

# Roanoke Electric FLASHES

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Serving 14,400 Members

"Owned by those we serve"

## Roanoke Electric lineman qualifies for the Statewide Pole Top Rescue competition

When power outages occur, Roanoke Electric Cooperative linemen are the first to respond on the scene. Like a brigade to its soldiers in battle, they rely on each other for their skill, their wisdom and ultimately their survival.

Their jobs require mental and physical toughness that they hone through the required OSHA (Occupational Safety & Health Administration) safety training. Certification courses and rescue drills prepare them to perform at their highest level.

As part of their physical preparation, North Carolina electric cooperative linemen begin every year with pole top rescue drills. This year, they competed for a chance to advance to regional and state pole top rescue competitions.

The rescue drill involves safety procedures they hope to never use: placing an emergency dispatch call, lugging climbing gear, scaling 20-foot utility poles, rigging pulleys, lowering a 120-pound mannequin and providing cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)—all in less than five minutes as required to maintain their certification.

North Carolina Association of Electric Cooperative's job training

and safety department, which conducts the bi-annual pole top rescue competition, selects a lineman with the best time from each of its participating member cooperatives.

Roanoke EC Serviceman Charles Bryant was once again victorious with a time of 2:09, and will advance for his seventh consecutive time in 14 years. Bryant says the competition prepares him for worst-case scenarios in the field. "When you go out on storms you really have to be sharp, because every moment counts."

Bryant is among 25 linemen representing electric cooperatives across the state. "Linemen have a high degree of pride and brotherhood," said Bryant. At age 37 and supervising several crew members in their 20s, he attributes his performance to lots of practice and experience. As a veteran, Bryant likens the



*Charles Bryant, the 2008 Roanoke EC Pole Top Rescue winner, will compete in the statewide competition later this year.*

competition's intensity to a big game. "When you're out there, you have to put your game face on, like Michael Jordan or Emmitt Smith," he says. You're competing with the best."

The first-prize winner of the 2008 Statewide Pole Top Rescue Competition receives \$1,000.

—Charles S. Martin

## The Tillery story: New Deal program provided resettlement farms to struggling black families

African American family farms are being lost at a rate of about 9,000 acres of land a week nationwide.

Often it is because African American farmers lack access to much-needed capital for operation expansion. Scraping up enough to pay property taxes has become all too common, especially for older farmers on fixed incomes.

A reflection of this phenomenon is Tillery—a small predominantly African American farm town made up of mostly elderly citizens in Halifax County. It was known as Tillery Farms back in the day. With a population of around 3,000, 85 percent of its people are over the age of 60. And for the few elderly farmers who are fortunate enough to still own their land, they are leasing it out to a younger generation of farmers.

Sitting at his kitchen table in his modest home that sits on about 250 acres of land is Leroy Harvey—he's one of only four African American farmers left in Tillery. Harvey made 35 cents an hour clearing rights of way and erecting poles for the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) before he bought his first piece of farmland back in 1941.

At 94 years of age, Harvey is perhaps more nimble and assertive than one might expect from someone as seasoned as he. "People had a chance, but didn't have anyone to teach them what to do," asserted Harvey, as he reflected on past landowners who had to return to sharecropping because they couldn't maintain their properties. "Some of the farmers just didn't know how to make it work—didn't know how to expand."

The four remaining farmers in town work about 85 percent of the resettlement farmland provided to them by the government in the late 1930s and 40s. Harvey was one of the benefactors of this New Deal legislation program. At the same time the REA made electricity available to rural homes and farms,

the New Deal program provided resettlement farms to struggling families—many former sharecroppers were sold land, equipment, cows and mules. Harvey vividly recalls having three hogs, two mules, a tractor, and a cow. "Some got a little bit more than 40 acres. The government gave us 40 years to pay for it," Harvey says.

The program cost the government about \$2.2 million, and was the Resettlement Administration's largest resettlement farm community in the country. Land purchasers migrated from as far south as Florida, as far north as Virginia, and as far west as Arkansas. "Sharecroppers first had to rent the land from the government to prove that they were capable of maintaining the property," said Gary Grant, a passionate advocate for the people of Tillery.

