

“A huge difference in comfort and costs”

An interview with Ouachita Electric member Kassy Starr on her utility’s innovative program to expand energy efficiency upgrades

Kassy Starr grew up in rural Arkansas, about 50 miles north of her current home in Sparkman where she lives with her husband Scotty.

“We met at the Harley Davidson in Hot Springs and moved here in 2011,” Starr says. “This used to be Scotty’s grandmother’s home.” The closest Walmart or grocery store is about 30 minutes away, and the nearest gas station, five miles away, only opened a couple of years ago.

The Starrs wanted to move to Sparkman to “be in the country, live the simple life,” Starr says.

Since they purchased their home, they have been investing in more land, to be able to raise cows for beef. “We purchased more land,” Starr says, “which has allowed us to grow, from 7 acres that came with the home, to 59 acres today.”

As they look ahead to making their farm viable financially, she works at the Christian Health Center that treats patients who lack health insurance, and her husband works at Woodfield Trucking, a family business.

Prioritizing investments in land and cattle was important to build for the future, but Kassy says that she and her husband also knew their home was in desperate need of upgrades as well. In the heat of summer, electric bills were up to \$330 monthly, which they knew were way too high for the modest two-bedroom home, but saving for a new HVAC system was difficult given other expenses.

The Starrs get their electricity from a local rural electric



Kassy and Scotty Starr at home in Sparkman, Arkansas

cooperative in Arkansas called Ouachita Electric, and Kassy had heard about the cooperative’s new on-bill financing program for energy efficiency called HELP PAYS, which is based on the Pay As You Save® (PAYS®) system.

Here’s how the process worked for Kassy:

- Ouachita Electric provided a complete home energy audit, at no cost.
- The audit identified needed improvements and analyzed annual cost savings associated with each one, to determine eligibility and arrive at a set of recommended upgrades. For the Starrs, these included additional insulation, air sealing, new doors, and HVAC upgrades.
- After the Starrs elected to have the work done, they chose among the local HVAC contractors participating in the program. A quality assurance inspector with the program checked the work on-site, verified it was done right, and the utility paid for all costs.
- The Starrs are now paying Ouachita Electric’s monthly cost recovery charge right on their electric bill out of the savings produced by the efficiency upgrades.

There’s no loan, no credit checks, dealing with banks, finding contractors — in short, no hassles. And the cost recovery charge stays with the meter, not the resident, so renters can participate, too.

The whole process to get started was “so easy,” Starr says, “and the next thing I know they’re calling to set up the upgrades: insulation, installing the new HVAC system, then Ouachita Electric came out to confirm it was all done



Kassy Starr is happy about a lower monthly bill and plenty of efficiency upgrades!



A new air conditioner helps to cut energy costs and increase comfort.

correctly.” After the upgrades, Ouachita Electric ordered a final energy audit, to show the savings. The upgrades were completed in September 2016, and energy use dropped nearly 23 percent compared to the year before, even though September 2016 was hotter (and required more air conditioning power) than 2015.

“It immediately made a huge difference in our home’s comfort,” Starr says. “The new air conditioning was so much better at the end of the summer — before, we were running our air conditioning nonstop, and the house was still too warm.”

Additional attic insulation and sealing leaks around vents keeps that more comfortable air inside, where it belongs. “My monthly bill is lower than before, and now we have more than \$8,000 in energy efficiency upgrades that will be repaid painlessly through energy savings,” Starr says. “We’d seen

a yard sign at a local home where HELP PAYS work was being done, and now many of our family and friends are also taking advantage of it — I totally recommend it! Before, we were trying to save for these energy upgrades, but now we can use that money for other expenses and investing in our cattle farm.”



Saving money on energy efficiency upgrades makes it possible to invest in growing a cattle farm.

A trip of a lifetime

THE 2017 YOUTH TOUR TO WASHINGTON

An all-expense-paid tour of the nation's capital awaits 44 high school juniors from Arkansas this summer.

If you apply for the 2017 Youth Tour to Washington, you might be chosen for the week-long trip to Washington. The trip, which is sponsored by the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas, includes tours of major sites in Washington, such as the U.S. Capitol; the museums of the Smithsonian Institution; the Newseum; and the Jefferson, Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr., Vietnam, Korean and World War II memorials.

This spring, Ouachita Electric Cooperative will select two high school juniors to attend the 2017 tour, which is set for June 9-15. The winners will be selected through essays. Applicants must be high school juniors and their parents/guardians must be members of Ouachita Electric Cooperative.

The Arkansas group will travel to Washington and return to Little Rock by air. Once in Washington, the students will join about 1,700 students from across the nation who are attending the tour.

Why do we do this? The answer is simple. Ouachita Electric Cooperative is committed to its members and to the communities it serves. Through the Youth Tour, we are helping Arkansas’ youth learn more about the workings of their nation’s government and the electric cooperatives, as well as develop leadership skills.



For more information, contact Angie McLendon at 870-837-3615 or amclendon@oecc.com.

The deadline for entries is March 17, 2017.

To learn more about the Youth Tour, visit: www.ecark.org and www.youthtour.coop

Don't miss out on this incredible, life-changing opportunity. It's a trip of a lifetime!