

2024 Board Chair Speech – Dr. Michael Lowder

Good morning!

I'm Michael Lowder, chair of your co-op's board of directors. My wife Lorelei and I live here in Oconee County, so I believe that qualifies me to officially welcome you to our community. Welcome!

After representing District 3-Farmington since 2013, I'm completing my first year as the board chair. So, this is my first time to represent the board of directors in reporting to you.

The co-op's new commitment statement is "Investing Energy in What Matters Most." One of the six pillars of that promise is Members — that's you and me, the consumer-owners of Walton EMC.

Members are what our co-op is all about. Without us, Walton EMC has no purpose. Meeting our needs — as well as our wants — is what this co-op is designed to do. As your elected

representatives, your directors ensure the co-op stays on course — for today and the future.

Walton EMC's Cooperative Solar program, which launched in 2015, is one example of the co-op's member-focused approach to service. This renewable energy initiative allows Walton EMC customer-owners to buy blocks of solar power to offset traditionally generated electricity.

To meet member requests, Walton EMC has erected three solar farms. They harness enough sun energy to completely satisfy the power needs of many of our members.

When word spread about Walton EMC members' exceptional commitment to solar power, big companies started calling and asking how they could participate. The result? Your co-op is now the Southeast's leading solar power developer....and it all began

because the co-op responded to your requests for access to renewable power.

If you aren't familiar with Cooperative Solar, I encourage you to check it out. There are some subscriptions available, and participating is very easy.

Renewable power is one of many energy innovations Walton EMC supports because members asked for it. From new energy efficiency tactics to electric vehicle charging, your co-op is delivering what you want.

“Investing Energy in What Matters Most” also means your co-op cares for the communities it serves. I hope everyone here is aware of, and participates in, the Operation Round Up program. By agreeing to let the co-op round up your monthly electric bill to the next dollar, you pitch in your pennies with those of other

members to benefit local charities, needy individuals and service organizations.

At last count, Walton EMC members have donated more than \$8.8 million since the program began in 1998. That's a number worthy of applause!

Your co-op invests in the community in many direct ways, too. I'm particularly proud of the support for education and schools. For instance, Walton EMC's School Empowerment Grants funneled more than \$367,000 into 59 area schools last year.

Your co-op is also a corporate sponsor of Georgia's state championships for high school sports. By the way, several of those 2023 state championships came to schools powered by Walton EMC electricity.

Another of the pillars of our “Investing Energy in What Matters Most” commitment is employees. For a few years now, we’ve been sharing with you concerns over finding and keeping the best employees in today’s labor and economic environment. I’m happy to report that 2023 was a turning point.

Walton EMC added a net 15 new employees while also keeping many of our current team members. Retention is significant because it means you have experienced, loyal individuals working to ensure the reliability of your electric service. Speaking on behalf of the board of directors, I want to commend those who put in the hard work to make sure Walton EMC employees remain employed at the co-op. Thank you!

I want to close by saying a sincere thank you to all of you for attending this business meeting. Your participation in member governance is what sets Walton EMC apart from many other utilities.

Our co-op has long held the reputation of being one of the nation's most innovative, consumer-centric utilities in the nation. I believe it's because we're "Investing Energy in What Matters Most." I'm gratified to be among those who represent you in keeping Walton EMC on this admirable path.