

# CHELCO NEWS

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## CHELCO Hosts 86th Annual Meeting with Special Guest Gary Smith of PowerSouth Energy Cooperative



*PowerSouth CEO Gary Smith (left) responds to CHELCO CEO Steve Rhodes' question about the growing impact of data centers.*

CHELCO welcomed members to its 86th Annual Meeting on Saturday, April 18, 2026, celebrating another year of cooperative progress, community connection, and member engagement.

Members enjoyed the chance to meet CHELCO employees, explore equipment and safety displays, and learn more about the cooperative's programs and services.



*(From L to R): CHELCO Energy Services team members Betty Sims, Bryan Gilbert, Holli Grantham, Kevin Campbell and Tina Rushing.*

New this year, CHELCO CEO Steve Rhodes extended a special invitation to **Gary Smith, CEO of PowerSouth Energy Cooperative**. Smith has led

CHELCO's wholesale power provider since 2000, and his presence made this year's meeting especially meaningful as he prepares to retire on June 1. Rhodes and Smith explored the future of the electric utility industry and the evolving role of cooperatives, particularly as rapid growth in data centers, artificial intelligence, and other emerging technologies drives new expectations for reliability, capacity, and innovation.

Each household in attendance also received a \$10 bill credit as a thank-you for attending. Immediately following the business meeting, CHELCO drew ten winners for the \$1,000 CHELCO Scholarship, continuing the cooperative's commitment to supporting local students and lifelong learning.

For those who may have missed the meeting—or would like to revisit Smith's remarks—a full recording of the business meeting and Q&A is available on **CHELCO.com** and on **CHELCO's YouTube** page.



A Touchstone Energy<sup>®</sup> Cooperative 

### Inside

#### Page 2

CEO Insights: Preparing Together for Hurricane Season

#### Page 3

CHELCO Charity Golf Tournament is May 29

#### Page 4

2026 CHELCO Board of Trustees election results

### Upcoming Holidays & Office Closures

CHELCO offices will be closed the following dates:

- **May 15 - All Employee Training Day**
- **May 25 - Memorial Day**
- **July 6 - Independence Day (Observed)**
- **Sept. 7 - Labor Day**
- **Nov. 26-27 - Thanksgiving**
- **Dec. 11 - All Employee Training Day**
- **Dec. 24 - 25 - Christmas**
- **Jan. 04, 2027 - New Year's Day (Observed)**

For more information on CHELCO office hours and locations, visit [www.chelco.com/chelco-offices-hours](http://www.chelco.com/chelco-offices-hours). Need to pay in a pinch? Learn more about **PayGo** on Page 3 of this newsletter.



## CEO Insights: Preparing Together for Hurricane Season

As we turn the page into May, our focus naturally shifts toward the start of **Hurricane Season** on **June 1**. Each year, we hope Mother Nature grants us a quiet summer. But hope alone is never a plan. At CHELCO, we prepare for the worst so we can deliver the best for our members—no matter what the season brings.



**Preparation is a responsibility we share as a cooperative family.** For our members, that means taking a few simple steps now to protect your home and loved ones.

- Create or refresh your storm kit with essentials like flashlights, batteries, medications, water, and nonperishable food.
- Review your family’s emergency plan and make sure everyone knows where to go and how to communicate if severe weather approaches.
- Stay connected to trusted local resources, especially your county’s Emergency Management Department, which provides real-time updates, shelter information, and storm guidance tailored to our communities.
- If you or someone in your home depends on electricity for medical

equipment or mobility, it’s important to plan ahead. Florida’s Special Needs Registry helps local emergency management agencies identify and assist individuals during disasters. *Please note, registering does not guarantee priority power restoration. If you depend on electricity, you must have a backup plan or evacuation strategy in place.*



Inside CHELCO, preparation is just as intentional. At the direction of our Senior Vice President & Chief Operating Officer, CHELCO employees participate in our annual **Hurricane Readiness Meeting**.

This cooperative-wide exercise brings together each functional workgroup—from line operations and engineering to member services and communications—to walk through scenarios and ask the critical question: “What if this happened?” That question drives our planning.



What if a storm stalls over the Panhandle? What if flooding limits access to certain areas? What if multiple circuits are damaged at once? By challenging ourselves with these possibilities now, we **strengthen our ability to respond swiftly and safely when it matters most.**

Many of our members may be surprised to learn that during

a major storm response, every CHELCO employee is effectively on call. Employees step out of their day-to-day roles and take on responsibilities that support the crews working to restore power. You’ll see staff from various departments delivering meals to field crews, coordinating logistics, or helping manage materials. It’s a full-team effort, and it reflects the cooperative spirit at its best.



