

January 2020

Alabama

LIVING

Wiregrass
Electric
Cooperative



A 'Higher' Calling

Local ministry supports families, elderly

Alabama LIVING

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A helping hand

Lifted Higher Ministries provides loving help to the people of the Wiregrass.

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ON THE COVER:

Brandee Lukas and her family started Lifted Higher Ministries to help fulfill a "higher calling" and bridge gaps in the services provided in the foster care system. See story, Page 6.

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Strengthening our communities in 2020

Les Moreland, CEO Wiregrass Electric Cooperative

The beginning of a new year is a time of excitement, planning and possibilities. It's also a time to reflect on what you accomplished the year before. At Wiregrass Electric Cooperative, we had a very successful 2019. For yet another year, we fulfilled our commitment to return capital credits to members, returning more than \$1 million. That's one of the many traits that make being a cooperative member special, and we are proud to do that each and every year.

We continued our efforts in 2019 to bring broadband to the Wiregrass, which consisted of proving through our speed test study that our area lacked the broadband access it needs. Those results were presented in Washington, D.C., and went a long way to helping our broadband partner, Troy Cable, receive a \$575,115 grant to continue building essential communications infrastructure for our members.

We continued our efforts to offer more opportunities for our youth through Youth Tour and Operation Round Up scholarships.

We also succeeded in receiving all eligible Hurricane Michael-related FEMA reimbursement, which ensured that our members won't see any negative financial impacts from that storm.

This is just a small sample of all we accomplished in 2019, but 2019 is done, and it's time to look to 2020.

One of our greatest commitments as a cooperative is to improve the communities we serve. We will have a continued commitment to that in 2020.

One of the many ways we work to better our community is through our Silent Heroes of the Wiregrass program. We are so proud of this program and thankful to our partner, WTVY, and our members, who agree to have their bills rounded up each month to make the program possible.

In this issue of Alabama Living, you will read about **Brandee** and **Adam Lukas** of Lifted Higher Ministries, our December Silent Hero winner. They, like all of our winners, have done great work in the Wiregrass, and most of it has gone unnoticed. Thanks to our Operation Round Up program, we were able

to recognize them and further their cause by donating \$1,000 to their ministry. That money was put to great use during the holidays by buying presents for the elderly. The Silent Heroes program helps so many in our community, and we will continue this in 2020.

We also will continue to sponsor students to attend the Montgomery and Washington, D.C., Youth Tours. This is a life-changing trip for these students, and we are looking forward to seeing who will represent our cooperative this year. We have had great students in the past, and I expect this year to be the same.

Our cooperative also made another big commitment to the Wiregrass United Way. In 2019, WEC has donated \$19,415.04 to this worthy organization. This amount includes almost \$12,000 from our employee contributions and WEC corporate contributions. In addition, WEC also donates annually from the community grant program at CoBank. Last September, WEC made a \$7,500 donation to the United Way with the money from that grant.

Our cooperative is so grateful to the United Way for all of its efforts to improve our community and to our WEC employees who volunteer their time to work with the Wiregrass United Way. We strive to help make our Wiregrass community a better place to call home.

Our efforts in broadband will continue in 2020 because we believe that is one of the most effective ways we can improve. We made great progress in 2019, but more work still needs to be done. We have said it before, and we will say it again: Our goal is to bring broadband to every WEC member, and we won't stop working until that happens.

Everything listed in this column is something our cooperative does to improve the community. We put such an emphasis on community development because we want to improve the lives of our members who live in these communities. Simply put, we do this for you — our members.

Improving your life has been our goal for more than 80 years, and we plan to continue that in 2020. Going the extra mile at WEC is what we do, because "Just Enough, Isn't Enough." That's "The Wiregrass Way." ■

BE PREPARED TO HELP US BEAT THE PEAK

January can sometimes be a difficult month. The holiday season is over and the weather turns cold in the Wiregrass. Those cold days can also lead to high energy bills. But your cooperative is here to help, and we need you, too.

