

From Foster Care to Forever: When God Writes the Story

Motherhood for Ashlie, an employee and member of First Electric, did not unfold the way she once imagined. Instead, it came through foster care, heartbreak, restoration and moments that later revealed God's hand at work.

Her journey began with a little girl who entered her home through foster care. What was expected to become a permanent placement and the beginning of Ashlie's long-awaited story of motherhood eventually shifted toward reunification with the child's biological mother. Saying goodbye was painful, but Ashlie chose grace over bitterness. She maintained a relationship with the child's mother and continued loving the little girl from a different place.

That same mother later honored Ashlie by nominating her for Foster Family of the Year, recognizing the love, stability and care she had provided during one of the most difficult seasons of her child's life.

Still, after the little girl left, Ashlie struggled with unanswered questions, wondering why God would allow such deep love only to end in separation.

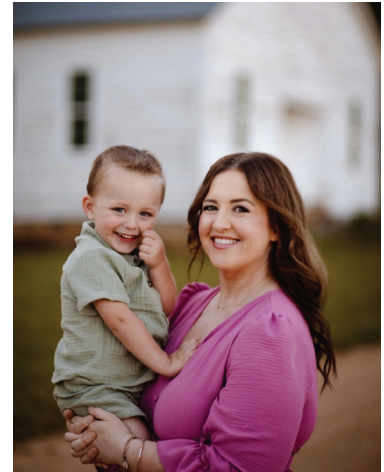
Months later, an unexpected call came about a baby boy being fostered by a friend. What began as occasional visits slowly became something undeniable. He did not feel temporary. He felt like home.

As their bond grew, Ashlie knew she was being called not just to care for him, but to fight for him — to give him a forever family. Through a long legal process, countless prayers and the support of family, she held tightly to



ABOVE Ashlie (center) was nominated as Foster Family of the Year. She had friends and family support her at the event including (pictured left to right) Hannah Brandon, Michele Belli (nominating mother), Dee Anna Conklin, Brianna Cottrell, Chasity Mckendree, Jessica Gardner, Heather Cagle, Carly Horton and Paige White.

RIGHT Ashlie and her son, Ryan, celebrate the forever family they found in April 2025.



hope. Then, in April 2025, surrounded by loved ones in a courtroom, Ashlie heard a judge confirm what her heart already knew: this child was her son.

But God's story was not finished.

Later, her son's biological mother gave birth to a baby girl who also entered foster care. Ashlie once again felt called to step in. For a season, the siblings were together under her roof, and she loved them both deeply. Eventually, after growth and healing in the biological mother's life, the baby girl was reunited with her family. Once again, Ashlie had to let go.

But this time she understood. The first little girl taught her love through transition. The baby girl taught her how to release love with hope. And her son became the reminder that some children are placed in your life to stay forever.

To Ashlie, none of it was accidental. Her journey became a testimony that God's plans rarely unfold the way we expect, but often far more beautifully than we imagined.

Summer Energy Assistance Available for Arkansas Residents

Higher summer temperatures often lead to increased energy use, which can strain household budgets. Qualifying Arkansas residents may be able to get help through the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), which assists with cooling-related utility costs.

Program highlights:

- **Summer Cooling Assistance** – Helps eligible households pay summer cooling bills. Applications usually open the first Monday after July 4, and run through the last business day of August.
- **Summer Crisis Assistance** – May be available for households facing a utility-related emergency and typically continues through the last business day of September.

- **Eligibility Requirements** – Eligibility is based on household size and income.

- **Limited Funding** – Assistance is provided on a first-come, first-served basis while funds last.

- **How to Apply** – Apply through your local Community Action Agency, and consider applying early.

LIHEAP can provide short-term relief during periods of high energy use and help families manage summer utility costs. Members who think they may qualify are encouraged to contact their local Community Action Agency for more information or visit the Arkansas Department of Energy and Environment LIHEAP page:

adeq.state.ar.us/energy/assistance/liheap.aspx

Operation Round-Up Scholarship Recipients Announced

First Electric awarded \$2,000 college scholarships to nine recent high school graduates living in the cooperative's five districts. The scholarships, awarded at \$1,000 per semester, may be used to attend a technical school or college in the state and are funded through the cooperative's Operation Round-Up program.

The 2026 scholarship recipients are:

Benton District

- Sierra Gibbs, Little Rock – Bryant High School
- Claire Matthews, Bryant – Bryant High School

Heber Springs District

- Miles Bittle, Heber Springs – Harding Academy
- Hannah Ritter, Heber Springs – Heber Springs High School

Jacksonville District

- Paten Oxner, Searcy – Searcy High School
- Georgie McMahan, Searcy – Searcy High School
- Logan Underwood, Austin – Cabot High School

Perryville District

- Grace Gunther, Bigelow – Bigelow High School

Stuttgart District

- Khloe Lloyd, Crockett's Bluff – DeWitt High School

First Electric members who participate in Operation Round-Up volunteer to have their monthly electric bill rounded up to the next even dollar amount. Since 1998, the Operation Round-Up program has awarded more than \$1.8 million in donations to nonprofit organizations and provided college scholarships. Members may enroll in Operation Round-Up by visiting First Electric Operation Round-Up or by calling 800-489-7405.



Sierra Gibbs



Claire Matthews



Miles Bittle



Hannah Ritter



Paten Oxner



Georgie McMahan



Logan Underwood



Grace Gunther



Khloe Lloyd



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106,996

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(Option 2 for outage reporting)

Connect2First
connect2first.net
833-411-2234

(Option 2 for outage reporting)

Willie Wiredhand's Corner: Fireworks Safety Tips

Howdy, friends! Here are a few quick fireworks safety reminders for a fun and safe Independence Day:

- Keep a bucket of water or a garden hose nearby.
- Never let children handle or ignite fireworks.
- Use fireworks outdoors in a clear area away from homes, dry grass and power lines.
- Never point fireworks at people or try to relight a dud.
- Soak used fireworks in water before throwing them away.

For the safest celebration, attend a professional fireworks show. Celebrate responsibly, stay alert and have a safe and happy Fourth of July!



Free & Brave

CELEBRATING
250
YEARS OF
AMERICA

Our offices will be closed on Friday, July 3, in observance of Independence Day.

Crews will be on hand in the event of an outage.

To report an electric outage, please call 800-489-7405 (Option 2).
To report an internet outage, please call 833-411-2234 (Option 2).

LEMONADE LOVE

STAND FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE.

BENEFITTING

THE CALL

First Electric Cooperative

CONNECT2First
Powered by The Electric

July 10th
805 W Main St, Suite C
10 AM to 12 PM

Every donation helps support children and youth in foster care.

