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The Value of Cooperatives

Although nearly 1 million people in the U.S. work for cooperatives of all types, few of us learn about the cooperative business model in school, including me who received a business degree in college. In 1983, however, when my professional career started at an electric cooperative in North Carolina, I came to understand the fundamental change that this business model brought to millions of people living in rural America. From the beginning electric cooperatives in particular were met with great opposition from the investor-owned utilities, citing the fact that “the primary interest of a utility was revenue, not social responsibility.” Without electric cooperatives, rural America would have waited long after the 1930s and 1940s to receive power. Today when I am asked to speak before a local community group, the opportunity to discuss the cooperative “can do” spirit is always rewarding.



For cooperatives in the U.S., October is National Co-op Month, which offers an occasion for more than 29,000 co-ops in the country to discuss with employees, members and the general public the cooperative difference. One important difference about electric cooperatives is that we operate on a not-for-profit basis so we can pass along an affordable rate for our services to you, the member-owner. As an integral part of the \$370 billion U.S. electric utility industry, co-ops like CAEC play a critical role in our nation’s economy and in our local communities.

Co-ops exist in every sector of the economy and can touch every aspect of our lives. If they took an inventory of the items in their homes most people would be surprised at just how many are manufactured or produced by a cooperative. Around the world co-ops operate according to the same core principles and values adopted by the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA), tracing the roots of these principles to the first modern cooperative founded in Rochdale, England, in 1844. By means of this magazine, we have been highlighting the seven cooperative principles, with this issue featuring Principle 6: *Cooperation Among Cooperatives* (pages 6 and 7).

But have you ever considered what it would be like if cooperatives did not exist? Co-ops exist not solely for the benefit of the member-owners but to also serve, strengthen and sustain local communities. In many developing countries, cooperatives such as credit unions and agricultural organizations have been very successful in helping people provide for themselves. Without cooperatives, many social, cultural and economic needs would not be addressed in our society.

Co-ops are everywhere, and the people who use cooperatives do so for a variety of reasons. While the benefits of being a member are numerous, such as your investment in a business that is locally owned and democratically controlled and having access to great products and services, you’re also part of an organization that places people ahead of profit, and perhaps the most significant is that your voice counts — your co-op truly cares what you think.

So while we take special note of the value of cooperatives in October, we are delighted to be a part of your community delivering affordable, reliable and quality services to you all year long. ■

Tom Stackhouse
President/CEO

2015 Annual Meeting Highlights

Customarily, we hold our Annual Meeting and Member Appreciation event at our Prattville Headquarters, but with the recent opening of our new home office in July, it was determined that for 2015, it would be best to move the event to our West Operations Center in Chilton County. This year it was held on Friday, Aug. 14, in Verbena, under our operations center truck shed. The shed blocked much of the sunrays and provided a natural breezeway, making it more comfortable to be outside for the many activities.

A total of 3,594 members registered and voted by mail, an additional 301 members registered on site the day of the meeting with an estimated 1,350 were in attendance for the family-friendly affair.

Members were presented with health screenings from St. Vincent's Health Systems, consisting of cholesterol, glucose, blood pressure tests and counseling on the results. Information was shared about energy-efficiency products and tips. CAEC's Action Committee for Rural Electrification (ACRE®) handed out material about the grassroots movement and the benefits of participating in the organization. And there was even a kiosk demonstration to show our newest way for members to pay their bills.



engaged children as they learned to stop, look and think when near electricity through a series of tricks and audience participation. Children also enjoyed face painting

and exploring nature through the Cooperative Environment program which is a hands-on interaction that teaches about the conservation efforts that utilities, like CAEC, utilize to protect wildlife habitats.

And for everyone, live entertainment was provided by the Kempters from Slapout, Ala. Door prizes, tasty food and ice cream were also available.

At the beginning of the business meeting, Trustee Terry Mitchell presented to Mrs. Ruby Neeley, a former board member, a resolution of recognition and appreciation for her 32 years of service as a trustee for CAEC. The Alabama State Legislature had passed the resolution praising her for the leadership she provided in the utility industry and for her unwavering loyalty and support to CAEC.