Our readiness is also shaped by the cooperative principle of **Mutual Aid**. Over the years, CHELCO crews have traveled across the Southeast to help sister cooperatives rebuild after storms. We’ve stood shoulder-to-shoulder with linemen in Louisiana to South Carolina—restoring power for communities facing their darkest days. And should our region ever face similar challenges, we know that same support will come right back to us.

While we pray for a gentle season, we remain committed to being ready for whatever comes our way. Your cooperative is prepared, your crews are trained, and your community is supported by a team that takes this responsibility to heart. Thank you for trusting CHELCO to power your homes, your businesses, and your lives—through calm skies and stormy ones alike.

**Steve Rhodes,**  
Chief Executive Officer

## CHELCO Charity Golf Tournament Returns May 29



(From L to R): Emily Cowan, CHELCO Senior Vice President of Member Services and External Affairs; CHELCO Board Vice President, Brady Bearden; and Jeanine Koons, Manager of Human Resources and Training at the 2025 CHELCO Charity Golf Tournament.



CHELCO invites golfers of all skill levels to hit the greens for a great cause at the annual CHELCO Charity Golf Tournament on **Friday, May 29** at **Eagle Springs Golf and Recreation Park**.

Whether you're a seasoned player or picking up a club for the first time, this event is a fun way to support organizations making a difference in our community.

All proceeds from the tournament will benefit three local non-profits that provide critical services to children and families across our region:

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

The day begins with **registration at 8 a.m.**, followed by a 9 a.m. shotgun start. Teams will compete in a **four-person scramble**, a format that keeps the game fun and accessible for golfers at every level. A variety of sponsorship opportunities are also available for businesses and individuals who want to support the cause.

To learn more, register a team, or explore sponsorship options, visit [CHELCO.com/golf](http://CHELCO.com/golf) or contact tournament director Tyler Wood at [twood@chelco.com](mailto:twood@chelco.com) or (850) 307-1121.

Join us for a day of camaraderie, community, and charity—all while helping support organizations that serve children and families throughout CHELCO's service territory.

## Read our 2025 Annual Report

Want a deeper look at your cooperative's year? Scan the QR code or visit [CHELCO.com/annual-reports](http://CHELCO.com/annual-reports) to explore our 2025 Annual Report, featuring messages from our CEO Steve Rhodes and Board President Gerald Edmondson, the 2025 Year in Review, financial statements, and Annual Meeting minutes.



CHELCO is governed by a nine-member Board of Trustees: Lee Perry, District 1; Terry Pilcher, District 2; Brantlee Lawrence, 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](http://CHELCO.com/board-trustees).



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Checkout by PayGo is a fast, simple, and convenient way to pay your electric bill at the checkout counter of participating retailers — just like buying groceries!

## GET STARTED TODAY!

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## Spring Member Appreciation Event a Home Run!



(From left to right): Nathan Hobbs, Board Vice President Brady Bearden, Chelsea Blaich, Betty Sims, Sam Dunn, Kevin Wilkerson, Zach Williams, and Tyler Wood at the Paxton Member Appreciation event.

CHELCO recently held its Spring Member Appreciation Night at Paxton School's Lady Cats softball game against Jay. All members in attendance were given free admission, and one lucky member was awarded a \$100 bill credit.

A special thank you to Paxton softball, Coach Carson Lassiter, and the rest of the staff who helped make our event a success!

Stay tuned for more information about our upcoming Fall 2026 Member Appreciation event.

## CHELCO Board of Trustees Update



**Brantlee Lawrence**  
District 3



**Ronnie Jones**  
District 5



**Gayle Hughes**  
District 8

Following the 2026 election, meet the Trustees for Districts 3, 5, and 8:  
**District 3, Brantlee Lawrence** (Newly-appointed to replace Tim Braddock who resigned due to relocating outside of CHELCO's service territory)  
**District 5, Ronald "Ronnie" Jones** (45 years of service to the Board)  
**District 8, Gayle Hughes** (27 years of service to the Board)

The Board of Trustees also held its election of officers following the Annual Meeting and nominated the following officers, unchanged from 2025:

**President: Gerald Edmondson (District 6)**  
**Vice President: Brady Bearden (District 4)**  
**Secretary/Treasurer: Gayle Hughes (District 8)**  
**Asst. Secretary/Treasurer: Bert Prutzman (District 7)**

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



**IF A VEHICLE OR OBJECT CONTACTS A POWER LINE OR UTILITY POLE**



Consider **all lines** to be live and dangerous.



**Tell others** not to approach vehicle, downed lines, or anything that may be in contact with downed lines.



Stay in place or inside your vehicle unless you see **fire or smoke**.

**35ft**

Warn others to stay at least **35 feet away**.



**IN THE EVENT OF FIRE OR SMOKE**

**Do not touch** the ground and vehicle at the **same time**.



Jump from the vehicle with your **feet together**.



**Shuffle away** and avoid lifting your feet.



### \$25 BILL CREDIT

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