

June 2020 Share Package

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Updated Energy Topics for 2020

Plugged In

July: Alexa, help me save energy (*new*)

August: Beneficial electrification

September: Storm preparations/generator safety

October: Cybersecurity

November: Efficient and safe holiday decorating

December: Gadgets

Energy Matters

July: Q&A with PPC Executive Director Scott Simms on the Public Power Council and Northwest power issues, including BPA (*new*)

August: UAMPS Carbon Free Power Project

September: Value of hydro (wind integration side)

October: Celebrating public power

November: Utility-scale storage (batteries, more)

December: Q&A with Scott Corwin of Northwest Public Power Association

***** Important note:** *Commitment to Community—a story we have produced each December for many years, and originally had on the 2020 schedule—has been replaced. However, you are encouraged to take what you normally send in or expand on it to tell your members how you make a difference in your communities throughout the year. The greatest impact really is highlighting what YOUR utility does, not so much in what OTHERS are doing.*

CUT YOUR UTILITY BILLS



PHOTO COURTESY OF EMERSON FANS

Ceiling Fans Offer Comfort and Savings

Q: What are some ceiling fan efficiency tips? Which fans are best?

A: In addition to improved comfort during summer, ceiling fans reduce winter heating bills. This is why most ceiling fans have a switch to reverse the direction of the blade rotation.

A ceiling fan is not actually a cooling device like an air conditioner. You only feel more comfortable under a ceiling fan because of the windchill effect of room air moving over your skin. Room air is cooler than your skin temperature, and moisture evaporation further cools your skin.

Running a ceiling fan actually increases the room air temperature. The electricity used by the fan motor ends up as heat. Switch the fan off when the room is not being used.

The overall energy savings comes from being able to set your air-conditioning thermostat a few degrees warmer. For each degree the thermostat is set higher, the electricity savings can be up to 5% for each

eight-hour period. The actual savings depends on many factors, including your local climate and outdoor temperature.

During winter, flip the switch and reverse the rotation of the fan blades to blow air upward. This gently moves the warmest air, which stagnates up near the ceiling, out and down the walls where people are. Run it on the lowest speed so as to not create a chilly breeze. You should not feel the air movement.

If energy savings is your primary concern, the simplest way to select a ceiling fan is to pick one that is Energy Star certified.

It is important to size the ceiling fan properly. If it is too small, it won't create enough breeze to make you feel comfortably cool. If it is too big, it will flow too much air when rotation is reversed during winter.

A rule of thumb for sizing is 36-inch blades for rooms up to 75 square feet, 36 inches to 42 inches for rooms 75 to 144 square feet, 44 to 50 inches for rooms 144 to 225 square feet,

and 50 to 54 inches for rooms 225 to 400 square feet.

Fan style may be important to you. Lower-cost fans have five relatively narrow blades, but fans with three wide decorative blades are becoming more popular.

Always check the fan's air flow specification. The size and number of blades is not the best air flow indicator. The speed and pitch of the blades have a greater impact on air flow.

The best ceiling fans use efficient ECM motors, which simulate direct current motors, and use as little as 33 watts of electricity. These fan motors provide more speed settings and less noise. Generally, though, three speeds are more than adequate for comfort and saving, and are less expensive.

There are many options for lighting kits for ceiling fans. Some stylish models have an integrated circular LED mounted inside a glass globe. Most are dimmable and provide a moderate amount of brightness on high. The drawback is it can cost up to \$60 to replace the bulbs.

Lighting kits with three- or four-bulb medium base fixtures allow you to select the type of

dimmable LEDs you want to install. You may prefer warm white—3,000 Kelvin—or day-light—5,000 Kelvin—bulbs. These bulbs last as long as the integrated ones and cost about \$1.50 a bulb to replace.

Models with a hand-held remote control are the most convenient to adjust speed and turn off the fan when leaving a room. For high-tech homeowners, some fans can be controlled from your cellphone with an app.

When installing a fan, the blades should not be lower than 7 feet from the floor for safety. Most fans include 3- and 6-inch downrods.

For a high ceiling, select a long downrod length so the blades are 8 feet above the floor. A downrod is the piece that connects the motor housing to the ceiling mount. This is a good height for effective air flow.

For lower ceilings, select a ceiling-hugger model, but realize the flow will not be as effective that close to the ceiling. ■



For more information or to ask a question about energy savings, go to www.dulley.com. (c) 2020 James Dulley

CUT YOUR UTILITY BILLS

Should You Replace Old Windows?

Q: I recently moved into an older home that's definitely not efficient. What upgrades should I consider?

A: Prepare yourself for a bit of sticker shock when you get your first bid to replace windows. To help you decide if you should replace your windows, consider a few factors.

Increased Comfort

The chill you feel near your windows when it's cold out is likely due to radiant heat loss. When you're near a cold surface, such as a window, you can feel chilled even if the temperature inside your home is warmer than 70 degrees.

The inside surface of an inefficient, single-pane window will be much colder on a winter night than that of a double- or triple-pane window.

Window coverings are one approach to increase comfort in your home. Curtains and blinds reduce radiant heat loss in the winter and can block unwanted heat gain in the summer.

Another aspect to comfort is the sun. If you have cold winters but lots of winter sunshine, you might enjoy the comfort and warmth of the sun streaming through your windows on a cold, clear day. If that's the



Curtains are an affordable strategy to increase comfort and reduce energy use. PHOTO BY SCOTT VAN OSDOL

case, you should take this into consideration as you ponder window replacement. Some windows are better at letting the sun's heat into the home than others.

Appearance and Function

If your windows are older, new wood- or vinyl-framed windows can act as an exterior facelift. But keep in mind, if you own an older home with classic wooden windows, vinyl replacements might look out of place. It's possible to buy new windows that match the style of some older wooden windows, or you could decide to apply a little elbow grease to get them back into shape. Wooden windows, even if they were built before 1960, can last the life of the home.

Windows can provide ventilation, which sometimes

improves comfort more cost-effectively than air conditioning. Windows also need to be cleaned occasionally. If your existing windows don't provide ventilation or they are hard to clean, replacing them could solve these problems.

Resale Value

Windows are a major point of interest for most prospective homebuyers, which is why we often hear window replacement is good for resale value. But a 2019 study by the National Association of Realtors found that on average across the U.S., installing new vinyl windows costs about \$22,000 per home, but only increased resale value by \$16,500. Only 4% of real estate agents said the new windows helped close the sale.

Energy Savings

Homeowners often believe the best way to reduce energy use is to replace their windows, but this is rarely true. Companies that sell new windows

sometimes advertise greater energy savings than the new windows can actually deliver.

The amount of energy you save really depends on the efficiency of your existing windows compared to the efficiency of the replacement windows. An energy auditor can estimate potential savings, but most audits show that there are much more cost-effective efficiency investments than replacing windows.

On average, according to Energy Star, replacing single-pane windows in a 2,000-square-foot home with Energy Star-certified windows can save \$125 to \$340 a year, depending on where you live. At this rate, it would take a decade or more to pay off your initial investment.

Replacing old windows can provide a number of benefits, but it's a costly endeavor. By considering these factors and how long you plan to live in the home, you will be able to make the right decision. ■

This column was co-written by Pat Keegan and Brad Thiessen of Collaborative Efficiency. For more energy tips, go to www.collaborativeefficiency.com/energytips.





Electric co-ops are leaders in community solar installations, such as the one here. Even though electric co-ops comprise about 10% of the nation's utility industry, at one point, electric co-ops maintained about 60% of all utility-led solar programs in the U.S.

PHOTO BY DENNIS GAINER, NRECA

SOLAR SUCCESS

Vibrant community support aids the growth of solar power

By Jennifer Paton

Central Electric Cooperative in Bend, Oregon, hit the streets in the fall of 2014 to solicit feedback on a community solar program. Members expressed interest and enthusiasm at the cooperative's nine public meetings. That year's member satisfaction survey results for community solar participation also were favorable.

By the end of 2018, CEC's 200,000-watt project was built and its costs fully recovered.

The community solar concept is simple: A utility builds a facility that uses photovoltaic panels to generate electricity and invites members to participate in its costs and benefits. Participation is voluntary.

Utilities often invest in community solar projects in response to member requests and to satisfy legislative mandates to provide more environmentally friendly power.

"The CEC program, ultimately, proved successful because it allowed for greater access to participation," says Brent ten Pas, director of member and public relations.

To appeal to the broader membership, CEC took a unique approach and offered members two ways to participate in the

community solar project.

The Shared Solar program was designed for those seeking a direct connection between energy production and their energy use. For members who could not afford to put solar on their roofs, the program provided them an opportunity to subscribe to the output of a full, half, quarter or multiple solar panels. For their participation, they would see a credit on their bill equaling the energy their subscription produced the previous month.

Members could also participate in CEC's Green Power program. These members opted to pay a premium—1.8 cents per kilowatt-hour—which went toward the community solar program and future renewable energy initiatives.

CEC's Community Solar Project's 700 panels are fully subscribed. The project is designed for future expansion, but there are no immediate plans to do so.

"While the project served the interests of those members willing to make an additional investment in renewable power, the demand to expand has not hit a tipping point," ten Pas says.

The community solar project continues to generate interest throughout the community and the state. For example, students from Skyline High School in Bend recently toured the project to learn about the benefits of solar energy and how that energy is distributed to the local electric grid. Representatives from other small utilities have inquired about the project as they consider doing something similar.

Benton REA in Richland, Washington, has found success in its smaller-scale community solar project, Co-op Solar. Benton REA has almost 11,000 members compared to CEC's roughly 35,000.

In August 2018, Benton REA members were given the opportunity to buy 550 solar units at \$200 per unit. The project sold out in eight days.

Co-op Solar went live January 2, 2019. In one year, the project produced 41,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity—enough to power two efficient, modern, all-electric, 2,000-square-foot homes for one year.

Although the system's production was lower than hoped during its first year—January and February were cloudy and snowy—the sun came out in March and produced steadily through October.

July, the sunniest month of the year, produced 6,280 kWh.

Co-op Solar has a payback of just more than 14 years.

"With that said, most people did not participate for the money," says Ron Mitchell, Benton REA energy adviser. "Our membership is very interested in technology and doing something good for our environment. As co-op members, they also have a sense of ownership and want to participate to do their part in the community to make it a better place for

Electric Cooperatives Lead the Way

By Paul Wesslund

Not long ago, solar energy was considered an oddity. Electricity generated from the sun was expensive, so not many people used it. Solar power barely registered on the list of electricity sources.

Pushed by improving technology and declining costs, solar is spreading across the country. Solar supplies 2.3% of the nation's electricity—the equivalent of more than 40 nuclear power plants.

One industry analysis finds the cost for electricity from large-scale solar energy installations has fallen 13% a year for five years. It is competitive with other fuels.

Electric cooperatives can claim a portion of the credit for the solar energy boom, pioneering community solar. With community solar, the co-op builds a bank of solar panels, and members can buy or lease the electricity the panels generate.

"Co-ops are leaders in community solar," says Debra Roepke, a solar energy specialist who consults with the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. "At one point, co-ops had about 60% of all the utility-led solar programs.

"There's been a tenfold increase in electric co-op solar capacity in the last five years. That's on track to more than double over the next one or two years."

Community solar is one of three ways solar panels are used to make and deliver electricity. Probably the most well-known technique is called rooftop solar, where a homeowner lays solar panels on their roof or in the backyard.

But most of the growth happens with utility-scale solar—fields of panels that can cover several acres. The growth in utility-scale solar is one reason costs are coming down. A bigger project can sell a lot more electricity without being that much more expensive to build, lowering the cost of each kilowatt.

As solar energy becomes more widespread, utilities are figuring out ways to make it more useful. It once seemed obvious there was no solar power at night. But bigger and more powerful storage batteries can soak up the sun for use later. At one time, solar power wasn't as useful because it peaked during the day when no one was home. But utilities are using sophisticated computer software to figure out how to juggle power sources such as solar, wind, coal and hydro among users, such as homes, businesses and manufacturers.

Other technologies make solar installations increasingly efficient and productive. Improvements in tracking technology mean more power as solar panels move to follow the sun across the sky. Bifacial solar panels contain solar cells on both sides of their surface, adding reflected light to the energy they receive.

the future generations."

Although plans for additional phases are far down the road, Mitchell says the co-op already has a waiting list of 60 members who would like to get into a second or third phase.

"For a second-phase community solar system, we would need the legislation to change adding new incentives or find additional funding sources to make it pay

for itself in a reasonable amount of time," he says.

Mitchell is optimistic about what lies ahead.

"We look forward to a future of working together with our members on new renewable energy projects to continue making our Benton REA electrical system efficient, reliable and safe for all," he says. "The popularity has been fantastic." ■

A Public Power Conversation

Meet Scott Simms, executive director of the Public Power Council

A lifelong resident of the Pacific Northwest, Scott Simms grew up in Snoqualmie, Washington. After graduating from Washington State University, he handled energy-related accounts and initiatives at public affairs firms. He then spent six years as chief spokesman at Portland General Electric—Oregon’s largest investor-owned utility.

In 2006, Scott joined the Bonneville Power Administration, most recently serving as manager of long-term power planning and then director of communications. He was hired as executive director of the Public Power Council in June 2019.

Scott’s backcountry horseback trail rides with his parents and their friends in the 1970s and ’80s left a lasting impression.

