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Proudly serving the members of Albemarle Electric Membership Corporation

## Albemarle Sounds

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**Albemarle Electric  
Membership Corporation**

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative   
The power of human connections®

P.O. Box 69  
Hertford, NC 27944  
(252) 426-5735

**Kevin Heath**, General Manager  
**Chris Powell**, Editor

Website and member portal:  
[www.aemc.coop](http://www.aemc.coop)

Outages and Payments  
**252-426-5735**

*Albemarle EMC is an equal opportunity provider and employer.*

## Byrum Competes in State Pole Top Rescue Competition

In a competition showcasing lifesaving skills, 25 electric cooperative lineworkers from across North Carolina recently raced against the clock – and their peers – for top honors at the 2025 Pole Top Rescue held at Nash Community College.

“Our lineworkers undergo intense training to ensure they’re ready to respond to any call, no matter the situation,” said Bobby Upton, Albemarle EMC manager of operations. “This competition puts their safety and rescue skills to the test while also recognizing the dedication it takes to maintain the lines that power the lives of electric cooperative members.”

During the competition, each lineworker executed a rescue scenario of retrieving an unconscious coworker from atop a utility pole. Each competitor, dressed in full climbing gear of up to 20 pounds, is judged on their swiftness and proficiency in radioing for help, scaling 20 feet up a utility pole, lowering a weighted mannequin and beginning CPR.

To advance to the state competition, each of the 25 competitors had to win a similar rescue event against their peers at their local electric cooperative. This year, Albemarle EMC’s own Matt Byrum completed the exercise with a time of two minutes, 44 seconds. The biennial competition is hosted by North Carolina’s Electric Cooperatives with members of its training and safety team serving as judges. All North Carolina electric cooperative lineworkers must complete this same scenario in less than five minutes to maintain their certification to work on co-op power lines.



## Apply Now for Washington Youth Tour

Albemarle EMC is offering two rising high school juniors or seniors the chance for a trip of a lifetime.

Applications are now being accepted for Albemarle Electric Membership Corporation’s Washington Youth Tour. Rising high school juniors and seniors can apply online by visiting [aemc.coop/schools](http://aemc.coop/schools) and filling out an online application. The deadline to apply is Monday, Jan. 26.



**Albemarle EMC will be closed Thursday, Jan. 1 for New Year's Day. Happy New Year!**

# Operation Manager Retires



Operations Manager Roy O'Neal will retire in January after serving 38 years for Albemarle EMC.

O'Neal was hired in 1988 as a load management technician. He then became a lineman and achieved lineman first class in 1995. In 2005 he was promoted to crew leader and finally manager of operations in 2022.

"Roy worked his way up from the bottom to the very top of the operations department," said Albemarle EMC General Manager Kevin Heath. "He has always been a hard working, dependable employee who will be greatly missed."

A lineman and crew leader for several years, O'Neal helped restore outages resulting from Hurricanes Isabel, Matthew and Irene. He also worked through outages caused by ice storms, tornadoes and countless thunderstorms.

In addition, he traveled with his Albemarle EMC crews to Kentucky, Florida and Alabama to offer assistance to electric cooperatives recovering from storm damage.

He worked through the summer heat and winter cold with a quiet resolve that earned the respect of other linemen who nicknamed him "Daddy." Under his watch, a serious injury never occurred.

"What I will miss the most is the people I have worked with; they really are kind of like family," O'Neal said. "I will also miss helping members getting power back on as safely and as soon as we could."

**Please Don't Use Staples or Paperclips When Mailing in Payments. They Damage Our Letter Opener.**



# Longtime Warehouseman Retires



*Editor's note: General Manager Kevin Heath had this to say about John Coston's retirement: "John has served as the cooperative's warehouseman for more than four decades. Managing inventory is extremely important to an organization where the availability of parts and materials can be the difference between restoring power or not. John performed his duties diligently, and he will be missed."*

**In the following interview, Coston reflects on his tenure at Albemarle EMC:**

**When did you start working for the cooperative?**

My first day was May 1st 1984.

**Why did you choose to work for Albemarle EMC?**

It was a great opportunity for me job-wise.

**What positions have you held at the cooperative?**

I have always been the warehouse supervisor.

**What was it like when you first came to work for the cooperative?**

When I started working at Albemarle EMC we only had one bucket truck and one line truck. We didn't have two crews like we do now.

**How was working here different before the arrival of computers?**

Everything had to be handwritten no matter what it was.

**Looking back on your career, what are you most grateful for?**

I am grateful that Mr. Brooks (former operations manager, now deceased) gave me the opportunity to come to work here. I am also grateful that I was an employee for 42 of the co-ops 81 years of existence, and that my job performance was satisfactory to all of the operations managers I have worked under.

**What was the biggest challenge of your career?**

My biggest challenge was keeping up with and ordering the materials for all the crews that helped us with the recovery after Hurricane Isabel. That was a challenge that I will never forget.

