

## Here's your opportunity to express yourself

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Please accept our sincerest gratitude for the prompt, courteous, and professional service we received on 6th of December 2010, a night on which temperatures dipped below 30 degrees. We had experienced a partial power outage, i.e., one of the two 120-volt power lines was damaged. We notified SECO at about 7:30 AM. By 8:30 AM the initial service man arrived, informing us that the problem was indeed a damaged 120-volt power line. He temporarily connected us to the main line and assured us that the problem had been called in and that a repair truck would be arriving soon to repair the line. The repairmen arrived less than two hours later. They replaced the old line with a new one and were finished by 12:00 PM. A job well done! Many thanks.

*Bob & Mandy Durocher*

Ocala, Florida



MERRY CHRISTMAS:

Barry Bowman and all SECO employees, thanks for the letter explaining the recent outage. I was a bit frustrated when I missed the end of a movie. 😊

Explaining the reason was very nice of you. This is the first electric company I have ever had

service from to explain why there was an outage. You certainly are back in my graces.

I also enjoy the news and special event paper that comes every month with the statement.

I wish for each and everyone at SECO a blessed Christmas.

Thankfully yours,

*Alice Ladwig*

Lady Lake, FL



My husband was looking out our picture window and saw a brilliant flash of light. Then we were plunged into darkness and prepared ourselves accordingly with flashlights and so forth.

We were pleased when in less than an hour later, the power was back on.

Yesterday, your letter came and we were thrilled to think we are part of a company that cares enough to contact all of us.

Thank you so much for your prompt fix of the problem and for your explanation.

Happy holidays,

*Jack & Mary Ann Swisher*

The Villages, FL



Thank you so much for updating those of your customers who suffered a recent power outage on Sunday, November 28th. Your thoughtfulness is much appreciated.

Happy holidays.

Sincerely,

*Elizabeth C. Babb*

The Villages, FL

### EDITOR'S NOTE

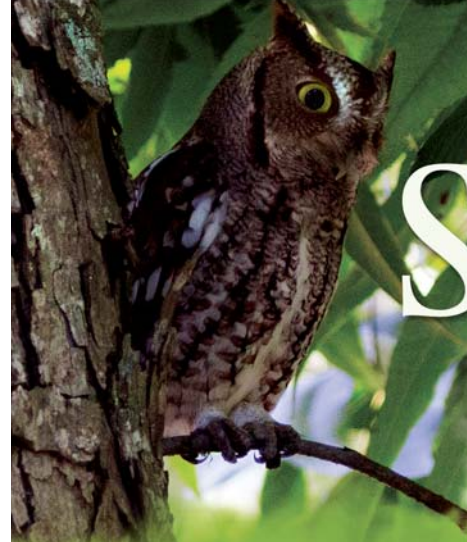
We have received terrific feedback from our customers, like the notes from the members you've read here, about a recent outage that occurred in The Villages. While the outage was dealt with swiftly and was not of terribly long duration, our relatively new customer initiative is to let folks know what caused the problem because we think good communication between the members and their co-op is very important. The response to this outreach to the members has been absolutely heartwarming. The phone calls, cards and notes praising our efforts have let us know we are doing the right thing. Thank you all!

Barry Bowman  
Director of Corporate  
Communications

Difficult economic times bring out a host of unscrupulous scam artists trying to sell you something you don't need and which probably will end up costing you a bundle of money. There are all kinds of scams out there including some which promise savings on your power bill. Occasionally we hear about these snake oil salespeople saying that they have paired up with or are working with SECO and other utilities to try and sell you something. Be a smart consumer. If you get an offering in the mail, it is not a SECO mailing unless you see the SECO logo on it and the only thing we promote by mail is surge protection. If someone calls you or shows up at your door selling some miracle device it won't be a SECO employee and it won't be a SECO endorsed product or service. Check out any offers you receive thoroughly. If it sounds too good to be true – it probably is. We don't want our members to become victims of consumer fraud. If you have any doubts you can always call SECO to check.

