

THE *Southwestern*

A SOUTHWESTERN ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE MEMBER MAGAZINE

MARCH 2025 • VOLUME 77 • ISSUE 3

SmartHub

ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT
APP LAUNCHES THIS
MONTH

POWER FOR
PROGRESS

RIGHT OF WAY

TREE TIPS

CONE ZONE

CO-OP KITCHEN

READER
CONTEST

The Eyes of the Storm

SOUTHWESTERN CREWS
AID HURRICANE RELIEF



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

04 News & Notes

Find the pot of gold and you may win a \$25 bill credit!

06 SmartHub

SmartHub is an account management app that allows co-op members to pay their bills, view their usage, report outages and receive important account information about their service. This month, SmartHub is coming to you!

08 Power For Progress

As you're reading this, you have less than two weeks to apply to be considered for this year's scholarship program. What are you waiting for?

10 The Eyes of the Storm

Last September, Hurricane Helene left a path of destruction in her wake. Southwestern Electric and countless other cooperatives were there to help pick up the pieces.

16 Right of Way

Right of way maintenance is necessary for the reliability and safety of your service. Find out where we'll be working in 2025.

20 Energy & Efficiency

It may be a small tree, but planting one can be a big decision with even bigger consequences if not done carefully. Fortunately for you, we've got the 411.

22 Health & Safety

Our linemen take a lot of measures to ensure the safety of them and everyone around them. Not all aspects of their safety are in their hands, though.

24 Co-op Kitchen

We all scream for ice cream, but banana split bread? Now that's really something worth crowing about.

26 Current Events

Considering a home remodel, seeing some Native American artifacts or just going "Barefoot in the Park"? Check out this month's events for all that and more.

27 Final Frame

Cooperative convoy.

Southwestern crews—and trucks—get an evening's rest after helping members of Satilla Rural Electric Membership Corporation, Alma, Ga., recover from Hurricane Helene. Cover: Southwestern crews set poles among the pines. Back: Southwestern linemen survey downed lines in the Georgia dusk.

Table of contents photo and back cover image courtesy Southwestern lineman Josiah Roberts.





525 U.S. Route 40, Greenville, IL 62246.
Phone: (800) 637-8667. Office Hours:
Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Visit us on the Web at www.sweci.com.

Board of Directors

Jerry Gaffner, President Greenville
Jared Stine, Vice President..... St. Elmo
Annette Hartlieb, Secretary Vandalia
Sandy Grapperhaus, Treasurer Collinsville
William "Bill" Jennings Alhambra
Brad Lurkins Greenville
Ann Schwarm Loogootee
Marvin Warner Pocahontas
Ted Willman Greenville

CEO

Bobby Williams Chief Executive Officer

The Southwestern

Joe Richardson Editor
e-mail: joe.richardson@sweci.com
Mike Barns Art Director
e-mail: mike.barns@sweci.com
Nathan Grimm Media Specialist
e-mail: nathan.grimm@sweci.com

Satellite Locations:

St. Jacob Office
10031 Ellis Road, St. Jacob, IL 62281

St. Elmo Distribution Center
2117 East 1850 Avenue, St. Elmo, IL 62458

Southwestern Electric Cooperative reserves the right to re-print member comments and correspondence in its cooperative educational and promotional materials.

The Southwestern (USPS 612-500) is published monthly by Southwestern Electric Cooperative, Inc. Periodical postage paid at Greenville, IL. Subscriptions cost \$10.67 per year. Comments or questions regarding material in this publication may be mailed to Joe Richardson, editor of The Southwestern, c/o Southwestern Electric Cooperative, Inc., 525 US Route 40, Greenville, IL 62246, or e-mailed to joe.richardson@sweci.com.

Postmaster: Send address corrections to The Southwestern, 525 U.S. Route 40, Greenville, IL 62246.

Apple and the Apple logo are trademarks of Apple Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. App Store is a service mark of Apple Inc. Android, Google Play and the Google Play logo are trademarks of Google Inc.

Editor's Note: We held this month's Out & About and Who~What~Where columns to make room for our hurricane feature, Power for Progress scholarship reminder, and SmartHub information. Out & About and Who~What~Where will return next month. Thanks for your patience!

Reader Contest

We've hidden an image of a pot of gold in your magazine. Your job is to find it. The actual image may be larger or smaller than what you see below. We may change the color or reverse or alter the image we've hidden to make the contest more challenging. If you find the pot of gold, email us or send a postcard with your name, address, phone number, and the page number where you found the image. Please email us at thesouthwestern@sweci.com or send your postcard to The Southwestern Magazine, Southwestern Electric Cooperative, 525 US Route 40, Greenville, IL 62246.

Entries must be postmarked or in our thesouthwestern@sweci.com inbox by the first day of



the month following the month of publication. For our March contest, we'll need your entries in our inbox or postmarked by April 1, 2025.

We'll choose one winner in a random drawing. Our winner will receive a \$25 credit on an upcoming electric bill. We'll publish the name of this month's contest winner in the May issue of The Southwestern.

JANUARY WINNER

Congratulations to Joe Dutchik of Maryville. As the winner of our January Hide & Seek contest drawing, Joe will receive a \$25 credit on an upcoming electric bill. Thank you to everyone who participated in our January contest. This month's image appears at left. You'll find Hide & Seek rules below.

RULES TO PLAY BY

- One entry per membership per month.
- A membership can only win once per calendar year.
- No phone calls, texts, social media posts, walk-in traffic, carrier pigeons, singing telegrams or other clever means of communication that may occur to you.
- Please respond *only* by emailing us at thesouthwestern@sweci.com or by sending a postcard to The Southwestern Magazine, Southwestern Electric Cooperative, 525 US Route 40, Greenville, IL 62246.
- Entries submitted by other methods will be disqualified.
- Entries emailed to other Southwestern Electric email addresses will be disqualified, deleted, then disqualified again, just to be safe.
- Entries mailed to other departments or included with other correspondence will likely never find their way to the editor. If they do, they'll be disqualified. Also, he'll add you to his list of people who can't follow instructions. It's a long (and growing) list and not one you care to be part of.
- March contest entries must be in our inbox or postmarked by April 1.
- We'll never hide the image on the front or back cover or on the page where we list the rules.

ON THE COVER

In September 2024, Southwestern Electric linemen joined crews from 17 states to help the victims of Hurricane Helene, including Satilla Rural Electric Membership Corporation in Alma, Ga. Our story begins on page 10.



Cover photo courtesy Southwestern lineman James Rickermann.

CO-OP REMINDERS

March 10 Payment processing systems will be unavailable from midnight to 4 a.m., while we perform system maintenance. No payments will be processed during this time. We will resume processing payments at 4:01 a.m.



FIND US ON SOCIAL MEDIA



For the latest news and notes, follow us on Facebook and x (formerly Twitter). You'll find us at facebook.com/SWECI and x.com/sweci. Search for Southwestern Electric on YouTube and Instagram. You can listen to our podcast, WireSide Chat, on Apple Music, Spotify, Audible and anywhere podcasts are found.

Illinois Electric Co-op Trade Association Offers \$2,000 Lineworker Scholarship

The Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives (AIEC), Southwestern's statewide trade association, is encouraging students of Southwestern Electric Cooperative members to apply for the LaVern and Nola McEntire Memorial Lineworker's Scholarship. The \$2,000 scholarship will help pay for costs to attend the lineworker's school conducted by the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives (AIEC) in conjunction with Lincoln Land Community College, Springfield, Ill.

To be eligible for the LaVern and Nola McEntire Memorial Lineworker's Scholarship, a student must be related to an electric cooperative employee or

director in Illinois, the son or daughter of an electric cooperative member in Illinois, currently be enrolled in the Lincoln Land lineworker's school, or have served or be serving in the U.S. armed forces or National Guard.

The scholarship is awarded based on an essay, a biographical statement, references, and a recommendation. Applications must be submitted online or postmarked by April 30, 2025.

You'll find full eligibility requirements and application instructions for the LaVern and Nola McEntire Memorial Lineworker's Scholarship at <https://aiec.coop/lavern-and-nola-lineworkers-scholarship>.



Co-op Offers Rebates for High Efficiency Heat Pumps, Electric Water Heaters, Smart Thermostats



Our rebate program will help you save money on the replacement or new installation of air source heat pumps, geothermal systems, electric water heaters and smart thermostats.

Members are eligible for one rebate per category per year. All rebates will be applied as a bill credit upon receiving the completed rebate application and proof of purchase.

Rebate forms are available on our website at sweci.com. You can email your completed application and proof of purchase to julie.lowe@sweci.com, or mail it to: Julie Lowe, 525 US Route 40, Greenville, IL 62246. You're also welcome to drop off your materials at our Greenville office.



HAVE QUESTIONS?

Call Julie Lowe at (800) 637-8667
or email her at julie.lowe@sweci.com.

We're moving to a new billing and outage notification system

Here's what it means to you

On March 3, Southwestern Electric is moving to a new billing and outage notification system. Members who store payment information in our system will need to re-register in our new payment portal. You can re-register beginning March 3.

