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Students share insight from trips at CFEC Annual Meeting



Boom trucks hold an American flag over the driveway into the CFEC headquarters and warehouse. At this moment on Saturday morning, a Chiefland Fire Rescue squad truck driven by Firefighter-EMT Robby Kalaf with Firefighter-EMT John Lake as the passenger was on the brink of passing under the flag.

Story and Photos By Jeff M. Hardison © Oct. 8, 2017 at 11:27 p.m.

CHIEFLAND -- A couple of young ladies shared some of the insight they gained this past year when they were the guests of honor Saturday morning (Oct. 7) during the Central Florida Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting.

Just before the business meeting part of the day, Katie Lott of Bronson Middle High School and Sydney Groom of Dixie County High School shared their insight from being part of the 2016 Capital Youth Tour participants.

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CFEC Communications Specialist Whitney Feather is seen with Katie Lott shortly before the start of the meeting.

CFEC Communications Specialist Whitney Feather is seen with Sydney Groom before the start of the meeting.



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CFEC Communications Specialist Whitney Feather introduces Katie Lott and Sydney Groom.

CFEC General Manager Mike Campbell introduced CFEC Communications Specialist Whitney Feather, who introduced Lott and Groom.

Feather said the cooperative program she looks forward to the most each year is the Capital Youth Tour Program. After an extensive process, CFEC takes six students to Tallahassee each year for a two-day tour of Florida's capital city.

From those six qualified high school juniors who go to Tallahassee, three are selected to go to Washington, D.C., for a weeklong tour of the nation's capital city.

These three students have the opportunity to learn more about rural electric cooperatives as well as to meet thousands of other young people from across the United States, Feather said.

Other than Lott and Groom, the third student this past year was Whitney Hodge of Dixie County High School. Hodge was not at the annual meeting on Saturday.

Lott, now a senior at BMHS, was the first to speak.

Lott is thankful for the opportunity to have gone on this past year's CFEC Youth Tour, she said.

It was an eye-opening experience for her to go to Tallahassee and Washington, D.C., where she saw how elected representatives make decisions for the state and the country, Lott said.

She also enjoyed learning more about history and rural electric cooperatives in America.

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One of her favorite historic sites was Mount Vernon, the home of President George Washington. Learning details about how government functions was another valuable part of the experiences she enjoyed while on the tours.

Lott said she was pleased to meet other young people who enjoy learning about politics, history, co-ops and leadership.

This trip inspired her to make a bigger impact on her community, school “and possibly even the world,” Lott said.

She believes this trip is important to inspire future leaders, and more importantly the future leaders of this co-op.

“I think Central Florida Electric Cooperative is doing a great thing here,” Lott said, “by cultivating our future and the future of the next generation of our nation’s leaders. It is my hope that this trip continues so that I can pass on my experience and inspire the next generation as well.”

Groom said she felt fortunate and blessed to have been part of the tour this year with Lott.

Groom, who like Lott is a senior this year, faced her fear of heights on this trip. It was the first time she had been in an aircraft.

Facing a fear to reach a goal means a lot, she said.

“And I am only 16, and I flew without my Mamma,” Groom said.

Feather took the girls from CFEC under her wing, Groom said, including holding her hand as they took off. And coming from a small town, Groom said the visit to Washington put some fear in her as well, but she overcame it.

Groom was prepared to learn a lot during the trip.

She was awestruck, however, when she visited the museum and met a military veteran. Groom said her heart was touched, and she is thankful for being able to go on

their tour to have that once-in-a-lifetime experience.

While these two students were stars on the stage, another 30 students from Williston and Bronson FFA chapters volunteered to help the hundreds of CFEC members and guests at the event. The FFA chapters selected to assist with the annual meeting rotates from among the schools within the cooperative’s service area.



**CFEC Board of Trustees
President Barbara
Townsend welcomes
everyone to the meeting.**

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Among the many people registering members at the entrance to the meeting area, are Williston Middle High School FFA Sentinel Hannah Robertson, CFEC Customer Services Representative IV Jose Morales and CFEC CSR Michelle Longoria.



Jim Menasco, CFEC mechanic, spins the tickets in the bin where people placed them after registering before the start of the meeting.

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A board displays some of the notes of thanks from members who were helped by CFEC this year.



Among the fun opportunities is this potential for photos.

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Beyond the youthful energy abounding at the meeting, there was a positive set of facts presented mirroring a relatively positive year, despite the loss of power by members during Hurricane Irma.

Linemen from several states joined the core group from Central Florida Electric Cooperative and they brought back electric service as quickly as was possible while using best methods to assure safety for employees and co-op members.

The thing about making an error with 14,000 volts is that there is no second chance.



