



# LiveWires

DECEMBER 2020

The official publication for members of Oconee EMC

## Let's Connect!



Terri Howard, President | CEO

When we say that we live in a “connected” world, most of us think about technology, like our smart phones and other devices and gadgets. But when you’re a member of an electric co-op (that’s you!), there’s so much more to being part of our connected co-op community.

We greatly value our connection to you, the members we serve. And we’d like to help you maximize the value you can get from Oconee EMC through a variety of programs, products and services that we offer our members.

When you download our Oconee EMC app, you can monitor and manage your home energy use, pay your bill online and access a menu of additional options for potential savings and more.

When you follow Oconee EMC on social media, you can stay up to date on power restoration efforts, planned outages, giveaways and more. You’ll also see photos of our line crews in action and our employees helping with community service projects— and who doesn’t enjoy seeing good things happening in our community!

By connecting with us, you can get real-time updates from your co-op. That’s why we want to make sure we have your most current contact information on hand. If we can’t connect with you on these platforms or in person, you could miss out on potential savings or important information. Oconee EMC relies on data for nearly every aspect of our operations, and up-to-date contact information from our members helps ensure that we can provide the highest level of service that you expect and deserve.

Updated contact information can even speed up the power restoration process during an outage. That’s because when you call to report an outage,

our automated system recognizes your phone number and matches it with your account location. Accurate information helps our outage-management system predict the location and the possible cause of an outage, making it easier for Oconee EMC crews to correct the problem.

We hope you will connect with us whenever and wherever you can—whether that means attending our annual meeting, providing feedback on a recent visit or call with our employees, or simply downloading our app.

Oconee EMC exists to serve our members, and when we’re better connected to you and our local community, we’re better prepared to answer the call. To update your contact information or to learn more about co-op products and services that can help you save, visit [www.oconeeemc.com](http://www.oconeeemc.com) call 478.676.3191, or stop by our office at 3445 HWY 80 W in Dudley, GA.

We look forward to connecting with you!

*That's the cooperative difference.*



# WALTER HARRISON SCHOLARSHIP

## Local Students Could Be Eligible for \$1,000

Applications postmarked by:  
**February 5, 2021**

Given the bleak economic climate, many students headed to college could benefit from a hand up to help offset the rising cost of higher education.

With that in mind, and the knowledge that many students and families face significant financial pressures, Oconee EMC is accepting applications for the Walter Harrison Scholarship, a program sponsored by Georgia's 41 electric cooperatives.

The \$1,000 scholarship can be applied to academic expenses at any accredited two- or four-year university, college or vocational-technical institute in Georgia. Twelve scholarships will be awarded statewide in 2021.

## VIRTUAL PROGRAM IN 2021 WILL RECOGNIZE OUTSTANDING YOUTH

While planning large group travel to Washington, D.C., is not a viable option for the summer of 2021, thanks to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, electric cooperatives across the state want to recognize outstanding youth by providing a valuable leadership experience for high achievers in their coverage areas.

Gale Cutler, senior director of the Washington Youth Tour (WYT), says they are in the development stage of creating a virtual program with live guest speakers and networking opportunities focusing on leadership and community development, among other topics.

Keep checking with your local electric cooperative in 2021, either through their newsletter in Georgia Magazine, website or social media platforms, for updated information.



## RETIRING YOUTH TOUR DIRECTOR SHARES TWO DECADES OF MEMORIES

By Kevin Braun

*Left: Posing with the U.S. Capitol as a backdrop are, from left, Tour Coordinators Kaleb Frady and Beth McMillan and Senior Tour Director Gale Cutler.*

For Gale Cutler, the night before the Washington Youth Tour (WYT) begins each June is like Christmas Eve. "I know the next day there will be so many 'presents to open' as I get the chance to meet a new set of amazing people," she says.

Serving as senior director of the Georgia WYT is only one of the hats that Cutler wears as senior public relations coordinator at Tucker-based Georgia Electric Membership Corp. (EMC). She'll hang up all those hats when she retires June 30.