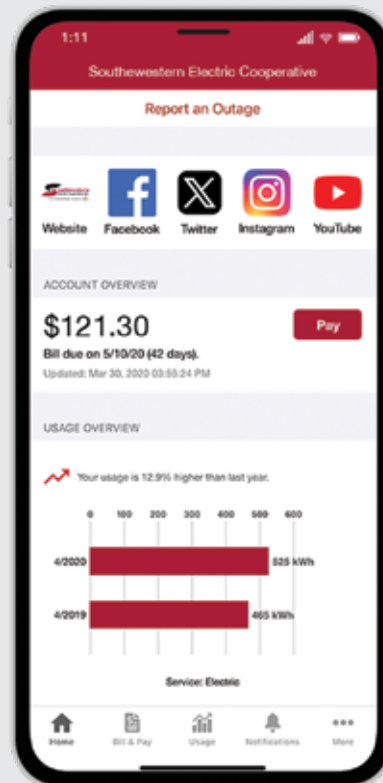
We'll post links to the registration page at sweci.com/smarthub. The links will direct you to SmartHub, our new payment portal.

SmartHub is a useful tool for every co-op member. It offers payment options, outage notifications and updates, real-time energy usage

information, and other account management tools.

SmartHub is free and easy to use. Beginning March 3, here's how you'll register for SmartHub and re-register your payment information:

- Go to sweci.com/smarthub. Click the SmartHub link.
- Enter your account number, your last name or the name of your business, and your email address.
- If you pay your bill using information stored on our system, re-register your payment information. You're done!



SmartHub helps you manage your account

Our SmartHub web portal and mobile app will keep you informed and help you save time and money.

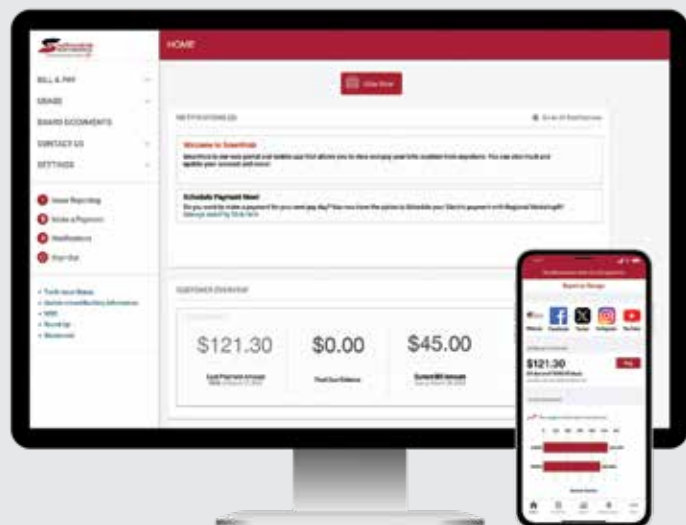
Billing & Payments: No more waiting for your bill to arrive in the mail. Access your bill anytime, anywhere. Save time with easy payment options to avoid late fees and service interruptions.

Alerts & Notifications: Stay informed on important account events via email or text messages. Receive the information you need to make informed decisions about your account.

Paperless Billing: Save some time and a tree when you activate SmartHub paperless billing, an eco-friendly way to instantly access your bill.

Usage Monitoring: Worrying about usage or surprising bill amounts can be stressful. When you know what devices are using the most energy, you can make money-saving decisions about your account.

Outage Reporting: Need to report a power outage? SmartHub is the fastest and easiest way to let us know when your power goes out. When widespread storms knock out power to an entire region, phone lines can become overloaded. With SmartHub, you can avoid busy signals and report outages with a few simple taps on your mobile device.



Members Billed in Cycle 2

March 3 Payment Date Adjusted to March 10

Our SmartHub go-live date is March 3 and for members billed in Cycle 2, March 3 is also your bill payment due date. Between work and family and life in general, you may not have an opportunity to register in SmartHub or make a payment on March 3. We completely understand that, and we're adjusting your payment due date to March 10. Your payment due date will return to its original day in April — April 3. If you have any questions, please call us at (800) 637-8667.

SmartHub Alternatives

What if I'm not interested in SmartHub?

You don't have to be. The SmartHub mobile app is a great tool for managing your account, paying your bill, and receiving outage notifications. You can do a lot of the same things with the SmartHub web portal, but it's much harder to carry around in your pocket.

Both versions of SmartHub are free.

But not all tools are for all people. Maybe apps aren't for you.

You can easily pay your bill by phone. Call us at 800-637-8667 and select Option 2.

And we gladly accept cash and checks. You can send payments via the postal service, leave them in our after-hours drop boxes, or you can stop by our office at 525 US Route 40 in Greenville, Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

We'll be happy to see you.



SIGN IN TO SMARTHUB

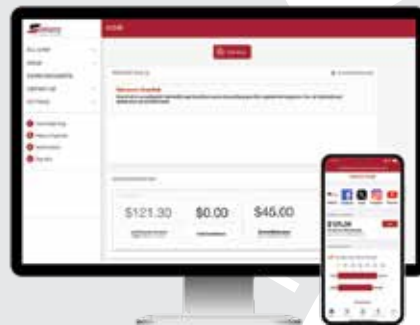
Manage your Southwestern Electric account anytime, anywhere. Visit sweci.com/smarthub for details.

Sign in to SmartHub beginning March 3!

It's an eco-friendly way to manage your account and control your energy bill.

- Set It & Forget It: Use **Auto Pay** to automatically pay your bill on the due date.
- Stay Informed: Get the information you need to make the best decisions about your account.
- Monitor Usage: Track your energy use and find ways to lower your bill.

Members who currently store payment information in our system need to re-register in SmartHub. You can re-register beginning Monday, March 3.



(800) 637-8667

Learn more about SmartHub on our social media channels and at sweci.com.

FINAL REMINDER SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS DUE MARCH 14

Co-op to Award \$16,800 in Academic Assistance

Since 1995, Southwestern Electric Cooperative's Power For Progress Scholarship Program has provided more than \$300,000 in academic assistance to students pursuing a college degree or vocational school certificate. The tradition continues this year with Southwestern's pledge to award 12 \$1,200 Southwestern Electric Scholarships, one \$1,200 Alan G. Libbra Memorial Scholarship and one \$1,200 Richard Gusewelle Memorial Scholarship to students in 2025.

Scholarship recipients can apply the funding to tuition at any accredited university, college or technical school in the U.S.

Scholarship applications may be downloaded from Southwestern Electric's website at sweci.com (the QR code at right will take you there). You may also request an application by calling Susan File at (800) 637-8667.

Separate applications will be provided for high school seniors graduating in 2025 and students who graduated from high school in previous years.

The completed application and supplemental materials — including a cover letter, academic transcripts and attendance records — must be delivered to Southwestern Electric's headquarters (525 U.S. Route 40 in Greenville), in a single envelope, by 4:30 p.m. on **Friday, March 14, 2025**.

**For more information,
contact Susan File
at susan.file@sweci.com
or 800-637-8667.**





ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- 1) The applicant (or the applicant's parent/legal guardian) must be an active member of Southwestern Electric Cooperative. Southwestern Electric directors, employees, and their immediate families are not eligible.
- 2) The applicant must meet all academic requirements for admission to an accredited university, college or technical school, and be admitted to that institution as a full-time student in the fall of 2025.
- 3) The entire application must be completed in full, and received with the appropriate supplementary materials, in advance of the application deadline, March 14, 2025.



**POWER
FOR
PROGRESS**



The Eyes of the Storm

SOUTHWESTERN ELECTRIC LINEMEN RECALL HARROWING RELIEF EXPERIENCE IN HURRICANE HELENE'S WAKE

Story by Nathan Grimm | Photos by Leo Dublo, James Rickermann, Josiah Roberts and Andy Wessel

Drive down a rural road in southern Georgia and you'll see longleaf pines.

You'd be hard-pressed to miss them, in fact. Many of the roads in Bacon County, Georgia, and the surrounding areas are lined with the thin, largely bare trees, reaching toward the sky as they tower over everything around them.

Timber is big business in Georgia. In 2022, the state's forest industry generated \$42 billion in revenue, according to the U.S. Forest Service. It's one of the leading industries in the state, especially

for rural communities such as Alma, the county seat of Bacon County.

So, when Hurricane Helene made landfall in the Gulf Coast on September 26 at 140 miles per hour and ripped through Georgia shortly thereafter, the devastation was tangible. According to a report from the Georgia Forestry Commission, 1.47 million acres of forestland were impacted by the hurricane's high winds, totaling more than \$1.28 billion in timber value.

When those trees fell, they fell on, among other things, rural power lines. One of the largest electric cooperatives

in Georgia – and one of the largest electric cooperatives east of the Mississippi River – is Satilla Rural Electric Membership Corporation, which has 59,000 members spread across nine counties in southern Georgia. Satilla manages more than 7,000 miles of power lines and 120,000 primary poles within its service area.

In the blink of an eye, those Georgia pines – and much of Satilla's infrastructure – came crashing down.

"Those pines have never seen any winds like that for a sustained amount of time," said Satilla REMC lineman



PHOTO COURTESY THE SATILLA RURAL ELECTRIC MEMBERSHIP CORPORATION



Chuck Waters. “All I can tell you is that it decimated our system.”

