Along these LINES

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2026



From Lineman to CEO

25 years in the making, Mark Phillips' career progressed from the ground up **Page 18**

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2026 Youth Tour

Seven Louisiana electric cooperatives selected 19 high school students to represent their communities on the 2026 Electric Cooperative Youth Tour.

The students traveled to Washington, D.C., where they joined more than 2,000 others from across the country. During the trip, they learned about the cooperative business model, explored the nation's capital and met with Capitol Hill staff members to discuss issues affecting their communities. ■





Interested in the 2027 Youth Tour? Contact your local electric cooperative for application details and eligibility requirements.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Louisiana delegates visit the U.S. Capitol during the 2026 Electric Cooperative Youth Tour. Abigail Martin was selected by her peers on the Youth Leadership Council to represent Louisiana at the upcoming National Rural Electric Cooperative Association PowerXchange conference. Delegates stop at Natural Bridge in Virginia on their way to Washington, D.C.



ADOBE STOCK ILLUSTRATION BY KANCHANAP

Happy Holidays from ALEC

ASSOCIATION OF LOUISIANA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES

Wishing you a joyful season and a bright new year!

Space Heater Safety: Warming Your Home Safely

By DeAnna Greene

During the colder months, many homeowners turn to space heaters as a convenient way to keep their living spaces warm and cozy. Space heaters have gained popularity for their ability to provide localized heat. However, it's important to note that most space heaters are not energy efficient. These devices typically consume a significant amount of electricity compared to other heating methods, such as central heating systems.

While space heaters can effectively provide localized warmth, it is essential to understand the potential risks they pose and the necessary safety measures to ensure a safe heating experience.

We prioritize the safety of our members, and we're here to provide guidelines on how to use space heaters safely.

Choose the Right Heater

When selecting a space heater, choose one that meets safety regulations and is appropriate for your specific needs. Look for space heaters with the Underwriters Laboratories label, which ensures the heater has undergone rigorous testing.

Additionally, consider the size of the area you plan to heat and opt for a heater with an automatic shut-off function in case the heater tips over or reaches a specific temperature.

Location

Appropriate placement of your space heater is crucial to avoid potential hazards. Always place the heater on a level, nonflammable surface, at least 3 feet away from combustible materials, such as furniture, curtains or bedding. Never place a space heater on countertops or near water sources. It could start a fire or create an electrical hazard.

Power Up With Caution

Before plugging in your space heater, inspect the electrical cord for any damage or fraying. Ensure the heater is compatible with the electrical outlets in your home. Never plug a space heater into an extension cord or power strip. They can overheat and create a potential fire risk. If needed, have a certified electrician install additional outlets to accommodate your space heater safely.

Temperature Control and Monitoring

Space heaters often come with built-in thermostats and temperature controls. Set the heater to a comfortable temperature and avoid leaving it unattended. Remember to turn off and unplug the heater for added safety when leaving the room or going to sleep.

Additionally, never use a space heater as the primary heating source for an entire home. They are intended for limited, localized use.

Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Detectors

Even when taking proper precautions, accidents can still happen. Have functioning smoke and carbon monoxide detectors placed throughout your home. Consistently check the batteries and ensure the detectors are always in good working condition.

Regular Maintenance and Inspection

To ensure the continued safe use of your space heater, perform regular maintenance and inspections. Clean the heater per the manufacturer's instructions, removing any dust and debris that may pose a fire hazard. In addition, schedule an annual inspection with a qualified technician to verify that all components are functioning correctly and there are no hidden problems.

Educating Children and Family Members

When using space heaters, educating your family members—especially children—about the potential dangers and safety precautions is crucial. Prevent burns or other accidents by teaching them to avoid touching or playing near the heater. Emphasize the importance of unplugging the heater when not in use, and encourage them to alert an adult if they notice any safety concerns.

Safety is our top priority. Following these space heater safety guidelines allows you to enjoy their warmth and comfort without compromising your well-being. Stay warm and safe this winter. ■



ADOBE STOCK PHOTO BY SASHKIN

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Volume 41, Issue 6

Mission
To enhance the quality of life for our members, employees and communities by safely providing reliable and competitively priced energy services.

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DEMCO is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Manager's Report

Mark Phillips
CEO & General Manager



Dear DEMCO Member,

Here at DEMCO, we're proud to recognize the veterans among us, employees who have served our country and continue to serve our members and communities every day.

