


JAMUP

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A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

The true value of membership

What does it mean to be a member-owner of an electric cooperative? We often consider such questions in the present tense. Members might question what they are currently receiving as part of their membership, or only consider real-time benefits.



Brent Goforth
Director of Member Services

However, I find that to fully appreciate the value of cooperative membership, one must also reflect on the past and look to the future. **Gloria Cross**

Reflecting on the past

For those who may not know the history of Southern Illinois Electric Cooperative, or electric cooperatives in general for that matter, we must go back to the 1930s when electric utility service was little more than wishful thinking for rural Americans. Outside of largely populated areas where private power companies served customers, electric utility service didn't exist. The cost to the privately owned companies was too high — with too little return to justify construction of electric distribution infrastructure to rural residents and businesses.

As mentioned, this lack of accessibility to electricity was not exclusive to southern Illinois, but all across the nation. According to NRECA, nine out of 10 rural homes were without electric service as late as the

mid-1930s. This sparked an effort by the U.S. government during President Franklin D. Roosevelt's first term in office to establish the Rural Electrification Administration (REA). On May 11, 1935, Roosevelt signed Executive Order No. 7037, paving the way for the Rural Electrification Act to pass a year later. **Hollas Reynolds**

Word spread over the years of this effort to provide service to rural Americans. In 1938, here in southern Illinois, a farmer by the name of Joseph McCormick arranged for a meeting with a representative from the REA. After calling on his friends and neighbors and gathering regional volunteers, delegates from each county were selected and nine directors were elected. Southern Illinois Electric Cooperative was formed, and with a \$200,000 REA loan, the first section of distribution line was constructed — illuminating members for the first time in May 1939. According to Carl Kitchens, associate professor of economics at Florida State University, \$3.6 billion in subsidized loans was distributed to newly established cooperatively owned (or member-owned) utility organizations just like SIEC between 1935 and 1940 (National Bureau of Economic Research). The value of membership to our inaugural members was accessibility to groundbreaking electric service for the very first time at a reasonable price.

Servicing the present

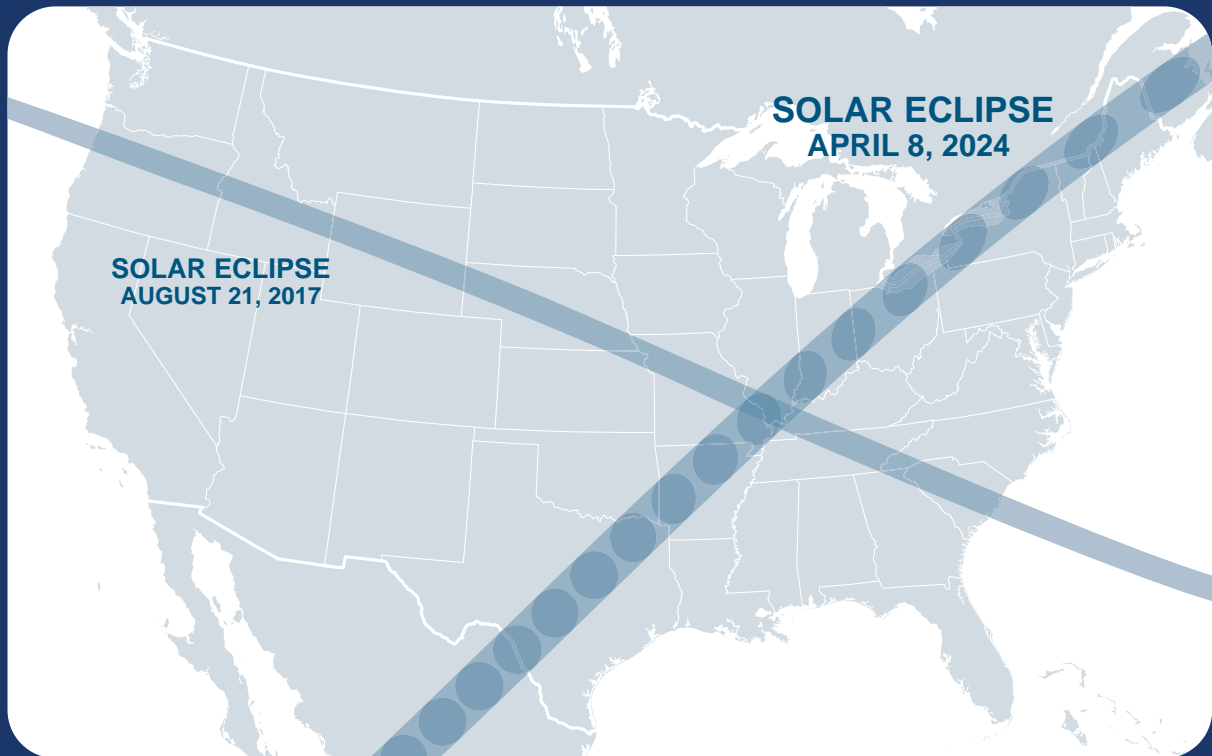
Just as our members valued this groundbreaking service, which was offered at a reasonable price, we aim

