

The VOLUNTEERS

MAY 2025

country living

FOR MEMBERS OF EAST CENTRAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

It's 4:30 in the morning when Will Duvall is woken by an emergency page on his phone. The McIntosh County dispatcher has sent the call out to all Hitchita volunteer firefighters to respond to a house fire on county line road.

"By the time we get the page, three or four minutes has already gone by from the initial call," Duvall said. Volunteers quickly get up, drive to the station, grab their gear, and load up trucks to drive to the scene.

"We're there 25 minutes after the initial call, and by that time, you're trying to keep it from spreading," Duvall said. "The first thing we do is make sure everybody is out."

Luckily, the homeowners in this mid-February fire had even been able to rescue some of their belongings. The seven men and four trucks did their best to battle the blaze and save what they could of the property.

"I didn't get to work until 10 o'clock that morning," said Duvall, the fleet management supervisor at East Central Electric Cooperative.

After working the rest of the day, Duvall went back to the station to clean the hose, fuel up the trucks, and make sure everything was set for when they get called out again.

CHALLENGES

The first part of 2025 was a remarkable fire season in Oklahoma. Wildfires burned over 170,000 acres, destroying homes and injuring lives.

"This has been a crazy year," Duvall said. "Last year our total call count for fires and medicals was 46. As of March, we're at 31 calls this year, so we're trending high."

There is not a single paid fire fighting force in McIntosh County,





East Central Electric will be recognized at the annual OAEC Annual Meeting in April for winning OAEC's Advocacy Award. It was reported ECE was the only co-op that checked every box. What this signifies to me is that we are doing all the right things for our members.

Your Board of Directors and East Central Employees are working daily for the betterment of our members' quality of life. I might add that our concern for safety in the workplace is revealed by the completion of 875 days worked without a lost time accident.

ECE has over 6,000 miles of power lines serving just over 37,000 meters. District 2 (my district) has led the new services list most every month I have served. I joke with the Board that everyone wants to live in my district. Truthfully though, if you drive up through Bixby to Glenpool and Jenks, you will have a grasp of what is going on in "my" district. Houses are going up by the hundreds.

"Your Board of Directors and East Central Employees are working daily for the betterment of our members' quality of life."

- LOWELL HOBBS

A grandson developed a desire for a pickup at an early age. He located a used push mower with a motor and entered the lawn care business. He saved his money, worked hard and was doing ok. One of his customers was a preacher, recently retired. As grandson was mowing his yard he spotted a nice bicycle hanging on the garage wall.

Grandson: What's the deal on that bicycle?

Preacher: You interested in it?

Grandson: Could be.

Preacher: Since I have retired, I could mow my own yard. I need the exercise and I will trade you my bicycle for your lawnmower.

Grandson (after a few thinking moments): You've got a deal, and soon rode off on his new prize. After circling the block a couple of times, the preacher hailed grandson down.

Preacher: How do you start this thing?

Grandson: You have to cuss it!

Preacher: Cuss it? I'm a man of the cloth. I don't use those words. In fact, it's been so long I don't even remember any cuss words.

Grandson: Just keep jerking on that rope—they will all come back to you!

Lowell Hobbs represents ECE District 2. To reach him, please call his cellphone at 918-695-5289.

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On March 17, F.A.I.C. was one of the many departments called on to provide mutual aid as a wildfire scorched 2,200 acres on Tiger Mountain. Only two structures were damaged as the controlled burn got out of control. I-40 was temporarily shut down due to smoke and visibility concerns.



ABOVE: F.A.I.C. was able to purchase wildland gear and a thermal imaging camera using an Operation Round Up grant.

BELOW: A chalk board in the F.A.I.C. fire station displays 'Prayers for our firefighters in Oklahoma.'

and the volunteer departments are spread out, separated by the branches of Lake Eufaula.

"Being rural, we're it. If your house catches fire, there is nobody else coming but volunteers," Duvall said.

This is also true in the Pierce and Fountainhead areas, where the Fountainhead Area Improvement Council Volunteer Fire Department (F.A.I.C.) is the first line of defense for house fires, medical emergencies, and vehicle accidents on I-40.

Despite the crucial role they play in the safety of our communities, volunteer fire departments get minimal funding from county governments, and only collect a portion of the funding they need in membership dues. If they can get a grant from the Oklahoma Forestry Services, their annual budgets are less than \$50,000.

The funds they bring in are quickly spent on vehicle and facility maintenance. There are costs to maintain yearly certifications, to perform routine hose and ladder testing, and the gear they wear only has a 10-year lifespan, assuming it isn't exposed to hazardous chemicals.

"We're very limited, especially in McIntosh County," Duvall said. "It's a very poor county."

CO-OP SUPPORT

To make ends meet, volunteer departments are on the lookout for grant opportunities, which is where the co-op's Operation Round Up program shines.

"The Operation Round Up grant has a significant impact on our ability to outfit our crew with life-saving equipment," said F.A.I.C. Fire Chief Shawn Moore.