During the business meeting, Wayne Gruenloh, CPA and owner of Gruenloh and Associates of Robertsedale, Ala., presented CAEC's audit and gave the Cooperative an unmodified opinion, which is the highest opinion that can be given.

In the Board of Trustees election, Board members Patsy Holmes, Wetumpka, District 3; Van Smith, Billingsley, District 7; and Chase Riddle, Prattville, District 8, were re-elected to three-year terms.

The meeting concluded with the grand prize drawing of \$500, won by Wendell Mims of Chilton County.

Following every Annual Meeting, the Board is required to have an organizational meeting where officers are elected. This year, they elected Terry Mitchell of Stewartville as Chairman of the Board; Charles Byrd of Deatsville as Vice Chairman and Mark Presnell, Sr. of Wetumpka as Secretary/Treasurer. ■

Cooperation Among Cooperatives

Official Founding Principle #6:

Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.

Cooperation is a key word for electric co-ops and a concept vital to our practice of business. Member-owned cooperatives, like CAEC, operate under seven key guidelines, including the Sixth Cooperative Principle, “Cooperation Among Cooperatives.” In short, electric cooperatives serve their members best by working together—because there is power in numbers.

At the most basic level, electric cooperatives know how to collaborate for the greater good, either by supporting one another in times of crisis or by partnering on projects. Alabama is part of a nationwide network of nearly 1,000 electric cooperatives from around the coun-

try that come together to assist each other in times of calamity. If a storm or other disaster hits one of our sister co-ops, we offer whatever help we can to ensure service restoration to their members as quickly as possible. Likewise, if we need assistance, our electric co-op “family” will be here for us. Electric co-ops also partner with credit unions, food and housing co-ops and others to bring critical services to rural residents and businesses throughout the country. We collaborate with local cooperatives to better serve you, our members and communities, with programs such as safety education and exhibits that highlight products and services.

When it comes to local and statewide issues, electric co-ops in Alabama combine forces through the Alabama Rural Electric Association (AREA), our statewide association. Small organizations such as electric co-ops use the power of an alliance; we share training resources and expertise to grow in influence, efficiency and economy. CAEC is part of a network in the utility industry, and when state and/or federal issues arise, there is expertise from electric cooperative advocacy organizations such as the Cooperative Action Network (CAN). By providing tools and multimedia information, the CAN website helps cooperatives communicate vital background information to its members on critical industry issues. In addition, the Action Committee for Rural Electrification (ACRE) represents the legislative and regulatory interests of the nation’s not-for-profit electric cooperative systems and their 42 million consumers living in rural, suburban and urban areas. The power of numbers gives us a louder voice at the state and national capitols when legislators make decisions that affect our consumers.



Co-op trucks from many states lined up to help a sister cooperative restore power to the members.

try that come together to assist each other in times of calamity. If a storm or other disaster hits one of our sister co-ops, we offer whatever help we can to ensure



Value of **Membership**

Nationally, we collaborate with other electric co-ops through the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), a service organization representing more than 900 consumer-owned, not-for-profit electric coop-

Energy extends the benefits of cooperation even further and delivers greater value to you, our member, through programs such as the Co-op Connections Card, which offers local and national discounts on goods, services and prescriptions.



NRECA Legislative Conference

Assisting other cooperatives is not limited to our U.S. borders. NRECA's International program provides people in developing countries with access to safe, reliable and affordable electricity. As part of the NRECA International Program, the International Foundation recruits U.S. co-op employees to volunteer for two weeks at a time to help build and expand electric distribution systems in rural areas of Third World countries, thereby providing electricity to people who have never had it.

eratives, public power districts and public utility districts in the United States. NRECA presents a unified consumer voice, particularly through our grassroots campaigns, a movement among electric co-ops and their members urging lawmakers to create legislation that's in the best interest of electric co-op members. And through NRECA's Cooperative Research Network, we receive information about new technologies that can help us control costs, improve efficiency and deliver superior service to you.

