Back to School

Continually learning to improve service for members

MESSAGE FROM
GENERAL MANAGER CLINT GARDNER

IT’S A NEW SCHOOL YEAR, AND KIDS OF ALL AGES ARE STARTING A fresh year of learning. From kindergarten through college, students attend school to gain knowledge to prepare them for the future. In a similar vein, Coleman County Electric Cooperative is continually learning to incorporate new technologies that improve electric service, reliability and safety—enhancing quality of life for the members we serve.

Innovations in technology and energy sources are fueling demand for more options. On the consumer front, people are looking for more ways to manage their energy use with smart technologies. Consumers expect more convenient payment methods—whether it’s bills that are automatically deducted, prepaid or paid online.

Technology Improves Efficiency

Automated meter reading collects energy consumption data and transfers it from the electric meter to the co-op. Collecting information remotely greatly enhances our system’s efficiency, helps control costs and improves work processes.

Advanced metering infrastructure is similar to AMR but more advanced. This system includes integrated smart meters, communications networks and data management systems that enable two-way communication between co-ops and members. In the event of an outage, this system provides a means to verify where power is out and that it has been restored.

One of the biggest benefits of AMI is pinpointing outage locations, which helps reduce risk for crews out in the field during severe weather events.

Energy for the Future

Consumer interest in green energy sources and renewables is at an all-time high. In Texas, increasingly efficient methods for capturing solar and wind energy are paving the way for new methods of generating and using electricity. That’s why we continue to research how best to adjust our energy mix.

Whether it’s examining green energy options or exploring how emerging technologies can better serve our members, for Coleman County EC, our schooling never ends. We continue to learn from our members about their priorities, and we will continue to research issues so that we can better serve you, now and in the future.

Top 5 Ways To Boost Outdoor Efficiency

COULD YOUR GARAGE, SHED, BARN OR other outdoor building use an energy efficiency boost? Try these tips to save energy and money:

1. The same rules apply for outdoor buildings as houses: Add insulation, install energy-efficient windows and seal ductwork.
2. Unplug power tools and battery chargers at the end of the season.
3. Install an insulated door and seal the sides and bottom to reduce air leaks.
4. Install motion sensors on outdoor lights.
5. Look into LED retrofit kits for outdoor security lights. They cost more upfront, but payback takes five to 10 years, and LEDs can last up to 20 years.

Power Tip

Insulating your hot water pipes can reduce heat loss, allow you to lower the water heater temperature setting and save 3%–4% per year on water heating costs.
Surge and Protect

A POWER SURGE, OR TRANSIENT VOLTAGE, IS A SUDDEN AND UNWANTED INCREASE IN voltage that can damage, degrade or destroy sensitive electronic equipment in your home or business.

The National Electrical Manufacturers Association estimates that 60%–80% of surges are created within a building, such as when large appliances, like air conditioners, turn on and off. Far less common are surges that originate from an electric utility during power grid switching. The most powerful surges can be caused by lightning, but those are rare.

A spike in voltage can be harmful to electrical devices in your home if the increase is above a device’s intended operating voltage. This excess voltage can cause an arc of electrical current resulting in heat that damages electrical components. Repeated small-scale surges may slowly damage your electronic equipment and shorten its life span.

Surge Protection Options
Consider protecting your devices and appliances with surge protection. Several levels of protection are available to consumers.

Point-of-use surge protectors protect only the items that are directly plugged into the device. They do not suppress or arrest a surge but divert the surge to ground. Use point-of-use surge protectors that have an indicator light or audible alarm that alerts you when the surge protector needs replacement.

Service entrance surge protection devices are mounted in or on your main electrical panel or at the base of the electric meter and provide protection for your entire electrical system. These devices cover components that cannot be connected to a point-of-use device, such as outlets and light switches.

Power strips do NOT provide surge protection. Be sure you are relying on the appropriate device for protection. And remember, power strips and surge suppressors don’t provide more power to a location, only more access to the same limited capacity of the circuit into which it is connected. Be careful not to overload the circuit.

Unfortunately, no surge protection device can handle a direct lightning strike. The best way to gird against surges caused by storms is to unplug devices.
Ice Cream, Co-op Business Bring Members to Coleman County EC Annual Meeting

NELLEFEVERE DIDN'T NEED CONVINCING TO ATTEND COLEMAN County Electric Cooperative’s 81st annual meeting July 19. “Well, did you know they’re serving homemade ice cream?” her friend asked over lunch earlier that day. Lefevere, who grew up in the area and has been a longtime attendee, already had the answer. “You know, they serve ice cream every year,” she said.

The Coleman High School cafeteria—and a bowl of ice cream, a reprieve from the afternoon heat—was Lefevere’s first stop. The ice cream social, courtesy of local 4-H members, remains a fixture at the CCEC annual meeting. In the week leading up to the meeting, 4-H students and their sponsors churn up batches upon batches of homemade ice cream, spanning an impressive range of flavors, to serve to the members of Coleman County EC.

This year, it was easy to hear the buzz over the crowd favorite: strawberry banana nut. “Call Blue Bell right now!” one member cheerfully exclaimed. “This is a hit.”

