Training and Safety Education Association. The program is designed to instruct participants in many electric utility industry safety areas.

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, nearly 4 million injuries occur annually in the workplace. One of the goals of a certified loss control professional is to help ensure a

safe work environment for utility workers and the general public.

Ricky is one of only a few electric utility professionals in the country who will receive this certification this year. The program requires participants to complete a rigorous series of seminars and tests, a 30-hour OSHA course and a detailed final course project.

Program participants go through four weeklong sessions designed to challenge and educate them in new, innovative safety techniques. Participants must also maintain their certificate by attending courses every year to stay on top of changes in the industry.

Ricky has been with ALEC for 2.5 years. ■



# NRUCFC Louisiana Director Workshop



Cooperative directors from across the state attended the National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation Louisiana Director Workshop. The event focused on financial statement analysis and how power markets work.

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To learn more or find the local Habitat serving your community, visit [habitat.org](http://habitat.org).



## Meet Cecil Garaudy and Thomas the Tortoise

Cecil Garaudy has been a dedicated part of the DEMCO family for 20 years. His commitment to his job and community service is what truly makes him shine.

His involvement with the Dream Day Foundation, which supports St. Jude Children's Hospital, is a perfect example. Cecil volunteers at the hospital's annual Fishin' Galore event. He and his 20-year-old African sulcata tortoise, Thomas, have become beloved fixtures in the petting zoo, a highlight for the children.

Together they also visit local schools and community events, bringing smiles to all. From making new friends in the community to walking the red carpet at the Baton Rouge Manship Theatre, Cecil's volunteer work with Thomas continues to grow. However, for Cecil, the real reward comes from the smiles and happiness his service brings to others.

Cecil's story is a testament to how DEMCO employees go above and beyond to make a positive impact—on and off the job. ■

## MyDEMCO Registered Member Accounts

Congratulations to these DEMCO members, winners of the random drawing for a \$50 gift card. You will each receive a gift card in the mail! **Victoria J., Cheronda R., Anita W., Kim H.**

# FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS



## Celebrating Community Spirit

At DEMCO, the belief in the power of community drives the hosting of Friday Night Lights, a celebration of high school football that brings together local teams, fans and families. This initiative reflects a commitment to supporting the communities served and highlights what makes the electric cooperative special.

This season features local teams: Amite vs. St. Helena College and Career Academy; Slaughter Community Charter vs. East Feliciana; and St. Amant vs. Denham Springs. Each home team receives a check for its athletic department, reinforcing the co-op's dedication to nurturing young talent and encouraging teamwork.

At each game, visitors at the tailgating tent enjoy camaraderie and game swag, along with opportunities to learn about DEMCO's youth programs and scholarship offerings. DEMCO makes a donation to each home school's athletic programs, further emphasizing support for local initiatives.

What sets DEMCO apart is a deep connection to the community. As a cooperative, ownership belongs to the members, which means every decision prioritizes their needs and interests. DEMCO is not just a utility; it is neighbors working together to enhance the community's well-being.

Friday Night Lights is one way DEMCO stands by its



**ABOVE:** DEMCO game swag was handed out to visitors at the tailgating tent.

**TOP:** DEMCO presents a \$5,000 check to St. Helena College and Career Academy. PHOTOS COURTESY OF DEMCO

commitment to support and uplift the areas served. Events rotate locations each year, ensuring all service areas have the chance to participate and celebrate their local teams. ■

# BACKUP POWER

## Is a battery-powered system right for your home during an outage?

By Scott Flood

We depend on reliable electricity more than ever before—even the briefest service interruption can be incredibly frustrating. It's no wonder many homeowners are taking a closer look at the latest battery-powered systems as backups during an outage.

Battery technology has advanced significantly in recent years, with batteries able to hold more electricity even as they shrink in size and cost. The same innovations that boosted the performance of electric vehicles are being engineered into today's battery-powered backup systems.

As their name implies, battery backup systems such as Tesla's Powerwall are essentially high-capacity batteries that store electricity you can use to power your home in the event of an outage. Some are constantly charged by the power grid, and others rely on solar panels for recharging.

Traditional standby generators use small internal combustion engines fueled by natural gas, propane or diesel. They can be connected to your home's electrical panel and kick on automatically whenever the flow of electricity stops. Assuming you keep them refueled, most can operate for days at a time.

Some standby generators can be noisy, and nearly all produce smelly exhaust containing deadly carbon monoxide gas, so they can't be operated indoors. Large standby generators are typically installed outdoors on a concrete pad, which may detract from your home's curb appeal.

Most home battery backups are smaller than comparable generators. Because they

don't use combustion to generate electricity, there's no danger of carbon monoxide exposure. That makes them safer and more environmentally friendly than generators. Most can be installed in a small space indoors. Battery backups are also significantly quieter.

When a power outage occurs, battery backups start instantly, unlike generators that may take a few moments to spool up and reach operating speed. Battery backups also don't need regular maintenance, such as oil changes or spark plug replacement, and there's no need to store fuel.

Of course, battery-powered generators do present some disadvantages. The amount of power they deliver is limited by the capacity of their batteries. When they're out of electricity, they may need hours of recharging before being used again, so they're not as well-suited for lengthy outages. Energy-hungry appliances, such as air conditioners and water heaters, may drain the batteries' capacity more quickly, so you may want to disconnect them during an outage.

Fortunately, some battery backups are modular, allowing you to add capacity as needed. If you only need a few devices powered during an outage, consider a portable battery-powered system. These small, quiet backups can be used indoors to power smaller appliances, such as your laptop, TV or microwave.

Generally, batteries require long charging times. If an initial outage is quickly followed by another, they may not be able to respond. There are fast-charging systems on the market, but they carry substantially higher price tags.



Even for a basic battery backup system, the upfront cost of a battery backup is more than a standby generator—in some cases, twice as much for comparable performance.

Like those in your mobile phones, batteries in these systems can degrade over time. In five to 10 years, they may need to be swapped out with new batteries, adding to the overall cost. Recharging battery backups with solar panels appeals to many homeowners, but the performance depends on the amount and angle of sunlight on your roof.

So, is a battery-powered backup system right for your home? The answer is different for every homeowner, but whether you're considering a battery system or a traditional standby generator, start by calculating the amount of power you need to keep your home's systems and conveniences operating efficiently. Once you know that,

you can determine which models are up to the task and calculate how long the device you're considering can power your home. If you have a family member whose health depends on devices such as a CPAP machine or supplemental oxygen, be sure to factor that into your decision.

Whether you choose a battery backup or a traditional standby generator, make sure it's designed to protect your home and all your electronics from power surges and other issues that may damage your TVs, computers and other sensitive electronics. That way, you won't have to worry about remaining without them long after an outage has ended. ■



**Battery backup systems, such as Tesla's Powerwall, are high-capacity batteries that store a set amount of electricity that powers your home during an outage.** PHOTO COURTESY OF TESLA



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