When temperatures drop below freezing, high energy demand can put Wiregrass Electric in danger of exceeding its peak energy forecasts. When that happens, your energy bill can increase.

However, you can help WEC beat the peak and keep your energy bills low.

Be sure to like and follow WEC on Facebook and Twitter. WEC uses these pages to communicate with members when there is a peak demand alert.

What is peak demand?

Cold temperatures can affect the price of electricity. WEC neither produces nor operates power plants. Instead, it purchases electricity wholesale for its members from its generation and transmission partner, PowerSouth Energy Cooperative.

Wholesale energy pricing depends on the concept of peak demand, which refers to the time of day of the greatest electricity demand. This is also when PowerSouth must supply the most power.

The more energy needed during those peak times, such as an extremely cold day, the more likely it is to increase prices for WEC and its members.

Members can do several things to help offset energy usage during those peaks, which usually come in the early morning hours during the winter.

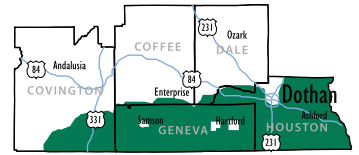
How can members help?

Here are a few guidelines to help us avoid exceeding our energy usage during the winter peak hours of 6 a.m. to 8 a.m.

- Keep your thermostat set to 68 degrees during the winter months.
- Take showers at night to avoid heating water during peak times.
- Run your dishwasher and washing machines during off-peak hours.
- Limit the use of TVs, gaming consoles, computers and unnecessary lighting during peak hours. ■



WEC Service Area



Contact Information

Mailing address

509 N. State Hwy 167
P.O. Box 158, Hartford, AL 36344

Phone

1-800-239-4602

Toll Free Outage "Hotline"

1-888-4-MY-OUTAGE
1-888-469-6882
(24 hrs/day)

Website

www.wiregrass.coop

Find us here:



Find Wiregrass Electric Co-op on Twitter (@WEC2), Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

Payment Options

BY MAIL

Wiregrass Electric Cooperative Inc.
Department 1340, P.O. Box 2153
Birmingham, AL 35287-1340

WEBSITE

Payments may be made 24 hrs/day by Visa, MasterCard, Discover, American Express and E-Check on our website at www.wiregrass.coop.

PHONE PAYMENTS

Payments may be made any time by dialing 1-800-239-4602.

NIGHT DEPOSITORY

Available at each office location.

IN PERSON

Mon.-Fri. 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Payment kiosks also available 24/7 in all offices.

Hartford

509 N. State Hwy. 167 • Hartford, AL 36344

Samson

13148 W. State Hwy. 52 • Samson, AL 36477

Ashford

1066 Ashford Highway • Ashford, AL 36312

Dothan

6167 Fortner St. • Dothan, AL 36305

For questions regarding sanitation service, call Houston County Sanitation Department at 334-677-4781 or Dothan City Sanitation at 334-615-3820.



Brandee Lukas and Lifted Higher Ministries recently used the \$1,000 donation from Operation Round Up to purchase Christmas presents for elderly in the Wiregrass.

PROVIDING EXTRA HELP

Lifted Higher Ministries earns Silent Heroes award from WEC in December

When **Brandee** and **Adam Lukas** became foster parents years ago, it began a journey that transformed their lives — and the lives of many others — in unexpected ways.

“Through having our first foster child in the home years back, we saw areas in the foster care system that could have used some extra help,” Brandee Lukas says. “God was showing us areas where he wanted to be present.”

The couple formed Lifted Higher Ministries, which in two years has assisted about 300 people in various ways. Those efforts are why Wiregrass Electric Cooperative’s Operation Round Up Charitable Foundation and WTVY News 4 in Dothan selected them as the December Silent Heroes of the Wiregrass winner. Operation Round Up also presented the organization with \$1,000 as part of the program.

That donation was put to great use as Lukas and Evergreen Presbyterian Church in Dothan purchased Christmas presents for the elderly in the Wiregrass.

