

South Carolina co-op



On a miss



Concern for community is one of the bedrock principles that guide South Carolina's electric cooperatives, and the same can be said for co-op members and employees who volunteer their time and talents on service and mission trips abroad. Here are three examples of how South Carolinians are making the world a better place, one life-changing project at a time. **BY JAN A. IGOE**

WHAT'S YOUR STORY?
Tell us about your experience helping others on a service project or mission trip. Send stories, photos and web links to Helping Others, 808 Knox Abbott Dr., Cayce, SC 29033 or to letters@scliving.coop. We'll compile our favorites and publish them online at SCLiving.coop. Sorry, photos cannot be returned.

Two drops of prevention, a world of cure

ADREL LANGLEY,
Santee Electric
Cooperative



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ADREL LANGLEY

Adrel traveled to India to participate in Rotary International's effort to eradicate polio.

Rotarians have a four-way test for thoughts, words and actions. Everything has to be the truth, fair to all concerned, intended to build goodwill and better friendships, and beneficial to everyone involved. Adrel Langley covered all the bases by spending her vacation giving life-saving polio vaccines to children in India, where the crippling polio virus still stalks the population.

"After hearing a speaker who had been to India to give the vaccines, my heart led me to go," says Langley, manager of community relations for Santee Electric Cooperative. "My great uncle always walked with a limp because of polio. He passed away, but my 15-year-old daughter didn't know why Uncle Bill walked that way. That generation has never heard of polio."

In the Western hemisphere, where Jonas Salk's vaccine quelled the polio epidemic generations ago, the disease has been largely forgotten. But children in Afghanistan, India, Nigeria and Pakistan are still at risk. According to the World Health Organization, if just one child anywhere in the world is infected, then no child is safe from polio.

Highly infectious, polio usually strikes children under 5 years of age and can cause total paralysis in a matter of hours.

Collaborating with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, UNICEF and the World Health Organization, Rotary International hopes to wipe polio off the planet by 2013. Since the 1985 launch of its PolioPlus



“I’m inspired by the challenges [of] a seemingly impossible project.”

program, the organization has dispatched 1 million volunteers and contributed more than \$700 million to support vaccination programs, and the effort is paying off. In 1988, there were 350,000 polio cases in 125 countries. Since then, cases have decreased more than 99 percent.

“The Rotary mission is not to stop until every child is polio-free,” says Langley, 39, who now speaks to community groups to raise awareness about the disease many Americans have forgotten.

Sponsored by a local company’s \$5,000 donation, Langley joined about 20 Rotarians from around the country for the February trip. After visiting New Delhi, Agra and Jaipur, to learn about the culture, the team traveled to a small village in West Bengal, where eight cases of polio had been diagnosed.

The Rotary team went from house to house, offering to vaccinate children at risk. Langley says she was surprised at the trust villagers put in the volunteers.

“It was very touching that a person would just hand me their child for any reason,” she says. “Many of these people had never seen people with white skin and blonde hair, and they were intrigued. Doctors from the World Health Organization said our presence would cause many more people to bring their children to have them vaccinated in the future.”

During her two weeks in India, Langley was also deeply touched by the gratitude of the people she met. In Kolkata, at a Rotary-sponsored prosthetics clinic, dozens of people lined up, patiently waiting for hours in the heat.

“If we wait more than 15 minutes, we get aggravated,” says Langley, who saw people with missing legs getting around on their hands, with no wheelchairs to help them.

At the clinic, Langley watched a young woman who’d lost her legs to polio as an infant take her first steps on prosthetic legs. “When limbs become too deformed to save, they’re amputated,” she says. “The way they diagnose polio is onset of paralysis, when it’s too late for prevention.”

Still, Langley described the occasion as joyous. “There was nothing sad about it. Her mother had the most wonderful smile and they were thanking everyone.”

No stranger to world travel—she joined a Rotary International Group Study Exchange to Wales in 2006—Langley says her time in India transformed her outlook on life here at home.

“There are no words that can begin to describe the horrendous living conditions there. My daily life revolves around keeping the lights on for Santee Electric co-op members. These people don’t even have electricity, much less sanitation or clean drinking water,” she says. “It made me realize how privileged the poorest people in America are to live in a country with so many programs to help our citizens. I was embarrassed and ashamed of how much I’ve taken for granted.”



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MILOSZ RETERSKI

Building bridges to a better world

MIKE McCORMICK AND THOMAS BLACK,
Fairfield Electric Cooperative



WALTER ALLREAD

Mike, left, and Thomas display a plaque commemorating the bridge-building project. At the bottom is a length of the heavy steel cable used to span the river.

