

Along these LINES

MAY/JUNE 2023



Essay finalists are, back row from left, Ethan Rispone, Christopher Garrett, Austin Wiltz, Eni Nwabueze; middle row from left, Callie Sproles, Amelia Hebert and Julia Blanchard; and front row from left, Lillie Lynch, Maggie Tullier, Julia Hebert, Kayten Zeigler and Tara Waller.

Essay Contest

Page 8

ALSO INSIDE >>

Manager's Message Page 4

Hurricane Prep Guide Page 17

Family Legacy Pages 20-21



Since winning the title of Strawberry Queen, Kirstin Drozd has traveled to fairs and festivals as far as California to represent Louisiana.



 /DEMCOLouisiana
DEMCO.org



A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

ASCENSION

Elinda Taillon

EAST BATON ROUGE

Steve Irving
Randy Lorio, Vice President
Jill McGraw

EAST FELICIANA

Mike Anderson
Glenn DeLee

LIVINGSTON

Danny Berthelot, President
Leslie Falks
Dennis Lott, Secretary-Treasurer

ST. HELENA

Tresa Byrd
Richard Sitman

TANGIPAOHA

Melissa Dufreche

WEST FELICIANA

Kevin Beauchamp

CEO & GENERAL MANAGER

Randy Pierce

CHIEF CORPORATE SERVICES OFFICER

Russchelle Overhultz, CEBS

CHIEF ENGINEERING & OPERATIONS OFFICER

Mark Phillips

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

Peggy Maranan

CHIEF MEMBER SERVICES OFFICER

Galen Dunbar

Mission

DEMCO is focused on enhancing the quality of life for members by providing safe, reliable and competitively priced energy services.

Volume 38, Issue 3

Along These Lines (USPS 4089) is published bimonthly by the Association of Louisiana Electric Co-ops Inc., 10725 Airline Hwy., Baton Rouge, LA 70816, in partnership with Pioneer Utility Resources.

Annual Subscriptions: Members \$2.02.
Nonmembers \$5.

Postmaster: Send form 3579 to 10725 Airline Hwy., Baton Rouge, LA 70816.

Periodicals postage paid at Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70821 and additional mailing offices.

DEMCO is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



Manager's Report

Randy Pierce
CEO & General Manager



DEMCO Board of Directors

Did you know DEMCO board directors are members just like you, elected by the membership to represent you, and oversee the governance and guide management of the co-op? And just like you, they live in one of the seven parishes powered by DEMCO.

Being a board director is a tremendous responsibility and commitment. In addition to attendance at monthly board and committee meetings, directors work hard to represent and serve the membership.

Each director participates in continuing education on topics such as governance, engineering, operations, management, politics, finance, technology, communications, risk management, power supply, parliamentary procedure, technology, policy development, and other ongoing and emerging issues.

In fact, DEMCO is one of nine co-ops—of the 900-plus electric co-ops in America—that can boast Director Gold Certification of each board director. This achievement is the most comprehensive level of education offered by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

To learn more about the board and director who represents your district, visit DEMCO.org/about-us/Board.

Scholarship Programs

As a local electric co-op, one of our guiding principles is Concern for Community. Although DEMCO offers programs year-round and for all ages birth through college, each spring we also offer two scholarship program opportunities.

Apply to the DEMCO Scholarship Program by May 9 and to the DEMCO Foundation Scholarship Program by June 16. For eligibility and to apply to each, visit DEMCO.org/Community.

Hurricane Season

It's time again to prepare for the dreaded hurricane season. Even though it happens every year, it can be easy to overlook or postpone. Before June 1, take time to gather essentials, read safety tips and review your storm plan with your family. A handy tear-out checklist is provided on page 17.

2023 Strawberry Festival Queen

In this issue, we feature Louisiana Queens, and with so many festivals around the state, we are thrilled to feature the Tangipahoa Parish 2023 Strawberry Queen, her family and festival legacy on pages 20-21.

Annual Meeting DEMCO Headquarters

16262 Wax Road, Greenwell Springs, LA 70739

10 a.m. Saturday, May 13, 2023

For more information, visit DEMCO.org.



Dennis Lott



Mike Anderson



Richard Sitman



Steve Irving

DEMCO Board Representatives Reelected to Serve Members

Four incumbent DEMCO directors were reelected to three-year terms.

Dennis Lott was elected to the DEMCO Board of Directors in 2009, representing Livingston Parish, District 8. He serves as secretary/treasurer, chairs the governance committee and is a finance committee member. Dennis also serves on the DEMCO Energy Services board and is president of the DEMCO Foundation Board.

Mike Anderson was appointed to the board in March 2020 to fill the unexpired term of longtime board member Faye Morris. Representing East Feliciana Parish, District 5, Mike serves on the operations committee.

Richard “Dickie” Sitman was elected to the board in 1987, representing St. Helena Parish, District 10. He chairs the operations committee and is a member of the board governance committee. Richard is also president of the Dixie Business Development Center and serves on the DEMCO Energy Services board and ALEC board.