**WARNING**

**Buyer Beware!**



# SECO News

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

## 2011 SECO Scholarships Available

Sumter Electric's Board of Trustees has authorized the continuation of the Youth Scholarship Program for the 2010-11 school year.

SECO plans to award up to twelve high school seniors \$2500 each to continue their studies at an institution for higher learning. High school seniors, who will graduate at the end of the current school year, are enrolled in an accredited college or vocational/technical school by the end of the year, and whose residence is served by Sumter Electric Cooperative, are welcomed to apply.

Qualifications are based on scholastic record, financial need, plus school and community activities. Scholarship application forms are now available in the guidance offices at area high schools and at all of SECO's local offices.

## Gearing Up for College Cost

*Scholarship aid helps students face financial facts*

With cost of college tuition on the rise, the price of advanced education can be overwhelming. However, with solid research, and hard work, many well prepared students can find scholarships to assist them financially.

Many families do not apply for scholarship aid because they mistakenly assume they won't qualify, because they earn too much money or own their own home. The fact is a parent's home equity or retirement program is not considered in the federal analysis formula. And, there is no simple cut-off based on income.

While financial need is sometimes taken into account when determining the scholarship recipient, some scholarships are awarded to undergraduate students based on other more unusual merits, along with other qualifying factors. For example one scholarship being offered is the *Chick & Sophie Major Memorial Scholarship Duck Calling Contest* that awards \$500 to \$2,000 scholarships open to any high school senior in the United States who can call ducks. Another grant offered is the *Tall Clubs International Student Scholarship* available to tall students who are under 21 years of age and attending their first year of college. The recipients must meet a height requirement minimum of 5'10" for women and 6'2" for men.

A wide variety of grant money is available and a little research pays off. High school guidance counselors and financial aid officers have a number of publications which list scholarship opportunities. In addition, low cost guides are available for those who wish to investigate the options available to them. ❁

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SECO's Board of Trustees will meet on Monday, January 24 at 2:30 PM in the Corporate Offices located 330 South US Highway 301 in Sumterville. A Trustees' meeting will also be held on February 28, 2011.

### RECOMMENDED RESEARCH

- scholarships.com
- students.gov
- scholarshipsandgrants.us
- collegescholarships.org
- secoenergy.com
- "The Sports Scholarships Insider's Guide"
- "Scholarship Handbook 2011"
- "How to Write a Winning Scholarship Essay"



**TOYS FOR TOTS**



U.S. MARINE CORPS RESERVE

## SECO employees helped make Christmas a happy time for many girls and boys as a result of their participation in the 2010 "Toys for Tots" drive.

The co-op has been involved with "Toys for Tots" or similar programs for many years. Being part of the community means you try to help those less fortunate. No child should be without a present Christmas morning.

SECO employees managed to purchase, collect, and donate new toys for children in the area. SECO's team leaders placed several collection boxes

at our five SECO customer service centers as well as several in our corporate offices in Sumterville and the operations center in Eustis.

Toys for Tots was started in 1947 by a band of Marine Reservists in Los Angeles. Every year the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve continues this tradition all across the nation. And as proud supporters, SECO employees feel good knowing that many children in Lake, Sumter, and Marion counties were able to receive a toy because of their service.

## SECO returns over \$30,000 to area schools in Capital Credits

The Sumter Electric Cooperative Board of Trustees authorized a return of \$3.4 million dollars in capital credits to its residential and commercial customers for 2010. And, over \$30,000 of that was returned to area schools.

One of the great benefits of being a member/customer of a not-for-profit cooperative like SECO Energy is that co-op customers get to

share in any excess margins the business might have at the end of each year.

As you can imagine, schools use a good deal of electricity to keep students comfortable and maintain effective operations. The schools where SECO provides electricity get to share in the capital credits returned each year. It's always a pleasant task to bring our various school officials the good news about their portion of the excess margins being given back to members.

The schools served by SECO in Marion County received \$12,657.89 as their share of 2010 capital credits. Sumter County schools received \$3,288.05. Lake County schools received \$9,192.63. Citrus County schools got a check for \$2,490.11. The Villages Charter Schools received a check for \$2,700.52.