**What will you miss the most about working at the cooperative?**  
Working with my co-workers; I'm going to miss that the most.

**If you have any advice for a person just starting to work at the cooperative, what would it be?**

Just take your time and work safely; because at the end of the day, you want to return home the same way you came to work.

**What are your plans after retirement?**

No big plans, just taking it easy and enjoying my freedom to do whatever I want to.



# Albemarle EMC is at Your Service



## Teachers Rewarded for Bright Ideas

More than \$16,000 was awarded to fund 19 projects for teachers who applied for 2025 Bright Ideas grants. The following are the successful teachers and their projects.

### Camden

Grandy Primary School teacher Glenna Markham was awarded a \$1,435 grant for her project "Read Me a Story & Show Me the World." Her grant will be used to purchase audio books that enable children learning to read to follow along with the text.

Grandy Primary School teacher Terina Culpeper was awarded a \$177.94 grant for her project "Classroom Comfort Increases Love for Learning." She will purchase motivational signs and lighting to create a more comfortable learning environment.

Camden County High School teacher Claudia Jarvis received a \$996 grant for her project "Building Choice, Building Readers." Jarvis plans to purchase sets of reading books for her classrooms.

### Chowan

Chowan Middle School teacher Martha Foster received a \$2,380 grant for her project "Winds of Change, Empowering Chowan Middle School." Foster will purchase wind energy kits for all students in Chowan Middle School. Her goal is to teach students about renewable energy.

White Oak Elementary School teacher Leslie Swain received a \$539 grant for her project "Seats for Success." She will purchase wobble stools and flexible ottomans that enable students to move independently in their own spaces while learning.

John A. Holmes High School teacher Erin Gray received a \$677.43 grant for her project "Borrowing Supplies." She will purchase supplies for a maker space and shared resource library.

D.F. Walker Elementary School

teacher Jessica Rose received a \$247 grant for her project "Board Games, Big Gains: Enhancing Communication, Inclusion & Independence." Her grant will be used to purchase board games to teach her special-needs students skills that include working independently, following directions and completing tasks.

### Currituck

Currituck County High School teacher Jennifer Robinson received a \$1,438 grant for her project "Gingerbread Studio, Design, Create, Sell." Robinson will use her grant to purchase 3Doodler EDU Create Learning Packs that students will use to design and build gingerbread houses. The gingerbread houses will then be marketed to teachers and classmates.

### Pasquotank

Elizabeth City Middle School teacher Christina Rockwell was awarded a \$600 grant for her project "Technology to Help Engagement." She will purchase touchscreen Chromebooks that will enable teachers to move around and interact with their digital whiteboards.

Northeastern High School teacher Martha Hoppe received a \$1,193 grant for her project "Resin Gone Wild." Hoppe will purchase resin and wood materials so students in the Exceptional Children's Department can make wind chimes.

Northside Elementary School teacher Ashley Richardson received a \$948 grant for her project "The Global Pen Project." She will use her grant to purchase paper, stamps, cultural exchange items and learning materials so students can exchange letters with pen pals from different cultures. Richardson also received a \$668 grant for her project "Northside Brew Crew." This grant will be used to purchase supplies for a mobile coffee and snack cart. Students will then run a business selling the items.

Northeast Academy for Aerospace and Advanced Technologies teacher

Linda Nelson received an \$876.10 grant for her project "Harmony in Numbers: Building Math Skills Through Music." She is a Bright Ideas grant winner. She will purchase items that teach music as it relates to mathematics.

### Perquimans

Hertford Grammar School teacher Naomi Mallory received a \$650 grant for her project "Planting Possibilities STEM Learning Through Hydroponics." Her grant will be used to purchase a hydroponic tower so that students can learn about plants grown without soil.

Perquimans Central School teacher Stacy Pierce received a \$900.74 grant for her project "Berries Galore." She intends to use her grant to purchase books, manipulatives and interactive resources to teach students about fruit grown in North Carolina.

Perquimans High School Teacher Silvia Toth received a \$450 grant for her project "Cuentos Sin Final." Toth plans to use her grant to purchase a copy of the book "Cuentos Sin Final" for each of her students. The book is designed to enrich Spanish language learning and includes open-ended stories that students can write their own endings to.

Perquimans Central School Teacher Jenna Caldwell received \$750 for her project "EMS — Every Morning Smiles." Her grant will be used to purchase items with affirmation messages to improve self esteem resilience and confidence.

Perquimans Middle School teacher Cheryl Lacey received \$232.79 for her project "Bringing Novels to Life for Multilingual Learners." She will purchase books written in Spanish to teach students who speak English as a second language.

Perquimans Middle School teacher Michele Swinney received a \$1,000 grant for her project "Happy Hands." She will purchase model kits and other items related to learning about our solar system.