“Brandee and her husband, you see their hearts are in the right place,” says

Brad Kimbro, Wiregrass Electric’s chief operating officer. “They want to make a positive difference in our community. That is what the Operation Round Up Foundation is all about.”

“This cause is very near and dear to me because I truly believe everything in our society starts with families. If we can fix that, then everything is good,” says **Spencer Bienvenu**, WTVY News 4 vice president and general manager. “They are exactly what we’re looking for in this program.”

To view the Silent Heroes presentation visit WEC’s Facebook page.

Learning from experience

After becoming foster parents themselves a few years ago, the Lukases noticed some gaps in services that governmental organizations could not address.

“The system would offer parenting classes, and these parents would attend three or four of those classes,” Brandee Lukas says. “Without their kids in their custody, though, they didn’t really get to apply those lessons.”

The Lukases began to provide transportation to and from supervised visits for biological parents whose children were in the foster care system. They also organized some of the supervised visits, which the Lukases conducted at area churches so parents and children could interact more comfortably.

The time spent on those visits and trips — some of which could take a couple of hours — allowed the Lukases to forge deep relationships with biological parents. They aimed to teach parents “how to create good patterns” in their lives, Lukas says. In turn, those patterns would allow birth parents to provide more stable environments for their children in the future.

“We come alongside to do life with them, to love on them, and to be there with them to get them reunified with their children,” Lukas says.

Creating structure

Eventually, the Lukases decided to handle those tasks through a nonprofit organization, and Brandee Lukas is the director. In January 2018, they began the

process of creating Lifted Higher Ministries, and local Department of Human Resources offices and other organizations reached out for their services once it was established the following month.

As of mid-September, Lifted Higher had helped 252 people in Houston County, 26 in Henry County and three in Dale County — although that number increased greatly after Lifted Higher provided Christmas gifts to more than 40 seniors in December.

That recent project reflects how much Lifted Higher has grown in just two years. Expanding beyond reconnecting families, Lifted Higher now aids the elderly in several ways, including home improvement projects if needed.

“We had one elderly client who was going to be evicted from her home,” Lukas says. “She had lived there for 20 years, but she had severe arthritis. She couldn’t take care of the home. She wasn’t passing the government housing inspections, so we came in with a team. We organized, cleaned and went to town on her place. The inspection was the next day, and she passed.”

All of the services Lifted Higher provides come at a cost, which is why Lukas cherished the Silent Heroes gift.

“This is amazing. I am just so humbled that Wiregrass Electric thought of us, and it’s such a blessing for us,” she says. “We do Christmas presents for the elderly for Dale County and Houston County through DHR. It couldn’t come at a better time. Words can’t explain how thankful we are.”

Rounding up hope

Wiregrass Electric members make



Carolyn Merrill, left, and Riley Phillips help wrap gifts.



Brandee and Adam Lukas began Lifted Higher Ministries to bridge the gap in foster care services.



Pictured from left are WTVY anchor Reginald Jones, Brandee Lukas, WEC COO Brad Kimbro and WTVY Vice President and General Manager Spencer Bienvenue at the taping of Silent Heroes of the Wiregrass.

possible gifts like the ones the Lukases received through their participation in the Operation Round Up program. Each month, more than 85% of Wiregrass Electric's customers opt to round their bills up to the nearest dollar to provide funds for the Operation Round Up Charitable Foundation, Kimbro says. "We appreciate our members' participation in the Operation Round Up program. Our members are helping change lives for the better in our Wiregrass area."

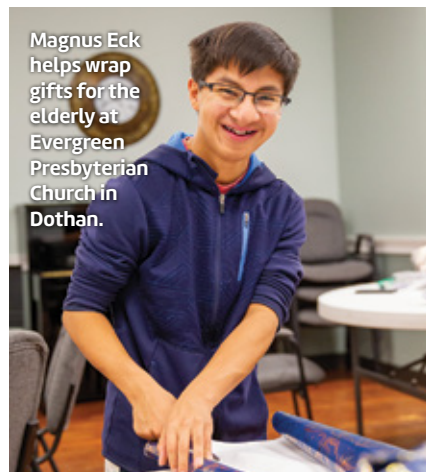
The foundation then provides scholarships and grants in an effort to improve the Wiregrass community. The program generates about \$120,000 annually, Kimbro notes.