“I remember at a really young age seeing those giant BPA transmission towers and asking the adults where those lines went,” Scott says. “Our family also participated in cattle roundups next to the Columbia River. I am as amazed today as I was then at just how large and powerful this river is. Looking back on those memories, it’s impressive to me to think how much the adults around me knew about the Northwest’s grid and the hydro-dominated power system we have, as well as the inherent value these assets provide to everyone in this region.”

Scott says he learned early in his 20-year energy career the need to get results for the time he spent, and still carries that mindset. “What can we get done that’s meaningful for our members with the annual investment they make in our operating budget?” he asks.

COVID-19 and the Region’s Energy Use

The Public Power Council surveyed its members to find out how the pandemic impacts their operations and communities, and how PPC could seek relief on their behalf. Results show average energy use has dropped 3% to 10%. Although residential consumption has varied, with more folks working from home, commercial and industrial users—from restaurants to manufactured goods—show reduced consumption due to less demand for certain products or social-distancing policies that keep customers away. Some sectors, including certain food processors, have increased demand due to changes in consumer behavior, such as more meals consumed at home.

Armed with that information, PPC formally asked the Bonneville Power Administration to temporarily pause the agency’s Financial Reserves Policy surcharge. The \$30 million a year line item in BPA’s rates helps the agency build up its “bank account” to weather financial ups and downs.

“While our members support the policy overall, now is a time for community relief,” Scott Simms says. “We are hopeful to get this for our members so they can pass it on to their customers. This is a direct example of the work PPC does in partnership with public power utilities.”

Why should end users of electricity from consumer-owned utilities care about the work of the Public Power Council?

Serving as an economic engine of the Northwest, BPA and its rates affect pocketbooks of residents and the vitality of businesses and job creation in the region. PPC works to keep BPA’s rates as low as possible while ensuring we preserve the value of the reliable federal power system that supplies electricity to Northwest public power communities. PPC initiatives range from holding BPA accountable for its costs of programs and expenses and helping it be more efficient to protecting BPA from outside threats, such as occasional efforts to break up the agency and sell it off piecemeal.

Capitalizing on opportunities to market surplus Northwest power elsewhere in the West is an important evolving issue for public power customers. PPC is working to ensure attributes of the federal system—such as being fast-ramping, carbon-free and available 24/7—are properly valued in electricity markets. If successful, these efforts have the potential to lower BPA’s rates.

The bottom line is PPC helps Northwest consumer-owned utilities and their communities be properly represented and protected regarding all aspects of their reliance on the federal power system.

What insights do you bring to your job from your background?

As a consultant charging clients by the billable hour I learned it’s not enough to try. You have to deliver results. This continues to be my career compass. I see the budget for our operations from our members’ annual dues as their investment to get results.

I understand from my work at PGE and BPA the difficult job our consumer-owned utility members have. PPC is a small, highly technical organization of analysts, policy specialists, legal and communications experts that work in unison with our members to build strategies and advance initiatives on behalf of Northwest public power tied to the costs of the BPA power system and grid.

What is a top issue that affects the supply and price of power?

A big variable is the cost of federal fish and wildlife mitigation costs largely borne by public power customers. PPC and its members have a strong interest in the effectiveness and cost of programs funded through rates BPA charges its customers. This includes support for science-based, cost-effective programs that help BPA meet its obligations for fish and wildlife mitigation.

Fish and wildlife costs are roughly 25% of the total BPA bill to customers, including operations costs and reduced operational flexibility from increased spill at the dams.

Even with success in other areas of BPA cost management, ever-escalating fish and wildlife costs could threaten near- and long-term economic sustainability. PPC is taking targeted steps to properly align cost responsibility for fish programs and recognize the region’s shared stake in the financial health of BPA.



Scott Simms, executive director of the Public Power Council, with his daughter, Ella, and wife, Erika, near their home overlooking the Columbia River. They enjoy exploring the outdoors, hiking in the summer and skiing in the winter.

As fish and wildlife costs rise, and courts consider ordering dams to be removed, how do power generation interests best advocate for a more balanced, science-based approach?

I would like to have honest dialogue around the holistic view of our river system and salmon health through the “All-H” approach to management: habitat, hatcheries, hydro and harvest. We used to be better at talking about these factors together as part of the salmon life cycle, but now it feels more disparate. If we can get all of the facts and science-based actions and results on the table, we can move toward more productive conversations based on those facts.

Time and again, public power steps up and pays for its share of mitigation. Public power alone should not be responsible for financing all of the new demands.

What BPA proceedings should consumers be monitoring?

Recently, BPA and its federal partners concluded a public comment process on a draft Environmental Impact Statement on how the Columbia River Basin should be managed. It was heartening to see citizens and businesses from all corners of the Northwest provide comments at webinars and in writing. Members of public power shared concerns about impacts to power production, local economies, river navigation, irrigation, environmental impacts and other factors.

It is crucial for customers who have first rights to BPA power to respond to calls for comment. When the dust settles, we are the ones who have to live with the consequences to our communities.

More and more, we are seeing single-issue special interest groups from across the country—even the globe—helicopter in with their opinions and then move on. No one knows our communities better than we do, and the tradeoffs and balancing we strive for as public power communities. It’s important for public power and its communities to stand up and be heard.

Tell us how the Hydropower Flows Here program came about while you were director of communications at BPA.

We heard loud and clear from Northwest public power that BPA should invest in showcasing the benefits of hydropower. I challenged my team to go beyond convention, and they delivered. The images and tools used are consumer-focused—photos of people and places in the Northwest, not the usual images of dams and transmission lines. We looked at consumer product marketing and thought, “That cola company doesn’t show the making of soda, it shows the end result of people enjoying the soda. We need to do that.”

The campaign has the potential to educate people—especially those new to the Northwest who arrive with a preconceived notion or lack of correct information—about the tremendous value of our hydro-dominated system and the great quality of life it supports.

To learn about the program, visit www.bpa.gov/hydroflowshere.

What most occupies your thoughts day in and day out?

I am constantly mindful of the cost pressures our member utilities are under, and that they feel those cost pressures directly from the citizens and businesses they serve.

Being from a small Northwest town myself, I feel a sense of duty and purpose to do what I can to seek balance and fairness for the people of this region who are served by public power. I think constantly about people struggling to make ends meet, the sacrifices they make and how there are a lot of decisions and policies dreamed up and decided without their direct involvement.

It’s hard for a consumer-owned utility to have a strong voice in some of these matters on their own, but a united public power can move mountains. I am grateful for the PPC member utilities, via their communities, who have invested in PPC since our inception in 1966 to advocate on their behalf in both cost oversight of BPA and preservation of the value it provides to the Northwest. ■

Alexa: Can You Help Me Save Energy?

Put those smart devices to work to improve your home's energy efficiency and potentially reduce your electric bill

By Paul Wesslund

Before this year's COVID-19 stay-at-home measures turned business meetings and family gatherings into smartphone conference calls and video conferences, your electric appliances were on the bandwagon of internet-connected energy.

If that makes your gadgets and gizmos sound almost human, well, in some ways, that's exactly what's happening.

Talking to a computer isn't just for Captain Kirk on "Star Trek" anymore. Surveys show about one in four American adults owns a smart speaker or technology such as Amazon Echo, Google Home or Apple HomePod.

We can ask Alexa or Siri to tell us the weather or how to save money on our electric bill.

Appliances you control from your phone aren't just luxury items anymore, says Brian Sloboda, director of consumer solutions with

the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

"Two years ago, when you would buy a smart appliance, you were really buying a high-end product," Brian says. "Now, they're in the middle. More and more appliances are smart, and they have come down in price. It's everything from lightbulbs you screw into your table lamps, to your microwave, to your washing machine, to your thermostat that you can control through a voice assistant or apps on the phone."

Brian says those internet-connected devices not only can make you more energy efficient, they can help you take advantage of your electric service in ways you never dreamed possible.

If your machines are acting more like people, you also should take precautions to protect your security and privacy. Smart speakers are on and listening in all the time.

Brian advises you to get in the habit of reading the fine print that comes with instructions and app downloads so you know how your personal information is being used.

As part of his full-time job at NRECA, Brian keeps up with appliance developments. He recently brought a high-tech device into his home.

"My washing machine sends me an email every month

telling me how much electricity it has used," Brian says. "It gives me tips on how to save energy. It suggests I could wash the clothes in cold water to save energy. It will gently tell you that rather than washing a small load, it's more efficient to let the clothes accumulate."

If all that sounds a little creepy, smart speaker manufacturers and marketers understand. They try to encourage customers to get more familiar with their devices. They want you to ask your smart speaker to tell you a joke or play music.

Brian says studies of how people might use voice-activated devices to manage their energy use show owners like to make those personalized connections.

"Consumers in these focus groups refer to Alexa as their friend," he says. "They start to give them human attributes. They really do refer to Alexa as 'she' rather than 'it.'"

While apps and speakers can help you use energy more efficiently by alerting you to lights on in rooms you're not using or suggesting you clean the filter in your washing machine, Brian says smart thermostats offer some of the biggest potential energy savings.

Heating and cooling are among a home's top energy users. High-tech thermostats



are becoming easier to use and more innovative. These days, they not only can change temperatures for daytime or nighttime, but can track your phone as you leave the house or move from room to room, figuring out your habits and making adjustments based on your lifestyle.

Before buying a smart thermostat, Brian suggests learning about it to make sure it is compatible with your heating and cooling system. Check with



About one in four American adults owns a smart speaker or internet-connected device such as Amazon Echo, Google Home or Apple HomePod. We can ask Alexa or Siri to tell us today's forecast and how to save on our monthly energy bills. Be sure to protect your security and privacy. PHOTO BY PAOLESE

A smart speaker is listening to everything that goes on in your home all the time. Reading those tiny-type agreements before you click “accept” might seem like an unrealistic pain, but they generally will tell you what kind of protections are in place to keep your personal information private.

Brian also recommends getting involved in online communities about your internet devices so you can know more about privacy, security and how to get the most out of your smart technology.

“All of these devices generally have some sort of online community for people to engage in and learn from each other,” Brian says. “Folks love talking about their devices—whether it’s a car or a doorbell. People love talking about technology, and they love showing off the things they’ve figured out.”

Brian says new technology is a way to bring people closer as they make better use of their electricity.

“We sometimes look at smart technology and we think it is meant to isolate us, but you can really turn it around and go to in-person meetups or engage online to share tips and tricks,” he says. “I am a real big believer that technology can actually bring us together.” ■

your electric utility, which may have an energy management program with a recommended model or even rebates.

Brian expects smart technology to get even smarter. Utility groups are involved in studies where people describe their values—what is important to them—to their apps and speakers, which respond accordingly.

If saving money is the most important thing to you, your lights might dim in a part of the room you’re not using. If

comfort is your priority, the temperature will stay within a certain range. For those especially concerned about the environment, the dishwasher might delay its start until renewable power is available because the sun is shining or the wind is blowing.

Along with all those benefits comes the need for precautions: Anything connected to the internet can be hacked. That could be a home security system, a baby monitor or a TV.

The first safety step Brian suggests is to change the password on your devices, which come with easy-to-crack passwords such as “1234” or “password.”

He says to check regularly for software updates and install them. They often add protections from the latest cyberthreats.

In addition to security, pay attention to privacy. Many interactions with the internet will collect information on you.



Hundreds of species of bees are hard at work in their role as pollinators. Make it easier for them by planting a mixture of flowering plants. JES/STOCK.ADOBE.COM

Give Bees a Chance by Knowing Their Needs

Andony Melathopoulos is out to bust some myths about the 500 species of bees living in the Pacific Northwest, most notably a myth about bee stings.

“I’ve been covered in 30,000 honeybees and didn’t get stung and I’m nobody special,” says Andony, a bee expert with Oregon State University Extension Service. “The key message is that most bees don’t sting.”

Honeybees sting, but only if their hive is disturbed or they are approached aggressively.

Wasps and yellow jackets, which sting without provocation, can be controlled with a variety of traps available at garden centers and home supply stores. The most effective traps use a synthetic attractant to lure yellow jackets into a trap. Fruit juice or meat can be used as attractants as well.

Hundreds of native bees live in the ground and aren’t even recognized as bees. These solitary insects come out to pollinate and return to their nests so quickly most

people never see them.

“There are a lot of bees in the city that are solitary,” Andony says. “They have radically different lifestyles than honeybees. I’m struck by people who want to save the bees who don’t know this. They’ll see an insect that looks like a fly and not realize it needs your help, too.”

Andony calls out bumblebees—one of the largest-sized bees in the country—as a group to be concerned about. Not as much research has been done compared to honeybees, but there is evidence of decline of some species. One bumblebee in the Midwest has been relegated to the endangered list.

There’s good news, though. Home gardeners, whether they know it or not, provide pollen and nectar for pollinators simply by planting a mixture of flowering plants. In fact, it’s been shown that cities provide better forage than bordering agricultural land that tends to be planted in large, one-crop fields that may attract

only one or a few types of bees.

“If you have diversity, as in many cities,” Andony says, “there’s an opportunity to feed many mouths. You lay out a smorgasbord for everyone. So the more things you plant, the better.”

There are three general principles to attracting bees to the garden.

