

CHELCO NEWS

POWERED *by* YOU

APRIL 2026 | VOL. 31, NO. 04

Culmination of nearly eight years of work will greatly improve reliability for Eglin AFB's Duke Field



CHELCO recently completed a major reliability project for Eglin Air Force Base's (AFB) Duke Field by successfully transferring electrical load to the nearby Duke Field substation. Until now, the field had been served from a substation 14 miles away.

The effort traces back to March 2019, when the project was first submitted as a Future Capital Upgrade. Although the need had been identified earlier, formal approval and funding were obtained from the Air Force Civil Engineering Center (AFCEC). Progress accelerated in September 2024, when updated load projections secured the remaining funding needed to move forward with the substation upgrade.

Once construction began, the work was extensive. During a single, scorching summer weekend in 2023, CHELCO crews upgraded and rerouted key lines to prepare for the transition.

Additional infrastructure improvements continued over the following months, culminating in the successful transfer of Duke Field's electrical load to the Duke Field substation on Feb. 21, 2026.

The benefits of the transfer were immediate and significant, strengthening the resiliency of Duke Field's power supply.

"The reliability improvement for Duke Field will be significant, and that was always the goal," said Rocky Hudson, CHELCO's Director of Engineering & Operations on Eglin AFB. "This doesn't happen without the sustained efforts of the 96th Civil Engineering Group Energy Office, CHELCO's design technicians, linemen, and everyone who touched this project along the way. This one was a long time coming, and it's a testament to what good teams can accomplish when they don't give up."

CHELCO



A Touchstone Energy®
Cooperative 

Inside

Page 2

Join us in recognizing Lineworker Appreciation Day on April 13

Page 3

CHELCO receives Century of Legacy Business Award

Page 4

NRECA Youth Tour Delegates Announced

Don't Miss This!

The CHELCO Annual Meeting is right around the corner!

When?

Saturday, April 18

8:00 AM: Doors Open

8:00 to 9:45 AM: Activities

10:00 AM: Business Meeting

11:00 AM: Scholarships, Prizes

Where?

Freeport High School

12615 US 331 Bus., Freeport, FL

What?

- Free Breakfast and Coffee
- Bucket Truck Rides (16 & under)
- Educational Demos
- Trustee Election Results
- Business Meeting
- Prizes & Scholarships

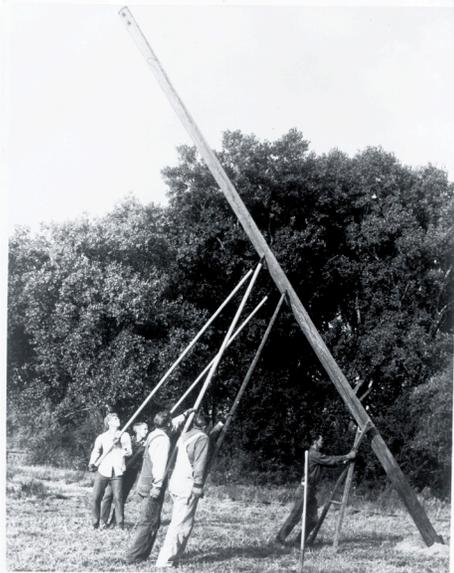
For more info, please visit
[CHELCO.com/Annual-Meeting](https://www.chelco.com/Annual-Meeting).



CEO Insights: Lineworker Appreciation Day - Celebrating Service, Skill, and Sacrifice

April 13 marks **Lineworker Appreciation Day**, a moment each year when we pause to recognize the extraordinary men who keep the lights on for our communities. Their work is essential today—but it is also part of a proud legacy that stretches back nearly a century.

When the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) was created in the 1930s, lineworkers were among the first to bring electricity to rural America. They built lines through fields, forests, and swamps, often with little more than hand tools and a belief that rural families deserved the same access to power as those in the cities.



This photo depicts the way the first electric poles were installed in rural America. (Records of the Department of Agriculture, Record Group 30; National Archives at College Park, MD.)

Today's lineworkers carry forward that same spirit of service, but with tools, training, and technology their predecessors could only imagine. The work is still hard—physically demanding, technically complex, and often performed in trying conditions—but decades of

innovation have changed what's possible. Our crews are now outfitted with advanced equipment, hydraulic booms, insulated tools, and state-of-the-art safety gear that help them perform their jobs as efficiently and as safely as possible. At CHELCO, we continue to invest in these improvements because nothing matters more than ensuring every employee goes home safely at the end of the day.



Today, crews have advanced technology such as the Digger Derrick Truck. Considered a "workhorse," this versatile equipment can dig holes, set utility poles, and lift heavy equipment, such as the nearly 3,000 lb. pole shown here.

Even with these improvements, the heart of the job remains unchanged. When a thunderstorm knocks out power at midnight, our lineworkers answer the call. They leave their families, step away from warm homes, and head into the dark to restore service. They work through rain, blistering heat, and—on those rare Florida occasions—snow.

They do it because they know our members are counting on them, and because they take pride in serving the communities they call home.



CHELCO Line Technician, Michel Armbruster alongside a young CHELCO member at a Member Appreciation event.