Steve Irving was elected to the board in 1987, representing East Baton Rouge Parish, District 4. He chairs the finance committee and is a member of the board governance committee. He also serves on the DEMCO Energy Services board.

Each expressed their gratitude to the cooperative’s members for their support. ■

Building
BRIGHTER COMMUNITIES

Member-students can apply for one-year scholarships of \$1,250 for each of two consecutive semesters awarded in a random drawing at the DEMCO annual membership meeting. **The DEADLINE is May 8, 2023.**

For eligibility requirements and to enter, visit DEMCO.org/Community.


DEMCO
A Touchstone Energy Cooperative 

Official Notice: Annual Meeting

In accordance with the provisions of Article III, section 3.03 of the Bylaws of DEMCO notice is hereby given that the Annual Meeting of the members of the corporation will be held at DEMCO’s Headquarters Facility, 16262 Wax Road, Greenwell Springs, Louisiana, Saturday, May 13, 2023.

The meeting is scheduled to begin at 10:00 a.m. In accordance with Article IV, section 4.05 of the corporation Bylaws, notice is hereby given that the following persons have been nominated by the official nominating committee to fill the four positions on the Board of Directors in which vacancies occur this year.

By Nomination:

- Dennis Lott, District 8
- Mike Anderson, District 5
- Richard “Dickie” Sitman, District 10
- Steve Irving, District 4



After enlightening parents, teachers, and DEMCO board members and staff with their essay content and presentation skills at a banquet, six juniors were chosen for a trip to Washington, D.C. Winner are, from left, Julia Blanchard, Amelia Williams, Eni Nwabueze, Maggie Tullier, Julia Hebert and Lillie Lynch. PHOTO COURTESY OF DEMCO

Juniors Compete for Trip to Washington, D.C.

DEMCO sponsors an annual essay contest for 11th grade students from across its seven-parish service area—Ascension, East Baton Rouge, East Feliciana, Livingston, St. Tammany, West Feliciana and Tangipahoa. This year, DEMCO received a record-setting 334 essays and a panel of independent judges narrowed the field to 12 semifinalists.

At a banquet this spring, student competitors enlightened parents, teachers, DEMCO board members, and staff with their essay content and presentation skills. After a competitive performance, six students were named winners: Julia Hebert and Maggie Tullier from Central High School; Lillie Lynch from West Feliciana

High School; and Julia Blanchard, Eni Nwabueze and Amelia Williams from Zachary High School.

The prize is an all-expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C., where these students will serve as DEMCO student delegates at the 2023 NRECA Youth Tour.

Other semifinalists who participated were Ethan Rispone from Central High School; Christopher Garrett, Callie Sproles, Tara Waller and Kayten Zeigler from Denham Springs High School; and Austin Wiltz from Zachary High School.

The Association of Louisiana Electric Cooperatives coordinates and chaperones the annual summer Youth Tour trip for

participating Louisiana electric co-op students. During their stay in the district, the Louisiana Youth Tour participants will visit the U.S. Senate, House of Representatives, Supreme Court, National Archives, Arlington National Cemetery, and many other historically significant buildings and landmarks.

DEMCO pioneered Louisiana participation in the 1978 Rural Electric Youth Tour when it sent the first students from Louisiana to Washington, D.C. The purpose of the Youth Tour program is to provide outstanding youth with insight into how their national government operates. ■

MyDEMCO Registered Member Accounts

Congratulations to DEMCO members **C. Truax, K. Evans, B. Bridges, C. Lanier.** Winners of the random drawing for a \$50 gift card. You will each receive a gift card in the mail!





Preparation Tips

- Have an adequate supply of prescription medicines and any necessary infant supplies on hand.
- If you use medical equipment at home that requires electricity, make sure you charge the battery.
- If you or someone you know uses life-support equipment that requires electricity to operate, charge the battery, identify a location with emergency power capabilities and make plans to go there during a prolonged outage.
- If you are in an area subject to an evacuation order, heed the order and move to a safe location.
- Develop an evacuation plan in case it's needed. Communicate the plan to your family. Include pets or livestock in your plan.
- Fuel your vehicles as a loss of power could affect gas stations.
- Assemble an emergency storm kit (battery-powered radio, flashlight, first-aid kit, battery-powered or wind-up clock, extra batteries, special needs items, insulated cooler, and a list of important and emergency phone numbers).
- Have a telephone with a cord or an extra charged cellphone to use as a back-up (cordless telephones won't work during an outage).
- Keep at least a three-day supply of non-perishable food and bottled water and have a hand-operated can opener available.
- Have supplies for your propane or charcoal grill; be sure to grill outdoors in well-ventilated areas for safety.
- Secure outdoor items; safely store lawn furniture, decorations, toys, garbage cans and other items that can be brought indoors.
- Protect your electronic equipment: unplug sensitive electronics or plug computers and other sensitive equipment into surge suppressors. Consider an uninterruptible power supply, such as a generator.