Some 768 miles northwest of Alma, Southwestern Electric Cooperative linemen were aware of the impending storm, too.

Cooperatives adhere to a set of seven core principles and values that guide their decisions. Among them is the idea of cooperation among cooperatives, that by working together cooperatives can improve services, bolster local economies, and deal more effectively with social and community needs.

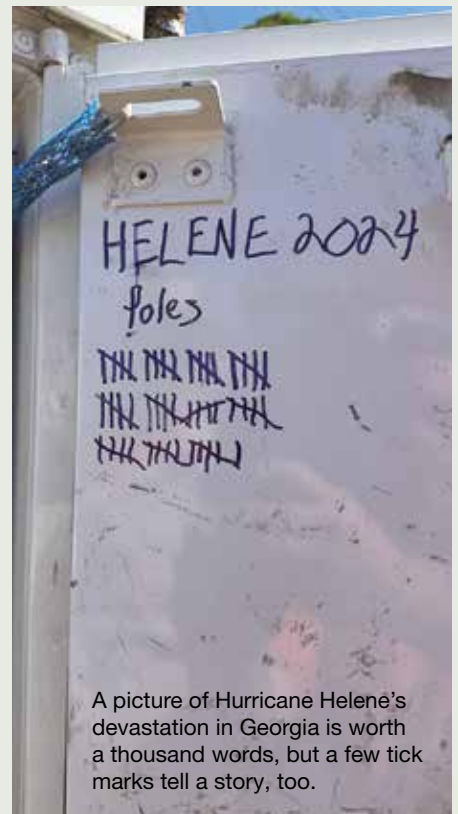
When Southwestern Electric CEO Bobby Williams was asked whether his cooperative would be able to provide assistance down south, his first concern was that the cooperative’s members in

southwestern Illinois wouldn’t suffer as a result. Ensured the workload was manageable and there were no threatening storms headed our way, Williams agreed to lend a hand.

“In a time of need, if a cooperative is asking for help, I feel it is a cooperative’s duty to help,” Williams said. “If we were in a state where we needed help, I’d hope people would take the call and come and help us.”

The next step was asking for volunteers. The task wasn’t enviable – leaving their families and lives behind to drive close to a thousand miles from home and help a community other than their own get back on its feet – but for Southwestern Electric construction foreman Andy Wessel and 11 of his peers, it

Continued on next page ►



A picture of Hurricane Helene’s devastation in Georgia is worth a thousand words, but a few tick marks tell a story, too.

“Those pines have never seen any winds like that for a sustained amount of time. All I can tell you is that it decimated our system.” —Chuck Waters, Satilla REMC lineman

► *Continued from page 11*
was a call worth answering.

“The first thought is, ‘What’s going on at home? Is there something going on that I can’t step away from?’” Wessel said. “At the end of the day, though, you go down there to help people get power back on, because our world runs on power.”

Satilla CEO Romeo A. Reyes called the events of September 27 “one of the most frightening things I have experienced in my lifetime.”

“Without exception, this is the most significant storm that I have been associated with over my 39-year career with Satilla,” Reyes said in a Facebook post on September 28.

Three days earlier, six Southwestern Electric linemen – Brian Bast, Luke Cordes, Ethan Fulk, Dustin Kemp, Tyler Meseke and Josiah Roberts – departed Southwestern’s Greenville, Illinois headquarters due southeast. The crews drove for most of two days and arrived at their hotel in Douglas, Georgia, just 25 miles west of Alma, late in the evening on Thursday, September 27.

A few hours later, Helene arrived as well.

“I don’t think anyone was really sleeping a whole lot,” Southwestern Electric Journeyman Lineman Dustin Kemp said.

“One of the most frightening things I have experienced in my lifetime.”

—Romeo A. Reyes, Satilla CEO

“They were saying they were seeing wind speeds anywhere from 100 to 105 miles per hour. We could feel the building shifting in the middle of the night as the hurricane came over the top of us.

“In the middle of the night, the doors were literally blown off our hotel. Just in our short drive from our hotel to the Satilla shop the next morning, we saw countless trees broken, snapped off, power poles in the middle of the road. Some of the worst damage you can possibly imagine, just in our short drive. Obviously, we came to find out that this is basically the worst storm these folks had ever seen in their lifetime.

“I can honestly say I’ve never seen damage anywhere close.”

In the aftermath, approximately 57,500 of Satilla’s 59,000 members were without power. Only seven of its 29 substations were energized. Getting the infrastructure back in place was the first priority of those on the ground, a daunting undertaking with so much to be done.

In his Facebook post in the wake of the storm, Reyes relayed his experience but quickly turned his attention to the task ahead.

“Nevertheless, now that Helene has moved on,” he said, “it is time to go to work.”

Just as wood and wire are no match for a Category 2 hurricane, rural electric cooperatives are not designed to accommodate the manpower required for such a cleanup effort.

In the days following the storm, crews from electric cooperatives on all sides of Georgia descended upon Alma to do their part. Electric cooperatives from

“In the middle of the night, the doors were literally blown off our hotel.”

—Dustin Kemp, Journeyman Lineman

seven states felt the effects of Hurricane Helene’s landfall, and another 17 states provided mutual assistance in the wake of the devastation. More than 100 lineworkers representing 21 Illinois electric cooperatives assisted with recovery efforts in Georgia and Kentucky alone.

By mid-October, more than 2,000 linemen, maintenance men, tree trimmers and other laborers had boots on the ground in Satilla’s service area. As of the 2020 census, the entire city of Alma had a population of only 3,433.

To accommodate the crush of lineworkers, huge tents – informally called “man camps” – served as housing. Tractor trailers were set up nearby for showers. Cots served as beds. It wasn’t ideal, but it was functional.

An alternative for many of the transplants came in the form of southern hospitality. Despite their circumstances, many residents within Satilla’s service area opened their doors to the visitors, offering them a place to sleep or a hot shower. It was a small kindness that was anything but small for those volunteers.

“These folks, as you can imagine, had nothing in some cases. They lost everything,” Kemp said. “For them to show us as much hospitality as they did, it was eye-opening to say the least.”

Continued on page 14 ►



Brian Bast
Journeyman
Lineman



Luke Cordes
Journeyman
Lineman



Leo Dublo
Maintenance
Foreman



Adam French
Journeyman
Lineman



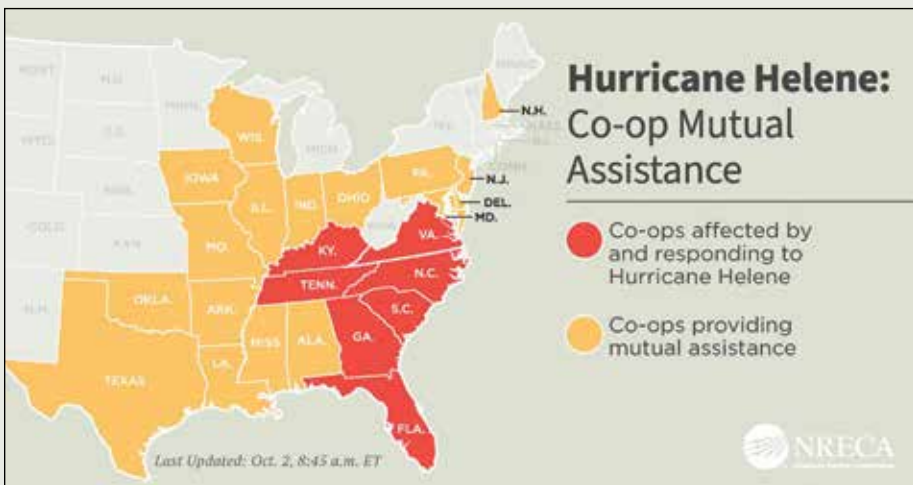
Ethan Fulk
Journeyman
Lineman



DJ Haarmann
Construction
Foreman



Top left: Southwestern Electric journeymen linemen, from left, Josiah Roberts, Tyler Meseke, Ethan Fulk, Dustin Kemp Brian Bast, and Luke Cordes pose for a picture before departing for Alma, Georgia, in late September. Left: Workers from various electric cooperatives, including Southwestern Electric employees, from right, construction foreman Jimmy Revisky, journeyman lineman Adam French, journeyman lineman James Rickermann, construction foreman DJ Haarmann, maintenance foreman Leo Dublo and construction foreman Andy Wessel, gather in the shed of a Satilla REMC employee for a family-style barbecue. Bottom left: An NRECA infographic details the extent of the mutual assistance provided by electric cooperatives in Hurricane Helene's wake. Below: A line crew repairs a stretch of Satilla's more than 7,000 miles of power lines.



