

Customer Satisfaction Coupled with Low Cost, Reliable Service

When it comes to customer satisfaction, electric cooperatives continue to outscore the rest of the utility industry. This recently was confirmed by an American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) survey. In this survey, results for the second quarter of 2007 give Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives a score of 81 and the utility industry, as a whole, a score of 72. This nine-point gap between the scores has been consistent for the past several years, shifting occasionally by no more than two points.

Wood County Electric Cooperative, a Touchstone Energy Partner, had a remarkable score, 88.7. The cooperative, in addition to scoring 7.7 points higher than the cooperative average, also received high marks for exceeding expectations. Member-customers rated WCEC employees highest on knowledge and competency and ethical business practices, which both scored above 90.

These scores are impressive as one considers where WCEC ranks in other areas when compared against 818 other cooperatives in the nation. The National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation (CFC) recently conducted a study and came up with the following numbers:

In average total number of consumers served, WCEC ranked 16th in Texas and 156th in the nation. In millions of kilowatts sold, WCEC comes in at No. 18 in the state and No. 170 in the nation. The CFC, in addition to gathering statistics on the numbers of consumers and sales numbers, also calculated performance. Another impressive number WCEC is proud of is what is called “onages,” or the per-

centage of time the power is on. WCEC’s score—99.98. That equates to an outage hour per consumer (OHPC) average of 1.63 per year. Other consumers in Texas averaged 2.33 OHPC, with the U.S. average at 3.

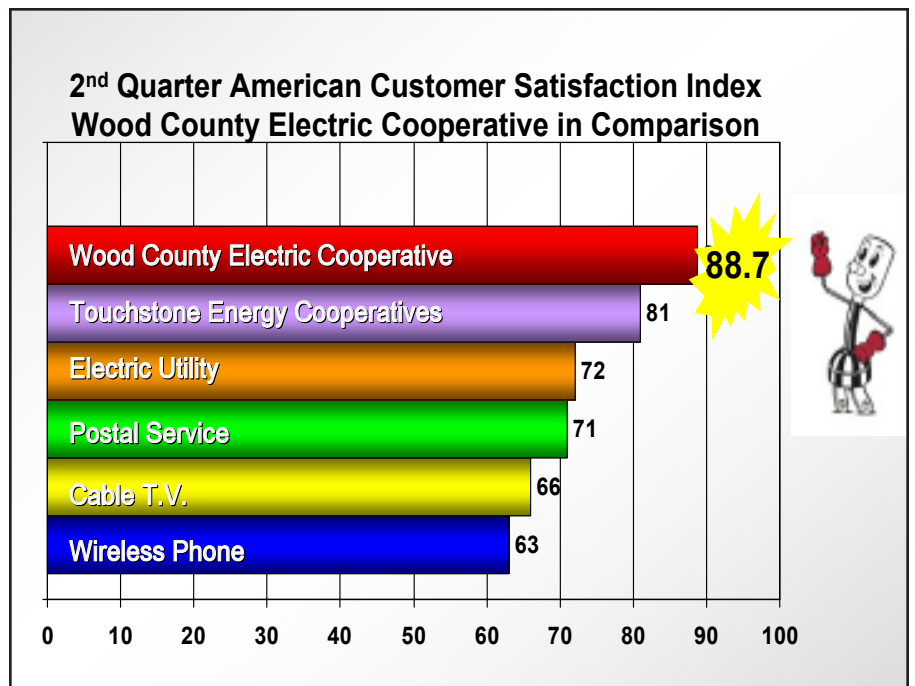
cost of generating electricity. However, WCEC has been able to hold rates stable for the past few years, and our current retail price remains lower than both the state and national average. For example, based on the June 2007

report from the U.S. Government’s Energy Information Administration, the average retail price of electricity to Texas customers was 12.74 cents per kilowatt-hour. The U.S. average was 11.07. WCEC residential consumers, on average, paid 9.4 cents.

These numbers are something we are proud to share because they are good indicators of our commitment to provide reliable service at reasonable rates. We hope you think so, too.

