

CHELCO NEWS

POWERED *by* YOU

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A Legacy of Generosity: Drebing's Gift Continues to Support Local Needs



Some may remember last year when CHELCO shared the news about an extraordinary gift from long-time member Muriel "Midge" Drebing, who willed the cooperative \$1.9 million after her death at age 77 in October 2021.

Now in its second year, The Drebing Fund—named in her memory—has become a meaningful way for CHELCO to extend her generosity into the community she called home.

Through a partnership with United Way Emerald Coast (UWEC), the fund is managed and distributed to vetted, high-impact nonprofit organizations serving Walton, Okaloosa, and surrounding counties.

Each year, a portion of the Drebing Fund supports:

- **501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations** that provide educational resources, family services, and programs that enhance quality of life in our communities.

- **CHELCO members in financial hardship**, through agencies offering utility bill assistance, ensuring that neighbors can keep the lights on during difficult times.

This year alone, \$90,000 was distributed through the fund—\$67,500 to community nonprofits and \$22,500 to agencies providing utility assistance to CHELCO members.

Mrs. Drebing's kindness is a lasting reminder of the power one person can have in making a difference. Her thoughtful estate planning ensures that, year after year, local families, students, and organizations receive the support they need to thrive. CHELCO is honored to carry out her legacy, and we remain committed to using these funds with integrity, transparency, and deep gratitude.

To learn more about the Drebing Fund and to see which organizations received grants, please visit [CHELCO.com/charitable-chelco](https://www.chelco.com/charitable-chelco).



A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

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Office Hours Change This Month

CHELCO will implement new hours of operation beginning Friday, August 29, 2025.

New Office Hours

Mon. - Thurs.: 7:30 AM - 4:30 PM

Friday: 7:30 AM - 4:00 PM

Closed every other Friday

While offices will be closed every other Friday, your cooperative never stops working. Members can still access their account through select area office kiosks, the MyCHELCO app, phone payments, online account, and drop boxes.



FOR MORE INFO, VISIT
[WWW.CHELCO.COM/](https://www.chelco.com/)
[CHELCO-OFFICES-HOURS](https://www.chelco.com/offices-hours)



CEO Insights: Thinking about solar? We're here to help

Residential solar panels are becoming more affordable and accessible, and many homeowners are considering them as a way to reduce their electric bills. If you're thinking about installing rooftop solar, it's important to understand how it works — and how CHELCO can help you make an informed decision.

What is Net Metering?

CHELCO offers a net metering program for members who install a renewable energy system, such as solar panels, at their home or business. Here's how it works:

- During sunny hours, your solar panels may generate more electricity than your home uses.
- That extra energy doesn't go to waste — it's sent back to the electric grid.
- In return, you receive a credit on your CHELCO bill for the excess electricity.

While solar is the most common option, net metering can also apply to other small-scale renewable systems, including wind, hydroelectric, geothermal, and biomass energy.

How are credits calculated?

When your system isn't generating enough electricity — like at night or on cloudy days — your home pulls power from the grid, and your meter runs like normal. When you generate more than you use, you send power back to the grid. At the end of the billing cycle, you're billed for the net amount of electricity you used — that's the energy you pulled from the grid minus the energy you sent back.

Who uses the excess power?

When your solar array sends electricity back to the grid, it doesn't necessarily go to your neighbor's house. Instead, it feeds into CHELCO's local power grid, where it becomes



Above: A CHELCO member's home, featuring a rooftop solar array. Check out our interview with Mr. Smythe, where he shares his experience with solar, by scanning the QR code.

part of the overall energy supply for the community.

While generating your own energy is exciting, it's also a big investment. That's why it's important to understand how everything works before moving forward.

What to know before installing solar

If you're a CHELCO member and plan to install a renewable system, there are a few steps you'll need to complete:

- Review CHELCO's net metering rate.
- Have your system inspected by your county building department.
- Sign an interconnection agreement with CHELCO.
- Schedule a final inspection and meter installation by a CHELCO technician.

Do your homework

Before signing a contract, contact CHELCO's Energy Services team. We can help you review your energy use, understand your potential savings, and determine if solar is the right fit for your home. We also recommend contacting multiple solar vendors to compare quotes and make sure you're getting accurate, transparent information.

Watch out for misleading sales tactics

Unfortunately, we sometimes hear from members who've been approached by aggressive or misleading solar salespeople.

While many solar companies are honest, we encourage you to be cautious. If something sounds too good to be true, it usually is.

Some door-to-door sales teams falsely claim to be "partnered with CHELCO" or suggest they "work with CHELCO" — this is simply not true. CHELCO is not affiliated with any solar sales company.

We're here to help

At CHELCO, we're more than your power provider — we're your energy partner. If you're curious about solar or have questions about how net metering works, we're just a phone call away.