Their military experience has shaped them into leaders, problem solvers, and teammates who bring discipline, dedication and a strong sense of service to everything they do. Whether they're restoring power, assisting members or supporting operations, their commitment strengthens our cooperative and the communities we call home.

Throughout my career at DEMCO, I've had the opportunity to work alongside many of these men and women, and I'm grateful for the experience and perspective they bring to our team. That gratitude extends to so many who have answered the call. To all veterans, thank you for your service and sacrifice.

In recognition of Veterans Day, DEMCO offices are closed Nov. 11 as we come together as a team to honor the veterans among us. Our employees will spend part of the day in an all-staff meeting and training, and we'll also work together to pack 40,000 meals for the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank. With many families turning to food banks for help, especially during the holiday season, it's an opportunity for our team to help meet a real need in the communities we serve.





Veterans who are a part of DEMCO's team include, at left from left, Matt Reed, Troy Bergeron, Shinell Aultman, Chad Norred and Andy Castello; and, at right from left, Gavin Young and Louis Lee. PHOTOS COURTESY OF DEMCO



Get to Know Your Board Members

In Livingston Parish, community is built by the people who call it home and the ways they show up for one another. Board members Leslie Falks and Dennis Lott know that well. Both are lifelong residents whose experiences in the parish and with the cooperative shape the perspective they bring to the DEMCO Board of Directors.

As a local business owner, Leslie has built strong connections throughout Livingston Parish and across the electric cooperative community. His volunteerism with organizations—including the Dixie Business Development Center and Southwest Power Resources Association—provides opportunities to exchange ideas, learn from others and bring a broader perspective back to DEMCO. His involvement with cooperative organizations at the state and regional levels complements something much closer to home: his desire to help people and remain connected to the community he serves.

Dennis brings a perspective shaped by decades of experience with DEMCO. Before serving on the board, he spent 35 years working for the cooperative, giving him firsthand knowledge of what it takes to provide reliable electric service and serve members every day. Today, as board secretary-treasurer and chair of the Board Governance Committee, Dennis draws on that experience as the board considers the cooperative's finances, policies and future.

For Leslie and Dennis, serving on the DEMCO board is another way to serve the place they have always called home. Their experience, local knowledge and understanding of the cooperative help keep members and their needs at the center of decisions about DEMCO's future. ■



Leslie Falks

- Favorite local spot in your parish: my recliner and Marlie's Restaurant.
- Hidden talent or fun fact: I enjoy cooking jambalaya and pastalaya, but more than anything, I enjoy helping people whenever I can.
- Current favorite book, podcast or TV show: my Bible, songbooks and "Chicago Fire."



Dennis Lott

- Favorite local spot in your parish: at home, where I spend quality time with my wife, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.
- Hidden talent or fun fact: I used to do electrical work on the side, and I can cook a pretty good jambalaya.
- Current favorite book, podcast or TV show: I'm currently enjoying Louis L'Amour novels.

Louisiana PLANNER

All ages can find something new and exciting around every corner of the state. Filled with rich history, abundant natural beauty and diverse events all year, Louisiana has fun options for everyone.

HOUMA

Nov. 7

Southdown Marketplace

Browse hundreds of booths of holiday home decor, jewelry, fine art, gourmet food, metalwork, woodworking and furniture at the historic Southdown Plantation & Museum. All proceeds benefit Terrebonne Historical & Cultural Society, which maintains Southdown Plantation. The one-day event features live music and activities for all ages. Admission is $5. Children 5 and younger are free.

southdownmuseum.org

COVINGTON

Nov. 14-15

Three Rivers Art Festival

More than 200 juried artists from across the country fill five blocks of Columbia Street in Covington's Cultural Arts District for one of the region's most beloved outdoor art events. The free festival features fine art and handcrafted work in all media, a live music tent, art demonstrations, local food and cocktail vendors, and a children's activity area. The event draws more than 50,000 visitors over the two-day weekend.

covingtonthreeriversartfestival.com

DENHAM SPRINGS

Nov. 27 to Dec. 20

Christmas in the Village

Downtown Denham Springs' Antique Village sparkles during this weeks-long holiday celebration, which kicks off with the lighting of Old City Hall. Festivities throughout the season include a Chef's Evening and Wine Tasting, a Kiwanis Christmas Parade and live music. The charming Antique Village streetscape creates a storybook backdrop for holiday shopping and family fun.

