

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT:

Sweet Delights Bakery serves French-inspired treats

After years in corporate America, Christine Freeman chose to pursue a passion she's had since childhood, baking. In 2023, she took a leap of faith and built an in-home bakery in the heart of Saline County, where she is proud to be a member served by First Electric Cooperative. What began as creating desserts for friends and family has grown into Sweet Delights Bakery, rooted in purpose, craftsmanship and community.

With a French background deeply connected to food culture and hospitality, along with formal education in hospitality and business management, Freeman brought together the perfect blend of creativity and expertise. She specializes in custom cakes, cupcakes, wedding cakes and desserts designed to celebrate life's most meaningful moments. Each order is thoughtfully crafted to reflect the client, their story, and the occasion being celebrated.

Beyond beautiful desserts, Freeman's bakery has quickly become known for its heart and attention to detail. She believes baking is more than taste, it's about connection, celebration and creating memories that last long after the final bite. By using quality ingredients and taking the time to understand each client's vision, she ensures every dessert tells a story.

Looking ahead, Freeman hopes to expand into a bakery café that brings together her custom desserts, warm hospitality and community. As a First Electric member, she values being part of a locally owned cooperative that supports small businesses and strengthens the communities it serves. As her business continues to grow, Freeman remains committed to staying rooted in Saline County and giving back to the community that supported her leap of faith, turning a lifelong passion into sweet, meaningful success.



Christine Freeman, owner of Sweet Delights Bakery, specializes in custom cakes and desserts.

MAKE YOUR MARK IN D.C.!

Youth Tour applications now open for high school juniors

Each summer, a select group of Arkansas high school juniors trades textbooks for front-row seats to history. First Electric Cooperative is seeking outstanding students to represent our service area on the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas Youth Tour, an all-expenses-paid, week-long leadership experience in Washington, D.C.

From June 13-19, delegates will join more than 1,800 students from across the nation for a life-changing journey. This isn't just a sightseeing trip, it's an opportunity for young leaders to discover their voices, strengthen leadership skills and begin shaping their legacies.

Participants will:

- **Meet their leaders:** Tour the U.S. Capitol and engage with Arkansas' Congressional delegation.
- **Explore world-class museums:** Visit the Smithsonian Institution and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.
- **Walk through history:** Pay respects at Arlington National Cemetery and visit iconic sites like Mount Vernon and the Lincoln Memorial.
- **Build lasting bonds:** Form lifelong friendships with peers from across Arkansas and the country.

Beyond the unforgettable experiences in Washington, D.C., students selected for the program will also have the opportunity to earn a \$5,000 scholarship.

Apply today and make your mark. **Application deadline is March 6!** For more information, visit firstelectric.coop/community/programs/youth-tour or call 800-489-7405.

Restoring Power, Restoring Hope

Cooperatives unite to power Jamaica

When Jamaica Public Service called for help after Hurricane Melissa devastated nearly 75% of the island's power grid, electric cooperatives from across the United States stepped forward without hesitation.

An 11-member volunteer lineworker team, coordinated through National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) International, traveled to Jamaica to help restore power and support local crews during a critical time. The team represented six cooperatives: First Electric, Rappahannock, Choptank, Steele-Waseca, Northeast Missouri Electric Power/Northeast Power and Sam Houston Electric.

Among the First Electric volunteers were Crew Chief John Hawkins of Perryville, returning for his second restoration trip to Jamaica, and Crew Chief Matt Goetz of Jacksonville, who took part in his first hurricane restoration effort on the island. Together, the crew worked long hours under challenging conditions, driven by a shared commitment to service.

This effort was more than restoring lines — it was about restoring hope. When neighbors needed help, the cooperative family answered, proving once again that the power of cooperation reaches far beyond borders.



Linemen restoring power to Jamaica represent First Electric, Rappahannock, Choptank, Steele-Waseca, Northeast Missouri Electric Power/Northeast Power and Sam Houston Electric.

First Electric Crew Chief John Hawkins of Perryville on his second restoration trip to Jamaica.



Jamaican residents show their appreciation to line crews who helped to restore power.



**THE POWER
TO SERVE YOU.**

105,976

ACCOUNTS SERVED

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800-489-7405

(Option 2 for outage reporting)

Connect2First
connect2first.net
833-411-2234

(Option 2 for outage reporting)

Factors that impact your electric bill

February often brings some of the year's coldest temperatures, and as heaters work harder to keep homes comfortable, energy use increases. Understanding what influences your electric bill can help you make informed choices and manage costs.

Your monthly First Electric bill includes a snapshot of your energy use, which may show higher usage during colder days or when you have guests in your home.

Fuel costs

First Electric Cooperative purchases power from Arkansas Electric Cooperative Corporation (AECC). The cost of generating and delivering electricity can vary with fuel prices, such as natural gas. We work closely with AECC to help manage and stabilize these costs for our members whenever possible.

Extreme weather

While we can't control the weather, we do monitor forecasts and plan for periods of high demand. Frigid temperatures often increase energy use across the system,

which can affect overall costs.

Infrastructure and reliability

A portion of your bill supports the local electric system through a monthly service availability charge. This helps cover equipment, materials, crews and day-to-day operations that keep power lines, substations and other infrastructure reliable in your community.

You have a role

While some factors are outside anyone's control, members can take steps to manage energy use at home. Setting your thermostat to the lowest comfortable temperature, scheduling annual HVAC maintenance and replacing dirty filters can make a difference. Sealing air leaks and using high-energy appliances during off-peak times can also help reduce consumption.

At First Electric Cooperative, we remain committed to providing safe, reliable power at an affordable cost — while serving our members and communities with care.





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