

## FreeState Hosts Youth Tour Delegates



FreeState Electric linemen give safety demonstrations and bucket truck rides to teach the 40 Kansas/Hawaii Youth Tour delegates about electric co-ops.

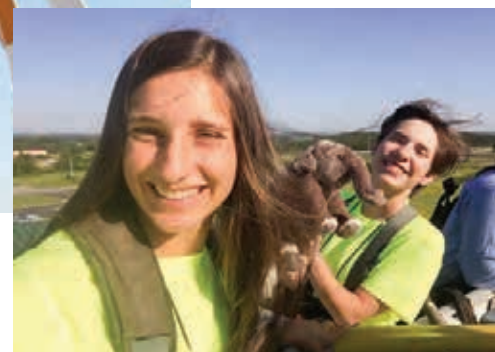
Since 2012, the cooperative has been proud to host the Kansas-Hawaii Youth Tour delegation on their first day of Youth Tour for breakfast and bucket rides.

This year, 36 students from Kansas and four from Hawaii learned about learned about co-op careers and electric safety.

"FreeState Electric is proud to have the opportunity to teach youth about electrical safety," said Randy Richards, assistant general manager. "It helps give them a basic understanding of safety and the

electric cooperatives who have sponsored them on this trip."

After learning about their co-ops, delegates traveled to Washington, D.C., to join more than 1,700 high school students from across the nation. During their week-long stay in Washington, D.C., the students had the chance to visit with their congressional representatives. They also had the opportunity to tour the Capitol, Smithsonian Institute, Mt. Vernon



Sierra Staatz (left) and Allison Williams view Topeka from FreeState's 60-foot bucket trucks.

and the many memorials.

FreeState Electric sponsored **SIERRA STAATZ** and **ALLISON WILLIAMS**, both from Tonganoxie High School on the trip as part of our commitment to community and mission to help develop our next generation of leaders.



# FreeState ENERGY EXPLORERS

## Electric Safety ART CONTEST Winners



Alyssa Streit

In April, FreeState Electric asked our Energy Explorers (from the age of 12 or under) to submit a masterpiece on the topic of electric safety. We would like to congratulate our grand-prize winner, **ALYSSA STREIT**. Alyssa's art will be featured as the 2017 FreeState Electric Cooperative corporate card.

Thank you for all those who submitted their artwork, and congratulations to this year's Electric Safety Art Contest winners: To view all the entries, visit [www.freestate.coop/artentries](http://www.freestate.coop/artentries).



Alyssa Streit, grand prize winner

### Ages 4 and Under

► **Winner** – ANNA MURPHY, Leavenworth

### Ages 5 to 7

► **Winner** – JOSHUA MURPHY, Leavenworth

### Ages 7 to 9

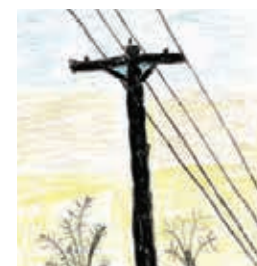
- **Winner** – CHANEY CARMEN, Silver Lake
- **Second** – MAYZIE PEAK, Oskaloosa
- **Third** – SAMUEL MURPHY, Leavenworth

### Ages 10 to 12

- **Winner** – ALYSSA STREIT, Rossville
- **Second** – COLBY HURLA, Delia
- **Third** – CALEB ROOKS, Silver Lake

### Grand Prize Winner

► **Winner** – ALYSSA STREIT, Rossville



Mayzie Peak



Caleb Rooks



Anna Murphy



Joshua Murphy



Chaney Carmen



Samuel Murphy



Colby Hurla



FREESTATE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC.  
800-794-1989  
[www.freestate.coop](http://www.freestate.coop)

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### District Offices

**East District**  
P.O. Box 70  
McLouth, KS  
66054-0070

**East & West District Office Hours:**  
Monday-Friday, 7:30 a.m.-4 p.m.

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1100 SW Auburn Rd  
Topeka, KS 66615

### FROM THE CEO

## Protecting Members Through Advocacy



Steve Foss

I was asked a question the other day, one I get asked often. "Why do you even pay attention to what is going on in Topeka? It's not like we can change anything, or that they listen to us anyway."

I disagree with that last statement. We can impact change by being engaged and taking an active role in communicating and educating those who represent us at all levels of government about issues that are important to us. We can all provide information to our representatives on how regulations or new or revised laws impact our daily lives.

We are blessed to have involved legislators in Topeka that represent the members of FreeState Electric Cooperative. We may not always agree with policies, but I can tell you that I have had positive and constructive dialogue with most of our representation. I can tell you that they want input, they want information, and they want constituents to communicate with them. We elect them, and they do represent us, so we should take some responsibility in guiding their decision making.