cityofdenhamsprings.com

DERIDDER

Dec. 5

Miracle on Washington Street Christmas Festival

Downtown DeRidder transforms into a holiday wonderland for this beloved community tradition. The free, family-friendly event features live music, photos and breakfast with Santa, vendors along Washington Street, carnival games, food contests, and the city's dazzling Christmas light show.

beauregardtourism.com

HOW TO INCLUDE UPCOMING EVENTS

Want to share a family-friendly event with Louisiana readers? Enter details at tinyurl.com/LouisianaPlanner or scan the QR code with your smartphone camera for easy access. Make sure to submit January/February events by Dec. 1 (due to press deadline). Events are published as space allows.

FRANKLINTON

Dec. 4-6

Pioneer Christmas Weekend

Step back in time at the historic Mile Branch Settlement on the Washington Parish Fairgrounds, where log cabins are decorated for an 1800s-style Christmas. Fires crackle in the fireplaces as costumed hosts offer sassafras tea and hot apple cider. The weekend features a Christmas parade, bluegrass and period music on the cabin porches, quilt making and cooking demonstrations, photos with Santa, sweet potato pie and tea cake contests, and a sack race. Admission is free.

washingtonparishtourism.com

HOUMA

Dec. 12 and 19

A Trip to the North Pole

Santa makes two special appearances at Southdown Plantation & Museum this Christmas season. Inside the museum's historic house, visitors take a photo with Santa, decorate cookies with Mrs. Claus, make reindeer treats, design a candy cane and much more. Entry time slots are available every 15 minutes from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., and each group is limited to 10 people with at least one adult. Advance tickets are required. Buy online or by calling 985-851-0154.

southdownmuseum.org

LAKE ARTHUR

Dec. 12

Christmas Winter Wonderland

Lake Arthur's charming Main Street fills with holiday spirit for this annual community celebration. Vendors line the street for Christmas shopping, and a lively gumbo cook-off gets palates in the holiday mood. The evening parade at 6 p.m. winds through downtown, followed by fireworks and a festive boat parade on the lake. Admission is free.

facebook.com/officialtownoflakearthurla

SHREVEPORT

Dec. 19

Rockets Over the Red

Downtown Shreveport rings in the holidays with a spectacular evening of fireworks and a drone light show over the Red River. The festivities include the Mistletoe Street Market with vendors, food trucks, Santa visits, face painting, inflatables and stage performances starting at 11 a.m. A Christmas tree lighting at 6 p.m. and a Texas Street Bridge light show precede the aerial grand finale.

downtownshreveport.com

ADOBE STOCK PHOTO BY MOUSE FAMILY



DEMCO lineman Cole Glascock reads a book from Dolly Parton's Imagination Library with pre-K students at Bains Lower Elementary School in West Feliciana Parish. PHOTO COURTESY OF DEMCO

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

A new book in the mailbox. A favorite story at bedtime. A few quiet minutes reading together. These small moments are gifts that can help a child develop a lifelong love of reading.

Through Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, children from birth to age 5 can receive a free, age-appropriate book in the mail each month, delivered directly to their home at no cost to their family.

We're thankful to Dolly for starting this program more than 30 years ago and proud to help bring her gift of books to children in our communities. Over the past year, more than 32,000 books were mailed to children in DEMCO-funded parishes, giving families more opportunities to read, learn and dream together.

In September, celebrating Dolly's legacy and love for reading, DEMCO linemen visited Bains Lower Elementary School and St. Helena Early Learning Center to read "The Little Engine That Could."

The classroom visits began with DEMCO's "9 to 5" campaign in 2025. After a warm response from schools and children, the read-aloud visits have become an annual part of our September activities supporting the Imagination Library.

A book is a gift children can enjoy again and again. Each new story offers another chance to spark their imagination, build their confidence and inspire big dreams. Give your child a gift that keeps on giving.