to continue that legacy by operating in a way that maintains the affordability of that same electric utility service. In an industry where new legislation, inflation of equipment and materials or even natural disasters can vastly affect the cost to provide electricity to you, the member, cooperatives continued to serve its members with a 99.94% reliability in 2023 while maintaining affordability.

We also continue to be active participants within the territory we serve. The priority we place on the safety of our employees, members and community is evident in the many Live Line Demonstrations we host each year. This demonstration allows an opportunity for real-life scenarios to be addressed with first responders, for valuable questions to be asked by children in our local schools, and for potentially lifesaving advice to be shared by the dedicated employees who perform the demonstrations.

Education is another value we provide for our members today. In February, I began traveling to local schools presenting Co-op 101 to students in 8th grade classes in southern Illinois. This program aims to show students the difference between the cooperative business model and investor-owned utility companies, to reiterate safety tips for soon-to-be new drivers, and to explain how electricity gets to the outlet in their home that powers their devices. Pair this with our long-standing history of investing in the education of southern Illinois youth

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Southern Illinois is being referred to as the “Eclipse Crossroads of America,” as we will be shadowed under the veil of a second total solar eclipse within the last decade! On Aug. 21, 2017, southern Illinois experienced a total solar eclipse, which lasted 2 minutes and 40 seconds. Less than 7 years later, we will experience a second total solar eclipse in our own backyard — this time lasting over 4 minutes in some areas. This natural phenomenon is rumored to attract thousands of onlookers to our region to take in the rare spectacle. For perspective, according to phys.org, before 2017 the last total eclipse to cross any portion of Illinois was near Chicago in 1806 (before the city was officially founded). The next total solar eclipse will not happen until 2099, the path again crossing over Chicago.

"Membership" continued from page 18A

through scholarships and classroom grants, and one can see the importance we place on the next generation of SIEC members and the services in which they'll find value.

Looking to the future

As I think about the future of the cooperative, I'm reminded of Mr. McCormick having the foresight to challenge his local community to come together for a project that would improve life for all those who called rural southern Illinois home. I imagine he pondered what life could look like if he and others had access to electricity. One of the biggest challenges we've faced in our area over recent years has been the technological divide created by high-speed internet. While it was not feasible to construct, own and operate our own fiber optic internet subsidiary, SIEC has made it possible

for those currently offering the service to navigate into southern Illinois by attaching to our existing electrical poles. This will mean that many rural residents will have high-speed internet service offered to them for the very first time. The value placed on this service extends past playing games or streaming movies at the click of a remote control. Members will have the ability to work from home. They will have access to telemedicine, and their children will be able to upload schoolwork. At SIEC, we look for ways to continuously increase the value we bring to our members, and I believe we are taking a large step into the future by partnering with those who can bring additional value to our region. I look forward to what the future holds here at Southern Illinois Electric Cooperative, as well as striving to provide each member with the services they value. **Howard E. Penrod Jr.**

CONGRATULATIONS

TO OUR 2024 YOUTH TOUR TO WASHINGTON

SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS



MCKENSEY CRITTENDON

Massac County High School Junior

McKensy has hopes of attending a university in Michigan upon graduation in 2025 to pursue a degree in psychology. She has always been fascinated with the human mind and plans to become a therapist to use her passion in helping others. When she is not in school, McKensy works at Frutta Bowls and enjoys spending time with friends and family.