Dustin Kemp
Journeyman
Lineman



Tyler Meseke
Journeyman
Lineman



Jimmy Revisky
Construction
Foreman



James Rickermann
Journeyman
Lineman



Josiah Roberts
Journeyman
Lineman



Andy Wessel
Construction
Foreman

► *Continued from page 12*

That included Waters, who served as a “bird dog” for the second wave of Southwestern Electric crews – after 16 days of working long hours in unfavorable conditions, the group of Brian Bast, Luke Cordes, Ethan Fulk, Dustin Kemp, Tyler Meseke and Josiah Roberts made their way back to Greenville, and a second group consisting of linemen Adam French and James Rickermann, construction foremen Andy Wessel, Jimmy Revisky and DJ Haarmann, and maintenance foreman Leo Dublo took their place in Alma to continue with the restoration efforts. Shortly after their arrival, Waters, who lost a few shingles off his roof and had the woods behind his house destroyed but otherwise escaped Helene’s wrath relatively unscathed, invited the Southwestern crew to stay in a pole barn on his property. His wife, Jennifer Waters, did the guys’ laundry, and the family invited the crew to dinner at a Mexican restaurant one night, treating them like family despite being a thousand miles from home.

“‘If you were out working with them, I’d want them to take care of you,’” Waters’ wife told him. “She’s just one of those ladies.”

That hospitality is one of the biggest things the group took away from the experience.

“It’s amazing to hear those stories,” Williams said in his Greenville office. “People in their time of need putting things aside to help the guys helping them. It’s great.”

By the time the second wave departed for home – real home, this time – in late October, Satilla was down to fewer than 100 members still without power.

That’s not to say the work was done, though, then or even now. Getting the lights back on quickly and safely was the highest priority, but Waters said that the months that followed have been filled with ensuring the system is wired correctly and to Satilla’s standards.

That’s not even mentioning the physical destruction of the region. A preliminary damage assessment estimated that Helene’s impact will cost

“In a time of need, if a cooperative is asking for help, I feel it is a cooperative’s duty to help.”

—Bobby Williams, *Southwestern Electric CEO*

Georgia’s economy at least \$5.5 billion in agricultural and timber losses, with major industries like cotton, chickens and pecans among the hardest hit.

“We have a lot of damage still,” Waters said in late January.

Arduous as it was at times, the journey is one that sticks with the Southwestern Electric crew.

“I pulled up to this one guy’s yard, and

his whole yard was wiped out,” Dublo recalled. “They hadn’t had a storm like this down there maybe ever, so you’d see a lot of huge trees down. The place was devastated. You could just barely see the house sticking out.

“He came running out and I thought, ‘Maybe I ran over his septic tank or something, he’s trying to stop me.’ No – he got down on his knees and raised his hands as if to say, ‘Thank you for showing up here.’ Everybody was very appreciative.”

“We didn’t run across anybody that was mad or not happy to see us,” Wessel added. “Even in some areas that you could tell were a little less fortunate, they still wanted to give you something as a token of appreciation for getting their power back on. Because that’s one of the first steps of them getting their life back together is to be able to go into their house and be able to take a hot shower, turn a light on and cook a meal. Without power, you can’t do any of that.”

“It’s a great experience to be able to go and do something like that, represent Southwestern,” Kemp summarized. “At the same time, you know those people are in desperate need of help. Knowing that we’re able to go down there and help as best we can is definitely something that’s a motivator to go down there and get those work experiences that you may never get in your working career for the rest of your life.” **S**



Scenes captured by Southwestern Electric workers in Georgia show the destruction – and the recovery efforts – in the wake of a Category 2 hurricane.



PHOTO COURTESY SATILLA RURAL ELECTRIC MEMBERSHIP CORPORATION

Reliable Rights of Way

LINE CLEARANCE PROMOTES SAFETY & RELIABILITY

Every now and then, Southwestern Electric receives calls or letters from members regarding right of way maintenance work. More often than not, those members are reaching out to compliment our crews on a job well done.

But not always.

On occasion, we hear from a member who's returned home after a long day to find co-op crews have cleared right of way on their property, and the extent of the work has surprised them.

That member may have seen tree trimming — select branches being cleared from lines to eliminate blinks — but he or she wasn't familiar with the corridor clearing our crews perform when they're cutting back foliage for right of way maintenance.

Tree trimming is the work most of you are familiar with. You've probably seen our crews making small, select cuts to specific limbs that have grown near or into our lines. Our objective with tree trimming is to resolve a blink or reliability issue that's confined to a well-defined area.

On pages 18-19, you'll find a map that outlines our right of way clearance plan for 2025. The circuits we highlighted on our map are scheduled for right of way maintenance. In this work, we clear a path that spans about 20 feet on either side of the power lines.

With right of way maintenance, our objectives are to ensure and promote member safety, system integrity, and long-term power reliability.

The work demands considerable time and resources. We currently clear right of way in an area once every five years. So if you're new to Southwestern Electric, you may not have noticed right of way maintenance in your area.

The change in landscape is dramatic, particularly in an overgrown area. But the close-cropped look is short-lived. You'll see significant and rapid change in spring and summer, when the open corridors allow grasses to take root and the canopy reaches into the edges of the corridor we cleared.

We understand the pride and affection you have for your timber and green spaces. We feel that way ourselves. As our operations and engineering teams will tell you, while trees are a tremendous asset, they're also a leading cause of outages. Consequently, sound forestry

With right of way maintenance, our objectives are to ensure and promote member safety, system integrity, and long-term power reliability.

practices are vital to keeping your family cool in the summer and warm in the winter months.

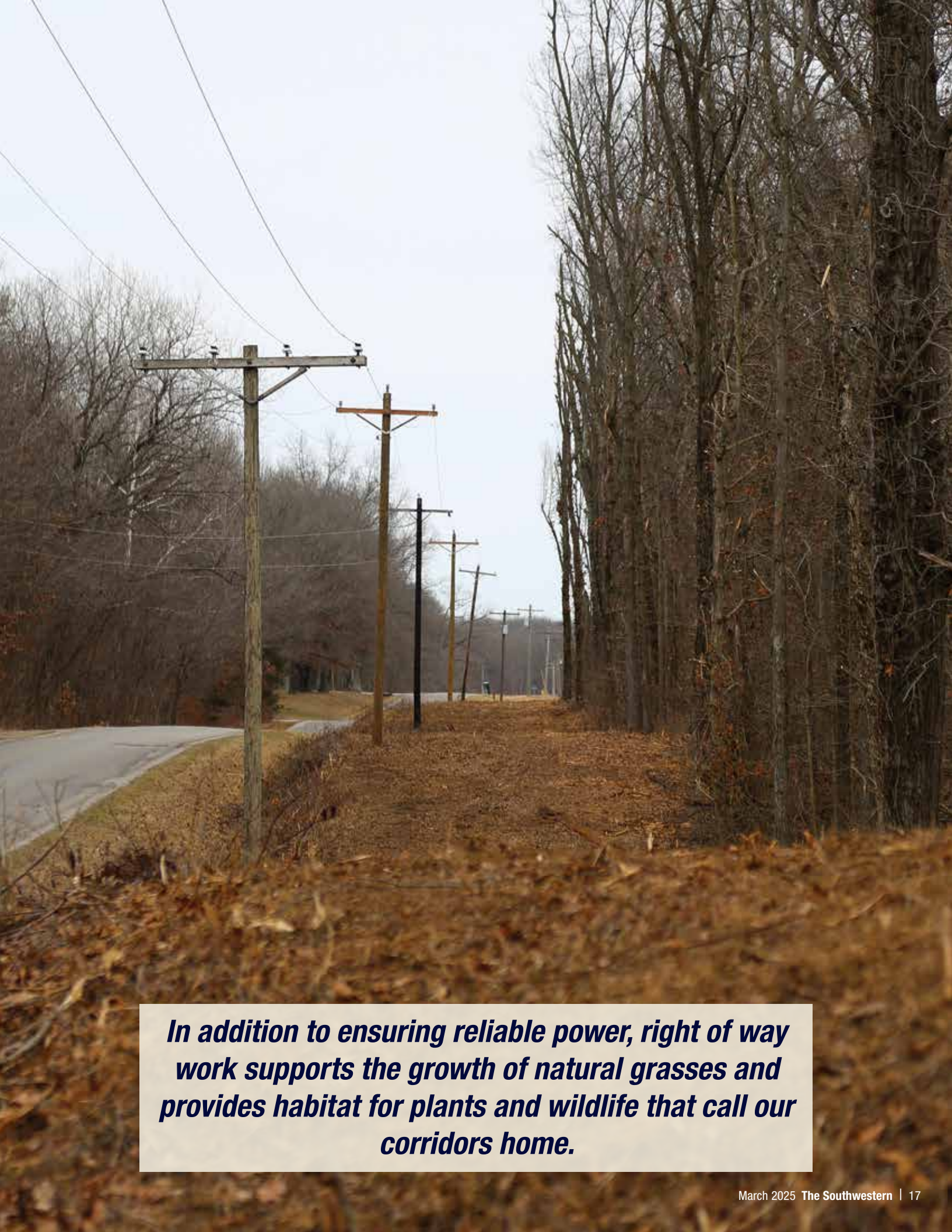
The co-op's right of way maintenance program has significantly reduced the number of outages you experience. It's also offered our crews better access to power lines, improving our power restoration times after storms.

In more remote areas, where lines travel through field and timber far from roads, it's a challenge for linemen to access our infrastructure and repair damage. So it's particularly vital that we do all we can to promote line integrity near homes in areas like this.

