



# inside your co-op

For members of Choctaw Electric Cooperative | JANUARY 2025

## Lighting the Way

### Johnie Courtwright recalls the early days of rural electrification in Southeast Oklahoma

Born in 1937, during the Great Depression, Johnie Courtwright grew up in a home without electric lights, refrigeration or running water. In 1955, electricity finally reached his family's house near Oleta. He recalls that life changed overnight: hauling water from the well became a thing of the past, evenings were no longer confined to the glow of kerosene lamps, and food could be preserved in an electric refrigerator. And although Johnie grew up in a household without electricity, he would go on to spend decades of his life ensuring no one else had to.

In 1958, three years after his family received power, Johnie began his career with Choctaw Electric Cooperative. His first role was on the brush-clearing crew, where he spent long hours cutting trees and vegetation to prepare rights-of-way for power lines. It wasn't long before he moved to the construction crew, helping to build out CEC's infrastructure.

Johnie's early years at CEC were defined by the long hours and grueling labor required to bring power to rural Oklahoma.

"In comparison to what they do now, it was totally different," Johnie says. "We'd get the name of a store or little

town, directions to it, and about how long the line should be. Then we'd load up materials, poles and chain-saws. Eight or 10 guys would survey, cut right-of-way and build the line."

Holes for utility poles were dug by hand with a spade and a spoon. Johnie explains the long-handled spade would chop dirt loose, and the spoon would drop in behind it to pull dirt out. They also blasted through tough soil with sticks of dynamite. Poles were hauled into place, sometimes by mules, then set upright with the strength of the crew's shoulders.

Johnie recalls one particularly difficult winter job near Nashoba, when he swam across a frigid river with a rope tied to his belt to pull wire for a new line construction. Climbing as many as 20 poles some days, the physical demands of the job didn't deter him.

"We had fun at it," he says, sharing story after story about the challenges of the job and camaraderie among the crews.

Over time, Johnie's expertise and leadership earned him a promotion to the "hot stick" line maintenance crew. He soon became supervisor of that crew and eventually took on the



role of line superintendent. In this job, he often led crews through ice storms and tornadoes, working long hours to ensure power was restored as quickly as possible. After 40 years of service, Johnie retired in 1997, leaving behind a legacy of commitment to the co-op and the communities of Southeast Oklahoma.

Today, he lives on CEC lines near Sobol with his wife of 66 years, Arvela. Together they raised two sons, Dewayne and Mike. Dewayne followed in his father's footsteps, took a job at Choctaw Electric Cooperative and continues the family's legacy of service.

From a childhood spent in the dark to a lifetime dedicated to bringing light to others, Johnie Courtwright's journey is a testament to the transformative power of rural electrification.

Visit the CEC website to watch an interview with Johnie Courtwright.

## Choctaw Electric Cooperative

Serving members in Choctaw, Pushmataha, Atoka, McCurtain, Bryan and LeFlore counties.

### CONNECT WITH US

Monday-Friday | 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

### 24 Hour Outage Line

(800) 780-6486

### Hugo Office

PO Box 758  
1033 N. 4250 Rd.  
Hugo, OK 74743

Toll free: (800) 780-6486  
Local: (580) 326-6486  
Fax: (580) 326-2492

### Idabel Office

2114 SE Washington  
Idabel, OK 74745

Toll free: (800) 780-6486  
Local: (580) 286-7155

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Tanya Roebuck | Executive Assistant/  
HR & Benefits  
Jia Johnson | Public Relations Director

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Download the free SmartHub  
app in your device's app store

# 85 Years of Progress

Powering our past, present and future

As Choctaw Electric Cooperative celebrates its 85th anniversary this year, I believe our founding members would be pleased to see the progress we've made. After being incorporated in 1940, CEC energized our first 45 miles of line in 1941, serving 250 members. Our first substation was established the same year in Choctaw County, on land donated by a founding board member.

From that humble start, we've grown to operate over 3,815 miles of line, some underground, and serve 15,395 members and 21,850 meters. We maintain 16 substations and one metering point. This infrastructure supports not only residential members but also some of the largest industries in southeast Oklahoma: food processing facilities, rock aggregate plants, and press board manufacturing, which provide valuable jobs to our communities.

Looking ahead into 2025, we're continuing this tradition of progress. Planned upgrades include a new substation in McCurtain County and capacity increases at our Frogville

and Broken Bow substations. A line conversion project in McCurtain County will further strengthen our system's reliability and support growing demand.



CEO Kooney Duncan

Today, technology plays a key role in our success. Tools like outage management systems, remote disconnects and automated reclosers help CEC improve reliability, analyze growth and enhance service.

Since the 1940s, our members' average usage has increased significantly from 40 kWh to 1,215 kWh per month. During this time, our rates have remained relatively stable, with the current rate of 13.1 cents per kWh only slightly higher than 12 cents in 1959 and 8.4 cents in 1941.

As we honor our history, we remain focused on preparing for the future. By investing in infrastructure and technology, we will continue to deliver safe, reliable and affordable energy to our members. Whether you're a long-time member or a new one, we thank you for being part of our journey.

## 2025 Board Meeting Schedule

CEC members are invited to attend monthly board meetings, held at 9 a.m. on the dates listed below. Meetings take place at the co-op's headquarters, 1033 N 4250 Rd., Hugo. Learn more: [choctawelectric.net/board-of-trustees](http://choctawelectric.net/board-of-trustees)

Jan. 28	May 27	Sept. 30
Feb. 25	June 24	Oct. 28
March 25	July 29	Nov. 25
April 29	Aug. 26	Dec. 30



## Energize Your Summer!

### Energy Camp applications now open

Choctaw Electric Cooperative is excited to offer three eighth-grade students from our service area an opportunity to attend Youth Power Energy Camp. Taking place May 27-30, 2025, at Canyon Camp in Hinton, this four-day, high voltage adventure promises fun, learning and discovery.