It's easy to register. Visit DEMCO.org/Community to learn more and sign up. ■

Statement of Ownership, Management and Circulation

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Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months

a. Total No. Copies (net press run)	93,792
b. Paid Circulation(1) Outside County	93,628
(2) In-County	-0-
(3) Sales Through Dealers	160
(4) Other Classes	0
c. Total Paid Circulation	
(Sum of 15b(1) through 15b(4))	93,788
d. Free or Nominal Rate Distribution	
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e. Total Free or Nominal Rate Distribution	
(Sum of 15d(1) through 15d(4))	-0-
f. Total Distribution (Sum of 15c and 15e)	93,788
g. Copies Not Distributed	7
h. Total (Sum of 15f and 15g)	93,795
i. Percent Paid (15c divided by 15f times 100)	100%

No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date

a. Total No. Copies (net press run)	94,127
b. Paid Circulation	
(1) Outside County	93,960
(2) In-County	-0-
(3) Sales Through Dealers	160
(4) Other Classes	-0-
c. Total Paid Circulation	
(Sum of 15b(1) through 15b(4))	94,120
d. Free or Nominal Rate Distribution	
(1) Outside County	-0-
(2) In-County	-0-
(3) Other Classes	-0-
(4) Outside the Mail	-0-
e. Total Free or Nominal Rate Distribution	
(Sum of 15d(1) through 15d(4))	-0-
f. Total Distribution (Sum of 15c and 15e)	94,120
g. Copies Not Distributed	7
h. Total (Sum of 15f and 15g)	94,127
i. Percent Paid (15c divided by 15f times 100)	100%

I certify the statements made by me are correct and complete.
Aarron Graham, CEO



Houma's Second Chance Cat Cafe allows visitors time to receive feline love—along with a cup of coffee. PHOTOS COURTESY OF LAN TIVET

Take Meow-t for Coffee

Houma's Second Chance Cat Cafe serves up feline love with its coffee

By Cheré Coen

Houma's Lan Tivet always loved pets, so while visiting Asia, she was thrilled to find dog and cat cafes—unique businesses that let guests snuggle with animals and perhaps bring one home. Lan didn't adopt an overseas pet, but as she traveled throughout the United States, she looked for similar cafes. She found many, each unique in their own ways.

"You never go to the same cat cafe twice," Lan says. "The layouts are always a little bit different. Everyone makes it their own. They're all different, but the goal is the same."

Operators hope to entice visitors to adopt a pet and give them forever homes.

Helping Homeless Animals

Terrebonne Parish, like much of the South, has a large stray and feral cat population. It's one of the highest in the nation, according to Louisiana Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Municipal animal shelters are occasionally overrun with animals in need of homes, and rescue organizations struggle to find adopters.

Lan returned home from Asia with the goal to start her own cafe, where craft coffees and pastries are served in one room, and 12 to 14 cats can run free in another. The Second Chance Cat Cafe, at 411 Corporate Drive in Houma, opened on Black Friday last year, meeting demand for caffeine fixes and feline love. Visitors can enjoy one, the other or both, and may bring treats from the cafe side into the separate cat area.

"The cats absolutely love the cold foam," Lan says of the milk foam that sits atop craft coffees. "They love the smell of coffee and sweet stuff."

Visitors can sign up for 50-minute sessions on the Second Chance website, choosing a time at the top of each hour the cafe is open. The fee is $15 per person, and it includes access to cat toys, board games and comfy couches. Cat treats are available for purchase and eagerly appreciated by the four-legged cafe residents.

"We can only allow eight people at a time because we want them to have the best possible experience, and we don't want to overwhelm the cats," Lan says.

Some people visit for the calming atmosphere. Studies show interacting with cats supports positive mental health through the chemical release of serotonin, dopamine and oxytocin.

Walk-ins are accommodated as space allows. If visitors just want to look around and briefly pet the kitties, there's no charge.

Second Chance lists on the wall the cats available for adoption with their ages, histories and other pertinent details. Visitors who fall in love with a cat and want to bring the animal home must fill out adoption forms and complete background checks. Once approved, patrons may pick up their kitties before or after cafe hours to bond without too much distraction, Lan says.

Businesses like Second Chance Cat Cafe that allow for animals to be in public spaces may increase their chances for adoption.



ABOVE: Visitors can sign up for 50-minute sessions when the cafe is open, enjoying time with the cats available for adoption.





ABOVE AND ABOVE LEFT: Owner Lan Tivet has placed more than 100 cats for adoption since she opened the cafe last year.

"The more animals are being in a place with more exposure, it gives them a fair chance to be adopted," Lan says. "It's hard to have a fair chance inside a kennel."