In the past, some members have requested we not clear right of way on their property. We simply can't honor that request without compromising the lines that serve them, their neighbors, and in some cases, many other members.

We presently notify members by phone before we begin work on a circuit. We'd prefer to stop by and speak with each of you personally before we begin maintenance in your area. These are expensive endeavors, and we're mindful of how we use the resources you entrust to us. As we review our budget for right of way maintenance, we assess the cost and opportunities included in dedicating an employee to meeting each member before right of way work begins.

Ultimately, we hope to create conditions that support growth of natural grasses in our rights of way, and provide habitat for plants and wildlife that call these corridors home.



In addition to ensuring reliable power, right of way work supports the growth of natural grasses and provides habitat for plants and wildlife that call our corridors home.

MAINTENANCE MAP

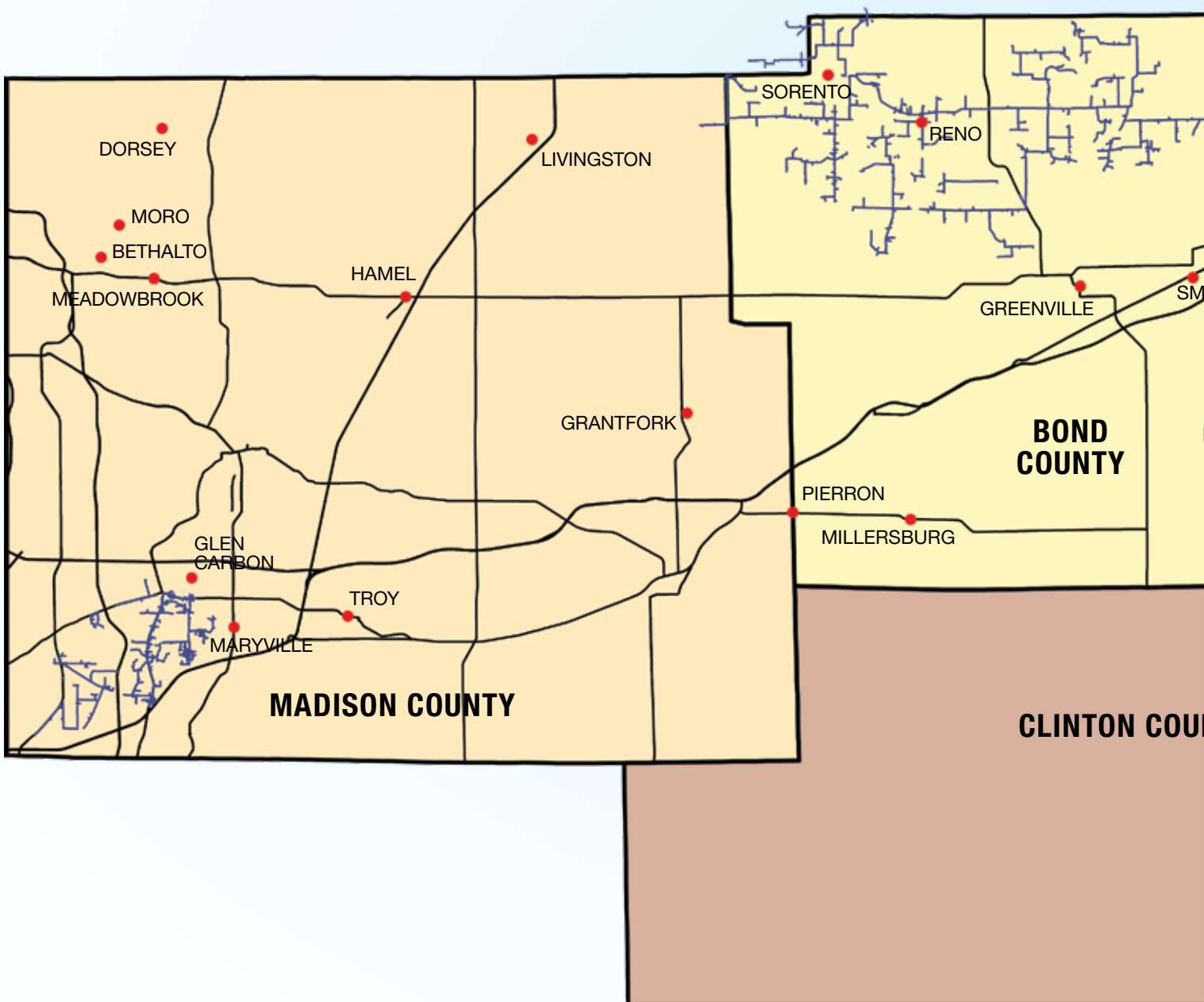
2025 RIGHTS OF WAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

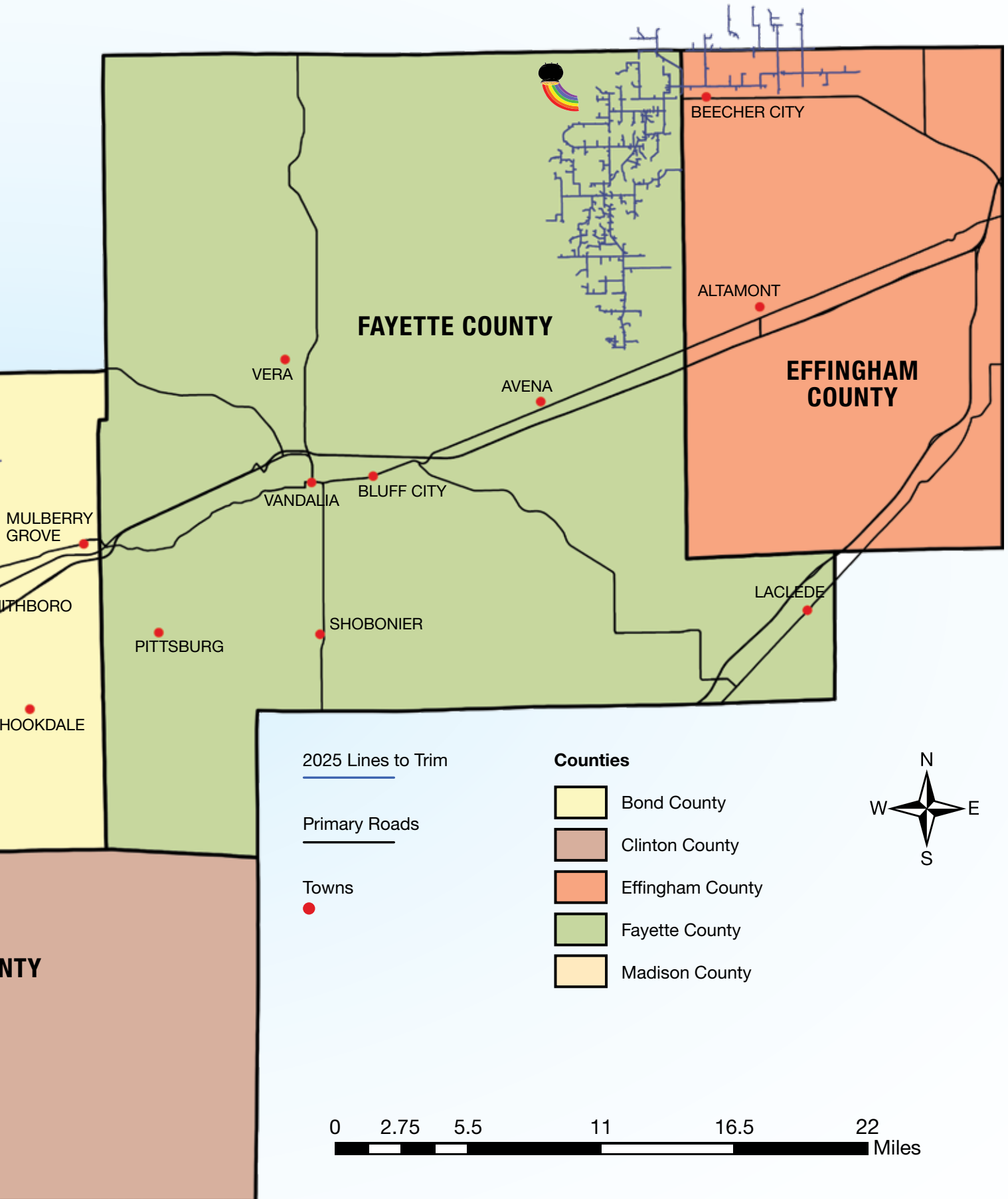
The areas highlighted in blue are scheduled for right of way maintenance in the coming months. When performing right of way maintenance, our crews clear a path that spans about 20 feet on either side of the power lines.

Southwestern's right of way maintenance program has significantly reduced the number of outages you experience. It's also offered our crews better access to power lines, improving our power restoration times after storms.

You can read more about our right of way maintenance work on page 16.

We'll call before we begin right of way maintenance in your area.





Sowing Seeds

THE MOST IMPORTANT ITEM IN YOUR TREE PLANTING TOOL KIT ISN'T A SHOVEL OR SEEDLING—IT'S A PLAN.

