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**SANTEE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE NEWS**  
 Joanna Hayes, *Editor*  
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**SANTEE ELECTRIC IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY PROVIDER AND EMPLOYER.**



A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



## I call him “Coach”

**I WANT TO KICK OFF** February by featuring another of SEC’s awesome employees. Jeff Brand is one of our construction crew foremen, and I know you will enjoy getting

to know him.

Jeff was born and raised in Kingstree and still lives in the Mouzon community. He went to Walker Gamble Elementary School and Kingstree Middle and High schools.

As one of seven children, family is a big deal to Jeff. He has one sister in Baltimore, but all his other siblings live nearby. Jeff’s parents, Mary Ann (who passed several years ago) and Ronald, have been a major influence in his life. Jeff’s wife, LaShanda, is an outpatient registrationist at MUSC Health Black River Medical Center.

Jeff has three sons and one granddaughter. DaQuan, 29, lives in Myrtle Beach and works for Palmetto Paving. James, 25, lives in Kingstree and works for Pepsi. Tyson, 24, also lives in Kingstree and works for Jimmie’s Tree Service. Granddaughter Peyton is 9 years old and is into dance and cheerleading. She calls Jeff “Pe-Pot,” so I’m sure he’s going to have a new nickname when everyone reads this!

Jeff loves fishing, particularly setting bush hooks for catfish, with his work buddies. He also loves traveling to college and pro football games and is a proud Cowboys fan. “Most of all, though, I’m a community guy,” he says. “I love working with kids in my area.” I’ve called Jeff “Coach” since I arrived at SEC, because my first memory of him was our sons being roughly the same age and playing baseball.

Jeff came to SEC in 2000 as a groundman on a line crew, and has worked his way to the top. Jeff has been the foreman of our crew covering the Manning and



Jeff Brand

JOANNA HAYES

Lake Marion areas for two years. I asked him what he likes best about his job, and he replies, “I love being in a position to help people. I’ve been on both sides in my life—needing help and giving help. It’s great to be able to give help.”

I also asked him about the tough part of the job. “Supervising people occasionally requires you to correct someone,” Jeff replies. “Going from buddy to boss has been a transition.”

Asked what he likes best about Santee Electric, he says something I have not heard in one of these interviews before. “Innovation!,” he says. “When I first came here, we carried around these huge books of maps in our trucks to help us navigate around. Now I can do all of that on my laptop or my phone!”

I end the interview by asking for one thing Jeff wants our readers to know. “This place is not unreachable,” Jeff says. “I grew up in a community where the co-op was a very prestigious job, and I thought it was out of my reach. The fact that I’m here and have risen to this position gives a lot of people hope.”

If you see Coach (or Pe-Pot) tell him we appreciate him a great deal. He’s hard to miss, because he always has a great big smile! SEC’s fortunate to have him.

### SANTEE EXTRA

Check out pages 12A-12D for a feature on Zilmet USA and more!

**ROBERT G. ARDIS III**  
 President and Chief Executive Officer

# Scholarships Available

## Operation Round Up Scholarship (\$2,500)

The SEC Round Up Trust will provide one \$2,500 scholarship in each of the four counties that we serve.

## Empower the Future Scholarship (\$1,000)

Santee Electric Cooperative offers multiple \$1,000 scholarships to seniors from the high schools in our service territory.

## Annual Meeting Scholarship (\$500)

Eight \$500 scholarships will be awarded to high school seniors at our Annual Meeting on April 14 (application below).

**Applications and scholarship guidelines are available at [santee.org/sec-schools](http://santee.org/sec-schools).**

**The deadline to apply is March 26.**



## \$500 Annual Meeting Scholarship Application

Santee Electric Cooperative will award eight \$500 scholarships to high school seniors at our Annual Meeting on April 14. Two awards each will be randomly drawn from applicants in Williamsburg, Clarendon, Georgetown and Florence counties. Please read the eligibility information and requirements before applying. Applications are due by 4:30 p.m. on March 26.

**Deadline:  
March 26  
Enter today!**

**Mail application to:**  
Santee Electric Cooperative  
Attn: Joanna Hayes  
P.O. Box 548,  
Kingstree, SC 29556

### Requirements/Eligibility

- Must be a high school senior.
- All blanks must be filled out or the application will be voided.
- The application must be signed on the spaces provided and turned in by the deadline of March 26, or it will be voided.
- Applicant must be a SEC member or a child or legal ward of a SEC member. Only one scholarship will be awarded per family per year.
- A student can only receive this scholarship one time. It's not renewable.
- The scholarship monies can be used by undergraduate students to attend, on a full-time basis, any university/college.
- Only high school seniors with a "C" average or better may apply.
- **Selected applicants will be required to provide SEC with an official transcript and acceptance letter to verify their eligibility.**



### 2026 Annual Meeting Scholarship Application



Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

Member's relationship to Applicant (if last name is different please indicate reason) \_\_\_\_\_

SEC Account Number \_\_\_\_\_ High School \_\_\_\_\_

GPA \_\_\_\_\_ University/College Attending \_\_\_\_\_

I have read and understand all of the above listed requirements for the SEC Annual Meeting Scholarship, and I agree to meet all of them. If I am selected as a recipient, I agree to allow SEC to use my name and/or photo in future promotions.

