

NE CONNECTION

A PUBLICATION OF NORTHEAST OKLAHOMA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE



**THREE EARN THEIR
JOURNEYMAN LINEMAN STRIPES**

JANUARY 2026



Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives

NE CONNECTION

A PUBLICATION OF NORTHEAST OKLAHOMA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

Northeast Connection is published monthly to communicate with the members of Northeast Oklahoma Electric Cooperative.

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BUSINESS HOURS

Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Offices are closed Saturday, Sunday and holidays.

DISPATCHING AVAILABLE 24 HOURS

1.800.256.6405

If you experience an outage:

1. Check your switch or circuit breaker in the house and on the meter pole to be sure the trouble is not on your side of the service.
2. When contacting the cooperative to report an outage, use the name as it appears on your bill, and have both your pole number and account number ready.

Please direct all editorial inquiries to Public Relations at 800.256.6405 or email publicrelations@noec.coop

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LOOKING BACK AS WE BUILD FOR THE FUTURE

DANIEL WEBSTER
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

As we prepare to embark on a new year, I always find it beneficial to perform an organizational inventory. This

checklist of sorts involves a review of what was accomplished the year prior. Ultimately, this information can be used to not only assess our performance but also help shape our goals for the coming year.

Call it what you will—"resolution" seems to be the popular term this time of year—but an organization managed effectively should have a plan in place to identify any necessary course corrections while implementing processes and procedures that create pathways for improvement.

In reviewing our accomplishments, I'd first like to congratulate a few of our employees. Our public relations team was recognized by the Oklahoma Association of Electric Cooperatives as the top communicator in the state of Oklahoma in 2025. This achievement reflects an unwavering commitment to effectively communicate, market, and promote the diverse facets of our cooperative—from events such as REC Day and energyKIDS to broadband offerings from BOLT Fiber. The NOEC PR team also received the same honor in 2022, so they are clearly doing something right, and that's something of which we can all be proud.

Speaking of events, it's worth mentioning that several hundred of you turned out for our 2nd Annual energyKIDS day at the Craig County Community Center in Vinita back on June 7. It was a memorable experience for all involved and one that allowed us to focus on delivering an important message of electrical safety in a fun environment for families across our area.

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\$100 IS HIDING!

Search the pages of *Northeast Connection* for a 6-digit account number with an asterisk on each side. For example: *XXXXXX*. Compare it to your account number, which appears on your monthly electric bill. If they match, contact the cooperative at 918.256.6405, by February 1, 2026, to claim a \$100 credit on your electric account.

JANUARY EVENTS

First Day Hike at Natural Falls State Park

Jan 1 | Colcord

Natural Falls State Park

The Grand Christmas Village & Ice Skating Rink

Jan 2-4 | Grove

Grove Community Center

Bluegrass Music Event by River Ridge Bluegrass Association

Jan 3 | Grove

Middle School Auditorium

Miami Public Library Silent Book Club

Jan 16 | Miami

Miami Public Library

Moms Unhinged Stand-up Comedy Show

Jan 22 | Miami

Coleman Theatre

Happy New Year

LOOKING BACK AS WE BUILD FOR THE FUTURE

continued from inside cover

We are thrilled with how many of you attended our 87th REC Day back on September 11. Thanks to your participation, we were able to establish a new registration record of 2,815 members. The previous record of 2,590 was set three years ago at the first-ever Thursday afternoon drive-thru. The success of these multi-location, drive-thru events, along with your overwhelmingly positive feedback, let us know how much you appreciate the convenience of this annual meeting format.

I would like to congratulate three employees on earning important certifications in 2025. Director of Accounting **Leslie Taylor** completed the challenging requirements of the Cooperative Financial Professional Certificate (CFPC) program, and two members of our five-person public relations team completed the Certified Cooperative Communicator (CCC) program. Multimedia specialist **Erin Hill** and marketing specialist **Alyssa Smiley** both completed the CCC course in 2025. These accomplishments are feathers in our cooperative cap that will certainly help drive the success of our cooperative going forward.

We bid farewell to four valuable members of our team and over a century's worth of experience in 2025 as retirement claimed **Wade Robertson, Kelly Rush, Les Newkirk, and Sandy Robison**. Those four employees accounted for 114 years combined on the job.

I consider our operations team to be the backbone of our organization. Along with performing its regular duties of construction and infrastructure maintenance, this team is on the front lines of every storm, working tirelessly to restore power in often-harrowing outage situations. They also find time in their busy schedules to perform many community service-type functions.

