

CHELCO NEWS

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Ronnie Jones celebrates 40 years on CHELCO Board



Ronnie Jones leads the opening prayer at the 2022 CHELCO Annual Meeting.

Forty years ago, a 23-year-old CHELCO member was encouraged to run for the CHELCO Board of Trustees. That 23-year-old was Ronnie Jones, and after winning his election, he has held a position on the board ever since.

"My grandfather, Jeff Laird, was a charter member of CHELCO," Jones said. "When he knew there was a vacancy on the board, he encouraged me to put my name in the hat. I probably didn't think I had a chance at winning an election against some of the more seasoned candidates. I filed by petition, and I was elected at the Annual Meeting at Camp Timpoochee that year."

A lot can change in 40 years, and CHELCO has grown from 10,000 accounts to more than 60,000 in Jones' time on the board. The core principles, though, have not changed, and Jones, who represents District 5, said that has made him want to continue his service to the membership throughout the years.

CEO Steve Rhodes said that Jones' leadership has made a significant impact on CHELCO.

"Congratulations to Ronnie for his many years of service," Rhodes said. "The length of time he has been a trustee is certainly admirable, but the quality of his service is of more importance. Ronnie has been a leader on the board and has played a critical role in CHELCO's success over the years. I appreciate and respect his contributions and look forward to continuing to work with Ronnie to make this organization even better."

Jones said that PowerSouth CEO Gary Smith once told a story that will stick with him for a long time.

"Gary went to a garden club and asked them where they got their electricity, and they pointed to an outlet in the wall," Jones said. "That was the extent of their knowledge of where electricity comes from, but there's a lot that goes on behind the scenes to get it there."



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Inside

Page 2

CEO Insights:
2023-25 Strategic Planning
begins soon

Page 3

Be safe around pad-mounted
transformers

Page 4

Southland welcomes new COO

Did you know...

As a member of a Touchstone Energy Cooperative, you have access to thousands of discounts at local and nationwide businesses. The Co-op Connections app is available for download on Google Play and the Apple App Store. Those listed on p. 4 of CHELCO News are just a few of the many discounts available to CHELCO members!



CEO Insights: 2023-25 Strategic Planning begins soon

Employees who have been at CHELCO for several years have probably heard me proclaim, “We plan the work, and work the plan” more times than they could count. Soon, we’ll begin to work on another new plan, and they’ll probably hear my familiar motto again.

As 2022 draws to a close, so does our three-year plan for 2020-22, and we are preparing to develop a new plan that will cover 2023-25. This will be the fourth such working document we have created since I became CHELCO’s CEO in 2013.

These exercises are extremely valuable for any organization that takes planning seriously. You’ve probably heard the old cliché, “A goal without a plan is just a wish.” The overall purpose of any strategic plan is to look forward and find a path to goals that can be reached.

At CHELCO, we begin our strategic planning by surveying our employees about where they see opportunities or concerns. We then solicit the

input of our managers and supervisors. Their views might be focused on changing a process or developing a new program. Similarly, our team might use their knowledge of our industry, technology or changing member expectations to express a need for change.

Once employee surveying is complete, the input is reviewed by our executive team, including myself. Using input from the surveys, we are likely to develop five or more initiatives, which are often broad statements about our priorities for the next three years. For example, in 2016, our strategic plan included controlling costs while maintaining value and service.

After the executive staff lays out their picks for the next three years, these initiatives are proposed to the Board of Trustees at a day-long retreat where the trustees also carefully consider the co-op’s direction. Then, after in-depth discussions and amendments, the board approves the initiatives.

The next step is to form employee task forces that formulate specific action steps to achieve these goals. From there, the work is executed by the departments involved, and we report our progress to the Board of Trustees.

The value of the strategic planning process is clearly defined by the results. For example, after a thorough study several years ago, CHELCO’s standard service line installation from the transformer to the meter is now underground. This change reduces long-term costs and improves reliability.

By the end of this year, a new strategic plan will be in place for 2023-25, and I will likely discuss that in a future column. Meanwhile, I can assure you that we’ll continue to plan our work and work our plan with goals and actions that benefit you, our members.

Steve Rhodes,
Chief Executive Officer

CHELCO Youth Tour students tour D.C., learn about co-ops

After three years of COVID-related cancellations, Youth Tour is back! Four CHELCO Youth Tour students recently traveled to Washington, D.C., to learn more about the federal government, electric co-ops and historical sites. Baker High School students William Emiro, Allison Baggett and Stella Hurley, along with McKenna Helms from Laurel Hill High School, represented CHELCO in the National Rural Electric Cooperatives Association’s Youth Tour, a program CHELCO has sponsored since 1983.



(L to R): William Emiro, Stella Hurley, McKenna Helms, Allison Baggett and chaperone Bonnie Whitfield meet with Congressman Neal Dunn on the steps of the U.S. Capitol Building.



(L to R): Allison Baggett, Stella Hurley, McKenna Helms and William Emiro visit The White House during their Youth Tour trip to Washington.