Applicant Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Guardian Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Local all-stars run winning play

BY JOSH P. CROTZER

**IT'S A POPULAR** offensive philosophy across all levels of football—if a play is successful, keep running it.

Since 2013, football players selected to the Touchstone Energy Cooperatives Bowl have teamed up to guide deserving children from Myrtle Beach schools on a Christmas shopping spree. Two days before the Dec. 13 game at Doug Shaw Memorial Stadium, 88 high school all-stars from across the state took a break from practicing to help students from Myrtle Beach Elementary School and Myrtle Beach Early Childhood navigate the aisles of a Target Superstore.

“It means a lot to me to be able to help a kid out with his Christmas list,” says Da’vion McNair, an offensive lineman from Andrews High School who helped a boy named Levi. “We got him some sweatpants and shirts and some Pokémon cards.”

Each of the 44 children were teamed with a player each from the North and South squads. The all-stars were tasked with helping the children find items on their lists, assuring clothes fit and making sure they had a good time.

The shopping spree wasn’t the only thing that made game week special. The night before the bowl game, a line crew from Horry Electric set up hands-on demonstrations on the football field so the players could explore careers as cooperative lineworkers. Players put on personal protective equipment and took turns performing various lineworker tasks such as drilling holes and changing out a fuse.

Other local all-stars selected to the game included Adrian Grate of Waccamaw High School, Tyleek Dukes of Kingstree High School, Chris Stewart of Andrews High School, and Terry Gordon and Ethan Cash, both of South Florence High School.



Kingstree High running back Tyleek Dukes (left) teams with R.J. Brown of South Pointe to help Mei, a kindergartener from Myrtle Beach Early Childhood, find a Princess Elsa dress.

South Carolina’s electric cooperatives sponsor the Touchstone Energy Cooperatives Bowl in partnership with the South Carolina Athletic Coaches Association.

## Returning to college? Scholarships for women available

It takes courage and vision to pursue a college degree as a working adult. Santee Electric offers an opportunity to female members who are taking that step.

The Jenny Ballard Opportunity Scholarship is for women who are resuming academic journeys that have been interrupted or delayed.

Applications for this one-time award are now open for female members of Santee Electric. Sponsored by Women Involved in Rural Electrification (WIRE)—a service organization associated with South Carolina’s electric cooperatives—and named after one of WIRE’s founding members, the \$2,500 scholarship is based on need and personal goals.

### The deadline to apply is June 1.

Applicants for the program must:

- ▶ Be a member of Santee Electric or another South Carolina electric cooperative;
- ▶ Have graduated from high school or earned a GED at least 10 years ago;
- ▶ Obtain acceptance into an accredited college or university;
- ▶ Demonstrate financial need.

The scholarship will be awarded based on the information provided in the application.

Recipients will receive scholarships for the fall 2026 or spring 2027 semester, with funds paid directly to the college or university.

## How to apply

Apply online for the 2026 Jenny Ballard Opportunity Scholarship by June 1 at [ecsc.org/wire](http://ecsc.org/wire).

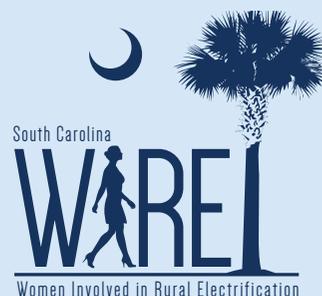
Paper forms are available at Laurens Electric and can be mailed to:

Peggy Dantzler

The Electric Cooperatives of South Carolina

808 Knox Abbott Drive  
Cayce, SC 29033.

Send e-mail inquiries to  
[Peggy.Dantzler@ecsc.org](mailto:Peggy.Dantzler@ecsc.org).



## “Spingiamo”

Zilmet USA moves forward with a new manufacturing facility in Andrews

BY JOANNA HAYES

**SCOTT JACOBSEN**, general manager of Zilmet USA, knows his favorite Italian word: “spingiamo.” It means “we push,” which aligns with one of Zilmet USA’s core values—“Always Moving Forward.”

Zilmet, a global organization that manufactures tanks and other plumbing products, was founded in Italy in 1955 by Ugo Benettolo. The company later transitioned to the next generation of leadership under Paolo Benettolo, who expanded Zilmet’s reach to more than 100 countries. His vision eventually led to Zilmet’s entry into the U.S. market, where Jacobsen would play a pivotal role.

Jacobsen forged a partnership with the Benettolo family in 2012. At that time, Zilmet’s footprint in the United States was minimal. Over the past 13 years, the company has experienced tremendous growth and in July 2025, Zilmet USA



The 150,000 sq. ft. manufacturing facility in Andrews.

PHOTOS BY JOANNA HAYES

opened its first manufacturing plant in the U.S., a 150,000-square-foot facility in Andrews in Georgetown County.