- **Choose plants attractive to bees.**

Walk through the neighborhood to see what they’re visiting. Many nurseries have areas where they display pollinator-friendly plants. Keep in mind, not all flowers provide food for bees. Some plants have been bred that don’t provide nectar or pollen. The rule of thumb is that natives tend to be better sources, but that doesn’t mean there aren’t exotic plants that offer food, also. Rosemary or cherry laurel—both bee magnets—are good examples.

- **Plant in swaths.** Planting something is better than nothing, but a single plant rarely has visiting pollinators.

“Bees are economical,” Andony says. “They want to go to a big-box store. No mom-and-pop stores for them.”

- **Have plants that bloom at different times of year.** For example, in spring in the Willamette Valley, a big burst of cherries, maples and Oregon grape is followed by ceanothus and lupine, but after that there are gaps. Pay attention and fill in those lulls with flowers.

Even if all you do is plant a patch of pollinator plants, you’re giving a hand to the honeybees and native bees living in your neighborhood.

“A lot of people want a different aesthetic,” Andony says. “There’s nothing wrong with planting plants that don’t attract bees if you have a good percentage of bee-attractive plants in among them. That can be a stunning success.” ■



Kym Pokorny

is a communications specialist for Oregon State University’s Extension Service. Previously, Kym worked for The Oregonian, most notably covering gardening and horticulture.



Being water wise saves money as well as the environment. NATALIALEB/STOCK.ADOBE.COM

Tips to Save Water During a Hot Summer

As the heat ratchets up, so does water use—costing homeowners money and doing no favors for the environment.

Amy Jo Detweiler, a horticulturist with Oregon State Extension, compiled the following tips to help you conserve water and save on summer water bills:

- When selecting new plants, look for options that use less water, such as native globe mallow, black-eyed Susan, sedums, blanket flower, lavender and coneflower. Once established, these plants require minimal irrigation. Group plants together based on their water use for maximum water conservation.
- Consider putting colorful bedding annuals in pots or hanging baskets where you can provide water directly, rather than watering the entire garden.
- Hand watering and automatic irrigation can be adequate if you are an efficient water manager. Monitor how much water is used and adjust it for warmer and cooler

periods. Water in morning or late evening to reduce evaporation.

- If using automatic irrigation, consider drip emitters in clay-type soils and micro-sprays in sandy soils. Provide adequate moisture to the plant's entire root zone.
- Soaker hoses are an alternative. Hook them to an automatic timer so you don't forget to turn off the water. This works for vegetable and ornamental gardens.
- Encourage deep-rooted landscape plants by watering deeper less often. Look for clues to water stress, such as slight wilting or a dull, transparent look of the leaves. Adjust your watering accordingly.
- When you plant new shrubs and trees, provide a long soak from a hose to saturate the soil deeply in the immediate area. Repeat this process several times, especially during dry periods, to give your new shrubs and trees the resources to grow strong and deep roots that will require less water in the future. ■

Choose Wisely, Save Water

Horticulturist Amy Jo Detweiler recommends these plants for water-wise gardens:

- ▶ **Cinquefoil** (*Potentilla fruticosa*). This compact deciduous shrub grows about 3 feet tall and 5 feet wide and sports sunny yellow flowers from June until frost. Best in full sun, but tolerates light shade. Hardy to zone 2.
- ▶ **Globe blue spruce** (*Picea pungens* 'Globosa'). This small conifer with striking silver-blue foliage grows slowly to 5 to 6 feet. Plant in full sun for best color. Hardy to zone 2.
- ▶ **Manzanita** (*Arctostaphylos*). This large genus of evergreen shrub varies from 2 to 12 feet. Interesting in all seasons, with hanging clusters of bell-shaped white to pink flowers in late winter to early spring. Hardiness varies by species and cultivar.
- ▶ **Ninebark** (*Physocarpus opulifolius*). Domes of white flowers in early summer show beautifully against the mid-green foliage of this 6- to 10-foot deciduous shrub. It has the added attractions of superb fall color. Hardy to zone 2.
- ▶ **Serviceberry** (*Amelanchier*). This shrub has it all: showy white flowers in early spring, edible purple-red berries that attract birds, and stunning red and yellow fall color. Wants full sun to perform its best. Grows 6 to 10 feet depending on the species. Hardy to zone 2.
- ▶ **Snowberry** (*Symphoricarpos*). In spring, small, bell-shaped blooms appear at the end of branches on this 5-by-6-foot deciduous shrub. The best part, though, are the white berries in fall. Birds love the berries. Bees, hummingbirds and butterflies are attracted to the flowers. Plant in full to partial sun. Hardy to zone 3.
- ▶ **Wayfaring tree Mohican** (*Viburnum lantana* "Mohican"). Flat-topped clusters of white flowers come out in spring and are followed by fruits that start out pink, turn to red and then black. This 7-by-8-foot rounded deciduous shrub turns deep purple in fall. Give it full to partial sun. Hardy to zone 3.

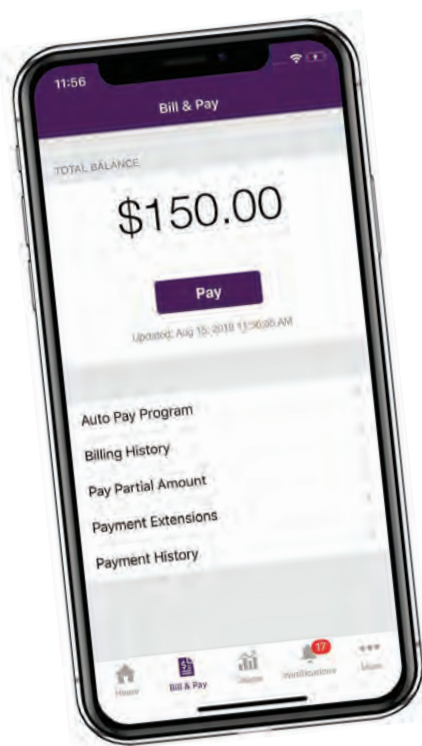


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Your Account at Your Fingertips



The SmartHub mobile app allows you to make secure payments, check your use and more, all from the palm of your hand.

By Courtney Cobb

Consumers Power Inc. members have access to their account information and energy use right at their fingertips. Through CPI's SmartHub program, members can manage their accounts from their computer, tablet or smartphone.

"SmartHub allows members to easily and securely access their accounts to make payments, make changes to their account, print billing statements, and view and monitor their daily usage," says James Ramseyer, CPI director of member services. "SmartHub is the perfect option for members who prefer to do online bill pay or might not have the time to call CPI during normal business hours."

Many members choose to switch to paperless billing and use the SmartHub platform. The program sends an email reminder when bills are available, as well as an email receipt when payment is made.

"It's very convenient for our members to use SmartHub to make one-time payments or set up autopay, but they are not required to pay their bills online to use all the

features of SmartHub," James says.

Mobile Features

The SmartHub mobile app goes beyond the traditional computer platform. It also allows members to report outage information so our crews have the latest outage location information. This helps us find problems quickly and get them repaired.

The mobile app allows members to connect with CPI's Twitter social media platforms. Members can learn valuable energy-efficiency tips and more.

"The SmartHub app allows CPI members to safely and securely do business with the co-op like they haven't been able to in the past," says James. "With today's smartphone technology, members can access all their information in just the palm of their hand."

How to Sign Up for SmartHub

Members can sign up with their CPI account number and a valid email address. Access SmartHub directly from CPI's website at www.cpi.coop, or download the mobile application from the App Store for Apple or Google Play for Android. ■

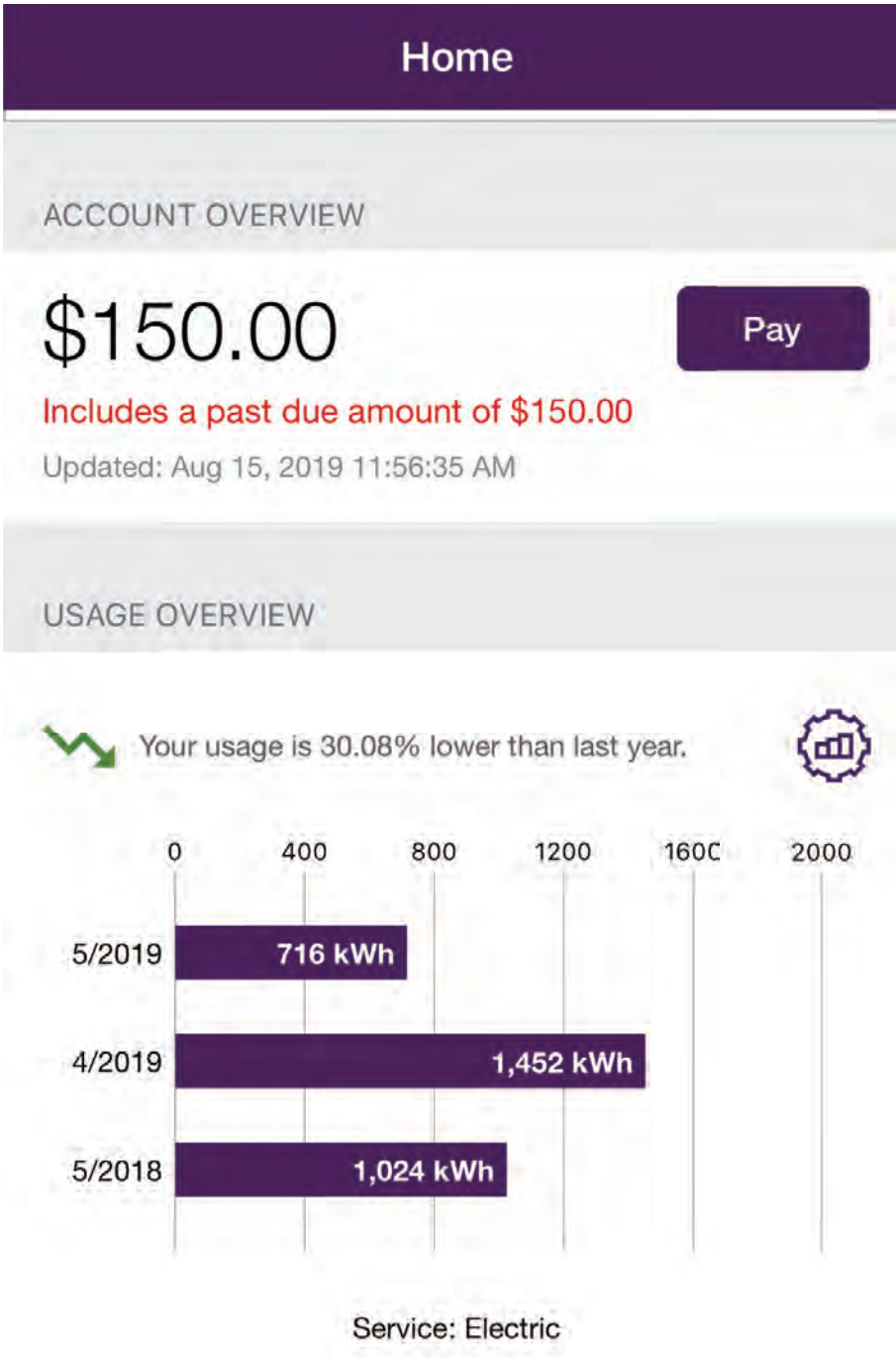
Director Elections

Each September, Consumers Power holds elections for three positions on our board of directors. This year the positions up for election include zones 1, 5 and 8. Election results are announced in September.

In May, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown announced a reopening plan due to the shutdown caused by the COVID-19 virus. The plan states that "all large gatherings should be canceled or significantly modified through at least September."

We are evaluating the effects the governor's plan will have on our annual meeting and more details will be provided in upcoming issues of Ruralite.





Want to keep track of your use or make payments from your phone while you are on the go? Download SmartHub mobile.

Sign Up Now

To register for SmartHub online:

- ▶ Go to www.cpi.coop.
- ▶ On the main screen, click Pay your Bill Online.
- ▶ On the New User Registration screen, fill out your billing account number, last name or business name, and email address. Click submit and follow further prompts.

To register for SmartHub on the mobile app:

- ▶ Download SmartHub from the App Store for Apple or Google Play for Android.
- ▶ Find your service provider by either your zip code or by provider name Consumers Power Inc.
- ▶ Confirm your provider.
- ▶ If you don't already have an online SmartHub account, click Register Now. On the following screen, enter your billing account number, last name or business name, and email address. Click submit and follow further prompts.
- ▶ If you already have an online SmartHub account, enter your email and password.

SmartHub online includes many features. Registered members may securely update their account information and determine different usage measurements.



ROMOLO TAVANI/ISTOCK PHOTO

Members Respond to Community Needs

Project Helping Hand gives members hope

By Courtney Cobb

In a time of need, Central Electric Cooperative and its members have provided support with Project Helping Hand. The program allows members to round up their bills or make donations to help other cooperative members who need assistance.

Project Helping Hand has given hope to

many members when there seems to be no light at the end of the road. Following are a few stories of cooperative members who have received help from Project Helping Hand. The names, places and some details from these stories have been changed to protect our members' privacy.

Peter and Amy

On a small farm outside of Terrebonne, Peter and Amy were fulfilling their retirement dreams. With breathtaking views, plenty of animals, a fixed budget and a comfortable home, the pair looked

forward to enjoying the years ahead. Then they received the news: Amy had cancer.

For the next year, Peter stayed by Amy's side, taking her to medical appointments, treatments and more.

The couple watched medical bills, oxygen treatments and transportation costs overtake their fixed income.