Whenever thunderous downpours threaten South Carolina, weather advisories warn locals to avoid travel. During the rainy season in Matiguas, Nicaragua—when destitute villagers are cut off from markets, schools, family, farmland and medical care—some have no choice but to attempt crossing the swollen, unpredictable rivers.

“Drowning is No. 1 cause of accidental death in Nicaragua,” says Mike McCormick, a Fairfield

Electric Cooperative member who has been smitten with Nicaraguan people since his first school-building mission trip in 1999. The mission team leader at Sandy Level Baptist Church in Blythewood couldn’t shake their predicament out of his heart. His passion quickly spread through the 150-member church.

Parishioners have been answering McCormick’s call for at least a decade, providing food ministries, sending youth teams, pouring concrete floors for homes and sheltering orphans. But no one had a clue how to approach his next challenge. During the rainy season, villagers outside Matiguas lacked a safe way to cross the river each day. Young and old would attempt the crossing with their wares stacked on their heads. The alternative—going around the



Riding, walking or driving across an often-swollen river was the only way two Nicaraguan communities could access one another before a 200-foot-long walking bridge was built by members of Sandy Level Baptist Church in Blythewood.

river by horse or mule when the river becomes impossible to cross—would take six or seven hours.

“Mike’s Nicaraguan friend wanted our mission team to come and build the Gavilan and Patastule communities a walking bridge,” says Thomas Black, vice president of engineering for Fairfield Electric Cooperative. “He told us the story of a whole family who were crossing the Bul Bul River in a small truck, when suddenly a wall of water hit the truck, causing it to turn over several times. The whole family drowned.”

Black, an electrical engineer, volunteered to approach some of his civil engineering contacts for help designing the bridge. “They must have thought I was crazy for asking them to help design a 200-foot walking bridge over a raging river in Nicaragua,” he says.

The first answer to his prayers arrived in March 2010, when a friend emailed him a story about Bridges to Prosperity, also known as B2P. The nonprofit organization, founded by Ken Frantz in 2001, helps communities in third world countries build footbridges over impassable rivers to access healthcare, education and economic opportunities. The organization’s mission is to “end poverty caused by rural isolation.”

Two days after Black sent a request for design assistance, B2P agreed to partner with the church. The following month, Black, 42, took his first mission trip to Nicaragua to survey the proposed site, and returned to South Carolina inspired to raise the \$25,000 needed for materials. With the help of the community, myriad fundraisers and several generous church congregations, Black met his goal within five months and by February 2011 he was back in Matiguas helping to lay the first tier of stones for the bridge foundation.

Building the bridge required the entire community’s help and months of hard labor. With no machinery available, volunteers and villagers carried tons of stones from

the river, dug foundations, mixed concrete and placed the foundation by hand. Black returned in May to help pull the first of seven steel cables across the river, another back-breaking task.

“Handling those heavy cables was very hard work, but thankfully there were 12 men there to help,” says Black, who didn’t mind the long hours and physically exhausting work. “If you’re called, you’ll enjoy it. When I swing a golf club, I’m sore.”

The Gavilan-Patastule Suspended Pedestrian Footbridge opened in September, but Black’s work with B2P is far from finished. He gave Matiguas town officials his word that he’d return next year to help build two more bridges. He’s currently seeking \$50,000 in donations to fulfill that promise, and has complete faith the funding will come through.

“I’m inspired by the challenges posed by working on a seemingly impossible project, like building the bridge in Nicaragua, and looking back and seeing how God provided all the answers,” he says.

Have God, will travel

REV. FLOYD SCHLEUGER, Santee Electric Cooperative



COURTESY OF FLOYD SCHLEUGER

As long as there is an opportunity to preach, the Rev. Floyd Schleuger isn’t going to let a few physical ailments, secret police or threats by Al Qaeda mess up his travel plans.

Schleuger, a member of Santee Electric Cooperative and pastor of Liberty Baptist Church in the Lake City/Johnsonville area, turned 73 in August. The bionic reverend has had both knees and a shoulder replaced; and a 55-foot fall through a deteriorating aircraft hangar during his 14-year stint in the Air Force “messed up a bunch of discs” in his lower back, but he still makes mission trips every spring and fall. Diabetes, high blood pressure and prostate cancer haven’t ended his quest to minister. In 1998, just days after gallbladder surgery, he was back on his feet, preaching in Siberia.