If you think about that, it is a lot like the cooperative model. You elect a board of directors, and they make decisions on your behalf with input from members. The cooperative needs guidance to serve you, our owners, in the best way possible. Our members are our priority and we work to protect you from legislation and regulations that would negatively impact the cooperative, and our members. It works the same way in your local community, county, Topeka or Washington.

We have taken initiative to discuss environmental issues, taxation proposals, coal generation, Rural Utilities Services (RUS) loan programs, economic development, and recently we defended a push for retail choice in Kansas that would have been detrimental to the Kansas energy industry by driving up the

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## SWIMMING POOL SAFETY

Make sure that any lighting equipment in your pool is up to code and regularly examined by a professional. To change or repair a light, ensure the electricity to the pool is first turned off at the circuit breaker.

If you are in the water and feel electric current, which can cause a tingling sensation, shout to let others know, try to stay upright, tuck your legs up to make yourself smaller, and swim away from anything that could be energized. Do not use a metal ladder to exit the pool.

Remember, water and electricity are a dangerous mix, even outside the pool. Never touch any electrical appliances or outlets when you are wet or standing in water.



## Please Make Room for Emergency and Utility Crews

When the power goes out, so do FreeState Electric's line crews. Lineworkers are the first to respond after an outage occurs, and they work tirelessly to restore power to the communities we serve.

If you're traveling and see one of our crews on the side of the road, we kindly ask that you move over if possible and give them a little extra space to work. We deeply care about the safety of all, and this precaution ensures just that.

If you approach a crew while traveling on a two-lane road, moving over to the next lane might not be an option. In this case, we simply ask that you slow down when approaching roadside crews.

If you approach a crew while traveling on a four-lane road and safety and traffic conditions allow, we ask that you move over into the far lane.

Utility crews aren't the only ones who could use the extra space. Emergency responders, such as police officers, firefighters and emergency medical technicians, often find themselves responding to emergency situations near busy roadways.

We ask that you follow the same procedures mentioned above to help keep these crews safe.

There's plenty of room for all. Let's work together to keep everyone safe on our local roadways.



## Protecting Members Through Advocacy

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cost of business and, in turn, the cost to provide service to you. In addition, FreeState has hosted our legislators on multiple occasions to discuss issues impacting our members, and we've even held forums to meet candidates during the last election cycle.

Some might call what we do lobbying, but it is much more than that. It's grassroots legislative advocacy. We work closely with our statewide organization, Kansas Electric Cooperatives (KEC) to follow and track legislation that will impact our members or the cooperative. We reach out to our legislators, and we provide information to those elected officials in the

form of written letters, emails and face-to-face meetings.

Legislative advocacy is more than going to the statehouse and meeting with our legislators; it's taking an active role in protecting our members by educating and communicating with decision-makers. We stand up for our cooperative and the member-owners we serve.

As always, if you have questions about this publication we encourage you to contact us at 800-794-1989 or email marketing@freestate.coop.

*John O. Jose*

## Local Students to Attend Leadership Camp

**MIA BOND** and **MEGAN ERNZEN** have been selected by FreeState Electric Cooperative to attend the 40th Annual Cooperative Youth



Mia Bond



Megan Ernzen

Leadership Camp in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, from July 14-20. Bond and Ernzen will join approximately 100 students from across Kansas, Colorado, Oklahoma and Wyoming.

Bond, Tonganoxie High School, and Ernzen, Lansing High School, were selected from a group of high school students through an application process, an essay about cooperative engagement, and a personal interview.

"FreeState is proud to support the Youth Tour program

every year," Steve Foss, CEO, said. "Our hope is that these student leaders will gain awareness of the cooperative business model, how our political system works, and why it's important for youth to be involved in our community." At the camp, students will be actively involved in daily membership meetings, establishing committees, and electing a general manager and board of directors. They will also have the opportunity to tour Fish Creek Falls, Trapper Mine and Craig Power Plant, visit Steamboat Springs, go river rafting, and enjoy camp activities such as volleyball, swimming and a talent show.

**FreeState sponsors the trip for two students each year. For more information, contact Sarah Farlee, youth program coordinator.**

# Golden Retirement

*Sacrifice, dedication and service—one lineman has demonstrated it all. Sacrificing a college career and family moments, dedicating his life and time to the Navy—RICK SMOOTS is such a man who overcame a period of hardship and demands. With the heart and strong determination to help others, he carried on to a long and successful career as he celebrated his 50-year anniversary as a lineman at FreeState Electric Cooperative on May 31, 2017.*



Rick Smoots in 1967.