Overwhelmed by mounting debt, Peter and Amy struggled to pay their electric bill. Peter tried to find a job where he could work from home and continue to take care of his wife and small farm. But no one would take a chance on

the retired 60-year-old.

When Peter received his latest electric bill, he knew he needed help. Setting aside his pride, he called Central Electric Cooperative. Talking with a customer service representative, Peter learned about the Project Helping Hand program, and how co-op members voluntarily contribute to the fund to assist others in their time of need. The CSR also directed Peter toward other community resources.

With the combined help of Project Helping Hand and other local nonprofits, Peter was able to bring his electric bill current. Amy is in remission and grows stronger every day.

Bonnie

As a single mom, Bonnie works hard to make ends meet for herself and her 4-year-old, Taylor. The pair live in a small apartment in Redmond where Bonnie works from home. Due to chronic health issues, it's hard for her to work in a regular office setting.

Despite working remotely, Bonnie's employer furloughed her at the start of Gov. Kate Brown's stay-at-home mandate in response to COVID-19.

Less than a week later, she found herself battling the virus while needing to take care of Taylor. Fortunately, it was a light case. Bonnie recovered quickly and Taylor never showed symptoms.

The bills, however, piled up. Never one to back down from a challenge, Bonnie continued to apply for jobs locally so she could pay her bills, but also afford to send Taylor to preschool in the fall. Enduring weeks with no prospects nor income, Bonnie knew she had to reach out for help.

Bonnie hesitated to call Central Electric Cooperative. She took pride in caring for herself and her son. When talking with a CSR about her situation, Bonnie learned about Project Helping Hand and the kindness of other members. She also discovered other community assistance programs, which could help her during this difficult time.

Bonnie applied for PHH and received the assistance she needed. Today, she's helping Taylor pick out his first backpack for school.

Wyatt

The 78-year-old widower was lost. He had spent several years alongside his wife, Maria, in her fight against cancer. There were highs and lows, but his wife always managed to come through. He had not prepared himself for when Maria would no longer be by his side.

In 57 years of marriage for these high school sweethearts, Maria had taken care of everything. She did the grocery shopping, balanced the checkbook, made sure to send payments in on time, never missed a church function and made homemade cookies every Sunday.

It was a fateful day in August when the couple stopped at a restaurant on their way home from treatments in Portland to celebrate. The prognosis was good. Maria's treatments were working, and the tumor was shrinking. However, two weeks later, after battling salmonella poisoning, Maria took a turn for the worse.

Without Maria's help, Wyatt fell behind on all of his utility payments. One day, Wyatt decided to move forward. He called Central Electric. He told his story to a CSR and shared it was the most challenging situation he had ever endured.

The CSR talked with Wyatt at length about his life with Maria. She comforted him and let him know there were resources to help, including Project Helping Hand. Wyatt had never heard of PHH, but learned about the generosity of his fellow cooperative members. Approved for assistance, he was soon on time with his bills again.

Little did Wyatt know his story profoundly impacted the CSR who was just newly married. He passed on this gem of advice for everyone married: "Always treat each other as though you did when you first dated."

Raymond and Julie

For the semiretired Raymond and Julie, life was good. Despite a tight budget, they had everything they needed to make ends meet, with Raymond working part time at a local chain store.

One day, while at work, Raymond suffered a heart attack. He was rushed to the hospital. Doctors immediately ordered bypass surgery.

Raymond and Julie struggled to make ends meet during Raymond's recovery, but made it through with grit and perseverance.

When Raymond finally returned to work, his hours were dramatically reduced. This concerned Julie, who had hoped Raymond would get back his regular schedule so they could get their finances back on track.

Later that week, Julie opened their electric bill and started crying. They wouldn't have the money to cover it, and they still hadn't bought groceries for the month. Raymond suggested she call Central Electric Cooperative and see if they could try a payment plan. She called CEC and told their story. The CSR took down their information, suggested other community resources and encouraged the couple to apply for Project Helping Hand.

Julie was surprised to learn about the program generously funded by other cooperative members who rounded up their bills each month. The couple received funds from the project, and Raymond has returned to his full working schedule.

Raymond, Julie, Wyatt, Bonnie, Peter and Amy represent many CEC members who are struggling to get by due to health or economic impacts of COVID-19 or other life-changing circumstances.

Today, you can help. Whether through a one-time donation or rounding up your monthly bill to the nearest dollar, CEC members can make a difference. ■

To help fellow members, or if you are in need of help, go to www.cec.coop under the community tab, or call 541-548-2144 and talk with a customer service representative.

WE
ARE
HERE
FOR
YOU.



ALWAYS.

Blachly-Lane Electric Cooperative has always had a plan to mitigate hazards such as earthquakes, major storms and wildfires, but a worldwide pandemic was not a thought.

When COVID-19 hit the U. S. in February, it required a quick change in how Blachly-Lane carries out its only mission and goal: delivering provide safe and reliable electric service to its members.

“From the start, our focus was on only one thing: continuing to serve members when they need us the most while we keep our employees,

members and community safe from COVID-19,” General Manager Greg Gardner says.

On March 3, Blachly-Lane implemented its Incident Command Structure, led by Operations Manager Mary Locke. The following day, the co-op’s managers and safety committee began developing a business continuity plan to maintain essential service to its

members should the situation develop further.

Utility partners and their safety specialists began collaborating on details for their COVID-19 responses. Lane County emergency management and health departments quickly brought local utilities into their fold. Using these resources as guides, Blachly-Lane had a business



TOP LEFT: Engineering Technician Garrett Crinklaw alternates days working from home and in the office.



BOTTOM LEFT: Warehouseman Kevin Smith wears a face covering while he takes care of equipment and supplies.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Serviceman Ryan Garner is part of the team working to keep the lights on for you during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The objective of the co-op's business continuity plan is to keep its members' lights on at all times. Outside lineworkers are separated into two groups, so if one group is exposed or showed symptoms requiring quarantine, Blachly-Lane has another group available to work on the lines.

The plan called for closing the front office to walk-in counter service to limit employee exposure. Front office employees alternate working in the office and working from home to keep one employee healthy should another be exposed to COVID-19. Members are met in the office on an appointment basis.

"Our members have been overwhelmingly positive and know we are still here working for them," Chief Financial Officer Carole Phillips says. "A few of our members used to stop by to pay their bills in person. They've had to make a change in how they pay, and we appreciate that they are taking advantage of our many other ways to pay. Otherwise, it's mostly business as usual for our members."

All nonmember-facing employees, such as accounting support workers, are working from home as recommended in the original stay-at-home order and Oregon's reopening plan. This limits viral exposure

within the workplace and the Blachly-Lane community.

As with all good plans, they change with the circumstances. By April 28, the co-op's managers and incident command team started to draft a back-to-work recovery plan in coordination with the governor's plan to reopen Oregon.

Blachly-Lane staff will take extra precautions for the foreseeable future. Employees will take their temperatures before checking in for work every day. Workspaces will be marked to keep employees from close contact. Lineworkers will follow physical distancing and increased-hygiene guidelines into their day and into every tailboard job briefing. Assertive housekeeping and handwashing protocols will remain in place. Meetings will be held with 6-foot distancing or electronically.

"Community resilience is what rural people are known for, and our members haven't let us down," Greg says. "They know that we're all in this together, and that we need each other to be well."

"We don't expect another pandemic any time soon, but we are learning things that will improve our hazard mitigation planning all the way around. And, yes, we will be adding a pandemic section to that plan." ■

continuity plan in place by March 10, ahead of the March 23 "stay home, save lives" executive order.

"We had a lot of work to do to be ready for social distancing and at-home quarantining," Operations Manager Mary Locke says. "Making sure all work-from-home employees had the technology tools they needed to keep running the

co-op was important. Having a plan to keep our crew out working on the lines with social distancing was completely new to us. In addition to the advice of outside experts, our employee work groups have been outstanding in offering input and ideas about how we can keep the lights on and keep each other safe at the same time."

Lighting the Way

NLI awards educational and lineworker scholarships

NLI awarded eight \$1,500 scholarships and one \$3,000 lineworker scholarship. Although this year's annual meeting scholarship presentation was postponed, these scholarship winners received their certificates by mail and all plan to attend college in the fall. Congratulations to the following students.



Jake Suhr is a Sandpoint High School graduate and will attend Montana State University in the fall.

“I want to receive a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from Montana State University in Bozeman, as well as participate in their ROTC program and serve in the military,” Jake says. “ROTC is a program for college students to be able to automatically become an officer when they graduate from college. I think that by having this pair of both being in the Army, as well as being a mechanical engineer, can really help me achieve my full potential in life.” ■



Megan Parnell is a Sandpoint High School graduate and plans to attend the University of Idaho.

“My future goals include attending the University of Idaho to attain a B.S. in agricultural business and apply my degree to a career in the agricultural field,” Megan says. “My passions for agriculture include business management, accounting and animal science. I also plan to have a family after I complete college. Family is very important in my life.” ■



Victoria Rae graduated from Bonners High School and will attend the University of Idaho this fall.

“My educational goals beyond high school will include seven additional years of schooling to pursue a career in occupational therapy,” says Victoria. “My first step toward achieving my goals will be attending the University of Idaho and earning my bachelor's degree in medical sciences while also earning all of the necessary prerequisite credits for Idaho State University's master in occupational therapy program. Finally, after completing my master's, I will be fully prepared to enter the workforce as a fully certified occupational therapist.” ■



Gracie Reichart also has graduated from Sandpoint High School and will attend North Idaho College.

“My educational goals are to complete my two-year nursing degree,” Gracie says. “I plan to go to North Idaho College in the fall to complete my nursing degree. After my two-year degree, I am hoping to continue on to get my four-year nursing degree. My occupational goal, once I graduate from college and receive my two- or four-year degree, is to become a pediatric nurse. I eventually want to move back to Sandpoint and work at Sandpoint Pediatrics.” ■



Shaleyna Higgins attends University of Idaho and is working toward a double major with bachelor's degrees in exercise science and advertising and a minor in dance.

"My first goal is to finish my bachelor's degrees and keep my GPA at 3.88 so I can be accepted when applying for a master's program," Shaleyna says. "I want to get my masters in exercise science and health with an emphasis in teaching and eventually become a professor at the University of Idaho. I would be thrilled to teach exercise science, health or dance classes at the university level. I am very passionate about education and training people in these fields. My dream is to eventually save enough money to open my own health and wellness center, gym and/or dance studio. I strive to have a career that I enjoy and one that fulfills my need to help others live healthy lifestyles." ■



Moxley Roesler-Begalke is a Troy High School graduate and plans to attend the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington.

"My future goals are to graduate from the University of Puget Sound with a bachelor's degree in history and a focus in prelaw," Moxley says. "I have not decided on whether I will work for a couple years or jump straight into law school. In either situation, I plan to attend University of Montana's law school to obtain my degree. After graduating from law school, I would like to work as a prosecuting attorney." ■



Madelynn Rusho graduated from Priest River High School and will attend North Idaho College in the fall.

"My parents raised me on a small farm with a herd of sheep, barn cats, chickens, pigs, goats and our loyal dogs," Madelynn says. "Being around all of these animals made me a more compassionate person, as I had to feed them every day, take care of their injuries and help with the birthing of baby sheep. I began to notice the grouse populations drop over the years more and more, along with the fish populations. All of these things drove me to choose fisheries biology to be the degree that I want to pursue. Fisheries biology will be my major and I am going to minor in wildlife biology so I can get a job with the Idaho Fish and Game when I graduate with my bachelor of science degree. I would like to help make a difference in at least our community when it comes to the conservation and preservation of our wild animals so they will be around for our future generations' enjoyment." ■



Sage Saccomanno is a Sandpoint High School graduate and plans to attend Bard College in Hudson, New York.

"My youth exchange year truly changed my perspectives of the world and allowed me to discover my true passions: traveling, justice, the environment and making meaningful change," Sage says. "My time in Italy made me realize the importance of protecting our environment. Growing up with the climate shift controversy and seeing different protests and activism throughout not only my own country, but also the world as a whole, allowed me to realize that young leaders are needed in the world today in environmental and worldly causes, and I aim to become one of those young leaders. My goals include pursuing environmental law, then eventually running for a political position to be able to directly make the positive changes that I believe are needed, and community supported for success and growth throughout our country. I am excited to continue on my journey." ■

Tyler Almeida is a graduate of Sandpoint High School and will attend Montana Tech Highlands to become an electrical lineman.

"I want to become an electrical lineman and work on power lines," Tyler says. "I've always been passionate about working with my hands and I really enjoy challenging work. I hope that by working



in this field I can help those recovering from natural disasters and help rebuild their communities, as well as gain a purpose and drive in a rewarding profession." ■

FINDING OUR WAY, TOGETHER



2020 ANNUAL MEETING



Thursday May 7, 2020

Live streamed online

Visit www.gvea.com/inside/about/annualmeeting to view meeting and annual report

Photography by Paris Photographics

Finding Our Way Together was the theme of GVEA's 73rd Annual Members' Meeting, which took place May 7, 2020. This theme is a reflection of the past two months, as we've all navigated the challenging circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Interior Alaska continues to grapple with the economic uncertainty caused by this event, and GVEA is committed to working with our members who are facing financial hardships as a result of the COVID-19 situation. Learn more by visiting: <http://www.gvea.com/resources/covid-19> as well as the article on page 32.