Be safe around pad-mounted transformers



Have you ever noticed those big green electrical boxes on the ground? While they may look like safe, harmless objects, they contain high-voltage equipment and should be treated with caution. Follow these tips to stay safe around pad-mounted transformers:

Don't touch equipment. Many people disregard pad-mounted transformers and don't think of them as a potential hazard, and children often play around them. Never climb or play on a pad-mounted transformer, and never put fingers, sticks or other objects into the equipment. Educate your children on the importance of safety around electrical equipment.

Keep surrounding areas clear. CHELCO crews and other staff need to be able to access the transformers to perform maintenance and other

necessary work. Keep shrubs, trees and yard decorations at least 10 feet away from the side with doors and four feet away from the other sides.

Don't dig near a transformer.

Transformers are surrounded by underground electrical cables, and hitting a cable could result in injury or outages.

Don't modify transformers. Any modification to transformers is prohibited. These units are painted and labeled for safety and operational reasons, and charges may apply if you damage, paint or otherwise alter a transformer.

Report issues. If you see anything out of the ordinary, such as damaged or open transformers, report it to us so we can fix it as soon as possible and avoid safety hazards.

Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Help keep costs low by limiting usage during peak hours. When many people use power at the same time, demand and costs rise. Cut back on usage from 4-6 p.m. in the summer and 6-8 a.m. in the winter to help limit costs for all. Postponing hot-water activities and adjusting your thermostat are the two most significant ways you can help save.



Give with Members Helping Members

Are you in a position to help those who are struggling financially? Members Helping Members may be a way you can help a fellow CHELCO member in need.

This program is an option for our members to donate \$2 or more on a one-time or recurring basis to help families who are struggling to pay their electric bill.

For more information, and to learn how you can help a fellow member in need, visit our [Members Helping Members](#) page on CHELCO.com.

Recipe of the Month



Tuna Fritters

Simple recipes are the best! With just five ingredients and a frying pan with oil, Tuna Fritters are a quick and delicious meal. Learn this recipe and more at [CHELCO.com/recipes](#).

CHELCO is governed by a nine-member board of trustees: Lee Perry, District 1; Terry Pilcher, District 2; Reese Harrison, District 3; Brady Bearden, Vice President, District 4; Ronald Jones, District 5; Gerald Edmondson, President, District 6; Bert Prutzman, Assistant Secretary/Treasurer, District 7; Gayle Hughes, Secretary/Treasurer, District 8; Dwayne Davis, District 9.

Southland welcomes new COO

Southland Utility Services, a wholly-owned subsidiary of CHELCO, recently welcomed Ryan Miller as their new Chief Operating Officer.

Miller replaced Mike Morris, former COO, who retired June 30 after nearly 17 years with Southland. Miller spent the month of June shadowing Morris and learning more about the company before taking over July 1.

"I have enjoyed every minute of my time at Southland so far," Miller said. "Everyone has been very welcoming, and I'm grateful for this opportunity. I'm looking forward to developing relationships with all the team members at Southland and CHELCO and finding ways to create more value for our customers."

Miller previously worked at PacifiCorp as a substation operations manager, where he managed all aspects of the utility's largest service territory, consisting of 48 substations, five communications sites, wind farms and solar providing hundreds of megawatts of power throughout numerous communities across Washington and Oregon.

"Leadership is a privilege, and I take it very seriously," Miller said. "It is my hope that my past experiences will prove valuable to Southland, CHELCO and our other customers. I feel that my experience in leading a high-voltage electrical contracting company fits perfectly in Southland and CHELCO's line of work."

A common theme with former COO Mike Morris, Miller also emphasizes



Ryan Miller
Southland Chief Operating Officer

safety as the top priority for Southland.

"Safety is paramount over everything," Miller said. "It's our moral obligation to provide a safe working environment for our team members and to ensure we are doing everything to accomplish this. When safety is first, it creates a positive cascading that affects all aspects of the organization."

CHELCO CEO Steve Rhodes said he is confident that Miller is prepared to continue right where Morris left off.

"I'm excited to have Ryan join the team," Rhodes said. "He was selected after an exhaustive national search. His background and experience convinced us that he is an excellent match for the position, and I have every confidence that he will carry on the high level of service we expect from Southland Utility Services."

Connections Corner

The Co-op Connections discount program is another benefit of being a CHELCO member. Local businesses, participating pharmacies and thousands nationally offer discounts to co-op members. Don't forget to download the Co-op Connections app!

This month, we highlight and thank the following businesses:

Absolute Dance Center
1031 US Hwy. 90 W. Suite 4
DeFuniak Springs
(850) 951-2020
\$5 off base tuition per month

Body-B-Healthy
2227 S. Ferdon Blvd., Crestview
(850) 682-8893
15% off vitamins and supplements

Drew's Computer Repair
199 Rachels Road
DeFuniak Springs
(850) 401-1541
10% discount on all services

For more information, visit CHELCO.com, email energyservices@chelco.com or call CHELCO's Energy Services Department at (850) 307-1122.

IS \$25 YOURS?

If the account number below matches yours, sign this page and mail it with your bill to CHELCO or drop it off at any office. You'll win a \$25 credit on your next bill.

Geohagan - 3010882326

For unclaimed capital credits, visit CHELCO.com/capital-credits.