Rick was the second eldest of five boys. He grew up in the small town of McLouth with his parents and brothers. He had always wanted to stay close to home because family is the most important aspect of his life—and always has been.

Rick met his wife, Debby Smoots, during his junior year at McLouth High School and her freshman year at Tonganoxie High School. They lived just a few miles from each other and spent weekends out with friends in Tonganoxie, where they met one evening. Even though they met at a young age, Rick and Debby met that night and never looked back.

"Now we have been married for 45 years," Rick said.

Their 45 years of marriage have not been without sacrifice. Rick began his career as a lineman after attending Washburn University for physical education and realizing it was not the path meant for him. After previous experience spraying vegetation underneath powerlines the summer before his freshman year at college, Rick was offered a job as a lineman for Leaven-

worth-Jefferson Electric Cooperative.

"This was around the time Perry Lake was being built and the electric cooperative could see a lot of expansion and growth in their service territory," Rick said. "They noticed me and asked if I wanted to become a lineman for them and have on the job training—so I took it."

The only problem—not going back to college made Rick eligible for the U.S. Military draft. "I knew my number for the draft was coming up and that I would be drafted if I didn't do something," Rick said. "I didn't want to be drafted into hand-to-hand combat, so I joined the Navy."

Rick spoke to a Navy recruiter in Tonganoxie and enlisted into the Construction Battalion, or Seabee, on Feb. 6, 1969. After completing training in Gulfport, Mississippi, and being stationed at Port Hueneme, California, Rick was assigned to the Mobile Construction Battalion No. 10 and deployed to Vietnam later that year.

Not even the military could deter Rick's career as a lineman. He continued to learn and gain experience through construction assignments given to his battalion.

"The Seabees were the ones in charge of building the air strips in Vietnam and thatch huts for the men to live in," Rick said. "We would also set up poles to run electricity to these buildings."

While Rick served his country, LJEC was holding his spot as a lineman until his tour of duty was completed. He was released from the Navy on Aug. 5, 1971.

"As soon as I got out I came back home to work," Rick said. "I've been here ever since, and it's been a great local community to raise a family close to home."

Although Rick was able to come back to the town he called home, marry the love of his life on April 22, 1972, and continue his work as a dedicated lineman, his days of sacrifice and hard work were far from over. He always put others before himself—including the members of LJEC.

"They knew they could depend on him. He was always the first one to say, 'I will go,'" Debby said. "He never turned down any request they asked of him."

Debby admitted the beginning of their marriage was a difficult transition as she struggled to understand his need to work long nights and miss family functions to restore power outages. However, she began recognizing him as the committed and hard-working man he was.



On May 31, 2017, FreeState Electric celebrated Rick Smoots' upcoming retirement after 50 years of dedicated service as a Lineman. Here he is working from one of FreeState's bucket trucks and is restoring power to members of the cooperative after an outage.

**For Rick, the consolidation expanded his "family"—the linemen brotherhood—as FreeState's east and west offices began working as one.**

"I became very proud of him and what he does," Debby said. "To me, he is the last of the true American worker."

While Rick has never regretted his decision to become a lineman, there were times it became difficult as family time was often sacrificed for the job.

"I missed a lot of sports events and the kids growing up through high school," Rick said. "A lot of moments with the family had to be given up to keep the lights on."

Rick's dedication to being a lineman and serving others never went unnoticed as Debby said everyone recognizes Rick as the honest, sincere and passionate man he is, not only at home but at work.

"His work ethic is above and beyond the average," Debby said. "Just look at him now. He just had his retirement party and here he is going back to work to finish out the day."

Of the 50 years Rick worked as a lineman, 49 were for LJEC.

He finished his career by retiring from FreeState Electric, after LJEC consolidated with Kaw Valley Electric in January 2017. For members, the consolidation saves money. For Rick, the consolidation expanded his "family"—the linemen brotherhood—as FreeState's east and west offices began working as one.

"I will miss the people I worked with the most," Rick said. "They really have become my second family."

Rick plans to spend his retirement focusing on his family and attending all of the softball games, volleyball matches and rodeos he can so he is not missing any more of life's little moments with his children, Marcy Smoots, Scott Smoots and his wife Kimberley, and his six grandchildren.

FreeState Electric thanks Rick for his service to the cooperative and wishes him the best of luck and many family memories in the days to come. Congratulations on this rare milestone.



Linemen Bill Likes (left) and Rick Smoots remove poles that were damaged in a tornado at the Leavenworth County Fairgrounds—a community service project initiated by Smoots in 2010. The poles suffered damage when a tornado passed through town. Over the years, the condition of the poles had worsened and posed a safety issue for fairgrounds visitors.