Members watched the meeting online this year via Facebook Live or YouTube Live, due to social distancing requirements, the state's health mandate limiting the size of public gatherings and GVEA's commitment to ensuring the safety of its members and employees.

Go to <http://www.gvea.com/inside/about/annualmeeting> to view the entire Annual Meeting presentation and get updated on what your co-op accomplished in 2019 and learn about some 2020 projects. The presentation also included these four videos:

- How Goodcents Helped the Nenana VFD
- How to Beat a Scammer with a Pencil
- How To Do Business While GVEA's Lobbies are Closed
- Right-Of-Way Reclearing Efforts & Homeowner Responsibilities



**Winners of \$500
Electric Credits:**
Blake Burley, Dist. 4
Priscilla Delgado, Dist. 1
Nina Dozette, Dist. 3
Branden Gilmore, Dist. 5
Barbara Kemp, Dist. 1
Delmae Wilson, Dist. 2

Continuing Community Support During the Coronavirus Crisis

By Joseph Hathaway

Communities across Eastern Oregon have banded together to support local businesses as the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic stretch into June and beyond. The combination of businesses being required to temporarily shut down and people staying home has caused small local businesses to suffer. The government is doing what it can in terms of financial relief and other initiatives, but that can only go so far and for so long. Ultimately, it's going to be up to us, the local communities and customers, to support these businesses and each other.

Local businesses are essential for our economy. They bring growth and innovation to our communities. They provide employment, create entrepreneurial opportunities and support local economies, communities and neighborhoods.

Many are feeling a financial strain right now and are worried about the future. If you need to buy something, check your local store first. If you can, order a meal from your favorite local restaurant. According to a national study of retail economics, for every \$100 you spend at locally owned businesses, \$68 will stay at home in our communities. The study says only \$43 stays in the community if you spend that same \$100 at a national chain.

OTEC Remains Committed to our Communities

Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative is committed to providing our member-owners with safe, reliable and competitively priced electricity during this uncertain time. To further support our member-owners who are impacted, we temporarily suspended late fees and disconnections. We want those who have difficulty paying their electric bills to call our offices. We will work with you to set up a payment plan.

We are proud to also help our communities through charitable donations for the purpose of public benefit, community improvement, and philanthropic or educational purposes. The OTEC Board of Directors approved an additional \$10,000 to be spread out equally and given to emergency and first-responder agencies and community support groups throughout our four-county service territory. We at OTEC hope this alleviates some of the strain put on our communities, and provides some of the necessary supplies and equipment our member-owners need.

OTEC continues to partner with communities to further economic development projects, including grant-funded virtual reality videos for tourism promotion and workforce attraction.

To learn more and access resources, visit www.economicdevelopment.otec.coop.



Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative is doing its part to help local communities by donating to organizations such as Baker City Fire and Rescue. PHOTO COURTESY OF BAKER CITY FIRE AND RESCUE

Give Back Through OTEC's Member to Member Program

To further support your local community—during the pandemic and afterward—sign up for OTEC's Member to Member program. Once you sign up, the bottom line of your monthly bill is rounded up to the nearest dollar. You can also participate in Member to Member Project Share, which allows you to choose a fixed donation amount to be added to your monthly bill.

All funds collected through OTEC's Member to Member Program currently support local emergency relief funds. In the past month, Member to Member funds were sent to local food banks to help those in need during the pandemic.

Enroll today by calling your local OTEC office or select "Round Up" on your "My Account" login on www.otec.coop.

If we all work to do our part to help one another during this crisis, our communities will come out stronger than ever. Your family, friends and neighbors at Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative are committed to supporting our communities. ■

Getting Ahead of the Blaze

OTEC prepares for wildfire season

By Joseph Hathaway

Every year, wildfires burn hundreds of thousands of acres across the United States, wreaking havoc on rural communities and businesses. We in Eastern Oregon never know when a wildfire might strike, but Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative is highly engaged and focused when it comes to reducing the risk of wildfires.

For OTEC, which operates in heavily forested areas across four counties in Eastern Oregon—much of it state and federal land—mitigating wildfire hazards is a significant part of providing safe and reliable electricity to its members.

Mike Pommarane, OTEC director of operations, oversees the co-op's vast utility infrastructure crossing forestland. He says wildfire mitigation is a priority for the cooperative.

"We know the coronavirus pandemic has been at the forefront of everyone's mind, but we want to remind our member-owners this could be a very dry summer, and OTEC remains vigilant in mitigating the risks of wildfires," Mike says. "We ask our member-owners to help prevent wildfires with common sense practices such as never leaving a fire unattended, following local burn bans and taking steps to be proactive in building a plan in case of a wildfire to protect themselves and their families."

OTEC's wildfire mitigation plan was developed based on information from state and local fire agencies and other industry-accepted practices. It consists of three main components: vegetation management, system hardening and system coordination.

The vegetation management plan includes hazard tree assessment and removal, trimming and mowing in the right-of-way. OTEC also deploys helicopters to patrol and inspect its power lines in heavily forested areas.

System hardening—building



Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative works year-round on its wildfire mitigation efforts to protect communities if a fire strikes. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE U.S. FOREST SERVICE

infrastructure such as poles, wires and equipment that can withstand a fire—includes measures such as constant safety inspections of the condition of wood poles in high fire areas, replacing those that could be vulnerable and, in some cases, selective wood pole replacement with alternative materials such as fiberglass or steel.

The system coordination component entails the monitoring of OTEC's system depending on the level of fire danger. OTEC abides by the industrial fire precaution levels set by the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and Oregon Department of Forestry. You may have seen the signs near federal and state lands. They include four levels of fire precaution. Level 1 is the lowest, and level 4 means extreme fire danger.

OTEC is in constant communication with these agencies to see what the fire danger is in its four-county service territory each day. The co-op ramps up its monitoring and preparedness based on the fire danger levels.

From its dispatch center, OTEC relies on an advanced supervisory control and data acquisition system to constantly monitor its approximately 3,000 miles of

infrastructure across its service territory for large circuit breaker operations that could be a problem with that section of line. Monitoring and adjusting how these circuit breakers respond to faults help mitigate a problem that could potentially cause a fire.

OTEC dispatchers constantly monitor weather conditions, including keeping an eye out for severe thunderstorms and lightning, which can cause wildfires.

OTEC's wildfire mitigation plan also includes a comprehensive avian protection program. The program's purpose is not only to protect migratory birds and reduce outages due to bird contacts, but to guard against wildfires because birds contacting lines can potentially cause a fire.

OTEC's hypervigilance about wildfire mitigation is based on the risk associated with one simple spark that can race out of control.

When it comes to preventing wildfires, there is a lot at stake: lives, personal property and the many benefits provided by Oregon's forests and rangelands. Each year, people start 70% of Oregon's wildfires. It is everyone's responsibility to prevent wildfires. OTEC continues to do its part to protect our communities. ■

The Future

Each of these students from Baker, Grant, Harney and Union counties has been awarded a college scholarship from Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative.



Alexandra Colton—North Powder
Oregon State University
Veterinary Science



Blaine Shaw—La Grande
Eastern Oregon University
Psychology



Brittany Robles Jimenez—La Grande
Western Oregon University
Elementary Education



Cody Singer—Cove
Arizona State University
Doctorate of Education
in Leadership and Innovation



Guadalupe Macias—Baker City
Portland State University
Biology



Isabelle Wachtel—Baker City
University of Arizona
Astronomy



Jenna Garner—Burns
Oregon State University
Biology



Julie Chandler—La Grande
Brigham Young University
International Relations & Law



Katie Perry—La Grande
Brigham Young University
Biology



Keith Oswald—Cove
U.S. Air Force Academy
Civil Engineering



Koedi Birmingham—Baker City
Eastern Oregon University
Elementary Education and Art



Lara Insko—La Grande
Western Washington University
Kinesiology



Lindsey Webb—Mount Vernon
Montana State University
Biological Sciences



Maggie Justice—John Day
Walla Walla University
Veterinary Science



Mary Letham—Hines
Dixie State University
Medical Laboratory Science



Naomi Woodward—Baker City
Cal Polytechnic State University
San Luis Obispo
Architecture



Quinn Coomer—Baker City
Corban University
Media Arts



Ryan Robles—Burns
University of Idaho
Wildlife Resources



Samantha Floyd—Canyon City
University of Oregon
Music Theory and Psychology



Sam McCauley—Baker City
Dordt University
Undecided



Shaelynn Bice—Prairie City
Eastern Oregon University
Elementary Education



Tea Recanzone—Burns
Boise State University
Sports Science

*Each \$5,000
OTEC scholarship
is funded from
unclaimed capital
credits.*

Is Bright

Use Energy Wisely

Tighten the Belt on Bills

Trimming your heating and cooling costs is one of the quickest ways to manage electric bills. Your HVAC system accounts for nearly half of your household energy costs.

When you keep your heating and cooling system in shape and set it for maximum efficiency, you will enjoy comfort and energy savings. As your savings connection, Escambia River Electric Cooperative offers these tips to help you do just that.

Set your thermostat to savings. To begin, set your thermostat as high as comfortable during summer and as cool as comfortable during winter. You can save up to 10% on your annual heating and cooling bills by adjusting your thermostat 7 to 10 degrees for eight hours each day from its normal setting. In summer, try a daytime temperature of 78 degrees



Change your air filters regularly to keep your HVAC system working properly.

or as high as comfortably possible. The recommended winter setting is 68 degrees during the day and cooler at night while everyone is sleeping.

Do-it-yourself maintenance.

To help your HVAC system operate at maximum efficiency, clear vegetation, fallen leaves and any obstructions that are closer than 2 feet from the outdoor compressor unit. This gives the unit the unrestricted airflow it needs. Change air filters inside your home regularly. Your system works harder to keep your home comfortable when filters are clogged.

Plan ahead for system tune ups. Don't risk having to call

a professional because your system goes out on a scorching summer day or the dead of winter. Schedule regular maintenance—at least once a year—to ensure your unit works efficiently when you need it most. During a service call, the technician can clear the drain of any clogs, clean the fan blades on the outdoor unit and get rid of buildup on the indoor evaporator coil. This wise investment will save energy and money, keeping your system in shape longer.

Upgrade when it's time. If your system needs repairs on a regular basis or is more than 10 years old, replacing it can

net big savings. Today's high-efficiency heat pumps reduce energy use by about 50% compared to older models. Heat pumps also keep a constant and comfortable temperature throughout your home—something you don't get with an electric furnace. That's because heat pumps move heat instead of generating it. As an added benefit, they also dehumidify the air inside your home, using less energy to cool your home during the summer.

By helping you reduce energy use and make your home more energy-efficient, we're connecting you to savings. ■

Shuttle Service Offered for Jay and Century

Northwest Florida Rural Health Network, in conjunction with ITL Services of Pensacola, provides round-trip shuttle services between Jay and Century. Services are provided Monday, Wednesday and Friday, excluding holidays. Round trips are scheduled at 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. starting at Jay Medical Complex/Jay Hospital. Riders are transported to Lakeview Center and Century Medical Center, with immediate return services to Jay Medical Complex/Jay Hospital. The cost is \$2 for one-way trips and \$3 for round trips. For more information, contact Northwest Florida Rural Health Network Inc. at 850-675-4787, Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Julie Lopez and Shawn Dudley smile behind their masks as they serve members at the Tavernier office drive-through.



The FKEC Smiles Behind the Masks

In crisis and in health, when in masks and when not, FKEC employees remain committed to serving our members. FKEC appreciates our staff's willingness to adapt to the changes in our workplace and for staying dedicated to serving our community.

As we re-open our lobbies, we continue to monitor the Coronavirus pandemic and follow all appropriate guidelines to keep our members and employees safe.

If You Visit

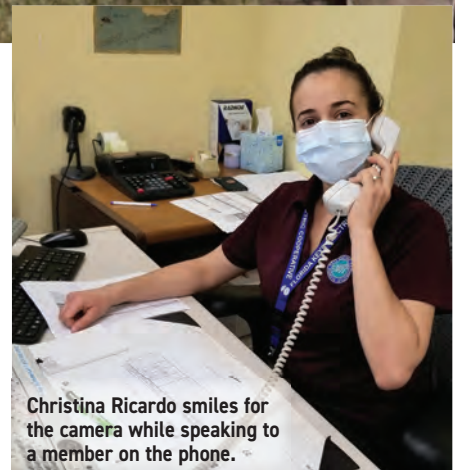
If you must visit an FKEC office, you will see signs outlining the rules to follow inside the lobby. For now, our Tavernier office will have a maximum occupancy of three members, and the smaller lobby in

Marathon will allow two. Hand sanitizing stations will be located right by the door, and we ask that you practice social distancing, keeping six feet away from anyone when possible.

Please only visit an FKEC office if necessary and do not enter if you have been exposed to COVID-19 or have any symptoms!

Health-Safe Services Encouraged

We continue to encourage our online health-safe services. Almost anything you can do at an FKEC office, you can do online at www.FKEC.com. You can also use our secure phone payment system at (855) 385-9912 or call a consumer representative at (305) 852-2431.



Christina Ricardo smiles for the camera while speaking to a member on the phone.

PHOTOS BY MARIA JONES

Your Feedback

Our members who have visited the drive-through have made our day with their positivity. Overwhelmingly, they've expressed appreciation for the proactive approach FKEC is taking to protect our employees and consumers, while still providing quality customer service.