Cutler has been going on the weeklong Washington Youth Tour since 2000. A lot about the tour has changed, perhaps nothing more so than the size of the Georgia delegation—from 81 (69 delegates and 12 adults) in 2000 to 131 (115 delegates and 16 adults) in 2019. The 2020 WYT was canceled because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another big change involves accessibility.

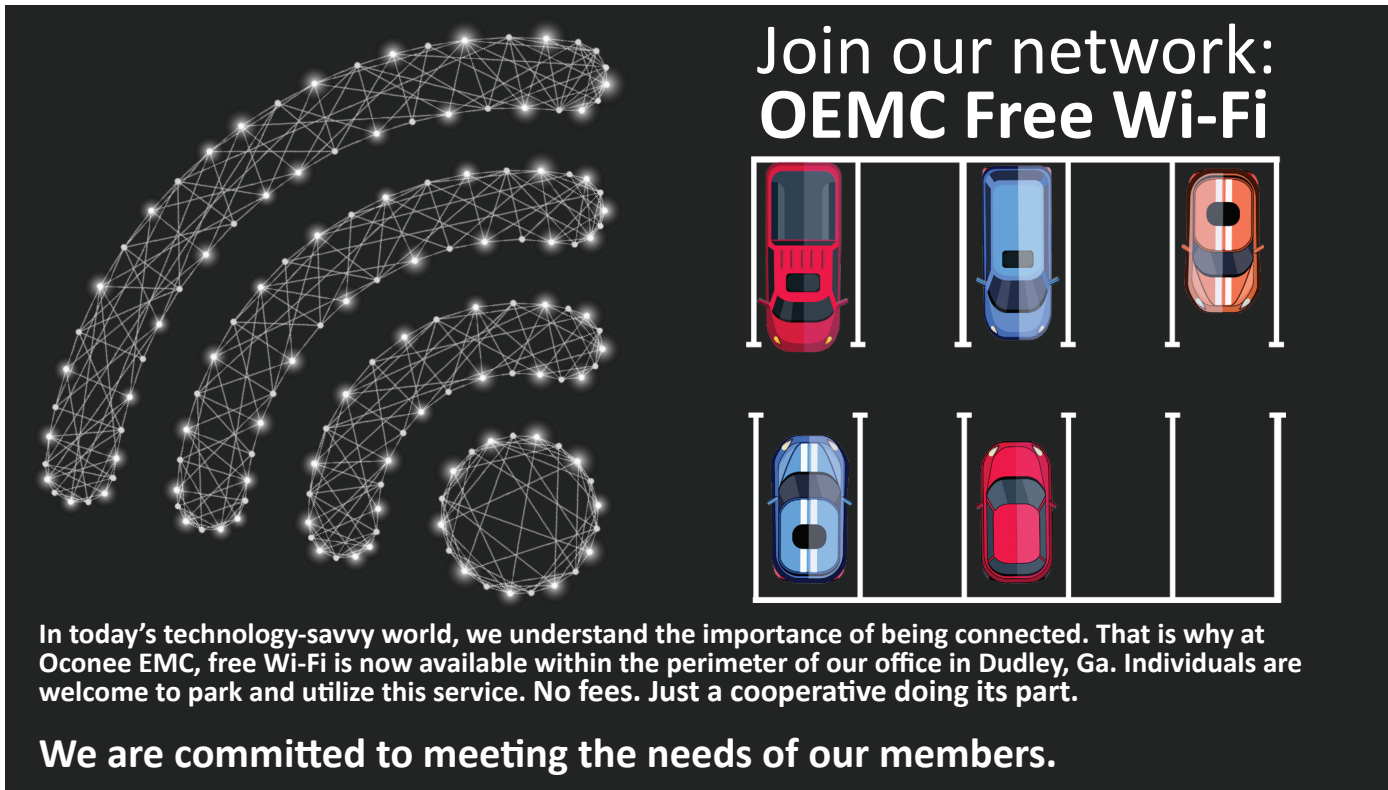
"Before 9/11/01 happened, we could just walk up to any building, including the Capitol or the House and Senate office buildings, and go right in," Cutler says. "Our buses could drop us beside the Supreme Court. Now, large vehicles are not allowed within a certain perimeter of streets, there is security at every entry point and touring the Capitol is by reserved guided tour."