Accepting the capital credits checks for their respective schools were Sumter Superintendent Rick Shirley, Citrus Superintendent Sandra "Sam" Himmel, Marion Superintendent Jim Yancey, and Villages Charter Schools Director of Education Dr. Randy McDaniel. In Lake County the whole board of education joined Chairman Debbie Stivender to enjoy the presentation.

The return of capital credits is unique to the cooperative business model. It's good news, especially during these difficult economic times.



## Can Prevent Forest Fires

With the hard freezes of winter, the Florida Division of Forestry is urging residents to abide by outdoor burning regulations.

Hard freezes kill and dry-out grasses and other light vegetation that helps spread fire.

### Outdoor burning safety tips:

- Check with your local fire department or the Division of Forestry office to make sure it is legal to burn in your area
- Burners must comply with county/city as well as Division of Forestry fire ordinances
- Make sure you meet the required setbacks: 25 ft. from your house and forested areas, 50 ft. from a public paved road and 150 ft. from other occupied buildings
- Burn only yard waste, no household garbage (includes paper products and newspapers)
- Don't burn on windy days
- Never leave a fire unattended
- Keep a water hose or shovel handy in case your fire escapes
- Make sure your smoke does not obstruct visibility on nearby roads
- Be sure your fire is completely out before you leave
- Use solid waste pick up within the city limits
- Visit the Division of Forestry's website [www.fl-dof.com](http://www.fl-dof.com) or call 352-955-2010 for more information

If your fire escapes, you could be liable for costs of suppression and damage to the property of others.

### MEMBER NOTICE

SECO has set new hours for the reconnection of electric service for individuals whose service is disconnected due to non-payment of their power bill. The new hours during which reconnects will be conducted are from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., seven days a week. This will make for more efficient use of SECO staff and help reduce the cost of service to the rest of the co-op's membership.

tips & quips about our environment and its inhabitants

## NATURE'S reflections

### EASTERN SCREECH OWL

One of five owls found in Florida and the smallest

The Eastern screech owl, *Megascops asio*, is our smallest owl at just six to nine inches tall with an eighteen to twenty-two inch wingspan. It has prominent feathered ear tufts, a round head, big yellow eyes and dense streaked and barred plumages. There are three color variations red, brown, and gray with some variation between them. These color morphs are independent of the bird's age, sex, location or season. Due to a higher tolerance for warmer temperatures, red and brown morphs are more common in Florida. Sexes are similar. The Eastern screech owl is found in nearly every habitat throughout the eastern United States.

With its unique voice, a hollow-toned quavering whistle, rising then lowering in pitch, it may well be the owl most responsible for the eerie characterizations of folklore.

This predatory bird is strictly nocturnal, roosting in a tree during the daytime. While it is quite common, it generally goes unnoticed probably due to its size and coloring. It is active at night or near dusk, using its excellent hearing and night vision to locate prey.

The Eastern Screech owl hunts from dusk to dawn, but with more intensity during the first four hours of darkness. It hunts in open woodlands or along the edges of open fields or wetlands. When prey is spotted, the owl dives quickly and seizes it in its strong talons.

Screech owls capture flying insects on the wing. It is especially fond of palmetto bugs. This opportunistic hunter will switch to any suitably-sized prey and readily eats a variety of animals from worms and frogs to small fish or mammals such as mice, shrews, or moles. Most food is swallowed whole and small pellets of indigestible materials such as bone and fur are regurgitated. Finding fresh, moist pellets on the ground underneath a large tree is a good indication an owl hangs out there.

Pairs mate for life but will accept a new mate if the previous mate disappears. Between February and July a pair builds a nest in a tree cavity, abandoned woodpecker hole or nest box. Two to four white eggs are incubated by the female for twenty-six days. The male fearlessly defends the nest and provides food for his mate. Together they feed the young who leave the nest four weeks later.

Column & photo by Sandi Staton - [sandi.staton@secoenergy.com](mailto:sandi.staton@secoenergy.com)