Along those lines, NOEC crews last year helped set light poles at the rodeo grounds in Southwest City and set batting cage poles for the little league organization in Wyandotte. They changed light bulbs at a ballfield in Welch, and did the same for the Grove Sports Complex and at the Vinita fairgrounds.

Linemen assist students with an egg drop experiment in Vinita.



They dug holes for New Life Ranch, at the Delaware County Fairgrounds, and to accommodate the City of Fairland's new tornado siren. They dug a ditch for utilities at Cleora Schools and helped the Vinita junior high with an egg drop competition. They installed poles for City of Ketchum, hung a sign at the South Grand Lake Airport, trimmed trees at the Loyal Shawnee tribal stomp grounds, helped do the cooking at the Fourth of July event in Southwest City, hung town Christmas lights for Langley and Oaks, attended a career fair sponsored by the Grove Area Chamber of Commerce, attended a career fair at Fairland High School, and attended Wyandotte's Halloween Trunk or Treat event.

It's a dizzying amount of activity, needless to say, and we appreciate these crews going above and beyond in their efforts to make a difference in their respective communities.

Our operations team was also quick to assist three neighboring co-ops with storm recovery last year. We sent mutual aid assistance crews to Central Rural Electric Cooperative, Kiamichi Electric Cooperative, and Verdigris Valley Electric Cooperative when storm damage on those systems required extra attention.

Lastly, we helped develop the next generation of Oklahoma linemen by hosting 17 interns throughout the year, including 13 from OSU-IT, three from Northeast Tech, and one from Tulsa Tech. We eventually hired two of those interns to full-time positions, offering one from Northeast Tech a lineman position and one from OSU-IT a safety coordinator position.

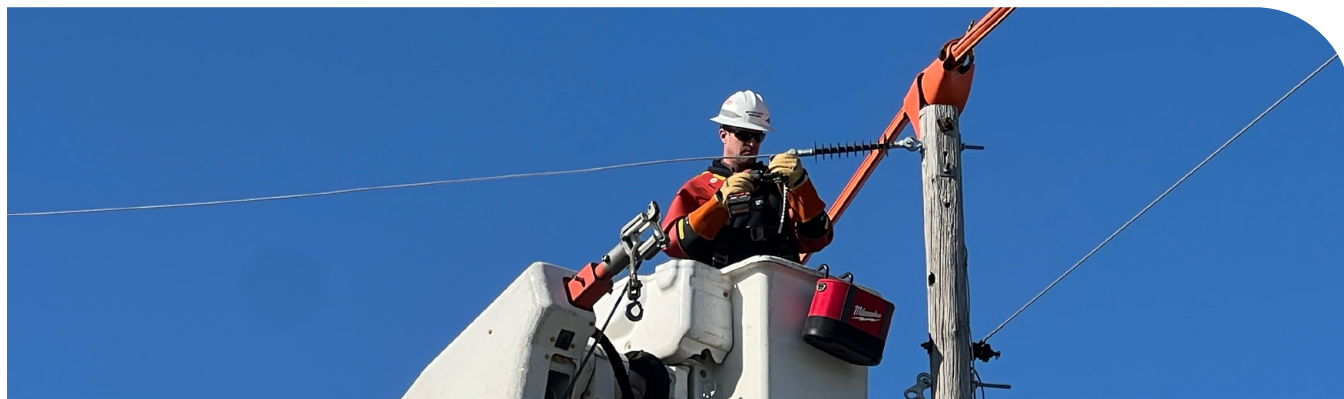
We are proud to announce that BOLT Fiber reached the 18,000-member plateau in 2025.

It should be pointed out that this remarkable achievement is the result of incredible teamwork with contributions being made at every level of our organization. Our broadband deployment will continue in earnest in the coming year as we finish a number of ARPA SLFRF-funded projects across northeast Oklahoma.

Being accessible to you remains a top priority for us. Our member services team is here to support you by answering questions about your service and making sure you stay informed about your account. To give you an idea of how busy they are and how seriously they take their jobs, that team year-to-date has fielded more than 56,000 phone calls.

Thank you for your continued support and patronage as we work tirelessly to build a bright future for our little corner of the state.

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OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE FOR AREA STUDENTS, TEACHERS

Northeast Oklahoma Electric Cooperative (NOEC) is announcing its **youth programs** for the current school year and wants to make sure all eligible students have an opportunity to participate. Along with four \$2,000 college scholarships, the cooperative is sponsoring an all-expense-paid trip to our nation's capital for two students.