With spring in bloom, many of us are eyeing our lawns, lots and acreage, and giving serious consideration to landscaping projects that were nothing more than notions a few weeks ago. If tree planting made it to your landscaping list, take time now to prepare a plan.

A little research and forethought addressing canopy size and shape, growth rates, and your tree's position relative to overhead and underground utilities, can ensure you receive the maximum benefit from the seeds or saplings you sow. Here are 10 items you'll want to consider as

you build your planting plan.

Climate. The National Arbor Day Foundation offers a Hardiness Zone Map (<https://www.arborday.org/trees>) to help you select trees well suited to our area. Southwestern Electric Cooperative's service territory is located in Hardiness Zones 6 and 7. Visit the National Arbor Day Foundation's web site at ArborDay.org for a catalog of trees that typically thrive in our zone.

Height & Canopy. Will the tree crowd your home, outbuildings, utility lines or other trees when it's fully grown?

Ever Green? Is the tree deciduous or coniferous? Will it lose its leaves in the winter?

Thick & Thin. A columnar tree will grow in less space. Round and V-shaped species provide more shade.

Life Span. How long will it take your tree to reach maturity? Slow growing species typically live longer than faster growing trees.


Bearing Fruit. It's satisfying to pluck an apple or pear from a tree you planted yourself. But fruit trees attract insects and can make a mess of your yard. Weigh the pros and cons of contending with bugs and lawn maintenance before you plant.

Hot & Cold. You can use trees and shrubs to boost your home's overall energy efficiency. A properly designed landscape can help you maximize shade in the summer, channel cool summer breezes toward your home, take advantage of the sun's warmth in winter, and minimize the cooling effect of winter winds.

Underground... Before you dig, contact the Joint Utility Locating Information for Excavators (JULIE). JULIE will notify member utility companies. The utilities will mark their underground facilities so you can dig safely. The marking services are performed at no charge to you. To contact JULIE, call 8-1-1 or visit www.illinois1call.com. It's simple, it saves lives, and it's the law.


...And Overhead. As you plant, keep right of way maintenance in mind. Avoid

Six things you should know when planting a tree.



1. **Call Before You Dig** - Several days before planting, call the national 811 hotline to have underground utilities located.
2. **Handle with Care** - Always lift tree by the root ball. Keep roots moist until planting.
3. **Digging a Proper Hole** - Dig 2 to 5 times wider than the diameter of the root ball with sloping sides to allow for proper root growth.
4. **Planting Depth** - The trunk flare should sit slightly above ground level and the top-most roots should be buried 1 to 2 inches.
5. **Filling the Hole** - Backfill with native soil unless it's all clay. Tamp in soil gently to fill large air spaces.
6. **Mulch** - Allow 1 to 2 inch clearance between the trunk and the mulch. Mulch should be 2 to 3 inches deep.

5. For more tree-planting tips and information, visit arborday.org.

Source:  **Arbor Day Foundation**
90075201

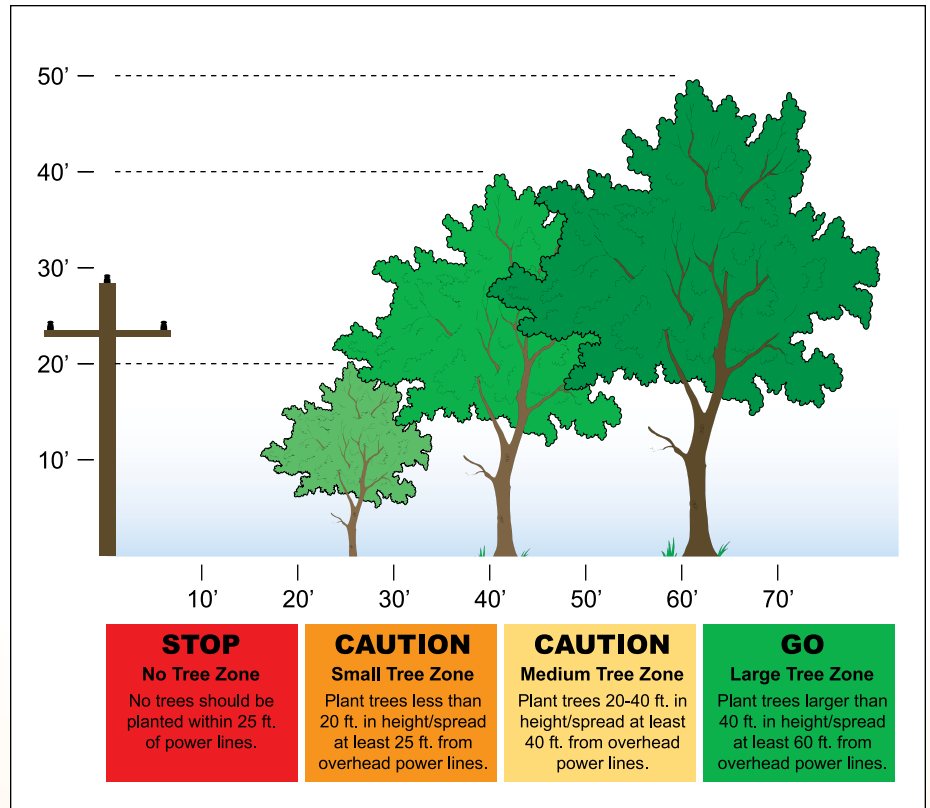
planting trees under or near power lines. Keep shrubs, hedges and other plants away from utility poles as well (see our distance guidelines diagram).

If you think you may be planting a tree too close to Southwestern Electric's right of way, please call us at (800) 637-8667. Cooperative operations and engineering personnel will ask you about the trees you have in mind, discuss the space you're working with, and offer suggestions.

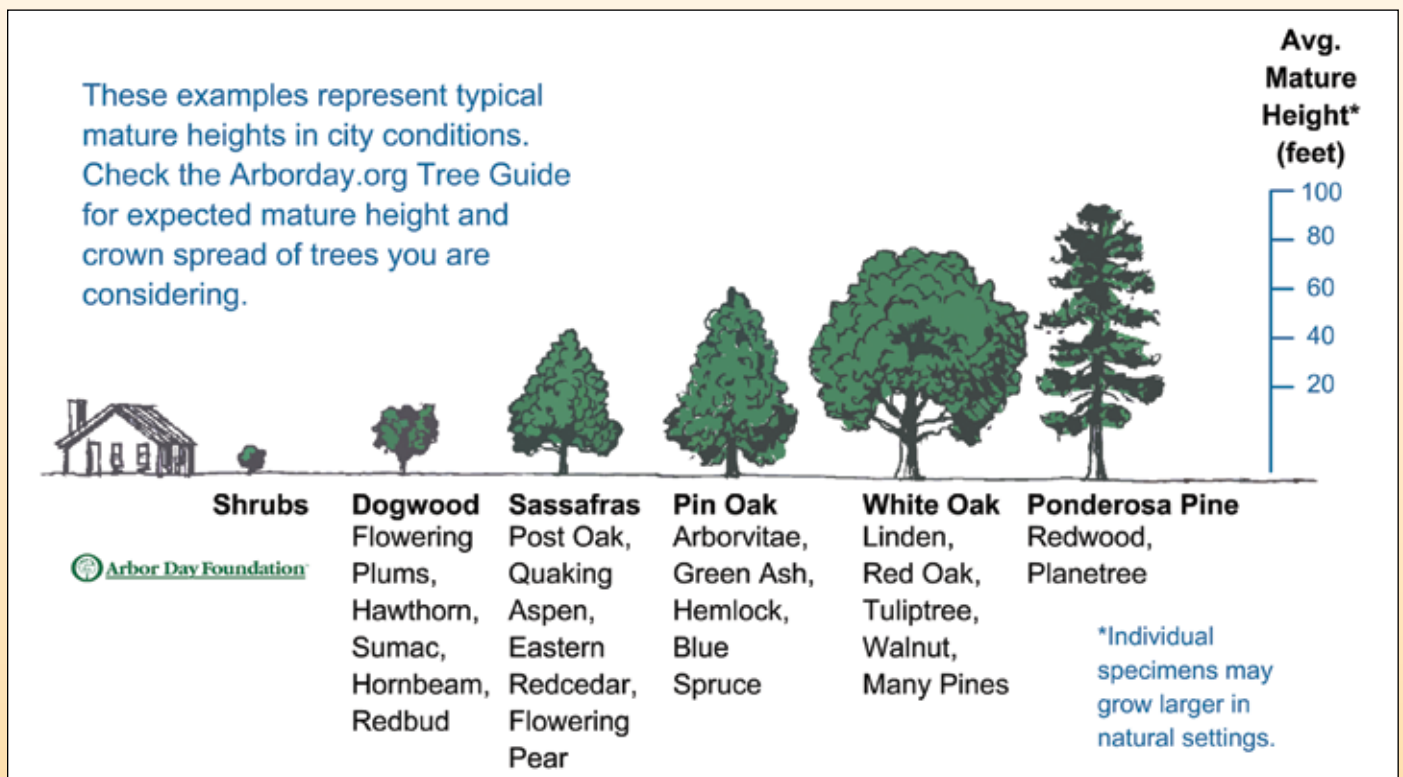
The conversation will help us ensure reliability by protecting the integrity of the co-op's distribution system.