***The Reflectsons* sing Gospel music. They are (from left) Glen Thigpen, Pam Renew and Dale Thigpen. Not pictured is sound man and bus driver Bruce Renew.**

Before the meeting started, the Gospel music group named *The Reflectsons* performed. Dale Thigpen, lead singer and founder of the group, was joined by one of his sons and a founding member of the band Glen Thigpen. They are from Trenton. Bruce Renew and his wife Pam Renew of Bartow were part of the group. Bruce drives the 45,000-pound bus and performs duties as the sound guy while Pam sings with Glen and Dale, although Dale is a substitute singer now.

Also before the meeting, members and guests had an opportunity to see displays about safety, and the equipment that is used. There was a cutout area for people to take photos as if they were linemen.

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Vegetation management team members were available to speak about this aspect of continuously providing safe and reliable electric service to members. There were free bottle of cold water and soft drinks available for everyone.



The warehouse meeting hall had fans include a very big fan at the top of the ceiling. CFEC Chief Financial Officer Eddie Thomas said that fan can be cranked up to create a very strong draft if needed. Thomas, Manager of Customer Service A.D. Goodman and Billing Supervisor Connie Ward were among the many staff members who were ready to help customers find answers to any questions they had.



This is a big, big fan.

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Among the many people helping members find answers to questions are (from left) A.D. Goodman, Connie Ward and Eddie Thomas.



There are at least 478 members here and about 600 people altogether. One, two, three... There is a requirement to have at least 1 percent of the membership present for a quorum. That amount of members is achieved every year very soon after registration begins.

As for the annual meeting, there were door prizes galore. And there were free gifts for all members who registered. Members received a bag with a tumbler that could hold cold and hot beverages, a light bulb, a night light and literature.

Seminole Electric Cooperative, the power-generating group, sent a contingent of representatives who shared literature and information, and gave away lightbulbs as well.

There were 200 door prizes. Those included an electric can opener, a jigsaw, an electric skillet, an electric knife, two drill-driver sets, a blender, a coffee maker, a crock pot, a multi-cooker steamer, a hand mixer, a tea maker, a Thermacell, a George Foreman grill, a Ninja Master Prep, a DVD player, a Dremel tool, a slow cooker, a trunk organizer, a mechanic tool set and an electric griddle.

Among the door prizes were cash prizes and gift cards.

There was one \$500 cash prize. There were seven \$100 cash prizes. There were scores and scores of \$25 and \$50 door prizes.

The 600 or so people attending the meeting on Saturday morning had an

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opportunity, too, to see a man who has served CFEC as an employee for 43 years, including this being his 20th annual meeting where he was active.

This was the last annual meeting for Randy Vogel as an employee, General Manager Campbell said, because he is retiring. Vogel accepted a plaque at the meeting in recognition for his service.

CFEC President and Trustee from District 9 Barbara Townsend expressed her appreciation to all of the employees for their work during this past year, and especially in dealing with the obstacles from Hurricane Irma. She also said she is grateful to the CFEC members for their patience during the period of electric service outage.

General Manager Campbell also expressed his gratitude to the employees this year for a job well done.

During the meeting, Campbell gave a breakdown of how 98 percent of all members who lost electric service had it restored by Sept. 16, within a week after the hurricane swept through the CFEC service area.

Some of the hardest hit areas with more damage or flooding took a few more days, he added, with full restoration being achieved by Sept. 18.

In addition to the hardships from the hurricane, there were other sad points during the year. Three members of the CFEC Board of Trustees passed away.

Thelma McCain, 76, of Cedar Key (District 1) passed away on Sunday, March 5, 2017 at home.

Campbell mentioned that she was the president of the board of trustees when she died. She had represented District 1 for 13 years.

George Stephens (District 2) died in early September, Campbell said. He had served that district for 33 years.

Clyde Earnest Townsend, 90, of Bell (District 9), passed away on Sept. 23. He was a member of the CFEC Board of Trustees for 28 years and he was a member of Seminole Electric Cooperative Board of Trustees for 16 years.



Here are (from left) CFEC Attorney Greg Beauchamp, Trustee Kyle Quincey (District 4), Tony Weeks (District 3); Carl Roof Sr. (District 2); and James McCain (District 1).

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Here are (from left) Secretary-Treasurer Alan Mikell (District 6), Donald Lane (District 5) and General Manager Mike Campbell.

Following is the list of all of the CFEC Board of Trustees:

President Barbara Townsend (District 9); Vice President Randy Mikell (District 8); Secretary-Treasurer Alan Mikell (District 6); James McCain

(District 1); Carl Roof Sr. (District 2); Tony Weeks (District 3); Kyle Quincey (District 4); Donald Lane (District 5); and Kenneth O'Steen (District 7).

McCain, Lane and Townsend were re-elected without opposition this year for another three-year term. There are three trustees up for election each year and all nine serve for three-year terms.

Here are Vice President Randy Mikell (District 8) and Kenneth O'Steen (District 7).