► YOUTH TOUR COMMUNITY SERVICE PROJECT (OR ESSAY)

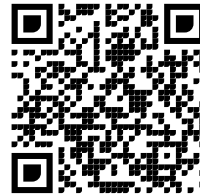
Area high school juniors can complete a 6-8 hour community service project for a chance to win an all-expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C., June 13-19, as part of the 2026 Youth Tour contest. Winning students will also receive \$500 in spending cash. As an alternative form of entry, students can submit a 300-500 word essay on the topic *"Making a Difference Where I Live."* Students who are in the eleventh grade and attend school within cooperative service area are eligible to participate in this contest. Cooperative membership is not a requirement.

Entry deadline: January 25, 2026.

► COLLEGE/TRADE SCHOOL SCHOLARSHIP

High school seniors whose parents or guardians are NOEC members and who live in a household served by NOEC electric can apply for a \$2,000 scholarship to a college, university, or trade school of their choosing. Four winners will be selected.

Entry deadline: April 3, 2026.



SCAN ME!

Learn more:

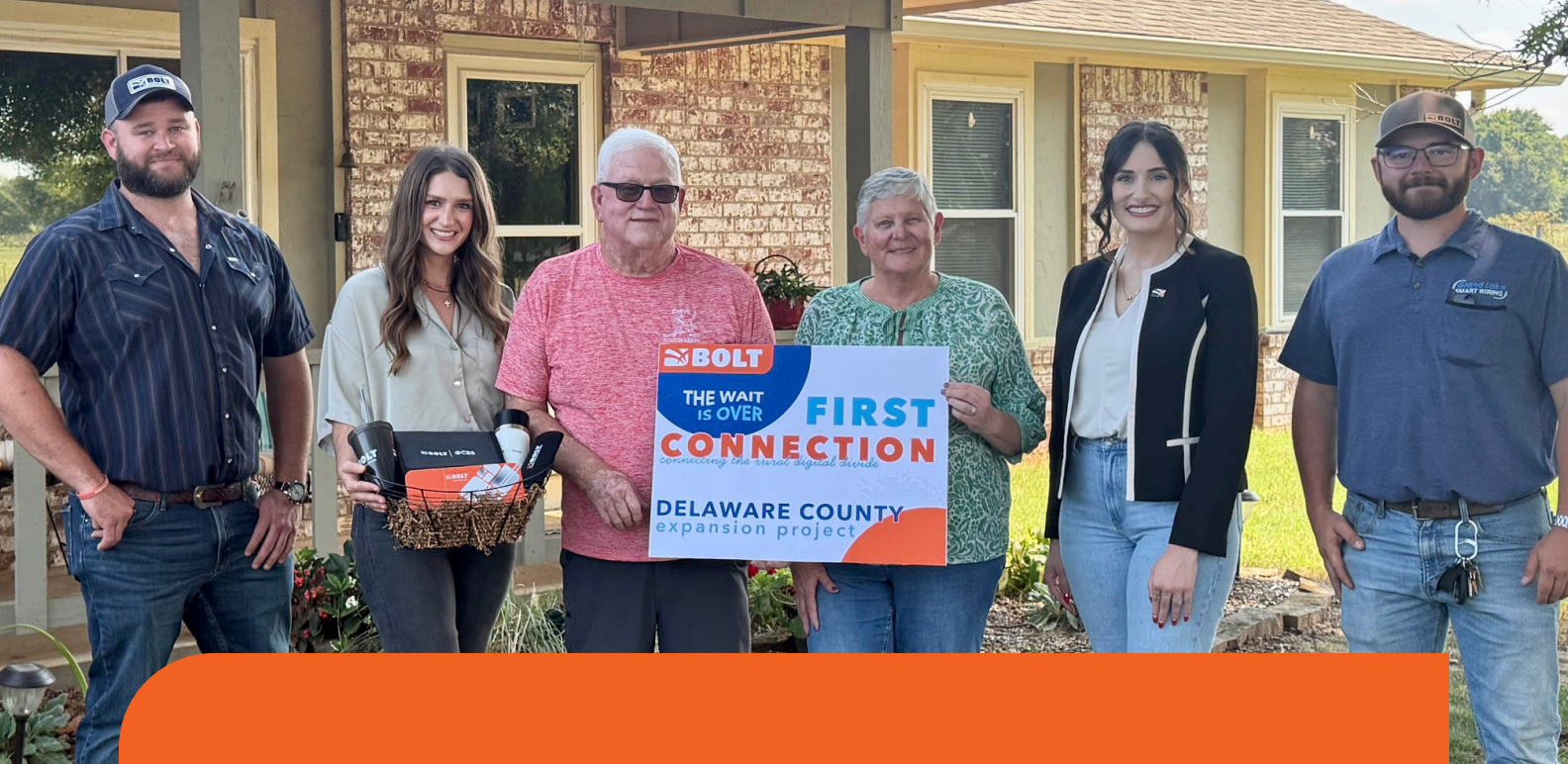
Please scan this code to access more information and applications. You can also visit: www.noec.coop.