Cutler begins planning for each Washington Youth Tour more than a year in advance. "Because of our size group, we are not easy to squeeze in at the last minute," she says. "Airline tickets are booked in October to be sure we have enough seats on two concurrent flights. Hotel and riverboat cruise contracts are negotiated several years out, and the rest of the stops as soon as you can request admission."





# ARE YOU CONNECTED?



**Join our network:  
OEMC Free Wi-Fi**

In today's technology-savvy world, we understand the importance of being connected. That is why at Oconee EMC, free Wi-Fi is now available within the perimeter of our office in Dudley, Ga. Individuals are welcome to park and utilize this service. No fees. Just a cooperative doing its part.

**We are committed to meeting the needs of our members.**

But even with the Georgia delegation's schedule painstakingly mapped out, sometimes there are curveballs. During the 2017 trip, on the morning of Hill Day (when the delegates meet with their legislators at the U.S. Capitol), a gunman opened fire on several Republican members of Congress, wounding one, at a baseball practice just outside Washington, D.C. "Georgia EMC's Government Relations team helped us navigate that morning," Cutler recalls. "While security was heightened, we had an official meeting on the books, so we were able to get to our meeting space, even though the general public was kept out of the Capitol.

"It was actually pretty incredible. Our group felt that we had backstage passes to what was going on, especially when U.S. Reps. John Lewis (D-Ga.) and Doug Collins (R-Ga.) came in together to update us and then proceeded to stand together and answer questions. Their main message to our students was that, while there were obviously issues that they and their parties disagreed on, there were more that they agreed about and worked on together."

Hill Day is always one of Cutler's favorite stops on the tour. "As another state's tour director once said, our delegates go into those congressional meetings as teenagers on a field trip and come out as constituents."

Over the years, Cutler has developed lasting friendships with bus drivers, tour guides, state directors, photographers and others she regularly sees on the trip. She stays in touch with many former delegates, mostly through the Facebook alumni group. It's easy to see how much pride she has in the group.

"I've been able to keep track of many as they finish high school, go to college, start their careers, marry and have children," she says. "They end up as valedictorians for their schools, state FFA or 4-H officers and college roommates. So many turn into adults who continue to use their passion for service leadership through community involvement or youth development. It is also neat to have some of them go to work for one of Georgia's EMCs, where we become colleagues."

Cutler and her husband, Chuck, plan to move to the Blairsville area after she retires. They have two sons: Zac, of Jasper, and Eric, of Portland, Ore.

Even after two decades of annual trips to Washington, D.C., Cutler hasn't had her fill of the nation's capital. She's already looking forward to future visits—but just with her husband, not with a group that takes three buses (or two planes) to accommodate.

Kevin Braun is an associate editor at Georgia Magazine.



**LiveWires**

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## LEGISLATIVE UPDATE AND STATE OF THE COMMUNITY 2020-2021

Oconee EMC and Altamaha EMC along with the Dublin-Laurens County Chamber of Commerce sponsored the Legislative Update and State of the Community for 2020-2021 on December 2, 2020.

Both EMCs gave updates on their cooperative's COVID relief efforts for members and updates on broadband. Afterwards, each guest speaker had an opportunity to give an update on their respective areas of interest and plans for future endeavors. To wrap up the event, audience members were given an opportunity to ask questions.



*(L-r): Jennifer Bryant, Oconee EMC Member Services Manager; Tammye Vaughn, Altamaha EMC Manager of Marketing and Communications; Senator Larry Walker; Representative Matt Hatchett; Bryan Rogers, Laurens County, Administrator and Matthew Bradshaw, City of Dublin Engineer.*



*Proudly serving Baldwin, Bibb, Bleckley, Dodge, Laurens, Twiggs and Wilkinson counties*

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