— Sharon Claude,
Consumer Account Rep.



From left, Phil Guinta, Brooke Vega, David Bogue, Isaiah Leake, and Jerry Betancourt

Powered By Positivity



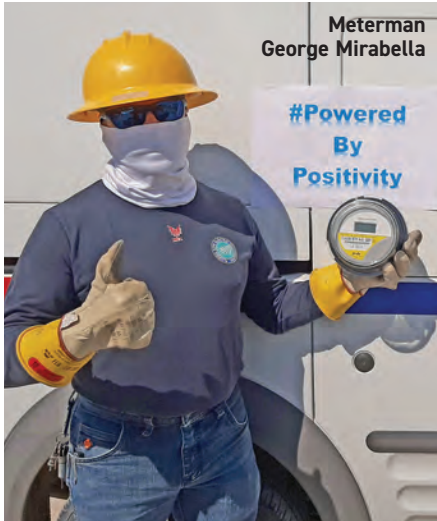
Member Service Rep. Veronica Ornelas.

As the COVID-19 crisis swept the country, FKEC employees and our members faced the challenges with positivity, support and mutual appreciation. To document the time and encourage a little light-hearted fun, we started a #PoweredByPositivity photo campaign among our employees. From home and from the office they continue to serve FKEC members.

Kudos to all our employees and members for staying positive during this uncertain time. We are proud to serve our over 27,000 members in the amazing Upper and Middle Keys Communities.



Accounts Payable Specialist Victoria Leonard and General Accounting Supervisor Ashley Lowman Arrabal.



Meterman
George Mirabella



NERC Compliance
Specialist Brian
Tiedemann and
Utility Forester
Jason Richards.

Support from our Members

Thank you for sharing words of appreciation and encouragement through social media, email, and phone.

Thank you all so much for what you're doing!

— Kim

Thank you so much for your service! You all keep us bright and happy!!! May God bless you and your families! Stay safe and healthy!

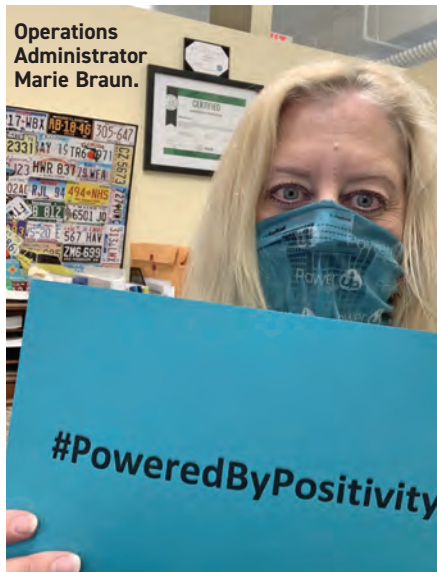
— Juan

Such a great group!

— Kendyl

One of your teams arrived this morning to remove limbs from our power lines. They did a great job! The power lines are now clear and the debris was chipped and hauled away. Thank you FKEC for your timely response.

— Patty



Operations
Administrator
Marie Braun.



I.T. Manager
Tamie Piekarski.



System Operator Clay Smith.



Consumer
Account Reps.
Yesenia Mora
and Julie
Lopez.



Neighbors Helping Neighbors

As the COVID-19 pandemic financially impacts many local residents, as always, our community has come together. From people grocery shopping for health-vulnerable neighbors, to civic organizations and larger groups like our local United Way providing food, neighbors are helping neighbors in the Florida Keys.

While the pandemic will have long-lasting effects on our residents, the immediate concern has been food insecurity. To respond to this unprecedented need, our local United Way of Collier and the Keys (UWCK) pledged \$100,000 to serve hard-working, paycheck to paycheck locals affected by COVID-19's economic consequences.

"To date, we've allocated \$60,000 of the \$100,000 for COVID aid with the majority going to the food pantries, and also safety net things like gift cards for groceries and prescriptions," explains Maria Jones. Jones is FKEC's Member Service Supervisor and also the Vice Board Chairperson for

UWCK. "As needs change or grow, we will continue to extend funds to help with necessities."

Along with individuals and other organizations, UWCK has donated over \$15,000 to expand the food pantries at Keys Area Interdenominational Resources (Marathon), Burton Memorial Church (Tavernier), and First Baptist Islamorada Church (Islamorada). Money is also going to assistance via Florida Keys Outreach Coalition (Lower and Upper Keys) and Keys Area Interdenominational Resources (Middle Keys).

If You're in Need

If you are a Florida Keys resident in need, there are numerous resources to help you. Get details in the online Community Resource Guide at KeysUnitedWay.org/CommunityResourceGuide.

UWCK also introduced a remote crisis case management system for residents to safely seek assistance and services from



PHOTO BY CAROL GRECO

Maria Jones and other volunteers package meals for takeout at the Burton Memorial Church Kitchen and Food Pantry.

their own home. The platform allows social service providers to remotely manage assistance efficiently. For more information, visit KeysHelp.org.

If You Can Help

Forty-two percent of Keys residents live paycheck to paycheck, and now many are unemployed or underemployed. To maintain our strong community, there are many great organizations you can give to, including the United Way of Collier and the Keys. 100% of the UWCK COVID-19 funds raised in the Keys benefit Keys residents through our partner agencies. Learn more at www.keysunitedway.org.

United Way of Collier and the Keys Merge

On April 1, United Way of Collier and the Keys merged. And the local United Way says they are already seeing the benefits including their ability to respond to the COVID-19 crisis immediately. The unification allows the organization to increase operational efficiency and streamline duplicated internal processes, ultimately resulting in more dollars available for both local communities. As internal operations are consolidated, external activities and programs in the community will essentially remain the same.

Beware...

Scammers Target FKEC Consumers

Utility scammers are back at it, targeting Florida Keys Electric Cooperative members. FKEC has received reports of members receiving a call threatening to disconnect power if payment is not given immediately.

To prevent falling victim to a phone scam, remember you can ONLY pay your Co-op utility over the phone by calling FKEC's secure phone payment number 1-855-385-9912. If you are given a different number to call, or if the thief asks for

your payment information over the phone it is a SCAM!

If you receive a suspicious call, or any call, email, or visit, threatening to disconnect your power, call FKEC at 305-852-2431 immediately to ensure you are speaking to a bona fide FKEC employee.

Learn more about scam tactics and how to protect yourself at www.FKEC.com/2020/04/scam-warning/

Enroll in paperless billing today.



It's safer.



It's faster.



It's more accessible.



And it looks just like your paper bill.



Log in to the SmartHub app to turn off paper bills or call us at 863-946-6200 to go paperless.

Hamming It Up to Help Our Members

By Tahlia Warrick

On the morning of Good Friday, a team of Glades Electric Cooperative employees started making its way before dawn to Costco in Fort Myers to pick up an unusual order.

When they arrived before regular store hours, the employees' order of 100 spiral-cut hams—boxed and stacked on a flatbed cart—was waiting for them. Soon, they began loading the hams for the trip back to Moore Haven, where they would be distributed to the community.

The idea of a ham giveaway was hatched less than 24 hours

earlier over a lunch conversation. The idea was to help support the community in a time when many people were out of work or dealing with financial difficulties as a result of the coronavirus.

“We knew people were in need, and with the holiday coming up, we were searching for a way we could help,” says GEC Executive Administrator Renee Bass. “Once we got the ball rolling, everyone was on board, and it was more just a matter of getting that many hams on short notice.”

Chief Communications Officer Jennifer Koukos began reaching out to local





A steady line of cars waits at the Moore Haven office to claim hams. To comply with social distancing recommendations, participants remained in their vehicles and GEC Executive Administrator Renee Bass placed hams in passenger windows. OPPOSITE PAGE: Renee gives a ham to a young man on a dirt bike. He used a backpack to transport it home.

supermarkets inquiring about the availability of hams, while the communications team worked on social media messaging to get the word out to the community.

“All of the local stores I talked to were short on supply or waiting for trucks to arrive,” Jennifer says. “When Costco said they could fill the order, we were thrilled. Even though it was more travel, I think it was even better to be able to bring the hams into our community to fill a need.”

As the team headed back to Moore Haven for the 11 a.m. giveaway, vehicles already were lining up along U.S. Highway 27 awaiting the hams.

By the time the group arrived at 10 a.m., sheriff’s deputies were on site to direct traffic because of the number of vehicles waiting along the highway.

“We were torn because we didn’t intend to begin until 11, but we felt that for everyone’s safety, we needed to get vehicles off the highway,” Jennifer says. “In the end, the point was to help our community, and I think we were able to accomplish that.”

To maintain social distancing recommendations, individuals drove through the parking lot of GEC’s Moore Haven headquarters while employees placed a ham inside their opened passenger windows. In about half an hour, all 100 hams had been distributed.

“It was wonderful to be able to help our community,” Renee says. “I wish we could have purchased endless hams to give to everybody, but I’m grateful we were able to help these 100 families celebrate Easter with a ham.”

While GEC was not able to buy hams for everyone, the co-op did sponsor a meal giveaway April 23 at Golden Corral in Lake Placid, providing 200 free meals to those in need.

“We wanted to do something special for people in need in both the northern and southern parts of our service area,” Jennifer says. “The Easter ham giveaway was readily accessible for people in Glades and Hendry counties, and the Golden Corral dinners helped struggling residents in Highlands and Okeechobee counties.”

Ray and Claudia Tharp, operators of Golden Corral in Lake Placid and Glades Electric members, began providing free meals nightly soon after restaurants in Florida were ordered to close dine-in services. With the help of sponsors who covered food costs, the Tharp

family personally prepared the free meals for the community.

“The time the Tharp family was donating to provide meals each night was tremendously generous,” Jennifer says. “They truly embody neighbors helping neighbors, and we were pleased to support their efforts to aid our community.”

Aside from assisting community members with meals, Glades Electric Cooperative has suspended disconnections for nonpayment and waived late payment fees in an effort to support members who may have been impacted by the pandemic and economic difficulties.

Honoring one of the seven cooperative principles, Concern for Community, through the coronavirus pandemic and in ordinary times, GEC is committed to supporting our communities. ■

From *Spirits* to *Sanitizer*

Sugar Sand Distillery in Lake Placid adapts to fill a community need

By Tahlia Warrick

In the face of unprecedented times, our community has responded in unprecedented ways.

When Don Davies, owner and head distiller at Sugar Sand Distillery, opened the distillery in 2018, he was exploring uncharted territory in this area of Florida's Heartland. As the only distillery in Highlands County, Don provided a new product and experience to the community, producing rum, vodka, gin and moonshine from sugarcane grown on site.

Now, in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, Sugar Sand is deemed an essential business, providing hand sanitizer when little can be found elsewhere.

"On March 18, the federal government wrote to all the distilleries, incentivizing hand sanitizer production for those who were able to meet the guidelines," Don says. "That was on a Thursday night. We had bottles and ingredients here, and we started selling it on Saturday morning. So we had a pretty quick turnaround."

For Don, finding a way to help his community in need was a no-brainer.

"Being able to produce hand sanitizer has allowed me to keep my employees working, and we're able to have the food truck out here, allowing their business to continue for carry-out orders," Don says.

Hand sanitizer production did not require major changes in infrastructure or process for Sugar Sand. The biggest hurdle was devising a recipe that resulted in a high-quality sanitizer.

Don and his team worked by trial and error to develop their final recipe.

"You would think it would be easy to make, but to make a decent product, it takes a little more," he says. "We came up



Owner and Head Distiller Don Davies measures progress of his next batch of hand sanitizer.

with a way to mix it that worked well."

The distillery is producing 50mL bottles of hand sanitizer for purchase at the distillery or online. There is a purchase limit to prevent hoarding.

Response to their newest product has been overwhelming. As they search for hand sanitizer, individuals and organizations from the Heartland area and other parts of south Florida have kept Don busy with calls and emails throughout the

day. He has made a concerted effort to serve those in Heartland communities first.

"I've got to take care of people around here first," Don says. "We're just doing what we can. We have a finite production, so we just try to keep it in check."

Don is not alone in his resolve to care for our local communities. Glades Electric Cooperative member U.S. Sugar was quick to partner with Sugar Sand Distillery to help meet the local need for hand sanitizer.



During a break in on-site sales, Sugar Sand Distillery Tour Guide Laura Baughman seals filled sanitizer bottles while Distiller Garrett Meredith, above and right, fills empty bottles.

According to U.S. Sugar, the company planned to buy up to 1,200 units of hand sanitizer from Sugar Sand to be distributed both to its own essential employees and to senior centers in Hendry County.

Sanitizer also will be distributed to centers in Belle Glade and Pahokee.

“In times of crisis, you can always count on the resourcefulness of farmers to help solve problems as they arise,” says Judy Sanchez, U.S. Sugar’s senior director for corporate communications and public affairs. “Whether its hurricanes, economic downturns, or even global pandemics, we are all in this together and are proud to serve our local communities during their time of need. We are taking care of our families because, after all, we live here too.”

Don worked in the fertilizer business

for many years, so he already had a relationship with U.S. Sugar. He says the partnership was a natural one.

“We just sent U.S. Sugar the last of their hand sanitizer yesterday, and they’ll be sending us fermentable sugars to make more,” Don says.

Although demand for his product has been intense, Don has managed to maintain a steady supply of hand sanitizer for local residents.