► CLASSROOM INCENTIVE

NOEC is encouraging area teachers to get involved. If a teacher administers the Youth Tour Community Service Project (or essay) as part of a classroom assignment and produces a contest finalist, he or she could be rewarded with \$100 toward the purchase of classroom materials or equipment.

For additional information, including entry forms and applications, visit noec.coop. Students can also contact the NOEC Public Relations department at publicrelations@noec.coop.





FIBER DEPLOYMENT

CONTINUES ACROSS NE OKLAHOMA

BOLT Fiber continues its deployment of high-speed broadband infrastructure in several areas across northeast Oklahoma as underwritten by the **American Rescue Plan Act State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund (ARPA SLFRF)**.

Work in **Mayes County** has passed 1,511 homes, covered 117.92 miles, and is 88% complete.

A total of 1,716 homes have been passed and 307.37 miles have been covered so far in **Delaware County**, where work is 66% complete. Work is underway in the Colcord area and will be moving next to the South Grand Lake area before finishing in the Bernice and Afton areas.

In **Ottawa County**, projects have passed 772 homes and covered 74.37 miles. Work is 92% complete with only underground left to finish. Crews are currently working in Town of Quapaw.

Work is also underway in **Craig County**, where thirty miles have been covered. Completion is anticipated in early 2026. Work will also commence (and be completed) in **Rogers County** in early 2026.



Please scan this code to see if your location is eligible for service or visit: tinyurl.com/msu77nfm

SCAN ME!

SHOULD I USE A SPACE HEATER OR TURN UP THE HEAT?

Drafty room?

Before reaching for your space heater, consider whether it's better to plug it in or simply turn up the thermostat.

Space heaters are designed to warm small, targeted spaces – not your entire home. If you find yourself relying on one often, it may be time to address your home's energy efficiency. **Fix efficiency first**, then supplement with a space heater.

Improving your home's efficiency helps it retain heat, reduces drafts and reduces your energy use. Many solutions are affordable and DIY-friendly, such as:

- **Seal air leaks.** Use caulk and weather stripping around windows and exterior doors to prevent drafts.
- **Add insulation where it matters.** Attic insulation has the biggest return on investment, and loose-fill insulation is an affordable option.
- **Check your heating system.** Schedule regular service for your furnace or heat pump. If it's outdated or struggling, it could be time for an upgrade. Check with your utility for potential rebates and incentives.
- **Use programmable thermostats.** These can help reduce energy waste by heating only when and where needed.
- Once your home is sealed and insulated, a space heater can be used to increase comfort and warm specific rooms, like a home office or bedroom, without turning up the heat for the whole house. A space heater is like a ceiling fan; it can improve comfort in a small area, but it's not a whole-house solution.



Use space heaters efficiently:

- Heat only the room you currently occupy.
- Close doors to keep heat contained.
- Choose the right size – too small and it won't warm you; too big and it wastes energy. Check manufacturer sizing guides.
- Use a heater with a thermostat and timer to avoid overheating the room or wasting electricity.

TIPS & TRICKS

ELECTRIC EFFICIENCY

As winter sets in and temperatures outside begin to fall, many of us migrate indoors to escape the cold. If indoor drafts leave you (and your heating bill) still feeling the “chill,” taking control is your best option.

Sealing attic air leaks will enhance the performance of your insulation and make a more comfortable home. Air infiltration is fairly easy to correct, the process requires a careful inspection of your home.

- Make a sketch of your home’s floor plan to reference potential leakage areas, such as dropped soffits over kitchen cabinets or bath vanities, where walls (both inner and outer) meet the attic floor, slanted ceiling over stairways and any other dropped ceiling areas.
- Gather supplies and use flashlights or drop lights to create a well-lit working area.
- Wear lightweight coveralls, a hat and gloves to keep insulation off your skin, a mask to avoid inhalation of hazardous substances, and knee pads to prevent pain from crawling on attic joists.
- Walk on only trusses or joists you trust and watch for nails sticking through the roof deck.
- Utilize inexpensive weather-stripping, caulking, and filler material to seal air leaks.