Co-op crews and contractors periodically clear rights of way and routinely trim trees using methods that protect power lines while preserving the health of trees. Right of way maintenance and tree trimming may change the shape of a tree. The best way to avoid clearance and maintenance is by planting in locations that aren't near the right of way.

Arbor Experts. Before you plant, talk to people who are familiar with the trends and conditions unique to your area. Your community's tree board, city forestry department, and representatives from your area's cooperative extension office can offer insight into local soil, moisture, disease, and pest issues.

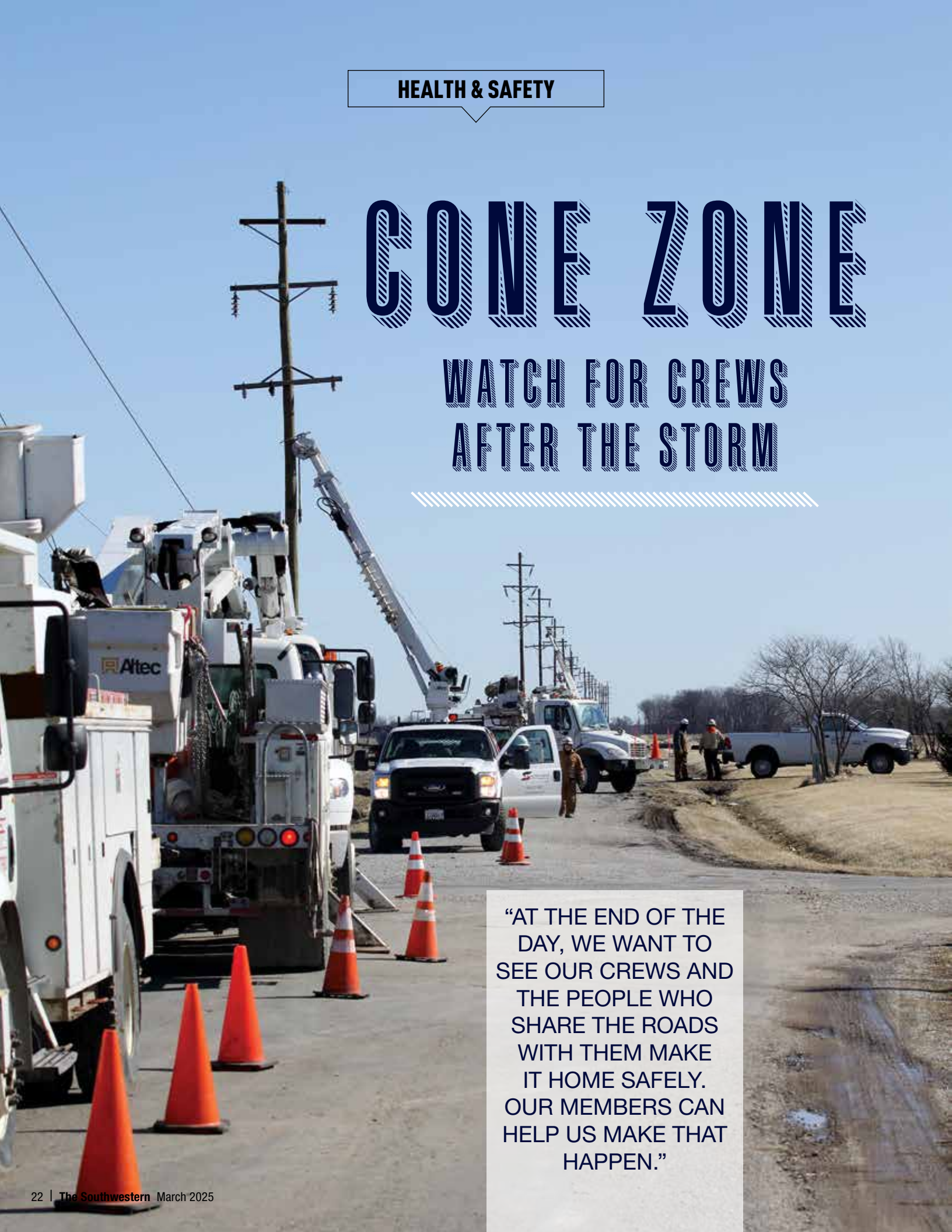


Concerned you may be planting too close to our right of way? Call us at (800) 637-8667. We'll be happy to talk with you and there's no charge for the consultation.



CONE ZONE

WATCH FOR CREWS
AFTER THE STORM



“AT THE END OF THE DAY, WE WANT TO SEE OUR CREWS AND THE PEOPLE WHO SHARE THE ROADS WITH THEM MAKE IT HOME SAFELY. OUR MEMBERS CAN HELP US MAKE THAT HAPPEN.”

In winter, Southwestern linemen navigate multi-ton trucks down snow-slickened blacktops to reach work sites. In spring they fight 40-mph gusts to replace poles in failing light. Come summer, they'll string wire after storms, working by headlamp and floodlight in 100-degree heat. Regardless of the job or season, our linemen approach each outage with a single concern foremost in mind: safety.

From the clothes they wear to the tools and training they use, safety is at the forefront of all they do.

But some aspects of a crew's safety aren't entirely up to them.

They're up to you.

"Most motorists our crews encounter are cautious and courteous. They make good decisions when they're approaching a work site," said *Southwestern* editor Joe Richardson. "But there are always a few who approach the area too fast. By failing to respect the crews, the cones, and the warning signs, they're endangering themselves, their passengers, and our linemen."

Richardson urged drivers to exercise caution when driving during or after bad weather.

"Storms bring down power lines and bring out work crews," he said. "In

many instances, moving a bucket truck off the road isn't an option. Drivers need to watch for signs and cones that signal crews are in the area. They may crest a hill to find linemen working and trucks parked immediately over the rise."

Every driver has a responsibility to exercise caution and good judgment. Leaving early, driving carefully, devoting your full attention to the road, and being attuned to the environment can help prevent accidents. "Ideally, you stay home when the weather makes roads treacherous," Richardson said. "If you have to get out, keep in mind you'll

**EVERY DRIVER HAS
A RESPONSIBILITY
TO EXERCISE
CAUTION AND GOOD
JUDGMENT. LEAVING
EARLY, DRIVING
CAREFULLY, AND
BEING ATTUNED TO
THE ENVIRONMENT
CAN HELP PREVENT
ACCIDENTS.**

be sharing the road with line crews and service trucks."

After a storm, stay alert for debris. Storms can drop poles and power lines into roadways. The lines could be energized, and they're very hard to see. "You may have rounded a bend a thousand times with no trouble — but storms change the environment. Reduce your speed and pay attention to the landscape. Are lights out? Limbs down? Then there's a good chance we have a crew working in the area."

It's important for drivers to recognize their limitations, especially in bad weather, Richardson said. "Some people aren't comfortable driving in rain or snow. I know a few drivers who rely on experience, and familiar routes, to compensate for slower reflexes, and eyesight that isn't as sharp as it used to be."

Those strategies are less effective when conditions are poor. "Don't risk your safety and the well-being of others. If you have to get out, call a friend or family member for a ride," he said. "At the end of the day, we want to see our crews and the people who share the roads with them make it home safely. Our members can help us make that happen."

ROAD RULES

Safe travel begins before you sit behind the wheel. Make sure your maintenance is up to date. Ask your mechanic to check your vehicle's battery, brakes, ignition, transmission, exhaust, and heating and air conditioning system.

Weather takes a toll on automobiles. Regularly check your wipers, tires, lights, and fluid levels (radiator, windshield washer, power steering, oil).

When you're shopping for tires, wipers and fluid, buy the best you can afford. All products are not created equal, and you'll notice a difference in performance. Never skimp on safety.

PLOT AND PLAN

Before you leave, check the weather on your route. Road reports are available for Illinois' interstate and freeway systems by visiting gettingaroundillinois.com.

Tell a family member, friend or colleague where you're going and when you expect to get there. When you reach your destination, call to confirm you've arrived.

If you're venturing through unknown areas, travel during the day. Print and carry maps of the areas. And make sure you have proper personal identification, registration and insurance information for your vehicle.

Remember to dress for the weather, not your destination.

STRANDED

If your vehicle breaks down and you have to pull off the road, move your car as far as you can from the flow of traffic. Call for help and wait for assistance from police or other emergency responders. Raise the hood, and turn on the dome light and flashers to make your vehicle more noticeable.

If a stranger offers you a ride, decline. Ask him or her to notify the police if you don't have a cellular phone or you're stranded in an area with no signal.

EMERGENCY KIT

Equip your car with an emergency kit that includes:

- Ice scraper, snow brush, rags and paper towels.
- Jumper cables, a basic tool kit, antifreeze, no-freeze windshield washer fluid and extra drive belt(s).
- Shovel, traction mats or old rugs, tire chains, salt, cat box litter or sand.
- Blankets and extra clothing including hats, socks, waterproof boots, coats and gloves, and rain gear.
- Non-perishable, high-calorie food.
- Candles, waterproof matches and a metal container (coffee can) in which to melt snow into water.
- Flashlight with extra batteries, flares or roadway reflectors, and a "Call Police" sign.
- A basic first aid kit and a fire extinguisher.
- A cellular phone with a backup power source.