To support Lifted Higher Ministries, visit liftedhigherministries.org or mail a check to P.O. Box 492, Headland, AL 36345. The organization also accepts donations of car seats, toys, diapers, furniture, mattresses and other similar items since it provides those to biological parents who need them to establish a proper residence before reunifying with their children.

For more information, call or text Lifted Higher Ministries at 248-342-8488 or email liftedhigherministries@hotmail.com. ■



Clark Brezina and Magnus Eck unload gifts to be wrapped at Evergreen Presbyterian Church.



Magnus Eck helps wrap gifts for the elderly at Evergreen Presbyterian Church in Dothan.



LIFTED HIGHER MINISTRIES SERVICES

- Parent Support Program — birth parent mentorship
- Birth parents/children transportation
- Birthday meals for foster children and birth parents
- Meal Blessing Program — meals for foster parents when new child arrives
- Housing assistance for birth parents
- Helping birth parents furnish a new residence
- Elderly assistance with transportation, groceries and other tasks
- Foster parent training seminars (Henry County)
- Educational events for foster children (Houston County)
- Partnering with various other organizations to provide assistance as needed

THE WIREGRASS WAY

JUST ENOUGH ISN'T ENOUGH

Amber Knight and the rest of the WEC member care team go above and beyond to ensure they make members' cooperative experience a pleasant one. From providing a warm smile to offering snacks in each office lobby to making phone calls to members who may see an increase on their monthly bill, WEC makes sure that it cares for its members.

Going above and beyond is something WEC employees proudly do each day because "just enough" isn't enough. **This is The Wiregrass Way.**

THE WAY WE CARE FOR OUR MEMBERS



WIREGRASS
ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE
A PowerSouth Energy Cooperative
www.wiregrass.coop

You may have unclaimed capital credits!

Find out today on WEC's website

Doing business with Wiregrass Electric is different than other places you do business with. WEC is a not-for-profit business that operates at cost. Revenues above the cost of doing business, known as margins, are allocated to our members annually in the form of capital credits. If the financial condition of the cooperative will not be impaired, the WEC board of trustees can elect to retire capital credits to members.

WEC has retired nearly \$12.4 million of capital credits to members in the history of the cooperative. This year, more than \$1.096 million in margins was retired from the cooperative's performance in 1997. Credits began appearing on the monthly statements of active members in September. Returns for nonactive members were mailed around Oct. 1.

To view your current capital credit allocation per year visit wiregrass.coop. On the homepage, you can find a link to view this through WEC's member portal section.

Sometimes, members don't receive their capital credit checks because of an incorrect or out-of-date address. If you think this might have happened to you, please visit www.wiregrass.coop/about/cooperative/capital-credits/unclaimed.

Here you can view a list to find out if you have unclaimed capital credits and how you can claim them. ■



Apply for the 2020 Youth Tour today!

Helping area students thrive is one way WEC demonstrates a dedication to its members and communities. The Youth Tour program is a leading example of that commitment to the leaders of tomorrow.

Each year, WEC selects 10 high school juniors, each a dependent of a WEC member, for the Montgomery Youth Tour March 10-12. Those students visit the state Capitol for a firsthand look at our state's history and the role the electric cooperatives have played in that history. Students also visit Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church, listen to motivational speakers and meet their local lawmakers. Each student also receives a \$500 scholarship.

From those 10 students, three are selected to attend the Washington, D.C., Youth Tour in June. Those students visit our nation's capital, museums and monuments. Also, they receive an additional \$500 scholarship.

Trip expenses for both the Montgomery and Washington, D.C., Youth Tour are paid by WEC.

Time is running out but there is still time to apply. Applications must be submitted by Friday, Jan. 11. Applications can be found online at www.wiregrass.coop/community/youth/youth-tour.