His rapid response in adapting to the situation to provide a coveted product in short supply, and the participation of GEC member U.S. Sugar, has been a great benefit to those in Highlands County.

Our communities are grateful for both of these businesses working to meet a critical need during a challenging time. ■



Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions on gatherings of large groups of people, Gulf Coast Electric Cooperative's 72nd Annual Members' Meeting was shifted from an in-person celebration to a virtual business meeting May 2. Members voted electronically or mailed in their ballots, and were invited to submit questions and make motions in advance. CEO John Bartley's message to the members appears on page 5. If you want to listen to the annual meeting broadcast, please visit www.gcec.com/annual-members-meeting.

Congratulations, Prize Winners!

Janice H. Dady of Westville won the grand prize: a 2004 Chevrolet 1500 4x4 pickup truck.

All members who submitted ballots for Gulf Coast Electric Cooperative directors and on board actions received \$5 bill credits and were entered in a drawing for all prizes: the truck, 10 \$100 gift cards and 40 \$25 gift cards.

Scholarship winners also were drawn. Names of all winners are listed on pages 6 and 7.

In Atypical Times, Not Your Typical Annual Meeting

I have been involved in planning and preparing for our annual members' meetings since 2003. Months ahead of time, I work with co-workers coordinating the many moving parts of an annual meeting.

This year was no different in the planning, but it certainly was unlike any of the other annual meetings I have helped plan.

We need to inform members about the meeting. We always create newspaper, radio and television advertisements; add messages to the signs in front of our offices and to our billing statements; and write articles for our monthly Florida Currents magazine. We also contact local organizations that offer a community calendar and make sure our meeting is listed. We announce the meeting on our Facebook page, send emails to members we have email addresses for and hang notices in our offices.

This year, getting the word out was even more important because the coronavirus forced us to change the plans we had announced in the months leading up to our annual meeting.

As usual, we worked with a third party to conduct our election.

Each year, we secure vendors to provide food and drinks, contract with a band to provide live music and arrange for the presentation of the colors to start our meeting, as Port St. Joe High School Naval ROTC has done for many years. We work with the Bay County Sheriff's Office and the Gulf County Sheriff's Office to ensure we have an organized procedure for parking and a safe environment for our members. We invite representatives from the Wewahitchka Ambulance Service to offer free blood pressure checks and the Florida Rural Electric Credit Union to give members information on opening an account.

All of those arrangements were in place for our May 2 meeting, and had to be canceled.

We usually coordinate which employees will work the day of the meeting and ensure they have proper uniforms so members can readily identify them when they have questions. The week of the meeting, our employees set up everything—from the children's bounce house to the sound system to the stage and chairs. We hang signs and make sure restroom and garbage facilities are ready. We



Kristin Evans

cannot forget everyone's favorite part: the prizes! With no in-person meeting, none of that was necessary.

Instead of designing and printing agendas so members could follow along with the business meeting, we had to find a vendor to provide a phone system to accommodate our call-in meeting, and establish and monitor a dedicated email address for members' annual meeting questions.

The morning of the meeting, I always arrive at our Wewahitchka office early to help welcome a few hundred members. When you count the family members they bring with them, we typically host around 1,000 people. It is satisfying to watch the GCEC team come together and to see our members smiling, socializing, and enjoying the lunch and band. Hearing children laugh in the bounce house is a joyful sound, and we love to share in our members' excitement as we call out winning prize numbers. Employees ice down drinks and inflate the bounce house. You can smell the aroma of lunch being prepared, and hear the band tuning up for their performance.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we had none of that. Although it was a beautiful Saturday morning in Wewahitchka, rather than hundreds of people coming together, there were only four of us: CEO John Bartley, Secretary Angie Morris, Attorney Pat Floyd and me. We gathered in the conference room and conducted the business meeting by telephone. I didn't even sit at the board table until it was time for me to speak.

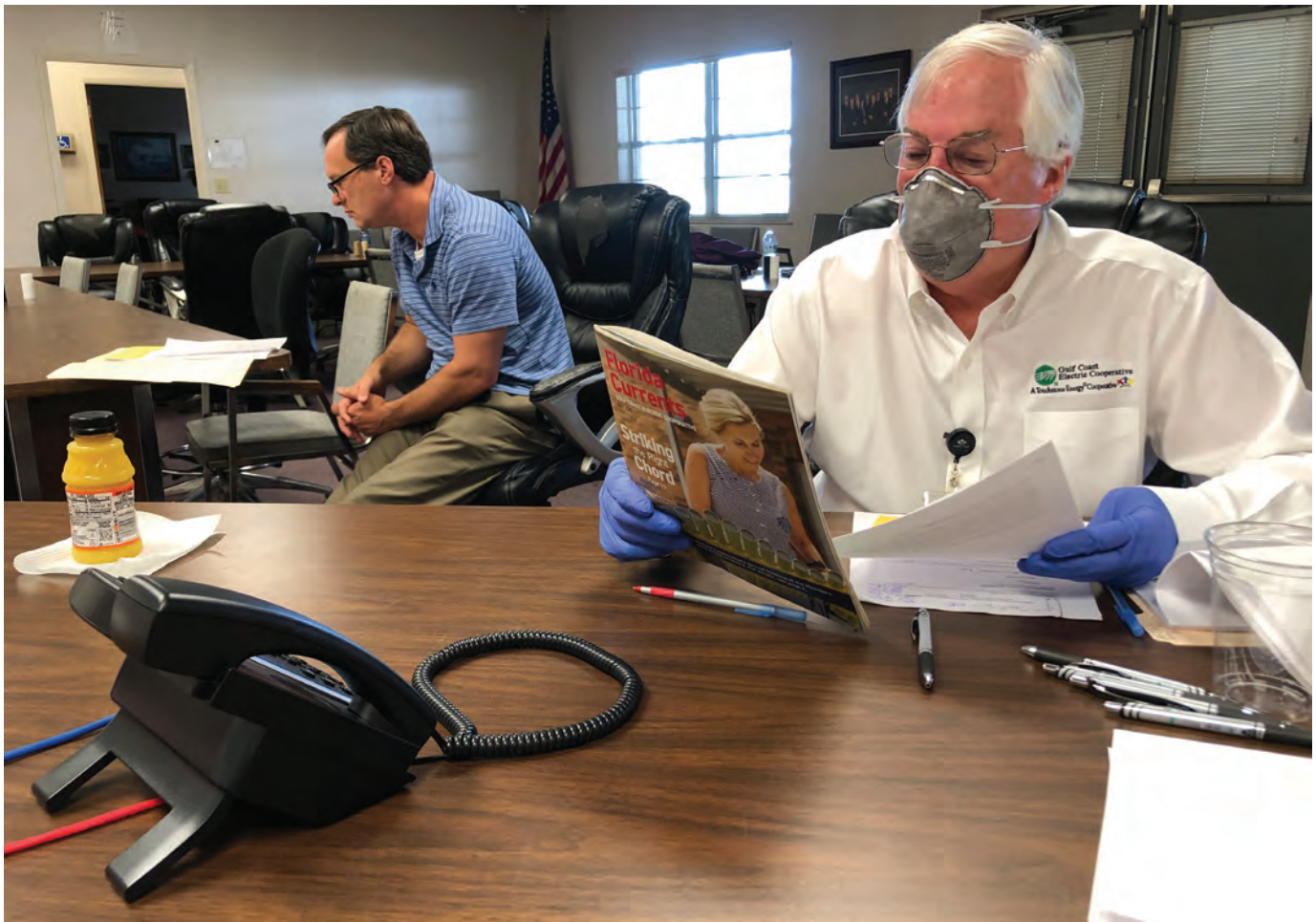
I admit I had nightmares about giving out the wrong number and no one calling in. Thankfully, callers did get through. The technology worked smoothly.

We greatly appreciate everyone's patience. Thank you to those who took the time to vote and participate in your meeting, sending your questions ahead of time and calling in to listen.

We thank you for your support of the cooperative.

We have never held a virtual annual meeting before. It was not as much fun as hosting you with lunch and entertainment. We can't wait to return to our in-person meeting for the 80th anniversary of our founding in 2021. Planning will begin soon!

—Kristin Evans, vice president of marketing/communications



Attorney Pat Floyd, foreground, verifies Gulf Coast Electric Cooperative's official notification of the annual meeting as CEO John Bartley maintains a safe distance and awaits delivery of his annual meeting message.

CEO's Annual Meeting Message

Thank you for joining us today for Gulf Coast Electric Cooperative's 72nd Annual Members' Meeting. I'm your cooperative's CEO and general manager, John Bartley.

The COVID-19 virus has forced us to hold our meeting virtually to comply with the recommendations of the Department of Health and CDC guidelines to keep our members and employees safe. This is a change from our normal meeting practice, and we appreciate everyone's flexibility and patience.

All of us at your electric co-op wish we could meet in Wewahitchka as we have for 72 years and have our normal meeting filled with good food, good people and good music.

I would like to start by thanking you for your participation in our election. We had nearly 4,100 members, roughly 25% of our membership, take the time to mail in their ballots or to cast their votes online.

Later, we will announce the winners of the gift cards, electric bill credits and the 2003 Chevrolet pickup truck.

We are proud to offer these prizes to our membership in appreciation of you taking the time to participate in the democracy of your electric cooperative. And remember—every member who voted will receive a \$5 bill credit!

We will also announce our scholarship winners. We had 18 high school seniors from six high schools apply to win one of 10 \$1,000 awards. We are delighted to assist these students as they continue their education at a college, university or technical school.

This year, we have two additional scholarship recipients.

Since 1978, Gulf Coast Electric Cooperative has participated in the Rural Electric Youth Tour, sending the two winners of our Youth Tour contest to Washington, D.C., each summer. Our competition was held in February. The winners were Tressa Carpenter of Bay High School and Shanna Sapp of Altha Public School.

Sadly, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, for the first time

Continues on page 6

GULF COAST ELECTRIC

Gift Card Winners

Thomas Cornel Brock, Panama City
Joyce K. Pointer, Fountain
Darla M. Fontenot, Youngstown
Allen A. Zycznski Jr., Panama City
Kimberly A. Channer, Panama City
Marvin R. Ward, Panama City
Paul D. Wright, Sr, Panama City
Bobby R. Bearden, Panama City
Richard Cantu, Panama City
Earl L Casteel, Youngstown
Jacob E. Whetstine, Panama City
Ruth A. Fulk, Southport
Robin R. Smith, Fountain
Lonnie R. Burton, Panama City
Gene T. Rogers, Port Saint Joe
Lynn A. McCullough, Panama City
Larry D. Holt, Southport
Jerome A. Moring, Chipley
Cynthia L. Lozier, Southport
Robert E. Dobbs, Southport
Michael Lee Colvin, Panama City
Thelma Lynch, Wewahitchka
Jamie D. Ellison, Lynn Haven
Criston L. Bradley, Chipley
Lisa Duncan, Wewahitchka
Karen Elaine Colvin, Wewahitchka
Kelli N. Davis, Southport
Pamela M. Mutter, Southport
Michael L. Call, Fountain
Malinda M. Maynard, Southport
Christopher Bartling, Panama City
Howard M. Marshall, Panama City
Janice B. Barbee, Fountain
Glen G. Hartzog, Panama City
Larry W. Black, Youngstown
Jerry Gaskin, Wewahitchka
Heather J. Nickell, Wewahitchka
Cindy L. Morris, Panama City
IPS Auto Part Inc., Fountain
David F. Zupancic, Youngstown

Carl Goodson, Doug Birmingham and Eddie Jones were uncontested and reelected to the Gulf Coast Electric Cooperative Board of Directors.

CEO's Message

Continues from page 5

in more than 50 years, there will not be an electric cooperative Youth Tour. The National Rural Electric Cooperative Association made this difficult decision to protect the students, chaperones and their families. Since the trip is not possible this year, Tressa and Shanna will receive scholarships.

Another local student, Kendall Creamer of Mosley High School, competed in the statewide essay contest for a chance to go on the trip. As the winner, she was slated to travel to Washington, D.C., this summer. She will receive a scholarship from the statewide.

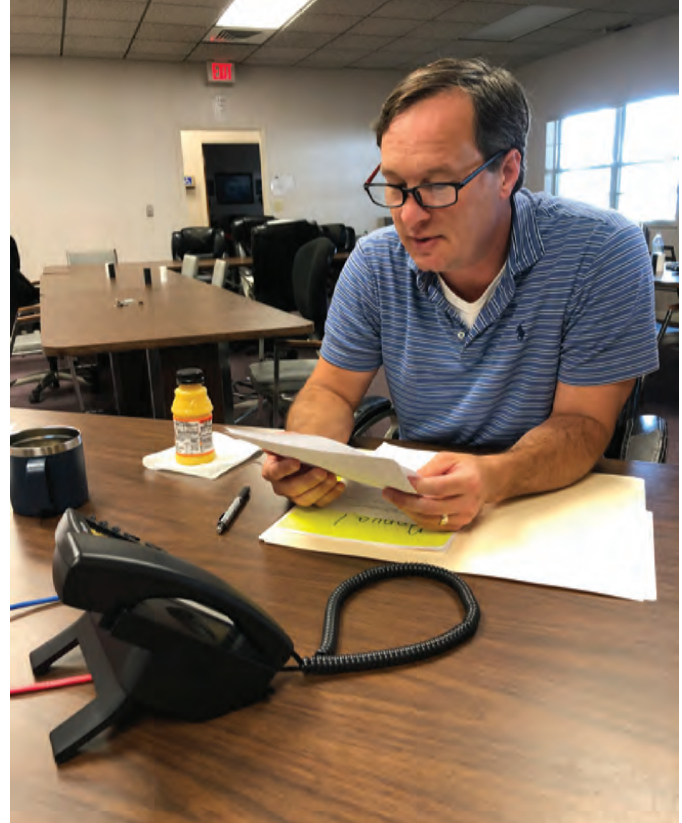
Congratulations to these great students. We wish them the best in their future endeavors.

