

# A Community Project with Heart:

## HONORING A LIFE THROUGH SAFETY AT VERSAILLES STATE PARK

By Sarah Simon, Member Services Representative

On March 15, 2024, I began my Relite orientation retreat—a day that unexpectedly took on a much deeper meaning. That same day, our community was shaken by the tragic passing of Carson Hughes, a young man from Osgood whose life touched so many. Like many others, my family and I were involved in the search for Carson. It was personal. I played sports with Carson's mother, Mandy, in high school, and our children grew up together. We knew the family. We felt their pain.

During the search efforts at Versailles State Park that weekend, one question kept resurfacing: Where are the cameras? As we learned there were none, I immediately knew what my Relite community project would be—installing security cameras in the park to help prevent such tragedies in the future.

The Relite program, created by Indiana Electric Cooperatives, is designed to grow leadership skills in young professionals from electric cooperatives. A key component of the program is a community impact project inspired by one of the seven cooperative principles. My project aligned perfectly with the principle of "Concern for Community."

After receiving support from Jason and Mandy Hughes, as well as Garrett McAdams, park manager of Versailles State Park, I began fundraising efforts within Southeastern Indiana REMC. With the support of our amazing team, I raised nearly \$300—enough to purchase two solar-powered Reolink cameras, which require minimal ongoing maintenance.

However, a new challenge emerged during installation: the park lacked a Wi-Fi signal, rendering the cameras inoperable. The only option was to

rely on cellular service or explore the potential for installing fiber internet in the park. That's when the project took a meaningful and unexpected turn.

I reached out to our SEI Fiber team and learned that fiber had already been installed in the back of the park. With their guidance and support, and the necessary approval from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR), we moved forward with extending fiber infrastructure to support the cameras and potentially more.

Currently, the project is in the trenching phase, thanks to the generosity of Comer Contractor, Inc., who offered their services at no cost. Versailles State Park has since expressed interest in expanding SEI Fiber throughout the park—including the front entrance—to provide enhanced security and monitoring of patrons entering and exiting the grounds.

While I wasn't able to complete the project before my first-year presentation for the Relite program, I look forward to delivering an updated presentation this year as I complete the program. More importantly, I'm proud of how this project reflects the spirit of cooperation and community that defines SEI REMC.

This project was born from loss, but it stands as a symbol of hope, prevention, and unity. I pray it brings comfort to the Hughes family and protection to all who visit Versailles State Park. If this initiative prevents even one family from experiencing the same heartbreak, then it will have been worth every step.



Sarah Simon