Contact our Energy Services team at (850) 307-1122, or visit [CHELCO.com/renewables](https://www.chelco.com/renewables) to learn more.

Let us help you power your home with confidence.

Steve Rhodes,
Chief Executive Officer

Pilcher begins term on Federated Board



CHELCO District 2 Trustee Terry Pilcher recently began a term on the Federated Rural Electric Insurance Exchange Board of Directors. In this role, Pilcher will represent Region 2, which includes Florida, Georgia and South Carolina

Federated Rural Electric Insurance Exchange is a member-owned, not-for-profit reciprocal insurance exchange founded in 1957 that provides coverage to rural electric co-ops.

CHELCO a proud mission partner of Eglin Air Force Base



CHELCO team members from our office on Eglin AFB pose in front of Lockheed SR-71A Blackbird at the Air Force Armament Museum.

On September 14, 2016, the Defense Logistics Agency awarded a utilities privatization contract to Choctawhatchee Electric Cooperative (CHELCO) to own, operate, and maintain the electrical system infrastructure at Eglin Air Force Base (AFB), Florida, for 50 years.

One of the most important benefits we've delivered to Eglin has been considerable outage reductions and faster restoration times. Since the contract started CHELCO has:

- **Reduced number of outages by 34%**
- **Reduced length of outages (SAIDI) by 40%**
- **Improved restoration times (CAIDI) by 38%**

The benefits of the UP contract aren't limited to the on-base support. Serving Eglin AFB through the UP contract enables your cooperative to offset some operational costs. This helps the cooperative to maintain affordable rates for its residential and commercial members. This partnership ultimately benefits the entire co-op community by strengthening financial sustainability while supporting a key regional military installation.

At CHELCO, our commitment goes beyond providing reliable electrical service—we're proud to support the military community living and working on base. We actively engage with service members through a variety of programs and events, including Honorary Commander inductions, military appreciation events, changes of command ceremonies, and key immersion briefings.

CHELCO recognized by co-op communicators



Above (from L to R): Manager of Communications & Community Affairs Chelsea Blaich, Communications Specialist Tyler Wood and Vice President of Member Services & External Affairs Emily Cowan.

CHELCO's Communications Department was recognized for their outstanding work during the Cooperative Communicators Association's (CCA) annual awards ceremony, held during the 2025 CCA Institute, June 1-3, in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Professional communicators representing more than 42 cooperatives from across the United States and Canada submitted around 400 entries in this year's competition. The awards recognize the best in writing, photography, programs, projects, and publications.

The department won Second Place for the Online/Electronic Newsletter, CHELCO News.

CCA is the only professional communications organization dedicated to serving those associated with member-owned businesses.



CHELCO teammates were honored to attend the Change of Command Ceremony for the Army 6th Ranger Training Battalion Lt. Col. Bradley Goodyear (second from left)

Local students visit Washington, D.C., for NRECA Youth Tour



L to R: Abby Lewis, Michael Richards, Landree Ryan and Ariana Henry at the Lincoln Memorial during the NRECA Youth Tour in Washington, D.C.

Since the late 1950s, electric cooperatives across the country have participated in a powerful tradition known as the **Youth Tour**, sending high school students to Washington, D.C., for an unforgettable week of learning, leadership, and connection. This June, more than 1,600 students from 44 states came together in our nation's capital to take part in this life-changing experience — and four local students proudly represented CHELCO.

This year's CHELCO delegates were Ariana Henry (Laurel Hill School), Abby Lewis (Rocky Bayou Christian School), Michael Richards (Baker School), and Landree Ryan (Freeport High School). These students earned their spots through a competitive application process, submitting compelling video entries that were evaluated by an independent panel of judges familiar with the Youth Tour program.

Throughout the week, students visited iconic landmarks such as the U.S. Capitol and national memorials, met with congressional staff, and gained a deeper understanding of the role electric cooperatives play

in powering and supporting their communities. Just as important, they formed lasting friendships with students from across the country — a hallmark of the Youth Tour experience.

Applications for Youth Tour 2026 will open in November, with information shared through local high school guidance counselors and at **CHELCO.com/youth-tour**. To be eligible, students must be high school juniors and the child of a CHELCO member.

If you know a student who is passionate about leadership, government, or service — encourage them to apply for this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity!



Students visit George Washington's Mount Vernon home during NRECA Youth Tour.

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

Water Activities Safety Tips



Water and electricity never mix! Remember to practice electrical safety when you're cooling off this summer.

- If you hear thunder, immediately exit the water. Storms may be near.
- Never bring electrical devices near the water. If they come in contact with water, electrical shock could occur.
- Outdoor electrical outlets should be covered to keep them dry.
- When possible, use battery operated electrical devices near water.



\$25 BILL CREDIT

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