Attic air sealing may be a DIY project if your attic is accessible and large enough to allow you to move around. Contact a contractor first if you inspect your attic and detect any of the following:

- Wet or damp insulation indicating a leaky roof.
- Moldy or rotted attic rafters or floor joists indicating moisture problems.
- Kitchen, bathroom, and clothes dryer vents that exhaust moist air directly into the attic space instead of outdoors.
- Little or no attic ventilation.
- If you have unsealed and uninsulated recessed can lights, special care must be taken when insulating around these fixtures.



THREE EARN

JOURNEYMAN LINEMAN STRIPES

Tylar Blalock | Cole Owen | Caleb Boyd

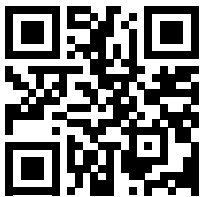
Northeast Oklahoma Electric Cooperative would like to congratulate its most recent graduates from lineman apprenticeship training.

Three members of the NOEC Operations team—Tylar Blalock, Cole Owen, and Caleb Boyd—completed the requirements necessary for graduation from apprenticeship to journeyman status as linemen in 2025. Cole and Caleb both came to us from Oklahoma State University Institute of Technology (OSUIT) in 2022, while Tylar joined our cooperative in 2024 from Davis H. Elliot Company, Inc., where he worked as an underground journeyman lineman.

- ▶ Cole graduated from Vinita High School and is a resident of Vinita. He has a son, Lee, and is engaged to fiancée Lexi. Caleb graduated from Fairland High School and resides in Peoria with wife Cierra and daughter Blayke. Tylar graduated from Chouteau High School and currently resides in Salina with wife Cassidy and sons Ryder and Waylon.

Our cooperative takes a great deal of pride in having a skilled labor force. An important tool for training employees is the **Northwest Lineman College Electrical Lineworker Program**. This is an accredited apprenticeship program that certifies line personnel. The program is recognized by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training.

In order to achieve certification as a journeyman lineman, apprentices must first complete line training through an accredited institution prior to undertaking the Northwest Lineman College Electrical Lineworker Program. The latter includes approximately 40 field-specific exams as well as extensive hands-on training conducted under the supervision of experienced journeymen linemen.



SCAN ME!

Learn more:

about the **Northwest Lineman College Electrical Lineworker Program** by scanning the code or visiting: lineman.edu



Tylar Blalock



Cole Owen



Caleb Boyd

RECIPE

FOR PROSPERITY



954353

HOPPIN' JOHN | FROM THE PIONEER WOMAN

INGREDIENTS

- 4 Tbsp butter
- 1 large onion, diced
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 green bell pepper, diced
- 2 stalks celery, diced
- 1 lb dried black eyed peas
- 5 cups low-sodium chicken broth, plus more as needed
- 1 whole ham hock
- Kosher salt and pepper to taste
- Cayenne pepper to taste
- White or brown rice to serve

Step 1: Soak the black-eyed peas in cool water for at least 6 hours. Rinse before using.

Step 2: Heat the butter in a large pot over medium-high heat. Add the onion, garlic, green pepper, and celery, and stir. Cook for 3 to 4 minutes. Stir in the soaked beans, then add chicken broth and ham hock as well as salt, pepper, and cayenne, to taste. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and cover the pot for 30 minutes.

Step 3: After 30 minutes, check the liquid level; if it's too soupy, cook with the lid off for another 15 minutes or so. If it's too thick, splash in a little more broth. Stir in vinegar, then taste for seasonings. Add more spice if needed.

Step 4: Serve over white or brown rice, making sure to get plenty of the cooking liquid spooned over the top. Or, you may mix the bean mixture with the rice before serving.

Variations: Add red bell pepper, canned diced tomatoes, diced jalapeños, diced ham (instead of ham hocks), or sliced bacon (instead of ham hocks). Stir in torn-up kale when 5 minutes of cooking time remain. You can also use canned, drained black-eyed peas if preferred. Just use diced ham instead of ham hock and a little less broth, as peas won't need to cook as long.

Hoppin' John Tradition In the southern United States, eating Hoppin' John with collard greens on New Year's Day is thought to bring a prosperous year filled with luck. The peas are symbolic of pennies or coins, and a coin is sometimes added to the pot or left under the dinner bowls.