His father, Mathew Grant, was the first African American board member to serve at Roanoke Electric Cooperative in Rich Square. "The government taught bookkeeping, homemaking, and cooperative skills training," Grant says. In the days of segregation, whites settled in the west at Roanoke Farms and were given all of the tobacco allotments from the government, while the most productive crop for black farmers were peanuts.

Though small in size, Tillery was a bustling town in the 1940s—people came together and purchased farm-fresh produce at its center. "We helped each other then," Harvey said with pride. Harvey recalls ice cream and soda pop shops, a bank at the corner, and a train depot where out-of-towners spent time and money. Ironically, that same depot sits in the same place it sat some 60 years ago. Though it is weathered and broken by decades of neglect, it serves as a chilling reminder of the town's economic decline.

Over a course of several decades, Tillery has become marginalized by



several economic factors: the departure of younger residents, the mechanization of farming, and the instability of textile industries to the area. Around seven textile companies have come and gone since the early 1980s. "Textiles never really brought any real stability to the town," said Grant. Most of the young people are employed about 45 minutes outside of town at Purdue Farms in Northampton County.

About three miles from the Harvey home, an historic house holds a photographic gallery and farming artifacts. This original Farm Security Administration (FSA) resettlement house, restored into a museum, is the town's attempt at educating children and adults about its unique history—its essence, spirit and pride. "If our young people don't begin to take hold of their children, teach them about their history, we're going to lose a generation," said Harvey, who believes moral values and respect for elders have been replaced by video games, television, and the worldwide Web.

Inside "History House," as it's been dubbed, a photo of Harvey as a young farmer graces the wall. The display reads, "Cash Crops." Grant, who spearheaded efforts to create the historic site, believes there is a positive lesson in all of this—he wants more young people to embrace land ownership and its economic value. "There's an adage that says that if you don't know your history, you're bound to repeat it."

—Charles S. Martin

## The Roanoke Center connects small businesses in rural communities to much-needed training resources and capital

Rising healthcare costs, increased fuel prices, limited access to high-speed internet service—these are some of the many negatives that hurt revenue streams for small businesses, particularly those in rural counties. They make it difficult to stay afloat—but not impossible.

Creating access to capital and small business training resources so that business ideas can flourish is part of Roanoke Economic Development, Inc. and The Roanoke Center's mission—to encourage entrepreneurship, create jobs and sustain business growth in rural communities.

The Roanoke Center, a subsidiary of Roanoke Electric Cooperative, serves as a conduit for the North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center (The Rural Center) in Raleigh, providers of the Microenterprise Loan Program. The Roanoke Center has partnered with The Rural Center to create job opportunities and help women, minorities, and low-income residents who are unable to qualify

for traditional loans become self-sufficient.

The Roanoke Center provides assistance in packaging client loan applications to assure basic threshold and loan requirements are met prior to being reviewed by the underwriters. Microenterprise loans can be used for start-up businesses, working capital, inventory, equipment, and property improvement, and can range from \$500 to \$25,000, with a term up to five years. The Express Loan uses more lenient criteria and is for smaller loan amounts ranging from \$500 to \$5,000—this loan requires no collateral and has a faster turnaround time than the standard loan.

“The Rural Center's microenterprise program is designed to make business capital more accessible to those who may not qualify for traditional bank loans,” said Diana Mitchell, director of The Roanoke Center. This means folks who have thought about starting a business or already have a business and live in Hertford, Bertie, Gates,

Northampton and Halifax counties have access and resources to business planning, technical assistance, and capital.

Carolyn Perry, director of the Microenterprise Loan Program, depends on organizations like The Roanoke Center to provide support and create loan opportunities. “Often people either have no business plan in place or are starting their business on a shoe-string budget,” said Perry.

Businesses that have benefited from The Roanoke Center include gift shops, auto parts stores, restaurants, daycare centers, trucking companies, and janitorial services. REDI is one of many partners throughout the state affiliated with The Rural Center. “The microenterprise program has enabled many clients to start their dreams,” said Mitchell.

For more information, visit [www.roanokecenter.org](http://www.roanokecenter.org). Interested or potential borrowers may contact Diana Mitchell at (252) 539-2236 or by visiting The Roanoke Center in Rich Square.

## Record Pro Jump and Slalom tournament set for June 7-8

The Beaver Lake Ski Club is proud to announce the 2008 Record Roundup Pro Jump and Slalom. This year's tournament promises to be spectacular, featuring the world's top jumpers joined by Pro Women Slalom. The event was recently rescheduled to a new weekend date, June 7-8.