His missionary journeys have led the preacher to some of the world’s most inhospitable places. The reverend has been arrested in Russia and China for telling people about God. He’s also found listening devices hidden in his hotel room. If the preacher ever vanished mysteriously, there wouldn’t be anyone around to tell CNN. Schleuger no longer travels with mission teams, preferring to fly solo.

“With teams, you can only preach at government churches that control what you can say. In China, there are undercover agents everywhere—military in civilian clothes. You can pick them out. On one trip with a friend, two carloads of agents would follow us everywhere we went,” he says. “They stopped me from preaching that

“Al Qaeda found out you’d be [in the Philippines]. They’ll try to kill you.”



The Rev. Floyd Schleuger’s mission to the Philippines found him preaching outdoors in town squares and inside at jailhouses.



trip—wouldn’t let me get behind the pulpit.”

No place is too remote, no challenge too daunting for Schleuger, who sometimes travels 12 hours by train and eight more on a bus to reach isolated villages. He’ll gladly preach back-to-back sermons to a handful of hospital patients, a block of maximum-security prisoners, or hundreds at a major venue. He preached right through the deadly SARS outbreak in China without bothering to wear a mask.

During a bus trip in China, Schleuger was traveling with Nancy Liu, his long-time interpreter, when six men out for an easy buck boarded and zoned in on him. She overheard their plan and panicked. “The big man behind you said he’s going to slit the American’s throat and take his money pouch,” Liu whispered. That might have frightened some, but Schleuger was sure God didn’t send him to China to die. “Give them Bibles. Stand up and tell them who I am,”

he instructed Liu, although such public declarations could land him in jail. “Tell them I am a missionary from the United States sent to help the Chinese people find Jesus.”

Liu complied, and the men exited the bus at the next stop, Schleuger says. That night, one of the first in line during the altar call was one of the men who had planned to rob him.

During another mission to China, Schleuger was asked to counsel an older man who lost his hearing “shooting big guns and rockets” in Vietnam, where Schleuger served as civilian coordinator at Da Nang Air Base in the late 1960s.

It didn’t take long for him to realize that this man, sent by China to fight with the Viet Cong, was responsible for attacking his base with mortars and rockets. “Four or five times a week that man tried to kill me and I led him to the Lord,” Schleuger says.

In the Philippines, he encountered threats of a different kind. When Schleuger was preparing to preach an open-air crusade for 400 people, Philippine Army trucks started rolling in. He watched 100 troops spread out on rooftops and throughout the audience, ready to fire their weapons to defend the crowd. “Al Qaeda found out you’d be here,” he was told. “They’ll try to kill you.”

A born salesman, Schleuger tried a few careers on for size before getting around to preaching. He became a Christian in 1963, but waited several decades to become an ordained minister. “I didn’t want to be no preacher,” he says. “It scared me to death.”

After his stint in the Air Force, he farmed tobacco, soybeans and corn, ran a country store, and managed his family’s sanitation company in his home state of Iowa. He aced auctioneering school and spent 22 years hosting Friday night auctions from a revamped farm shed behind his home. Since answering the call to become a preacher almost 12 years ago, Schleuger figures he’s led more than 12,000 people to the Lord.

Every two-week mission costs about \$10,000, mostly for Bibles and gifts for the people. Between overseas trips, he travels throughout South Carolina speaking to churches and civic groups raising funds one love offering at a time. When interviewed this summer, Schleuger had collected just \$1,700 for his fall trip to China, but noted he’d never failed to fund his journeys. “The doors have closed on me a lot of times,” he said. “This magazine article may be the answer to my prayers.” ☺

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Eradicating polio through Rotary International

For more information, visit rotary.org/en/endpolio.

■ TO CONTRIBUTE, visit rotary.org/en/contribute/funds/polioplusfund or send checks designated “PolioPlus” to Kingstree Rotary Club, P.O. Box 504, Kingstree, SC 29556.

Building bridges in Nicaragua

For more information, visit sandylevel.org and bridgestoprosperity.org.

■ TO CONTRIBUTE, send checks designated “Bridge Fund” to Sandy Level Baptist Church, P.O. Box 518, Blythewood, SC 29016.

Rev. Floyd Schleuger’s missionary work

For more information on the Rev. Floyd Schleuger’s mission work call him at (843) 386-3143.

■ TO CONTRIBUTE, make checks payable to Liberty Baptist Church and designate “Missions” on the check. Mail to Liberty Baptist Church, 436 South Fire Station Road, Johnsonville, SC 29555.