CO-OP KITCHEN

A close-up photograph of a loaf of quick bread, likely a banana bread, resting on a light-colored wooden cutting board. The bread is sliced, revealing a moist interior with visible red specks (possibly dried fruit) and dark specks (possibly chocolate chips). The background is a dark blue patterned fabric. The text 'Quick Bread Cravings' is overlaid in a large, blue, serif font with a white outline.

Quick Bread Cravings

LEMON BREAD

Bread Ingredients

- ½ cup canola or vegetable oil
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 eggs
- Zest of one lemon
- 1½ cups flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup milk

Glaze Ingredients

- Juice of one lemon
- ½ cup sugar

Directions

1. Cream together oil and sugar.
2. Mix in eggs and lemon zest.
3. Sift the dry ingredients together and add to the sugar mixture alternately with the milk until thoroughly combined.
4. Pour into greased bread pan and bake at 350° for one hour or until a toothpick comes out clean.
5. Mix together glaze ingredients and drizzle over warm bread.
6. Let bread set 15 minutes in pan.

BANANA SPLIT BREAD

Ingredients

- 3 eggs
- 1 cup canola or vegetable oil
- 2 cups sugar
- 1 (20 ounce) can crushed pineapple and juice
- 2 teaspoons vanilla
- 3 cups flour
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- 1 ripe banana diced
- 1 (10 ounce jar) maraschino cherries diced
- ½ cup walnuts or pecans chopped
- ½ cup chocolate chips

Directions

1. Combine eggs, oil, sugar, pineapple with juice and vanilla.
2. Sift together flour, salt, baking soda and baking powder.
3. Combine the two mixtures together.
4. Stir in the banana, cherries, nuts and chocolate chips.
5. Pour evenly into two greased bread pans.
6. Bake at 325° for 60-75 minutes, testing often with a toothpick.
7. It's done when the toothpick comes out clean.


STRAWBERRY BREAD

Ingredients

- 3 cups flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 3 teaspoons cinnamon
- 2 cups sugar
- 1 cup canola or vegetable oil
- 4 eggs
- 1 (16 ounce) package frozen strawberries thawed and diced or 1 quart fresh strawberries diced
- 1 cup chopped pecans

Directions

1. Sift together flour, baking soda, salt and cinnamon. Set aside.
2. Beat eggs. Add oil and sugar and mix thoroughly.
3. Stir in strawberries.
4. Mix in dry ingredients and pecans.
5. Pour evenly into two greased bread pans.
6. Bake at 350° for one hour or until a toothpick comes out clean.
7. Let cool ten minutes before removing from pans.



Banana Split Bread
Prepared & photographed
by Mike Barns

CURRENT EVENTS

March 1 - May 31 NOTABLE WOMEN ON ROUTE 66, Edwardsville. Explore the influence of women on Route 66 at the Notable Women of Route 66 display. West End Service Station, 620 St. Louis Street. Wednesday - Sunday 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. Admission is free. Visit cityofedwardsville.com/749/west-end-service-station.

March 7-9 HOME BUILDERS AND REMODELERS HOME EXPO, Swansea. Over 150 booths of everything you need from remodeling to building a new home. Friday 11 a.m. - 6 p.m.; Saturday 9 a.m. - 6 p.m.; Sunday 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. Admission is free. Belle-Clair Fairgrounds & Exposition Center, 200 South Belt West. Visit belleclair.org.

March 13-16, 20-23 BARE-FOOT IN THE PARK, Lebanon. A theatrical performance by the Looking Glass Playhouse. All performances begin at 7:30 p.m., except for Sunday shows, which begin at 2 p.m. Looking Glass Playhouse, 301 West St. Louis Street. For tickets visit lookingglassplayhouse.com.

March 14-16 ILLINOIS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY SHOW, Collinsville. See Native American art and cultural items, listen to IAS speakers, and peruse an exhibition focused on archaeology. The show will display authentic Native American artifacts dating from the pre-1900s. No contemporary Native American material will be at the show. Presenters/exhibitors must have authorization before event. Admission is \$5. Gateway Center, One Gateway Drive. Visit illinoisstatearchaeologicalsociety.com.

March 15 ALTON LITTLE THEATER: SING IN THE LOVE & LUCK OF '25, Alton. Celebrate the arrival of 2025 with a spectacular concert featuring the extraordinary tenor, Thomas M. Taylor IV. Join us for a musical journey through Broadway's finest, from the golden age to today's contemporary hits. After the concert, enjoy a reception with refreshments. 2 p.m. Tickets are \$25. For tickets, call (618) 462-3205 or visit altonlittletheater.org.

March 15 LUCKY LEPRE-CHAUN 5K RUN/WALK & KID'S RAINBOW DASH, Belleville. Kick off your St. Patrick's Day celebrations with our 5K run/walk and the 50-yard Rainbow Dash for kids 12 and younger. 9 - 11 a.m. Starts and ends at Union United Methodist Church, 721 East Main Street. For more information or to register, visit bellevillemainstreet.net.

March 15 & 16 AMERICAN INDIAN & ETHNOGRAPHIC SHOW, Collinsville. Immerse yourself in a Native American ethnographic culture gallery. See native art, tools, and cultural items and learn about the different cultures and tribes of the native American people. Items featured at this show will include beadwork, Native artifacts, fossils, pottery, antique guns and knives, native rugs and blankets, paintings, modern art, turquoise jewelry, Civil War items, old west artifacts, and artifacts from around the world. Saturday 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.; Sunday 8 a.m. - 2 p.m. Admission is free. Gateway Center, One Gateway Drive. Visit gatewaycenter.com.

March 21 & 22 HEARTLAND COMMUNITY CHORUS SPRING CONCERT: GOING OVER JORDAN, Lebanon and Highland. Our guest performer will be renowned soprano Christine Brewer. The concert will feature spirituals, gospel and more. March 21 performance at 7 p.m. at St. Paul United Church of Christ, 123 East Dee Street in Lebanon. March 22 performance at 3 p.m. at St. Paul Catholic Church, 1412 Main Street in Highland. For tickets, visit heartlandcommunitychorus.org.

March 23 CHICKEN DINNER, Hamel. Dinner includes fried chicken, mashed potatoes and gravy, green beans, slaw, applesauce and dessert. Purchase raffle tickets for a quilt, TV, \$50 gift card and themed baskets. Drive-thru carry out only. 11:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. All meals are \$14. Hamel Immanuel UCC, 5838 Staunton Road, 1.5 miles south of Hamel. Call (618) 633-2277.

March 29; April 27 TELESCOPE NIGHT, Godfrey. Want to look at the universe through a telescope but don't own one? Come to Talahi Lodge on the night after a full moon and we will have some set up. Bring your own telescope and we can help you use it. We will talk about how telescopes work and look at the moon and other night sky objects. March event 8 - 10 p.m.; April event 8:30 - 10:30 p.m. Free for members; \$5 for non-members. Space is limited, registration required. The Nature Institute, 2213 South Levis Lane. To register, visit thenatureinstitute.org.

April 3 FAYETTE COUNTY HOSPITAL - HANDBAGS FOR HEALTH, Vandalia. Join us for an evening of fun and your chance to take home great prizes while supporting FCH initiatives. Doors open at 6 p.m.; silent and live auctions start at 7 p.m. Admission is \$35 in advance; \$40 at the door and includes 2 raffle tickets, 1 door prize ticket and signature drink (until gone). 8th Day Venue, 1405 Veterans Avenue. For tickets, call (618) 283-5401 or (618) 283-5446.

April 4-6, 10-13 ALTON LITTLE THEATER: THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE, Alton. A musical by the Alton Little Theater Company. April 4, 5, 10 and 11 at 7:30 p.m.; April 6, 12 and 13 at 2 p.m. Adult \$27; youth 17 years of age and younger \$18. Alton Little Theater, 2450 North Henry Street. For tickets, call (618) 462-3205 or visit altonlittletheater.org.

April 5 LAKE SARA DAM RUN, Effingham. A Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics Illinois. Choose from half marathon, 8-mile run, 5K run or 5K walk, and virtual. Half marathon starts at 7 a.m.; 8-mile at 8 a.m.; 5K run and walk at 9 a.m. Lake Sara Dam Run raises money for Special Olympics. Raceroster will donate \$1 for each registrant. Lake Sara Dam, 9352 East Park Avenue. For more information or to register, visit lakesaradamrun.com.

Call to Confirm

Listings are provided by event organizers or taken from community websites. We recommend calling to confirm dates, times and details before you make plans. All are subject to change.

Submissions

To submit an event for consideration in our calendar, email your event information to joe.richardson@sweci.com. Please use our Current Events format (as seen on these pages) to write your submission. Include a contact number or email and submit your listing at least two months prior to your event.

Southwestern linemen head home after bringing light and hope to the members of Satilla Rural Electric Membership Corporation, Alma, Ga., following Hurricane Helene. Photo courtesy Southwestern maintenance foreman Leo Dublo.

THE FINAL FRAME