Students will enjoy summer activities like swimming, hiking and water games while building leadership skills and exploring career possibilities. Hands-on workshops will provide a behind-the-scenes look at the energy industry, including the chance to experience life as a lineworker.

To apply, students must submit a 150-200 word essay addressing this topic: How is electricity generated, transmitted and distributed to Choctaw Electric Cooperative and its members? Essays should be double-spaced, typed or neatly written, and submitted with an attached entry form by 5 p.m., Friday, March 7, 2025. Judging will focus on originality, creativity, composition,

grammar, neatness and spelling.

For more details and entry forms, [choctawelectric.net/energy-camp](http://choctawelectric.net/energy-camp) or contact Energy Camp Coordinator Brad Kendrick at 800-780-6486 ext. 209.



Above: 2024 Energy Camp delegates Kylie Butler, Aiden Pound and Jacob Brunette pose with Willie Wiredhand.

**LAST!  
CHANCE!**

Attention juniors! Youth Tour applications are due by Jan. 17.  
[choctawelectric.net/youth-tour](http://choctawelectric.net/youth-tour)

### Do you remember?

Do you have a memory of when the lights came on? If you were living on CEC lines and recall when your home or farm was first electrified, please contact Jia Johnson at 800-780-6486, ext. 241.

### Go paperless!

Sign up for paperless billing via the SmartHub app or call Choctaw Electric Cooperative at 800-780-6486. New incentives coming soon!

### Energy Saving Tip

Check and replace central heating filters regularly! Dirty filters trap lint, pollen, dust, and more that can reduce airflow. This makes your system work harder, taking longer to heat your home, and driving up costs. Make sure to check your filter every month. If it's dirty, change it. At a minimum, replace your filter at least once every three months.

### Avoid Energy Scams

Never make a utility bill payment to anyone calling you on the phone, coming to your door, texting you or emailing you. Call CEC directly at 800-780-6486 if you have a question about payment or billing information. Know your bill payment options—online, via the SmartHub app, by phone, automatic bank draft, by mail or in person.

### Lucky Acct #38851254

If this is your account number, please contact CEC at 800-780-6486, ext. 241 by the 5th of the month to claim your \$75 bill credit. Unclaimed bill credits roll over each month by \$25 for a maximum credit of \$100.

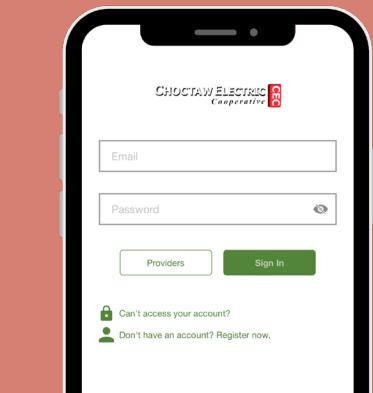


## Celebrating CEC's Retirees!

Congratulations to Choctaw Electric Cooperative's most recent retirees (above, from left): Darryl Barnes - 30 years of service, Amanda Daniel - 23 years of service, Ross Turner - 20 years of service, Jim Percer - 14 years of service. They were recognized at a luncheon in December. We are grateful for their contributions to CEC over the years, and we wish them well in their retirements. Congratulations!

## SmartHub simplifies account management

CEC's free SmartHub app puts account management at your fingertips! Report an outage, pay your bill, sign up for Auto Pay, track your usage history, update contact information, and more! If you have questions, please call customer service at 800-780-6486.

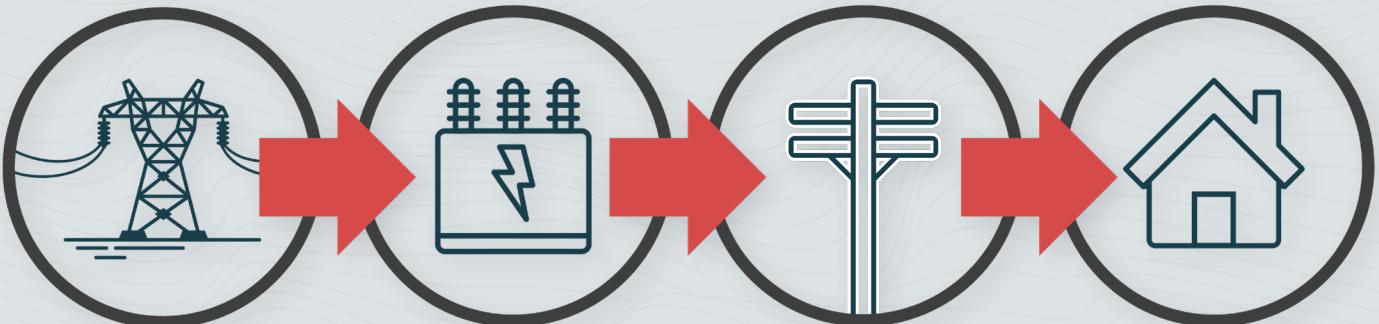


Scan here to learn more and sign up!



## The Steps to Restoring Power

When a major outage occurs, CEC crews work to safely restore service to the greatest number of people in the shortest time possible – until everyone has power.



### 1. High-Voltage Transmission Lines

These lines carry large amounts of electricity. They rarely fail but must be repaired first.

### 2. Distribution Substations

Crews inspect substations, which can serve hundreds or thousands of people.

### 3. Main Distribution Lines

Main lines serve essential facilities like hospitals & larger communities.

### 4. Individual Homes & Businesses

After main line repairs are complete, we repair lines that serve individual homes & businesses.