Rising fuel costs have had a significant effect nationwide on the cost of generating electricity. However, WCEC has been able to hold rates stable for the past few years, and our current retail price remains lower than both the state and national average.

Although customer service and reliability are important, at WCEC we also realize the effect our rates have on our members. Rising fuel costs have had a significant effect nationwide on the



Southern Hospitality, Finely Baked

With Sugar ... or Meringue ... or Icing on Top

From the moment they pass under the angels framing the front door, visitors to the Sweete Shoppe Bakery and Deli in Mount Vernon are greeted with scents of homemade pies, cakes, pastries, candy and fresh-made bread. Monday through Saturday, this restaurant has become a meeting place for locals and a sort of mecca for some who journey there to taste homespun food crafted with the care of yesterday. Many groups meet at the restaurant, from Red Hatters to Sunday school classes.

Rita Hughes, the shop's owner, started humbly in 1995 when her children entered their teen years. The Sweete Shoppe was born in a small add-on kitchen attached to the rear of the family home. As the name reflects, the focus was primarily on sweets, in the form of Southern-style homemade candies and what is still her signature today, mountainously fluffy meringue-topped pies with flaky homemade crusts.

Soon, the demand for Rita's baked goods quickly surpassed the capabilities of her starter business, so she opened a storefront kitchen on Mount Vernon's town square. The larger setting with upgraded equipment allowed Rita to also showcase her homemade breads, and she added

breakfast and lunch service. The shop began to pick up a brisk catering business, so Rita hired four employees to help her not only with catering for businesses, parties and weddings, but also to serve walk-in customers. In no time at all, the business had outgrown the little shop on the square.

The present day Sweete Shoppe, now with six full-time employees and still in Mount Vernon, is located off Interstate 30. The parking lot is spacious for customers who want to grab to-go orders, and the dining room has swelled to a 70-seat lunch capacity and can seat 150 for special occasions. It also has a private room for group luncheons that will seat 25 to 30.

There is an old-fashioned lunch counter that frames a view of sweet Southern legends, including the can't-live-without standards such as pecan and buttermilk pies and the lovely peaked meringues of chocolate and coconut pies. Any given noontime, a good-natured crowd lines up to put in requests for deli-style sandwiches made to order with a choice of homemade breads. There is always a homemade soup, and maybe a quiche or casserole special. But—ask anybody—as delightful and memorable as the lunch fare is, what they really come for is the pie.

When asked about her success, Rita points everywhere else but to herself. First, she gives credit to her mother, Ruth Averitt, saying, "My mom is the backbone of all of my work." And then, she follows up by saying, "I could not have done all of this without my family, employees and God." She also reveals, with a little smile, where a few of her trade secrets came from. The legendary made-in-the-pan pie crust comes from



Festive decorations announce the upcoming holiday season as customers enjoy lunch. The old-fashioned counter in the rear is where customers decide whether dessert will be chocolate, coconut or something equally delightful. Decisions, decisions.

her grandmother-in-law's recipe, while her fluffy meringue is the invention of a favorite great aunt. But, she hints with a gleam, there may be a few of her own secrets thrown in here or there.

Beyond her secrets, Rita has been known to share a few recipes and sweetly giggles when she recalls people telling her that their attempts did not measure up. She laughingly says it must be her angels that give her creations that special something.

Rita and the rest of her staff will likely need that extra help from above, as the busiest time of the year is coming. If it's anything like past years, there will be up to 15,000 hand-decorated holiday cookies flying out the door, in addition to all of the pies and cakes that will grace family tables across East Texas. Future plans should keep them even busier, as the website and mail-order business is launched.

For a little taste of heaven, visit the Sweete Shoppe Bakery and Deli at 604 N. I-30 Service Rd. or online (www.sweeteshoppe.com), a member of Wood County Electric Cooperative.



Amid the hustle and bustle of the noon rush, the ladies of the Sweete Shoppe, from left, Adrienne Alonso, Sheree Harris, Rachel Dunham, Proprietor and "Mother of Chocolate Pies" Rita Hughes, Krystal Fulmar and Kara Novell, take a quick break to pose with some of their famous creations.