The effects of COVID-19 have been far-reaching. We realize the financial impact this virus has made on many of our members. In response, your board of trustees and management team decided to temporarily suspend disconnects for nonpayment and to waive late fees.

In this time of uncertainty, you can be certain you will continue to have electricity.

Not-for-profit electric co-ops have no shareholders. Because of this structure and the desire to keep energy costs as low as possible, there are limited reserve margins to sustain high rates of nonpayment. Therefore, I want to remind our membership that these disconnect suspensions are not bill waivers.

I encourage our members who are unable to pay their full balances at this time to contact our offices. We are



CEO John Bartley delivers his message to members during the virtual meeting.

always willing to work with our members on a payment plan or to see if they qualify for assistance, and now is no exception. Members should pay at least a portion of their bill as they are able. Taking this simple step can help avoid a large multi-month balance when the pandemic is over.

As members spend more time at home, you may see a surge in home energy use. If we can help you by offering energy- and money-saving tips, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Another word of caution I would like to offer: Beware of scammers. We have received reports of our members being contacted by scammers posing as our employees and threatening to disconnect power unless paid right away. Other scammers claim the cooperative is hiring people to work from home if we are sent money to cover the cost of a computer.

You will not receive a phone call from any of our employees threatening to turn your power off, and any job openings the

cooperative has will be posted on our website. We will not contact potential employees and request money from them or offer to interview them virtually.

I want to thank the management and employees for doing their part in this pandemic response. We are lucky to have such incredible people working behind the scenes to power our homes, businesses and communities. Through storms, pandemics and whatever else comes our way, your cooperative's employees and board are here to keep the power on and serve you, our members.

Linework is one of the most dangerous jobs in the country. Keeping our employees safe is our top priority. At least once a month, our employees participate in safety training—from first aid and CPR to lineworker safety training. I am proud of our employees for currently working 488 days with zero lost-time accidents.

The employees and trustees of Gulf Coast Electric Cooperative are focused on

providing its member-owners with safe, reliable and cost-effective electric service. As a non-profit, your cooperative operates to cover the cost to provide service to each of our members.

We have received many questions lately from members who are curious to know if we are going to offer a one-time bill reduction. Our rates are structured in such a way that we have been crediting members' bills monthly for many years. For example, let's say you consume 1,200 kilowatt-hours of electricity per month. In the past year, we have credited your account \$154.20 through the Wholesale Power Cost Adjustment. You will see this as a line item on your bill. If you would like for us to further review your bill with you, please don't hesitate to contact us.

GCEC continues to recover from Hurricane Michael. The Category 5 storm inflicted \$85 million in damage to our distribution system. To cover these hurricane-related expenses, the cooperative had to acquire an emergency line of credit in the amount of \$75 million from the National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation. The interest charges on this line of credit cost almost \$150,000 monthly.

Last year, our board made the difficult decision to adjust rates to recover a portion of the Hurricane Michael restoration costs. Our rates had not been adjusted since 2012, but the tremendous expense associated with the storm made the rate adjustment unavoidable.

Last June, our members began to see the "Storm Cost Recovery" line item on their bills. The revenue collected through this rate rider is only used for storm restoration costs

and will be in effect for a maximum of five years, or no later than June 2024.

In the meantime, we are continuing to negotiate with FEMA and the Florida Department of Emergency Management for reimbursement for large portions of our recovery costs and to reduce the impact of these costs being passed on to our members.

These are reimbursements we need and deserve. So far, we have secured reimbursements for one-third of our Hurricane Michael repair expenses. We will continue these negotiations so we may keep the cooperative financially sound while at the same time impacting our members' power bills as little as possible.

Speaking of Hurricane Michael, we will soon complete repairs to our Southport and Wewahitchka offices, while accounting for future growth.

Also, it is exciting to announce we are getting close to reopening our Panama City office at 6243 East Highway 98 in Parker. This office was heavily damaged in the storm, and the repairs are nearly complete. We look forward to serving our members at this location very soon.

Since March 2011, Gulf Coast Electric Cooperative has owned and maintained the electric and water distribution systems on Tyndall Air Force Base. As all of you know, the damage to the base during the hurricane was catastrophic.

Since that time, we are proud to support and rebuild the base of the future. Tyndall is not only a valued part of our membership. It's a vital part of our community. We are proud to be a part of Team Tyndall and to assist in its mission and in its rebuild.

As of today, our office lobbies remain temporarily closed to protect our members and employees from the potential spread of COVID-19. However, our employees are still working to deliver safe, affordable and reliable power.

Our drive-thrus are open, and we are answering our phones during regular business hours. And don't forget our drop boxes, automated phone system and website are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for payments or for reporting power outages. I encourage you to follow us on Facebook and to keep an eye on our website and Florida Currents magazine for updates.

In closing, I encourage you all to help each other and to take care of one another. We can look out for our neighbors, friends and family. We can help those most impacted by closures and cancellations. We can help feed our kids who rely on school breakfast and lunch, and we can bring groceries to an elderly neighbor who is too vulnerable to go to the store.

We are all in this together. We are moving through a fluid situation, and we're doing all we can to make sure that not only our members are safe, but the employees at the cooperative are also safe and healthy. The decisions we make are not taken lightly. I hope you all can remain patient with us as we get through the coming weeks and months.

Thank you again for your time and attention this morning. If you know of a member who missed this broadcast live, we will post a recording online at our website www.gcec.com.

We are grateful for our members' patronage and support of the cooperative. ■

Bill Credit Winners

Jimmy Wilson Gainer, Panama City
Judy C. Martin, Youngstown
Carolyn Withem, Panama City
Daniel Davis, Kinard
Jacob T. Todd, Altha
Ranell A. Johnson, Chipley
Ellen E. Gordon, Wewahitchka
David Evans, Panama City Beach
Linda M. McHenry, Southport
Georgia Wright, Wewahitchka



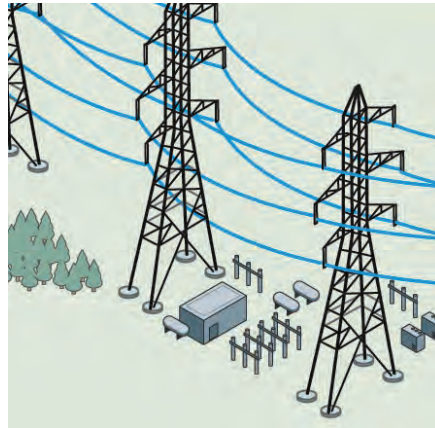
Scholarship Winners

Brittnee Britt
Wewahitchka High School
Jaron D. Bush
Vernon High School
Michele Chen
Wewahitchka High School
Hanna Davenport
Wewahitchka High School
Janna Jones
Wewahitchka High School
Matthew Laster
Wewahitchka High School
Cyrina Madrid
Wewahitchka High School
Daniel Smith-Montero
Bay High School
Leigha Grace Price
Wewahitchka High School
Emma Wilson
North Bay Haven Charter Academy

Powering Up After an Outage

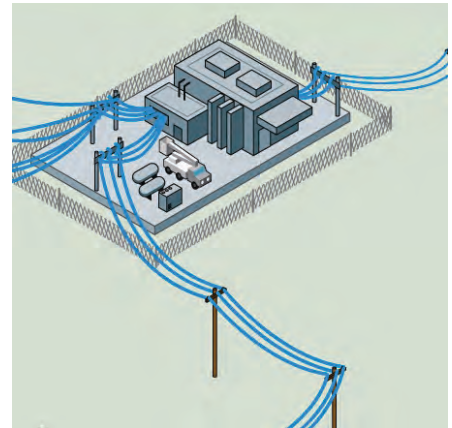
Five Steps to Restoring Your Power

When hurricanes or storms cause widespread damage, extended outages are likely. Electric utility line crews work long, hard hours to safely restore service to the greatest number of consumers in the shortest time possible. Here's the sequence crews follow when power goes out.



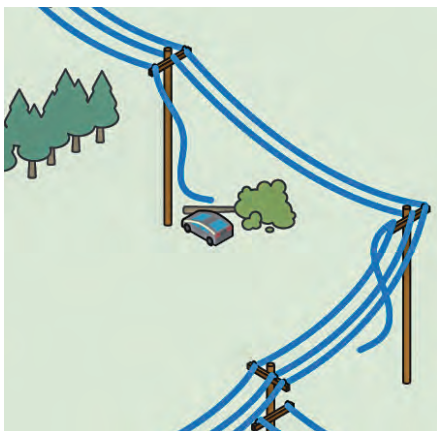
1. High-Voltage Transmission Lines

Transmission towers and cables that supply power to transmission substations—and thousands of members—rarely fail. But when damage occurs, these facilities must be repaired before other parts of the system can operate.



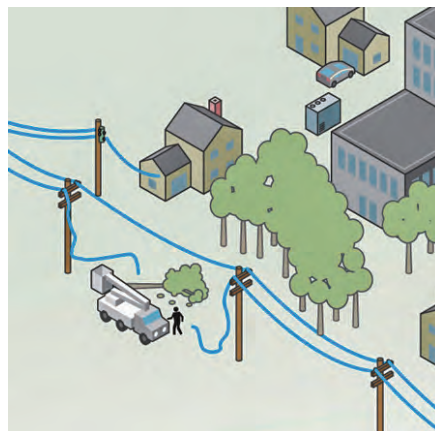
2. Distribution Substation

Each substation serves hundreds or thousands of consumers. When a major outage occurs, line crews inspect substations to determine if problems stem from transmission lines feeding into the substation, the substation itself or if problems exist down the line.



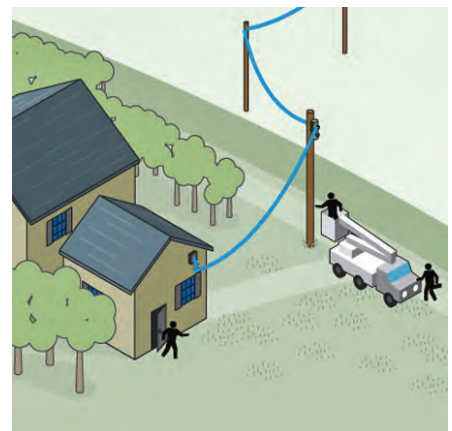
3. Main Distribution Lines

If the problem cannot be isolated at a distribution substation, distribution lines are checked. These lines carry power to large groups of consumers in communities or housing developments.



4. Tap Lines

If local outages persist, supply lines—also called tap lines—are inspected. These lines deliver power to transformers mounted on poles or placed on pads for underground service outside businesses, schools and homes.



5. Individual Homes

If your home remains without power, the service line between a transformer and your residence may need to be repaired. Report outages through your online account at www.preco.coop, on our SmartHub mobile app, by texting OUT to 800-282-3824 or by calling PRECO at 800-282-3824.



Operation Round Up Grants COVID-19 Emergency Funds

PRECO contributes \$51,000 to six organizations that help provide food for community members

YOU Can Make a Difference!

PRECO couple donates \$1,500

A Manatee County couple was so moved when reading about Operation Round Up's COVID-19 aid, they decided to pay it forward by donating \$1,500 to help the board of directors assist more food pantries.

The couple, PRECO members for nearly 20 years, asked to remain anonymous.

If you are able, please consider contributing to help those in need by making a 100% tax-deductible donation to Operation Round Up.

To donate to Operation Round Up, email Communications@preco.coop or call 800-282-3824.

The COVID-19 pandemic has touched the lives of every community in Florida and beyond. Many people in PRECO's 10-county service area became jobless overnight as a statewide stay-at-home order took effect.

Recognizing local food pantries were seeing unprecedented increases of families in need, the Operation Round Up Board of Directors quickly moved to provide funding to help those organizations get food into the community.

"Typically, organizations come to us by submitting a grant application when they are in need of funding," says Ellen Hamel, Operation Round Up chairwoman. "Due to the sudden increase in need, we called a special board meeting to release funds immediately to these food groups without requiring them to apply."

Through March and April, Operation Round Up disbursed more than \$50,000 into Hardee and Manatee counties, where more than 80% of PRECO members live.

"We will continue to provide aid to hurting communities throughout this crisis," Ellen says. "We are so grateful to the PRECO members for making this possible." ■



Ellen Hamel

<i>Grant recipients</i>	<i>County</i>	<i>Amount</i>
Hardee Help Center	Hardee	\$15,000
Our Daily Bread	Manatee	\$10,000
Woodland Community Church	Manatee	\$7,000
Hope Family Services	Manatee	\$7,000
Feeding Empty Little Tummies	Manatee	\$7,000
The Salvation Army	Manatee	\$5,000
Total		\$51,000

Operation Round Up is made possible through the donations of Peace River Electric consumers who allow their electric bills to be rounded up to the next dollar for charitable purposes. For more information about Operation Round Up, visit PRECO.coop online.