Supporting the Cause

Money raised by cafe admission fees and donations funds medical care, food and supplies for the rescued cats, as well as educational programs to promote responsible pet ownership. The Second Chance Cat Charity also supports trap, neuter and return efforts in Terrebonne Parish, which aim to humanely manage and reduce cat populations in the community.

"That helps with the feline homelessness issue," Lan says. "I don't have stats, but it's definitely working."

Lan receives her felines from eight Louisiana rescue organizations. Her primary source is the Terrebonne Parish Animal Services shelter. If she has space available after accepting cats from the parish shelter, she moves on to the next one on the list, she says. That includes organizations such as Because of Brucey and MeowWOOF Animal Collective in Lafayette, the Ponchatoula Kat Vet and Bridge to Bridge Animal Rescue in St. James Parish.

Lan says it's been quite the undertaking and a lot of work, getting the cafe up and running and maintaining a business that relies on a revolving door of felines.

"It's not easy work, but it's very rewarding, especially when you have a cat coming in who's very nervous and shy, and they turn into the cat they're supposed to be and get adopted," she says. "It makes it all rewarding."

So far, the nonprofit has exceeded its goals.

"Our goal was to get 100 cats adopted by the end of the year," Lan says. "We surpassed that in July."

Second Chance Cat Cafe is planning a fundraising car show in December, and Santa will visit the cafe for photos with the kitties. Lan also plans to offer a 50% adoption discount in December. ■

For more information or to schedule a feline visit, visit secondchancecatcafe.com.



Sweet Dreams

Sleep in Heavenly Peace gives kids in need beds of their own

By Trish Milburn

The pounding of hammers, the whine of circular saws and the chatter of volunteers with a common mission came together all across America the week of Sept. 5-12 to build twin and bunk beds for kids who didn't have a cozy place to sleep.

The eighth annual Bunks Across America event, coordinated by Sleep in Heavenly Peace, was the largest coordinated bed-build event of its kind.

"Our BAA 2026 goal was to bring 15,000 volunteers together in 250 communities/chapter locations to build 12,000 beds for kids in need," says Leigh Ann Dufurrena, social media and public relations manager for SHP.

Humble Beginnings

It may be hard to fathom, but millions of children sleep on couches, floors or other makeshift spaces that aren't beds every night. SHP began because of one such child.

During the 2012 Christmas season in Kimberly, Idaho, SHP founder Luke Mickelson learned a neighbor recently transitioned to a home from living in her car with her young daughter. Once Luke heard the little girl didn't have a bed, he jumped into action and built one in his garage. His longtime friend Jordan Allen, now the CEO of SHP, helped deliver that first bed to the girl, who had gone from sleeping in a car to sleeping in a nest of clothes.

Luke and Jordan knew then they didn't want children sleeping on floors when they could do something about it. In fact, "No Kid Sleeps on the Floor in My Town" became SHP's motto and mission.

"When they posted about the





ABOVE: Volunteers are integral to Sleep in Heavenly Peace's efforts to make sure children have a bed to sleep in. RIGHT AND OPPOSITE PAGE: Bunks Across America event volunteers work to assemble bed frames. PHOTOS COURTESY OF SLEEP IN HEAVENLY PEACE

experience on Facebook and offered to help other families in need of beds for their kids, the response was overwhelming," Leigh Ann says. "SHP was born."

As the operation grew out of Luke's garage, the organization officially registered as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit in 2014.

"SHP grew to about six chapters," Leigh Ann says. "In 2018, we were featured on Mike Rowe's 'Returning the Favor,' an episode that launched SHP into the national spotlight and flooded our early leadership team with new chapter interest.

"SHP grew to 100 chapters seemingly overnight. We now have roughly 420 chapters and are in nearly every state. We're hoping to grow our chapters in more communities to cover 40% of the U.S. population by 2029."

Helping Louisiana's Children

Volunteers run four chapters of SHP in Louisiana, with the two most recent—Lafayette and St. Charles Parish—starting in May of this year.

Lee Jones, president of the Lafayette chapter, got involved with SHP in October 2025 because he was looking to continue giving back to his community after his retirement.

The chapter hit the ground running.

"I have a core team of eight that coordinates build days and delivers beds," Lee says. "We've had 64 volunteers for events since July, with around 300 hours given."