ELLA HARRELL

Massac County High School Junior

Ella is in the MCHS Drama Club and National Honor Society. When she's not in school, she works at Ulta Beauty and enjoys hanging out with friends. Ella plans to further her education in psychology upon graduation in 2025.



Member prize

In this issue of the JAMUP, we printed the names of three SIEC members who are eligible to receive a \$10 credit toward their utility bill. If you find your name printed in this center section and it's not part of the story, call Brent with your account number at **800-762-1400** to claim your prize.

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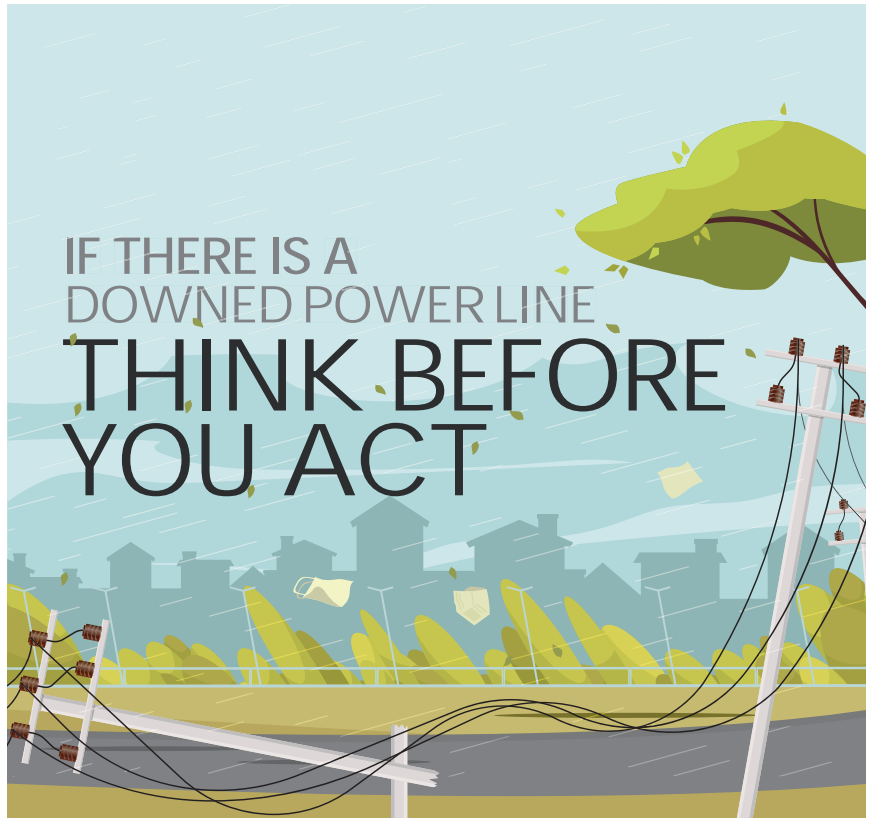
Southern Illinois Electric Cooperative

7420 U.S. Highway 51 South
 P.O. Box 100
 Dongola, Illinois 62926









618-827-3555

Office hours: 8 a.m. – 4 p.m.





www.siec.coop



An overhead power line can become damaged or fall due to a severe storm, car accident, public damage or other reasons. If you see a downed power line, take these actions:

-  **Consider all power lines energized and deadly.**
-  **Stay at least 50 feet away.**
-  **Call 9-1-1 or the utility to report the downed line.**
-  **Do not approach it or try to move it with another object.**
-  **Do not get out of a vehicle or cab.**
-  **Do not approach the scene.**
-  **Warn others to stay away.**
-  **Turn around and go another way.**

Other things to know

-  **Energized downed lines spread voltage through the ground or nearby objects.**
-  **If you go near a downed line, you can become electricity's path to ground.**
-  **You cannot tell if a power line is live just by looking at it.**
-  **Even if a power line appears coated, it is never safe to go near it.**

While transmitting and distributing power is typically safe, extreme scenarios like downed power lines are extremely dangerous. Never approach a downed power line.

Even if you do not see a downed line, realize one could be hidden by storm debris, water, snow or ice.

Learn more at:
 SafeElectricity.org