Their dedication extends far beyond CHELCO's service territory. When other cooperatives face devastation after hurricanes, tornadoes, or ice storms, our crews step forward to help, just like the ones we spotlighted on the cover of last month's newsletter.



Read past newsletters at www.chelco.com/chelco-news.

As members of this cooperative, we benefit from our lineworkers' skill and commitment every day. Whether you see them along the roadside or cheering on their kids at the local ballfields, they remain the backbone of our mission to provide safe, reliable, and affordable power. On April 13—and every day—we are proud of them, grateful for them, and honored to celebrate their service to our communities.

Steve Rhodes,
Chief Executive Officer

CHELCO receives Century of Legacy Business Award from Walton Area Chamber of Commerce



CHELCO Retiree and former Walton Area Chamber of Commerce Board President Mike Richards (second from left) presented the award to CHELCO at the Chamber's Awards Gala. Left to right: Kevin Jones, Chelsea Blaich, Kevin Henderson, Graham Campbell-Work.

CHELCO was recently recognized with the Century of Legacy Business Award at the Walton Area Chamber of Commerce's Annual Awards Gala. The award comes during a milestone year for the Walton Area Chamber of Commerce, which is celebrating 100 years of service to Walton County.

The award recognizes organizations that have demonstrated long-term commitment and impact in the community. For CHELCO, it reflects our continued focus on providing

reliable, affordable electricity to our members and our commitment to the communities we serve.

We appreciate the Chamber's recognition and congratulate them on their 100 years of service to the local business community.

As we celebrate our 86th year in business, CHELCO remains focused on delivering dependable service and meeting the needs of our members now and in the future.

CHELCO Charity Golf Tournament is May 29 at Eagle Springs Golf Course

CHELCO invites golfers of ALL skill levels to compete for a good cause at the CHELCO Charity Golf Tournament on **Friday, May 29!**

New this year, the tournament will be held at **Eagle Springs Golf Course and Recreational Center** in DeFuniak Springs, Florida.

*Note the change in location from previous years, as Blackstone Golf Course is closed for renovations.

All proceeds will benefit the following organizations:

- Children In Crisis, Inc.
- Emerald Coast Autism Center
- Emerald Coast Children's Advocacy

Registration starts at 8 a.m. and the shotgun start is at 9 a.m. The format will be a four-person scramble, and there are various sponsorship levels available.

To learn more, visit **CHELCO.com/golf** or contact tournament director Tyler Wood at twood@chelco.com, or by phone at (850) 307-1121.



A Touchstone Energy Cooperative

PAY WHERE YOU SHOP

Thanks to **CheckOut by PayGo**, CHELCO members can pay their bills at various convenient locations, and it's as easy as 123. Scan the QR code to learn more or visit CHELCO.com/CheckOut-PayGo.



FAST & EASY BILL PAY NOW AVAILABLE AT SELECT RETAILERS NEAR YOU

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; Ronnie 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. For more information, please visit CHELCO.com/board-trustees.

CHELCO Announces 2026 NRECA Youth Tour Delegates



(from left to right): Aidan Enriquez, Crestview High School; Noah Seeliger, Collegiate High School at Northwest Florida State College; Graham Beauchamp, Niceville High School; Calie Brackin, Walton High School; Rose Weinacker, Niceville High School; Kaylee Yeakos, Paxton School

CHELCO is proud to announce its **NRECA Youth Tour** delegates. This year's selection followed the completion of the FECA Youth Tour, where 22 local high school juniors traveled to Tallahassee for a day-and-a-half of hands-on learning, including mock legislative sessions and tours of Florida's historic Capitol.

After returning home, each student submitted a video reflection describing what they learned and how the experience shaped their understanding of government. An independent panel of judges—representatives from local energy and electric cooperatives unaffiliated with

CHELCO—reviewed the submissions and selected the top students to represent CHELCO in Washington, D.C., this June.

CHELCO Youth Tour Delegates:

- Kaylee Yeakos, Paxton School
- Calie Brackin, Walton High School
- Noah Seeliger, Collegiate High School at NWFS
- Rose Weinacker, Niceville High School

Alternates:

- Aidan Enriquez, Crestview High School
- Graham Beauchamp, Niceville High School



Move over a lane for stopped emergency and utility vehicles. If you can't move over safely, **reduce speed to 20 mph less than the posted speed limit.**

For unclaimed capital credits, visit [CHELCO.com/capital-credits](https://www.chelco.com/capital-credits).

Know What's Below

Utility lines beneath the ground provide the essentials for a modern home, including electricity, water, natural gas, and sewer. Call 811 to locate them before you start any projects that involve digging on your property—like landscaping, fence installation, or construction. It's the law, one that can prevent thousands of dollars in damage and the risk of injuries.

Call 811. It's Free. It's the Law. Here's what happens next after you call 811 to have underground utilities located:

1. A utility locator comes out to your home or business.
2. The utility locator locates natural gas and utility lines on your property — for free.
3. The utility locator uses visual markers to identify the lines, so you know where it's safe to dig and areas you should avoid.

Call 811 or visit [sunshine811.com](https://www.sunshine811.com) to have underground utilities marked.



\$25 BILL CREDIT

If the account number below matches yours, call (850) 892-2111 to redeem a \$25 bill credit on your next power bill!

#900036674 - VIGEE