Those volunteer hours have resulted in 28 children receiving new beds, mattresses, pillows and linens as of mid-September.

"Every delivery has a strong emotion attached when you take a minute to realize the impact of what we are doing has on each child," Lee says. "Recently, we delivered beds to a 5-year-old and a 3-year-old. Their father sent me photos after we left. The 5-year-old was all smiles, and the 3-year-old was fast asleep."

The Sulphur SHP chapter has been active since 2019, delivering nearly 2,400 beds over the years. More than 360 of those beds were built this year.

"The chapter was founded by a group of individuals from Henning Memorial United Methodist Church," Chapter President Paul Warner says. "We were looking for a community outreach project and decided that this was a great opportunity."

Since its inception, the Sulphur chapter has had more than 1,000 volunteers take part in bed builds and deliveries. Like Lee, Paul is moved by how meaningful something as simple as a bed can be.

"One that comes to mind is that of a 10-year-old girl crying because she had never had her own bed," Paul says. "Being involved with helping children is one of the high points of my life. Every child needs a bed to sleep in."

The fourth chapter is based in Bossier Parish.

More Than Just a Few ZZZs

Having an actual bed to sleep in means more to growing children than mere comfort. Proper sleep is essential to physical, mental and emotional health.

A systematic panel review by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine published in the Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine in 2016 established that meeting age-specific sleep targets—for example, nine to 12 hours for children ages 6-12—leads to significant improvements in attention, behavior, learning, memory, emotional regulation, quality of life and physical health.

The findings also outlined the importance of sleep to physical and metabolic health. Adequate sleep duration regulates metabolic hormones. Chronic













ABOVE: Bunks Across America Build Day volunteers work together in Lafayette. PHOTO BY KELLY ANDRES/LAFAYETTE SHP CHAPTER **AT LEFT: Young recipients of new beds are all smiles now that they have a comfy and safe place to sleep every night. BOTTOM LEFT: Volunteers report the experience of building beds is rewarding.** PHOTOS COURTESY OF SLEEP IN HEAVENLY PEACE

sleep deprivation in growing children increases the risk of childhood obesity, hypertension and insulin resistance.

Another study, published in The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health in 2022, indicated chronically insufficient sleep during child development correlates with a higher risk of behavioral problems, depression, anxiety, impulsive behavior and injuries.

According to facts compiled on SHP's website from studies done at Harvard University, the National Science Foundation, Auburn University and The Better Sleep Council:

- Poor sleep can lead to hyperactivity issues as early as age 5.
- In teenagers, anxiety and depression are linked to poor sleeping habits 27% and 69% of the time, respectively.
- Kids who don't sleep well don't grow as well as their peers.
- Kids who get good sleep tend to get sick less frequently.
- Plenty of sleep usually translates to better grades, improved emotional health and a healthier home life.
- Sleep is a recharge time for body and mind. If it's not adequate, there are negative physical and mental effects.
- During sleep, cells can repair themselves, leading to better physical health.
- The brain and body release important hormones during a good night's sleep, leading to better physical and emotional health.
- Kids who don't get enough sleep tend to struggle with irritability, forgetfulness and emotional regulation.
- Kids who are sleep-deprived tend to struggle with being overweight or obese.

How It Happens

SHP is now headquartered in Pocatello, Idaho, where the organization has a distribution warehouse for mattresses, tools and other items. Its national team works remotely, and the more than 400 U.S.-based chapters are 100% volunteer-driven at the local level.

SHP has also expanded into Canada with 16 chapters. SHP Canada has its own leadership team and board of directors.

Beds cost around $250 to build and outfit. Each comes with a new mattress, new pillow, new sheets and a comforter or a locally handcrafted quilt.

"That's $500 for a bunk bed," Leigh Ann says. "We use raw lumber to construct the beds using a templated model.

"Chapters rely on community donations, monetary and in-kind and business sponsorships. Businesses/organizations can sponsor a bed-build event for the community or their employees to volunteer and give back."

Chapter funds can also come from grants, donor-advised funds, stock gifts, bequests and more.

"Our founding partner, Lowe's Home Improvement, allocates Community Impact Grants and Bunks Across America funding to several of our chapters, as well as national support through programs like their Round Up for Charity," she says. "Lowe's is a big part of SHP's mission to end child bedlessness and build strong communities."