Safety Tips

- Follow the advice of your local emergency management and health officials.
- Stay away from downed wires. Storm debris can hide downed power lines, so be extra cautious.
- Practice caution around crews and equipment. Do not approach crews for updates or to report outages.
- Storm debris can hide downed power lines, so be extra cautious. Any dangling line or lines on the ground covered by water can be deadly.
- Do not enter flooded areas, which can conceal downed wires or other potential hazards.
- Tune in to local news broadcasts for the latest weather and emergency information.
- Contact local health department or emergency management offices about shelters that can assist you during a prolonged outage. If you have a medical emergency, call or go to the hospital.

Report your outage using any method below:

- Visit [DEMCO.org](https://www.demco.org) homepage and click 'Report Outage'
- Text OUTAGE to 225-261-1177
- Call 1-844-MyDEMCO (1-844-693-3626) Option 1
- Download the MyDEMCO mobile app available for Android and iOS

Visit [DEMCO.org/Storm-Center](https://www.demco.org/Storm-Center) for additional preparedness and safety resources.



The 2023 Strawberry Royalty are, from left, Mary Howes, Blossom; Chairman Larry Byers; King Arthur Thompson; Queen Kirstin Drozd; and Grand Marshal Gary Stanga. PHOTOS COURTESY OF KIRSTIN DROZD

51st Louisiana Strawberry Queen Continues **Family Legacy**

Kirstin Drozd talks about representing her community and hometown festival during her reign as Strawberry Queen

By Erin Bass

Kirstin Drozd is fulfilling her family legacy by participating in the Ponchatoula Strawberry Festival and being crowned Louisiana Strawberry Queen. Her great-aunt Patricia “Sissy” Dufreche Allgood was the first “Berry Bonanza” queen in 1971, and her grandfather, Julian Dufreche, was the 2004 Strawberry King.

“It’s been a dream come true and something I didn’t know I needed,” Kirstin says.



Before he died, her grandfather told her he wanted one of his granddaughters to compete for queen. As the oldest, Kirstin had the first chance.

Since the age of 18, she served as a member of the Ponchatoula Jaycees and was invited to represent them in 2018 as a voting member on the Strawberry Board. That year's festival was canceled due to COVID-19, but she learned a lot about the festival, city of Ponchatoula and the importance of supporting her community.

"My love for the festival has grown over the years," she says. "I remember going as a little girl, and my mom has friends who have been strawberry queens. I've learned throughout this experience, it's about love for community, the festival and the state. It's way more than just a crown and banner."

Since winning the title of Strawberry Queen, Kirstin has traveled to fairs and festivals as far as California to represent Louisiana. She also attended "Strawberry Day in the Park" at the beginning of April.

Named for her grandfather, "Julian Dufreche Strawberry Day" is a mini festival at Ponchatoula Memorial Park with a cookoff, car show, strawberry auction and bakeoff—with the main ingredient being strawberries, of course.

Kirstin's mom, Melissa Dufreche, who

serves on the DEMCO board of directors, says she was proud of her daughter for just competing.

"The representation she has provided to Ponchatoula, our farmers, the state and also the representation for Tangipahoa Parish—it's been an amazing experience to get to go with her and see how she's grown," Melissa says.

The Strawberry Festival was Kirstin's first time competing in a pageant. She rewrote the song "Strawberry Wine" to "Strawberry Time" for her required skit but says stage fright almost got the best of her.

"I never in a million years expected to get up there and win," she says. "It's a lot of work and a lot of nerves. I competed against girls that were more experienced than I was."

Kirstin remembers seeing former Strawberry Festival queens when she was a child and looking up to them as role models.

"The little girls and boys that come up to you and are in awe of this beautiful crown and the way you hold yourself and represent your community," she says. "Seeing the looks on their faces makes me tear up almost because I remember being in their shoes."

An example for her community and younger queens she's met along the way,

Kirstin is a role model far beyond her title. She holds a part-time job at a local pizza shop, is studying to get a degree in marketing from Southeastern Louisiana University, and volunteers for the Richard Murphy Hospice Gala and the local chapter of the Louisiana Coastal Conservation Association. She has also helped the Ponchatoula Jaycees support hurricane victims and raise money to build a special needs park in the city.

She took a semester off from college to fulfill her duties as queen but plans to resume her schooling in June. Kirstin helped crown her successor during the 2023 Ponchatoula Strawberry Festival from April 14-16, but her reign isn't officially over until July 1. She is expected to keep traveling to fairs, festivals and pageants across the state promoting this year's strawberry crop until then.

"The berries are big and sweet, and the crops are looking incredible," she says. "I don't just hold a title for the Ponchatoula Festival, but I hold a state title for the Louisiana strawberry, our state fruit. People come to the festival and think they've seen it, but you have to go down farmers row to see what it really is all about."

"My life is definitely live, love, bleed strawberry right now." ■



2023 Strawberry Queen Kirstin Drozd poses with a photograph of her grandfather, Julian Dufreche. LEFT: Kirstin is shown with parents Melissa and Corey Dufreche.