



## Woodland Wonder

When choosing the perfect tree, the builder looks for strength, hardiness and the stamina to weather storms.

The ideal specimen is deeply rooted, with a sturdy backbone and spreading branches. It must show flexibility in wind, not rigidity, and demonstrate an ability to flourish in adverse conditions, not wither. Once selected, this seemingly ordinary tree becomes something magical, the stuff of daydreams.

In the hands of the builder, a tree house is created.

At Camp Southern Ground in Fayetteville—the latest stop for Animal Planet’s hit TV reality show “Treehouse Masters”—this kind of transformation is all in a day’s work.

Nine weeks out of the year, the 900-acre passion project of Grammy Award-winning artist Zac Brown comes alive with campers, focusing on children from every background, with emphasis on those with neuro-developmental disorders. In particular, kids with Asperger or Tourette syndromes, autism spectrum disorders and learning differences—like ADD/ADHD and dyslexia—find Camp Southern Ground to be a good fit. The camp also hosts children with social/emotional challenges and those from military families.

The children learn to thrive in nature and challenge themselves with a variety of stimulating social, physical and mental activities. They gain confidence



and learn valuable lessons through traditional camp pursuits like archery and a ropes course, but also explore new endeavors like organic farming, STEM projects and music.

“We just try to give kids extraordinary experiences,” said Resource Development Coordinator Joyce Gaglione. “They are meant to impact the world with their unique gifts, and we want them to recognize that.”

To further the camp’s mission and raise awareness, Brown recruited the “Treehouse Masters” team—Pete Nelson and his expert craftsmen—to build their biggest tree house to date, revealed in the Sept. 16 season six finale.

The one-of-a-kind sanctuary, affectionately dubbed the “Space Crab,” is a soaring, modern, vaguely crustacean-like hideaway set among the leaves in a forest clearing. A wheelchair-accessible ramp

*continued inside*





## The President's Message

*Chris Stephens  
President and CEO*

Each year for more than a century, co-ops have observed National Cooperative Month in October. As we celebrate all things co-op this month, it's a great time to discuss the value of being a member of a strong cooperative.

Coweta-Fayette EMC, like other co-ops, is a not-for-profit, democratically controlled business owned by you, the consumers we serve. That's why you are a "member," not a customer. You have the opportunity to elect fellow members to represent you on the board of directors, a group that oversees operations and works collectively to represent your best interests.

As a bonus, revenues received in excess of cooperative operational costs are allocated to members, in proportion to their usage, as capital credits. Some of this revenue is used to make system improvements like installing new poles, lines and transformers. Being able to use capital credits to partially finance these upgrades keeps our annual debt down and, therefore, our rates lower. When the co-op's financial condition will not be impaired, the board approves capital credit refunds to members. Coweta-Fayette EMC's nine directors have authorized the retirement of over \$20 million since 2000.

Another perk of Coweta-Fayette EMC membership is competitive rates. The Georgia Public Service Com-

mission recently released the 2016 summer residential rate comparisons, and we ranked 16<sup>th</sup>-lowest out of 94 electric utilities statewide, with an average use of 1,500 kWh/month.

When it comes to reliability, our industry uses a System Average Interruption Index (SAIDI) to measure performance and compare results among utilities. These metrics simply show the average time (in minutes) a consumer is out each year. Coweta-Fayette EMC's 2015 SAIDI score was 74.61; the state cooperative average is 113.36!

Your co-op is also committed to employees and safety. This starts with recruiting the best people and continuing to offer educational advancement opportunities throughout their career. We earned a perfect score on our most recent safety accreditation and will continue to look for ways to learn and improve—a goal that ultimately benefits your level of service.

One of the greatest aspects of membership in a strong cooperative is our level of commitment to the communities we serve. We live, play and work here and feel it is our duty to give back, from volunteering as little league coaches, PTO leaders and church deacons to joining civic organizations, non-profits and chambers of commerce. And through our many generous members participating in Operation Round Up, more than \$4 million has been distributed by the trust board to individuals/organizations in need since 1993.

As co-ops around the globe celebrate this month, your EMC will join in the festivities—not because we enjoy patting ourselves on the back, but because we believe in this unique business model and recognize that your membership is what makes us who we are.

## Camp Southern Ground Treehouse *continued*

winds through the trees toward an interior that's anything but rustic.

With a massive King Arthur-esque round table that can be raised and tucked away in the ceiling, multiple flat screens for corporate retreat activities, a variety of telescopes for star-gazing out myriad floor-to-ceiling windows, plenty of comfy chairs for lounging, a wet bar and air conditioning to help combat the heat, plus many other features to delight and amaze, this tree house is truly extraordinary.