Since SHP's founding in 2012, volunteers have built nearly 500,000 beds and recently delivered the 400,000th in Cincinnati. As of mid-September 2026, volunteers had built more than 67,000 beds, including 58,000 delivered, and contributed 367,000 hours this year.

Families or guardians of children who need a bed can apply at shpbeds.org/apply. The application process is simple and confidential. To receive a bed, the child must be between the ages of 3 and 17, live

within a chapter's service area, and have a living space that can accommodate a twin-size bed or bunk beds, with enough room for SHP volunteers to install it. The national average application-to-delivery fulfillment time is 30 days.

Recognition for Efforts

The people involved with Sleep in Heavenly Peace don't devote their time and energy to the mission for recognition, but it has come to them nonetheless.

"We're incredibly proud to hold Candid GuideStar's Platinum Seal of Transparency for financial stewardship and transparency," Leigh Ann says. "We also were honored with the 2025 Angel Award from South Carolina's secretary of state, recognized for dedicating 95.1% of total expenditures to charitable programs, far exceeding the Better Business Bureau's recommendation that donors give to charities spending at least 65% of total expenses on charitable programs."

The man who started it all, Luke Mickelson, was named one of CNN's Top 10 Heroes in 2018. At the CNN Heroes Tribute, he shared what all of SHP's efforts come back to.

"If you want real joy, stop looking at yourself and see how you can help someone else," Luke says. "It doesn't matter what race, religion. We don't care. We're humans helping humans, and these are little humans, and they need our help." ■

Get Involved

Chapters welcome volunteers as well as donations of money, twin sheet sets, pillows, comforters, building materials and tools. Business owners can offer a discounted rate on any of these items, which lowers operating costs and allows chapters to build more beds.

Contact a local chapter to volunteer, inquire about its needs or apply for a bed by visiting shpbeds.org/chapters/?state=Louisiana.

To start a local chapter of Sleep in Heavenly Peace, visit shpbeds.org/start.



Recipients often help the build teams assemble their new beds. PHOTO COURTESY OF SLEEP IN HEAVENLY PEACE

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Mark Phillips works as a lineman during his early years with DEMCO.
PHOTOS COURTESY OF DEMCO

From Lineman to CEO

25 years in the making

In 2001, Mark Phillips reported for work at DEMCO as a lineman's helper. Twenty-five years later, he earned the ultimate promotion, becoming the cooperative's chief executive officer and general manager.

The distance between those two roles might seem like a lot, but for Mark, every step along the way helped prepare him for the next.

Born and raised in Baker, Mark grew up around electrical work. His father worked as an electrical and instrumentation contractor, his brother became a lineman and his uncle spent 40 years in the trade.

"Electricity has always been our family's thing," he says.

At a young age, Mark worked for his father at a plant, an experience that helped point him toward the career he would eventually find at DEMCO.

"I fell in love with working outside every day," Mark says. "I fell in love with using my hands. I fell in love with the teamwork and camaraderie."

At DEMCO, he started at the ground level and experienced firsthand the physical demands of building and maintaining the electric system. As his career progressed, he learned more about engineering, planning, substations, operations and technology.

Each role added another layer of understanding and gave him a broader view of how an electric co-op works. He learned DEMCO's system from the ground up, literally.

"I've had the privilege of working alongside incredible people who taught me, challenged me and helped shape the leader I am today," Mark says.

As Mark moved into engineering and operations leadership, his responsibilities grew. He helped lead system improvements, construction planning, substation upgrades, and new technologies aimed at strengthening reliability and preparing DEMCO to serve a growing membership.

Eventually, as chief engineering and operations officer, he was helping plan not only for the current needs of the electric system, but for where the cooperative needed to go next.

Through it all, Mark says, the work was never about one person or one department.

"DEMCO's greatest strength has always been its people," he says. "Our success has never been about one person. It's the result of dedicated employees, a board of directors elected by and accountable to our members, and member-owners who believe in



Mark Phillips welcomes new linemen to DEMCO.

the cooperative way of doing business."

When Mark became CEO and general manager in July, the new role marked another step in a career spent learning the cooperative from many different perspectives.

He knows what it means to work on a crew and restore power. He has worked with engineers planning for the needs of a growing electric system and with employees across DEMCO whose responsibilities may look very different but ultimately serve the same purpose.

That experience gives Mark something no job description can provide: a firsthand appreciation for the work it takes across the cooperative to serve DEMCO members every day.