### Finding the right location

Zilmet USA’s search to establish a manufacturing facility in the U.S. began in Rhode Island, where the company operated a distribution center at the time. After an extensive search, the company ultimately focused on South Carolina, where six sites were considered. Jacobsen had always known Georgetown County was a great area from years of visiting, but a turning point came when the company’s leadership connected with Ronald Carter, Santee Electric Cooperative’s manager of Economic Development & Government Relations. Jacobsen says he knew it would be a great partnership.

“Ronald Carter and Santee Electric were instrumental to the deal,” Jacobsen says. “I don’t think we would be here if it wasn’t for Ronald and how he reconfigured what we needed to make this space work. He made it happen.”

The 150,000-square-foot facility Zilmet USA now occupies was built as a result of Santee Electric’s economic development efforts. One of Santee Electric’s core values is concern for community, and economic development aligns with that mission by bringing industries and jobs



JJ Strickland, a Zilmet USA employee, demonstrates what sets the company apart, its attention to detail. Each tank is painted on the inside and carefully inspected.

## Zilmet USA

- ▶ Manufacturer of expansion tanks and other plumbing products
- ▶ Founded in Italy, located in over 100 countries
- ▶ Established Zilmet USA in 2012

### Core Values

- ▶ **Moving Forward in all we do:** Improve upon yesterday. Keep moving the business forward.
- ▶ **Easy:** Be easy to do business with people, keep it simple
- ▶ **Relationships:** Relationships matter, both internally and externally. Find shared goals between partners.
- ▶ **Balance:** Maintain balance in work and play. Find balance in shared goals. Balance gives you perspective.

to our communities to make them better. “We were very transparent with them throughout this whole process—what we could and could not do, and how long things would take,” says Carter. “My goal is always to do what’s best for the company.”

That transparency helped solidify trust and move the project forward.



Zilmet USA ensures that there are no defects in its products. Rachel Bluefort, is showing how to check for deformities.



Scott Jacobsen (left), general manager of Zilmet USA, and Ronald Carter, manager of Economic Development and Government Relations of Santee Electric, at Zilmet USA's Andrews manufacturing facility, the company's first in the United States.

PHOTOS BY JOANNA HAYES

### Building the brand and community

Zilmet is the largest manufacturer of plumbing products in Europe and continues to expand its presence in the U.S. The company's focus has been on building its brand domestically, down to the details, such as packaging and adding the Zilmet logo to every tank. Over time, these efforts have paid off and Zilmet has become a major name in the U.S. industry. Primary partners include plumbing wholesalers and water well distributors. Today, Zilmet serves more

than 250 customers—20 times more than when the company first entered the North American market in 2012.

Jacobsen says in an aggressive industry, Zilmet stands apart because of its determination to go the extra mile.

"We try harder, we follow up with customers, we push and most importantly—we listen. We focus on understanding customer needs and will customize as needed to deliver the right solutions," he says.

Being based in Andrews has made

Zilmet USA an even stronger player in the market, according to Jacobsen.

"We do not have one regret in choosing Georgetown County," he says "I love it here. The people have been great, and the community is great."

Another major selling point for Zilmet USA establishing its manufacturing headquarters in Andrews was the Georgetown Center for Advanced Manufacturing at Horry-Georgetown Technical College. Zilmet has three employees currently enrolled in courses there, with plans to continue training through these programs.

"When we visited the tech school with our owner, Paolo, he looked at me and said, 'We have nothing like this in all of Italy.' That's when we knew this would be a huge asset for us," says Jacobsen.

### Always moving forward

Zilmet USA currently has 32 employees, with plans to keep hiring as needed. Twenty-eight of those are based in Andrews. Jacobsen believes that one of the key factors to Zilmet USA's success is hiring great people and taking care of them.

"We want people to be here," he says. "My favorite core value is 'Always Moving Forward.' We want to be better today than we were yesterday, and better tomorrow than we are today."

For Zilmet USA, that's exactly what 'spingiamo' means—keep pushing forward.



Zilmet USA is proud of its automated manufacturing process. Zilmet USA employee, Sharon Windley, runs this machine daily.

# Ready for an experience you won't forget?

Your co-op has two amazing trips planned this summer. Juniors: Apply for the Washington Youth Tour. Sophomores: Apply for the Cooperative Youth Summit.

**Juniors:** Experience Washington, D.C., with hundreds of students from across South Carolina and the country, meeting lawmakers and touring all the sights. Your electric co-op will cover your round-trip plane ticket, tours and meals. In other words, it's all free!

**Sophomores:** Experience South Carolina's capital like never before. Tour the Statehouse, meet lawmakers and see how co-ops are preparing for our state's energy future. Plus, there's plenty of fun with visits to popular Columbia attractions like the South Carolina State Museum. Your electric co-op will cover all your expenses.

We've made it easy to apply for either FREE trip. Apply today!



ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES  
OF SOUTH CAROLINA



Washington Youth Tour: June 14-19, 2026



Cooperative Youth Summit: July 13-16, 2026



Applications available: [santee.org/youth](https://santee.org/youth)  
Application deadline: February 20, 2026



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