Some of the items F.A.I.C. has been able to purchase with grant funds include lights, hard hats, two full sets of wildland gear, and a thermal imaging camera.

The wildland gear is designed with lighter materials and rated for lower temperature fires. It is less cumbersome than structural gear, making it ideal for vehicle extractions—a common concern along I-40.

The thermal imaging camera allows firefighters to see objects, people, and hot spots in the smokey conditions of a house fire.

"We got the camera a week before, and it actually saved one of our firefighters," Moore said.

Through the Operation Round Up program, East Central Electric Cooperative members have donated over \$133,000 to provide equipment and training for local firefighters over the last 5 years.

CEO Dwayne Elam said, "The safety of the members and communities we serve is our highest priority, and we are proud to support the men and women who keep our communities safe."

CALL TO ACTION

Volunteer fire departments are not just hurting for funds, they are hurting for people.

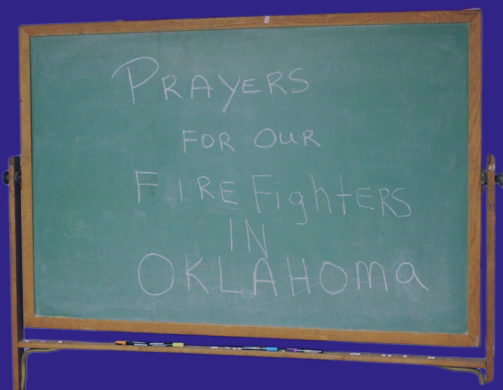
F.A.I.C. maintains two stations with room for up to 50 volunteers. They have 15 on the roster. On any given call, maybe six show up.

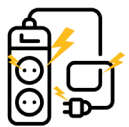
"We're pretty lucky at Hitchita," Duvall said. "We've got a core group of about 7 and then our chief is awesome. He's down there almost every day doing something."

"To be a volunteer, people think you have to have all this training and knowledge," Duvall said. "I walked in with zero. Never done it before. Anybody can be a volunteer."

Duvall noted that there are plenty of ways to contribute beyond emergency response. Volunteers can assist with truck maintenance, keep equipment clean or handle paperwork. Because the station also serves as a polling place during elections, extra hands are needed to prepare the space and ensure everything is in order.

Oklahoma's volunteer fire departments are the backbone of rural communities, answering calls in the middle of the night, battling blazes with limited resources and saving lives with sheer dedication. These firefighters give their time and energy to protect their neighbors—now, more than ever, they need their neighbors to stand with them.





ELECTRICAL SAFETY TIP OF THE MONTH

Never enter a flooded room if electrical outlets are submerged. The water could be energized.

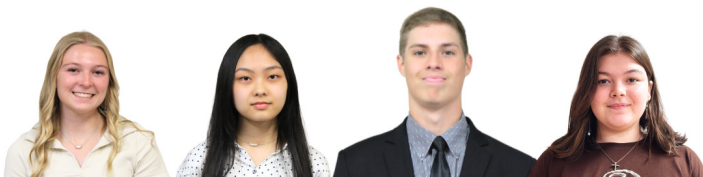
SOURCE: SAFELECTRICITY.ORG

Congratulations Winners!

Please join us in congratulating the students who won our 2025 youth programs contests.

2025 Oklahoma Youth Tour

Applicants were given the choice of submitting a letter to an elected official about a topic that was important to them or completing a video project about a day of life without electricity. These submissions were judged by individuals unaffiliated with the co-op. The top 10 applicants then participated in a live interview to round out their scores. The top four were chosen for this leadership experience in Washington D.C., with two runner ups selected to participate in Leadership Summit at the Oklahoma Youth Expo next year.



Kaylee Kendrick
Glenpool

Hana Yang
Oktaha

Noah Ellis
Haskell

Kaley Fortenberry
Checotah

2025 Energy Camp

To apply for Energy Camp, 8th graders had to submit a video or scientific report over their experience building and using a solar oven to make s'mores. Whether they succeeded or failed, submissions were judged based on how well the students presented their experiments. The top four students will be headed to Hinton, Oklahoma after Memorial Day to experience line life and co-op leadership up close and personal.



Ryiah Mattox
Hilldale

Brygette Riley-Johns
Hilldale

Bodie Elrod
Hilldale

Easton Scott
Preston



Cherry Salad

INGREDIENTS

- | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 can sour pie cherries | 1 can crushed pineapple, undrained |
| 1 C. sugar | 1/4 C. lemon juice |
| 2 (3 oz.) pkg. cherry JELL-O | 1 C. chopped pecans |
| 1 C. hot water | |

DIRECTIONS

Boil together undrained cherries and sugar for 5 minutes. Dissolve JELL-O in hot water and add to cherries. Add pineapple, lemon juice and nuts. Refrigerate.

SOURCE: ECE 85TH ANNIVERSARY COOKBOOK



East Central
ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

PO Box 1178
2001 S. Wood Drive
Okmulgee, Oklahoma 74447-1178
(918) 756-0833
www.ecoec.com



Office hours:
Monday-Friday, 8 am - 4:30 pm.

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