Despite the tastiness of the frozen treat, Lefevere doesn’t attend the annual meeting solely for the ice cream. Like many members, she likes to stay in the loop on co-op business and catch up with friends. After socializing in the cafeteria, she and other members filed into the nearby auditorium, where the meeting was held.
Once inside, members visited booths to learn about useful information and services, such as free blood pressure tests provided by Coleman County Medical Center.

With goodies from the exhibit show in hand, members made their way into the auditorium, guided by the cool sounds of country musician George Allison. His acoustic stylings entertained the crowd until it was time to start the meeting, which opened with the national anthem sung by the local Methodist women’s choir.

The first item on the agenda for the business meeting was the co-op’s financial report. The co-op has seen another fruitful year, according to David Wright, CCEC board secretary-treasurer. “Coleman County Electric Cooperative is in very good financial condition,” he said, “and the kilowatt-hour sales increased for 2018 by approximately 14.5 million kWh and an increase in revenue of $770,000.”

This increase in power usage gave CCEC an operating margin at the end of the year of more than $1.5 million, leading the board to return capital credits to the membership. This year, including capital credits from Golden Spread Electric Cooperative, which generates the electricity that CCEC distributes, the co-op is returning to members a total of $710,239.77.

The prosperous year was not without its share of challenges, said Bob Fuchs, the board’s president. CCEC received a cease-and-desist order from the Public Utility Commission of Texas that was filed by the city of Coleman. After 20 months of CCEC leadership defending the co-op’s right to serve, the city’s request was declined in a unanimous decision by the PUCT—a significant win for Coleman County EC and all electric cooperatives across Texas.

Weather posed another big challenge over the past year. In May, extreme storms and tornadoes caused major outages for CCEC members. “Our employees worked tirelessly to restore power across Runnels and Coleman counties and replaced in excess of 120 poles,” Fuchs said. “We had an overwhelming support throughout this tragic time as crews from Lyntegar...
Electric Co-op aided our line crews in the field. We also had an outpouring of support from our communities and members, which touched each one of us.”

Fuchs invited all linemen to come up to the front to be recognized. They received a standing ovation from the meeting’s attendees.

With increasing load demands, CCEC continually implements new technologies in order to continue providing the most affordable and reliable electricity possible. The co-op’s advanced metering infrastructure, which is nearing completion, is part of that process. “The new system will allow us to better forecast and plan for system improvements by collecting the load data on the system,” Fuchs said.

The co-op is relying more on digital mapping technology to help identify exact outage locations, Fuchs said, which minimizes the duration and inconvenience of service interruptions for members.

Mark Schwirtz, Golden Spread Electric Cooperative president and CEO, took the stage briefly to update members on where their electricity comes from. “Last year was a milestone for Golden Spread,” Schwirtz said. “Its rates were cheaper than they’ve been for 30 years due to the strategic decisions of the board of directors—two of them being Bob Fuchs and Clint Gardner.”

Schwirtz explained that current low rates result from a decision made 10 years ago to build power plants and invest in renewable energy resources as a way toward independence from investor-owned utilities.

The annual meeting is a chance for CCEC’s members to practice Democratic Member Control, one of the seven guiding principles of the cooperative business model, by voting for the co-op’s board of directors. This year, members voted to reelect incumbents Roger Kruse, who represents District 2, and Darla Wise, District 6.

Concern for Community, another cooperative principle, has always been at the top of CCEC’s list of priorities. The
co-op actively supports many charitable causes, and this past year, it successfully rolled out Operation Round Up, a community assistance program in which members can choose to round up their monthly electric bills to the next dollar. Fuchs noted that the average member contributes about $6 per year. “This is a simple and rewarding way for us to raise money for local charities, needy individuals and organizations who can use some help,” Fuchs said.

Gardner, Coleman County EC CEO and general manager, spoke about the co-op’s programs that help students. CCEC continues to support local youths with its scholarship program, which this year benefited 10 students. He also announced the participants of the 2019 Youth Tour to Washington, D.C., Bailey Kimmel and Tallye Harris.

Sadly, in late July, Harris, 16, was killed in a fatal all-terrain vehicle accident. An upcoming junior at Coleman High School, Harris’ peers knew her as a bright, sweet, caring and talented young lady who touched many lives in Coleman County—a joy to all whom she met. “She was a wonderful representative of our cooperative this summer on the Youth Tour in our nation’s capital,” Gardner said. “Our prayers go to her family, friends and community during this time and the days ahead. Tallye will be deeply missed.”

The annual meeting closed with a selection of door prizes. Kids won $20 bills, and dozens of members went home with prizes, including household appliances, coolers and gift cards. Five lucky members each won $100 in cash.

With the door prizes—as with everything Coleman County EC does—member service was at the core. “At CCEC, we continue looking for ways to better serve our members and our communities,” Fuchs said, before bidding farewell to members. “Reliability and the value of our service to you, our members, is important to us, and we will continue to strive for excellence. Thank you, again, for attending this year’s annual membership meeting and staying involved in your cooperative.”