In "Treehouse Masters," "tree whisperer" Nelson and his team execute outrageous, sky-high retreats designed to inspire, enchant and awaken the inner child in everyone. Whether he's contriving magnificent multi-bedroom abodes with state-of-the-art kitchens and bathrooms or rendering simpler one-room escapes, Nelson always goes out on a limb to

create breathtaking treehouses with spectacular vistas.

In 2012, Zac Brown began a journey to make a lifelong summer camp dream come true. He and his wife, Shelly, put to paper the vision Brown shared

with her on their first date. Camp Southern Ground, still under construction and slated to be fully operational in 2018, will ultimately have a campus feel. When camp is not in session, the cutting-edge facilities—including the treehouse—will be used internally as a think tank for high-level thought leaders in a variety of fields. It will

also be available for special interest retreats, corporate team-building, educational conferences and special events.

For more information or to watch this episode, visit [Animalplanet.com/tv-shows/treehouse-masters/](http://Animalplanet.com/tv-shows/treehouse-masters/) or [Campsouthernground.org](http://Campsouthernground.org), or visit either group's Facebook/Twitter pages.







# EMC Linemen Journey to Costa Rica to Aid in Rural Electrification Effort

Two Coweta-Fayette EMC linemen recently returned to the U.S.

after volunteering in Costa Rica alongside local electric utility workers as they constructed a 1.92-km power distribution system benefitting five families.

Completed over two weeks, the Santa Ana de Nicoya electrification project—sponsored mainly by NRECA's International Foundation and its annual fundraiser, Take Aim at Progress (TAAP)—began as a means of fortifying the community's economic development and contributing to residents' access to basic services, like healthcare, education, security and technology. When work on the system was finished, project participants from Coweta-Fayette EMC, Carroll EMC, Cobb EMC and nearby Coopeguanacaste Electric Cooperative could feel proud knowing they had helped 20 people gain access to electricity.

"The poverty some Central American villagers still face is staggering," says EMC CEO Chris Stephens. "We were honored to assist our sister co-op, Coopeguanacaste, with this project."

NRECA International was created to give people in developing countries access to safe, reliable and affordable electricity. In 2015, Stephens received the organization's International Award, which recognizes exceptional dedication to the development of global communities.

Take Aim at Progress is a charity clay shoot held at Cherokee Rose Sporting Resort in Griffin to benefit NRECA International. Through the program, volunteers travel to impoverished countries to help build electric lines. For many who make the overseas journey—which is by no means a vacation—the impact of helping to electrify a rural community is deeply felt.

"The hardest obstacle to overcome at first was not being able to communicate," says Steven Robinson, who made the trip this year with fellow lineman Wes Abbott. "But the way linemen talk is universal, and we found a way to teach each other a lot about different work practices. I'll always remember the people there, how nice they were to us. They generously opened their homes to strangers—I'd say we gained some life-long friends."

Coopeguanacaste serves Guanacaste, an area known for its beaches, surfing and sport fishing, as well as inland cattle ranches, sugar cane and cotton plantations. Parts of the region have had electricity for decades, but service is still rare in other areas.

While living in Costa Rica, U.S. volunteers face many challenges, including the language barrier, climate and lack of equipment/technology.

"We are proud our guys take advantage of opportunities like this to learn and grow," says Stephens. "I can't think of a more noble motivation than the desire to make the world a better place by helping those who need it most."



## Don't Be Fooled by Common Energy Myths!

Eating carrots will improve your eyesight, cracking knuckles leads to arthritis, watching too much TV harms your vision. We've all heard the old wives' tales, but did you know there are also misconceptions about home energy use? Read on to ensure you aren't tricked by electric urban legends that just won't die...

**Myth:** The higher the thermostat setting, the faster the home will heat (or cool).

Many people think that walking into a chilly room and raising the thermostat to 85 degrees will heat the space more quickly—not true. Thermostats direct a home's HVAC system to heat/cool to a certain temperature; drastically adjusting the setting won't change how quickly you feel warmer or cooler. The Department of Energy recommends keeping thermostats at 78 degrees in the summer and 68 degrees in the winter.

**Myth:** Opening the oven door to check on a dish doesn't really waste energy.

While it may be tempting to check the progress of your meal, opening an oven door does waste energy. Each time you do this, the temperature inside decreases by as much as 25 degrees, delaying your dinner and, more important, costing money. If you can't resist, try using the oven light instead.

**Myth:** Ceiling fans keep the house cool while you're away.

Ceiling fans cool people, not rooms. They circulate air, but do not change the temperature.

**Myth:** Reducing my energy use is too expensive.

Many consumers believe efficiency requires expensive up-front costs, like purchasing new appliances or making pricey upgrades. The truth is, small changes of habit—like turning off lights when not in use, sealing air leaks and using a programmable thermostat—can bring about big savings!

Remember, energy efficiency doesn't have to be difficult. Focus on little adjustments that add up over time. To learn more, visit us online at [Utility.org](http://Utility.org) or call 770-502-0226.



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