

Making a Difference Every Day

*Your electric utility
and the neighbors
who work there
contribute to
the community*

By Pam Blair

For public power utilities and their employees, service means more than delivering electricity to customers. It means providing a “hometown touch,” offering amenities and participating in programs that enhance the lives of the people and the communities they serve.

Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative (OTEC) demonstrates its commitment to the communities it serves in a number of ways.

Renewable Energy Education

OTEC began a renewable energy education program in 2006. The goal is to help students learn about renewable energy first hand.

In 2007, OTEC installed 1-kilowatt (kW) photovoltaic (PV) electric generation systems at high schools in Baker City, Burns and Cove. Each system included an online monitoring tool that allows students to track solar energy production and correlate the data to weather conditions and the position of the sun.

In addition, OTEC supplied renewable energy education lesson plans that explain how photovoltaic panels make electricity, and the economics of installing solar generation.

Each 1 kW system placed in the schools cost about \$13,000.

“We found that some schools lightly touched on renewable energy education by trying to use solar powered calculators or hand held PV modules,” said Steve Schauer, manager of Member Services.

“However, teachers felt using those



A Midstate Electric member gets a blood pressure check during the annual meeting in La Pine, Oregon.

devices were not the most effective learning tools.”

Teachers said a 1 kW PV array and monitoring system would be an outstanding tool for students.

“OTEC is pleased to have been able to supply these PV systems to these high schools,” said Schauer. “Now, students can better learn about renewable energy—a very important energy that is produced by resources that are replenished naturally and minimize harm to our environment.”

OTEC plans to add two more solar PV educational projects in 2008.

Washington Youth Tour

OTEC selected four high school students, one from each district, to attend the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association’s Washington Youth Tour June 7-14.

A total of 1,500 students from around the United States participated in this educational youth camp.

OTEC students wrote essays stating why they would like to go to Washington, D.C.

The all-expense-paid trip gave students an opportunity to learn about the energy industry, the political process, see government in action and visit popular historical sites, includ-

ing Capitol Hill, the Library of Congress, the Smithsonian Institute, war memorials, the National Gallery of Art, and the Air and Space Museum. They also attended a legislative session and visited with Oregon’s U.S. Rep. Greg Walden and Sen. Gordon Smith.

Applications for Youth Tour 2008 are available for high school juniors at OTEC offices and from school counselors.

Harney County Fairgrounds

For some time, the Harney County Fair Board has wanted to eliminate many of the unused meters at the fairgrounds in Burns. The goal is to reduce

meter charges for meters spread throughout the fairgrounds.

The fair board has worked on this idea for some time. However, little progress has been made.

Earlier this year, OTEC heard of the concerns and stepped up, designing a system to achieve the desired result. A local electrician, OTEC and Harney County worked together to ensure the fairgrounds could take the first step in reducing monthly meter charges.

A three-phase line was brought into the grounds to feed a large transformer that provides power for the entire system. It is metered at one location. OTEC donated the hours employees spent on the project.

As funding becomes available, Harney County will install underground lines to all areas of the fairgrounds, eliminating meters in each area of the grounds.

This not only will reduce the cost to the county, but the fairgrounds will be more attractive and more suitable for growth.

Football Field Lights

With high-reaching bucket trucks, electric co-ops are sometimes asked to help with special jobs.

This summer, the co-op’s



Kent Osterberg of Blue Mountain Energy demonstrates solar panels at Burns High School. Photo by Randy Parks/Burns Times-Herald.

La Grande district was contacted by the administrator at Elgin High School, who explained that numerous light bulbs were burned out at the football field.

The fixtures are perched atop 60-foot poles. OTEC is the only company in town with a lift that could reach and replace these bulbs.

After receiving their request for help, Bill Neilson, the co-op's La Grande operations superintendent, organized an OTEC crew and bucket truck to complete the job.

Because line crews were busy with new line extensions and power line maintenance, the line workers offered to complete the job after work. One evening, before the start of football season, OTEC employees replaced 120 light bulbs.

Scholarship Program

OTEC offers 20 \$2,000 educational scholarships for consumers and high school seniors. Applications are available at OTEC offices or from high school counselors.

What Others Are Doing

Here are ways other utilities contribute to their communities.

Blachly-Lane Electric Cooperative, Eugene, Oregon—

The co-op helped a nearby school district served by an investor-owned utility repair a failed underground electrical cable that left the high school football field lights inoperable.

Central Electric Cooperative, Redmond, Oregon—Employees volunteer with the Patriot Guard Riders, which attends the funerals of American soldiers as invited guests of the family, shielding mourners from interruptions by protestors.

Columbia Basin Electric Cooperative, Heppner, Oregon—The co-op helped wire a scoreboard for a local school's football field.

Columbia Power Cooperative, Monument, Oregon—The co-op offers \$2,000 in scholarships for continuing education for high school students and regularly contributes to EMT volunteers.

Harney Electric Cooperative,

Burns, Oregon—Employees help each year with a Halloween parade and a breakfast with Santa. An employee volunteers as a coach for the Burns High School football team.

Lane Electric, Eugene, Oregon—The co-op hosts a golf tournament to benefit cancer research and donates to a middle school Solar Car Challenge.

Midstate Electric, La Pine, Oregon—As part of the annual meeting, the co-op provided health screening and healthy lifestyle tips. The co-op provided monetary donations of more than \$30,000 for various community projects.

Northern Lights Inc., Sagle, Idaho—The co-op donated money so the food bank could buy a forklift.

West Oregon Electric Cooperative, Vernonia, Oregon—The co-op gave out three scholarships to members interested in pursuing careers as lineworkers. Employees participated in two garage sales, raising money for the co-op's energy assistance program. ■