The crowd will watch the top men pro jumpers from around the world soar distances well over 200 feet and women of the slalom course go head to head to see who can survive the swerve challenge at Beaver Lake.

Cash prizes will be awarded to the top skiers in both Pro events. Top amateur slalom and jump skiers will warm the crowd up

early for the pros!

Beaver Lake has grown over the past few years into one of the South's premier ski sites. This will be the third year that the Beaver Lake Ski Club has hosted a pro tournament. The site has also hosted several State Championships, as well as the National Collegiate All-Stars. Several collegiate records have been set at Beaver Lake when hosting the Collegiate All-Stars in 2003 and 2005.

If you want to witness the best of the best in a beautiful setting with top-notch southern hospitality, this is the tournament you don't want to miss!



The competition will be held at Beaver Lake in Gates County. The site is on Highway 13/158, two miles north of the Chowan River Bridge between Ahoskie and Suffolk, Va. For more information, visit [www.beaverlakeskiclub.com](http://www.beaverlakeskiclub.com).

## Make sure your family is prepared for storms

Summer's increased temperatures bring a warm change of scenery and liveliness to the outdoors. However, summer weather changes also pose a greater threat of thunderstorms and hurricanes. Research shows that lightning from thunderstorms



injures more than 300 people each year and kills more than 80 people annually. Also, flash flooding associated with thunderstorms and hurricanes is responsible for the deaths of more than 140 people

annually, along with costly home and property damage.

Electrical damages caused from lightning and flash flooding can cause death, injuries and expenses. Be prepared and make sure your family knows what to do if a storm or flood occurs.

- Have an evacuation plan that includes the safest route to an emergency shelter or other facility.

- Develop an emergency communication plan for family members, and have a pre-determined, safe site to meet.

- Have a disaster supply kit on hand. This kit should include flashlight, extra batteries, a portable battery-operated radio, first-aid kit and manual, emergency food and water, non-electric can opener, essential medicines, cash and credit cards and sturdy shoes.

- Make arrangements for your pets because pets aren't always allowed into emergency shelters for health and space reasons.

- Teach children how and when to call 911.

- Ask an out-of-state relative or friend to serve as an emergency contact. Make sure everyone in the family knows the name, address, and phone number of the contact person.

- To minimize the risk of electric shock during a lightning storm, avoid bathing, don't touch metal items (bicycles, farm equipment, etc.), and if you need to make a phone call, use a cordless or cell phone.

- Never attempt to touch or pick up a fallen power line. Assume all downed power lines are energized. Keep children and pets away from downed lines as well.

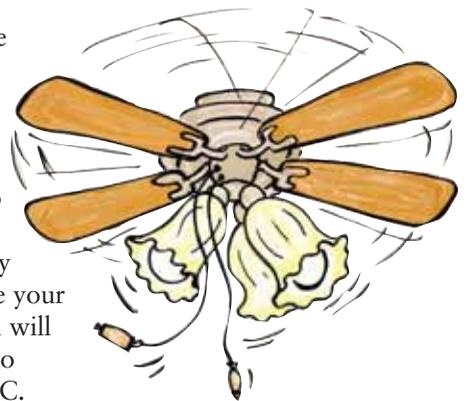
## Draw shades, turn on ceiling fans to cool it this summer

Relieve some strain on your A/C and knock a few dollars off your energy bill this summer. Here's how:

- Change the air filter every time you pay your energy bill. The unit doesn't have to work as hard to

push air through a clean filter as it does through a dirty one.

- Turn up the thermostat and turn on ceiling fans. Ceiling fans circulate the air and help you to feel cooler. For every degree you raise your thermostat, you will save 2 percent to 3 percent on A/C.



- Weatherstripping and caulking around doors and windows isn't just for winter. It can keep hot air from coming into your home during the summer, too. Seal leaky joints and seams around windows and doors to keep cool air in and hot air out.

- Draw blinds or shades during the day. If your windows don't have reflective coatings, add window film to keep the sun's heat from seeping in.

- Cook or run washing machines, dishwashers and other heat-generating appliances after 9 p.m. Using appliances during these "off-peak" hours can save you money and reduce indoor heat when the sun is blazing.

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