THIS MONTH, I FOUND SOME INSIGHT TO SHARE FROM CO-OP HISTORIAN TED CASE, who is the executive director of the Oregon Rural Electric Cooperative Association. His books, *Power Plays* and *Poles, Wires and War*, describe the effect electric co-ops have had on national policy since the 1930s. Case recently talked with Paul Wesslund from the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association about what the history of electric co-ops means for members.

Q: Has researching these books changed your view of electric co-ops?
Case: I have a greater appreciation. The core values of what co-ops do are the same as in 1936 when the Rural Electrification Act became law.

Q: What are those values?
Case: I think of one particular co-op: It has several thousand people who come to the office to pay their bills. They don’t need to do that—it’s a lot easier to just toss the bill in the mail or pay online. But they go in because the co-op has this value beyond just electric service. It really is the center of everything in the town and the economic driver. The co-op is not just a power company; it’s the center of their world.

Q: Does that kind of relationship really apply in this increasingly high-tech world in a high-tech industry?
Case: As I travel the country, I’m blown away by the technical acumen and the vision and the strategic abilities of co-op leaders to see into the future. Some electric co-ops are considering providing broadband internet connections at a time when nobody else will do it.

Q: Can a co-op be successful providing technologies as different as electricity and broadband?
Case: Co-ops will embrace new technologies when that’s what their members want. Co-ops have never strayed from that business model that listens and responds to their members, their customers, their owners.

Q: How does that business model relate to the basic mission of keeping electricity reliable and affordable?
Case: Co-ops are very competitive, in rates, service and reliability. It comes back to that local connection. Members know the folks who work at the co-op and the directors. There’s terrific customer service getting the lights back on after an outage.

Q: One characteristic of electric co-ops is their nonprofit nature. How does that affect the members?
Case: A lot. Increasingly, institutions have fallen from grace because everybody believes there’s this profit motive that’s just out to milk you, and there’s such a lack of trust in a lot of the large institutions. Being a nonprofit is an attractive feature that means decisions are based on the best interests of the co-op and the consumer.

Q: So what should members know about their electric co-op?
Case: That they have the ability to influence their co-op more than they ever imagined. Directors are really interested in hearing from folks. When somebody at a co-op annual meeting has a point to make, the boards take it seriously. The co-op’s management takes it seriously. That’s the value.
CCEC Employees Recognized

95 years of combined service

From left: Meter Assistant/Mapping Tech Sage Brooks, 5 years; Apprentice Lineman Trent Smith, 5 years; Equipment Operator Mike Curry, 35 years; First-Class Lineman Mark Kaczyk, 25 years; Equipment Operator Kolton Titsworth, 5 years. Not pictured is First-Class Lineman Mark Garrett, 20 years.

At a December 21, 2017, meeting, Coleman County Electric Cooperative honored employees for their years of service. Those reaching a milestone in their careers include Meter Assistant/Mapping Tech Sage Brooks, 5 years; Equipment Operator Mike Curry, 35 years; First-Class Lineman Mark Garrett, 20 years; Apprentice Lineman Trent Smith, 5 years; Equipment Operator Kolton Titsworth, 5 years; and First-Class Lineman Mark Kaczyk, 25 years. Congratulations to those receiving awards this year! Thank you for your hard work and for being dedicated employees of your member-owned electric cooperative.

Power Tip Consider insulating your hot water pipes. Doing so can reduce heat loss, allow you to lower the temperature setting and save an additional 3–4 percent per year on water heating.