We also belong to Touchstone Energy Cooperative, a nationwide alliance of more than 750 electric cooperatives which exemplifies consistent standards of excellence and quality. Member-owned electric cooperatives that have become a part of this national organization have pledged adherence to Touchstone Energy's high standards of service such as integrity, accountability, innovation and a longstanding commitment to the communities they serve. Touchstone Energy cooperatives in 46 states deliver energy and energy solutions to more than 40 million members each day. Our participation in Touchstone



CAEC employees volunteered in the NRECA International Program for two weeks in Puerto Barrios, Guatemala.

This cooperation among cooperatives continues today, not only with co-ops directly related to the provision of electricity but in other sectors as well. By pooling our resources and working collectively, we offer you, our member, better value through reliable, affordable and quality service. ■



HALLOWEEN ELECTRICAL SAFETY

The National Retail Federation reports Halloween to be almost as popular as Christmas when it comes to consumers displaying indoor and outdoor decorations. When you welcome trick-or-treaters to your doorstep, make sure your property is a safe place for the little ballerinas, monsters and superheroes. Listed below are some electrical safety tips geared specifically for Halloween safety.

- Before decorating, count the number of outlets available and take note of where they are located so you can plan your displays accordingly. This will allow for a safe distribution of use among different outlets and prevent you from having strings or lights stretching across the floor or yard.
- For outdoor displays, only use decorations that are labeled for outdoor use. Always use safety approved electrical lights and decorations. Check for approval by independent testing laboratories such as UL, ETL-SEMKO or CSA.
- Only plug outdoor decorations into ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) protected outlets to prevent electric shock.
- Don't overload your outlets or cords —check your electrical cords to be sure you are not exceeding the maximum load.
- Avoid attaching lights or cords to metal objects. This can be an electrical shock hazard.

- Place all light strings and cords out of walkways, stairways, doorways and high traffic areas. This will prevent tripping hazards or curious pets from getting injured.
- Inspect your electrical wires for bare spots, cracks or frays as they could cause a fire or electrical shock.
- Never nail or staple light strings or extension cords. This can damage or degrade the cord's insulation and result in a fire and/or an electric shock.
- Turn off all lights and electrical decorations when you are leaving your home or going to sleep.

Make sure your home is the right kind of scary this Halloween with these electrical safety tips. When you know you are doing everything to protect your home, your family and the ghosts and goblins visiting you on Halloween night, you can relax and enjoy the festivities. ■





Recipe for *Efficiency* from CAEC

Ever wonder how much your attic entrance costs you each month in regard to your cooling and heating bills? The attic door can be one of the main areas of air infiltration and heat gain/loss in your home due to a lack of insulation and air sealing, essentially making it similar to having an open door to the outside.

Insulating your attic door

You can insulate the attic door in multiple ways. The example below will show you how to build an encapsulated box. The materials are inexpensive (under \$50), widely available, easy to work with and the project takes about 30 minutes.

Ingredients (supplies):

Foam Board
Foil Tape
Caulk/Foam

Utensils (tools):

Utility Knife
Measuring Tape

Directions:

Step 1: Measure the length, width and height of your attic access from inside your attic. You will need to measure high enough that the attic ladder can fit inside the box. Be sure to mark the foam board with your recorded measurements.



Step 3: Tape pieces together with foil tape.

Step 4: Seal any gaps with caulk or foam. (Tip: If the hole is bigger than your thumb, use foam).



Step 2: Cut foam board at measured lengths. Apply safety precautions when utilizing the utility knife, such as cutting from your body instead of drawing the knife towards you. Verify the pieces will fit over the attic door when closed before attaching the pieces.



Step 5: Place box over attic door and verify the door will close without moving the box.

This is a relatively low-cost, simple and quick home efficiency project that can make a big difference in the comfort of your home.

CAEC offices will be closed Oct. 12 for Columbus Day

Convenience starts here.



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You can find the app via a link on our website (www.caec.coop) or search for "CAEC" in your mobile app store.