While becoming CEO represents a significant milestone, Mark doesn't see it as the culmination of his DEMCO career. He sees it as another opportunity to serve.

"This cooperative has given me far more than a career," he says. "It has given me purpose, lifelong friendships and the opportunity to serve the communities we call home." ■

About Mark

Family, church and community are important parts of Mark's life outside of DEMCO. He and his wife, Meghan, a registered nurse, have two sons and share their home with three dachshunds. Mark coached baseball and flag football when his sons were younger and remains involved in their activities. He also serves through his church and has been involved in various community service efforts over the years.

Deck the Halls

With Energy-Efficient Gifts

The holiday season is a time of joy, celebration and gift-giving. As we embrace the festive spirit, let's remember the importance of energy efficiency.

Everyone has experienced the strain of the economy, and we all play a role in the amount of energy we consume. This Christmas, choose gifts that bring the holiday spirit to your loved ones and contribute to reducing energy use.

Here are eight gift ideas that make both the recipient and their electric bill happy.

1 Solar-Powered Gadgets

Solar-powered gadgets are the perfect gift for tech enthusiasts and eco-conscious individuals alike. From solar chargers to power banks to garden lights, these devices harness the power of the sun to provide renewable energy.

Solar chargers are particularly handy for keeping smartphones and other devices functioning while on the go, perfect for those who go camping, hiking or just enjoy being outdoors.

2 Energy-Efficient LED Lights

Among the most iconic decorations of the holiday season are the twinkling lights that adorn our homes and trees. Opting for energy-efficient LED lights instead of fluorescent and incandescent light bulbs is a great way to reduce energy use.

LED lights use less electricity, last longer and produce less heat, making them a safer and more energy-efficient choice.

3 Energy-Efficient Home Appliances

Consider giving the gift of energy-efficient home appliances. Energy Star-appliances, such as refrigerators, washing machines and dishwashers, lower energy use and save money on utility bills. Plus, they often come with awesome features and designs, making them functional and stylish.

4 Smart Thermostats

A smart thermostat is a fantastic gift for anyone looking to make their home more energy efficient. These devices learn the household's temperature preferences and adjust heating and cooling systems accordingly. Thermostats can significantly lower heating and cooling costs and reduce energy waste by minimizing the amount of electricity used to heat and cool a home.

5 DIY Energy-Saving Kits

For those who love hands-on projects, consider creating a DIY energy-saving gift basket. These kits can include weatherstripping, LED bulbs and smart power strips. Encourage your friends and family to embark on energy-saving home improvement projects that are easy to complete and help them reduce their energy consumption and lower their energy bills in the process.

6 Blankets and Warm Clothing

Some of the most heartwarming and energy-efficient gifts we can give this season are blankets and warm clothing. These gifts provide more than just physical warmth—they can help reduce energy use during the colder months. By remaining cozy with warm blankets and attire, your friends and family can stay comfortable while lowering the thermostat.

These gifts can provide an energy-efficient approach to staying cozy this winter while helping to lower the thermostat.

7 Smart Outlets and Switches

Smart outlets and switches are excellent tools for improving home energy efficiency, making them a thoughtful and practical gift. These smart devices allow consumers to remotely control and schedule the power to various appliances and electronic devices, ensuring they are not left on unnecessarily.

Through smartphone apps and voice commands, users can turn off lights, chargers and other devices when not in use, reducing standby power consumption.

By giving smart outlets and switches as Christmas gifts, you empower your loved ones to take control of their energy consumption and lower their electricity bills.

8 Dryer Balls and Drying Racks

Dryer balls and drying racks can significantly boost energy efficiency in the laundry room. When used in the dryer, dryer balls help improve airflow and reduce drying time, cutting down on energy consumption. Additionally, they prevent static cling and soften clothes naturally, eliminating the need for dryer sheets.

Drying racks also offer benefits. They are an alternative to using the dryer and are ideal for delicate items. Gifting both or one of these items is a surefire way to help your friends and family reduce their energy use, while helping them keep their clothes fresh and clean.

This holiday season, embrace the spirit of energy efficiency and give practical gifts. These thoughtful Christmas gifts bring joy to your friends and family, and contribute to saving them money on their electric bills. Give the gift of saving all year long. ■



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Source: Federal Trade Commission

