

Your Money Stays at Home



**MESSAGE
FROM
MANAGER
DEBBIE
ROBINSON**

Who owns your electricity provider? If you're a member of Wood County Electric Cooperative (WCEC), you can find the answer by looking in the mirror.

At WCEC, like any other cooperative across the country, you, the members, are the owners. The equipment and assets that bring power to your home are owned collectively by all members. A portion of the bill you pay each month goes into building the



Infrastructure built by your electric cooperative benefits your local community.

infrastructure—the poles, the wires and the substations—that brings you a steady supply of electricity.

The investments WCEC makes in infrastructure add to both the integrity of our system and the development of our communities, while bringing power to nine East Texas counties.

In our daily operations, when availability allows, we purchase locally and from within the state, pouring back into this community about \$7.2 million annually for goods and services.

Your payments do more than build lines, buy equipment and pay for wholesale electricity. They also pay the salaries of our hard-working employees who live right here in our communities. These workers, in turn, spend their salaries at local businesses, spreading that money around and helping our economy stay healthy. Of note, 67 cents out of every dollar members spend with WCEC goes directly to pay power costs. Of the rest, 22 cents goes toward operations and margins, while the remaining 11 cents is for fixed costs.

Any funds left over after bills and salaries have been paid, infrastructure built and lenders paid, go into each member's capital credit account. Then, at a time when our board of directors deems prudent, the capital credits can be paid out in the form of a check.

The amount each person receives is based on his or her past patronage—the amount of electricity used. This year, the board of directors has decreed that \$1.5 million in capital credits will be returned to members, and checks will go out this month.

Capital credit refunds are to our members what dividends are to stockholders in for-profit companies. Only we don't aim to make a profit. Our goal is to provide you with electricity at a price that is as close to cost as possible. That way, more of your money stays in your pocket.

You are not paying your electric bill to a big, profit-making company. You are receiving a vital resource, electricity, and you are getting it from a business where your friends and neighbors are working to provide you with the highest level of service they can while keeping your costs as low as possible.

And that's the cooperative difference.

SAVE 7-UP FOR HOLIDAY DRINKS

You've added bleach, aspirin, soda, syrup or sugar to your Christmas tree's water to help the evergreen last longer. Did they work?

Tree experts say they don't.

It seems like they would: The common blend of 7-UP and bleach seems like it would, indeed, make the tree's water more acidic and help the tree take in more moisture and food. The sugar in the soda should help feed the tree. The disinfectant in the bleach should prevent mold, fungi and algae from forming, right?

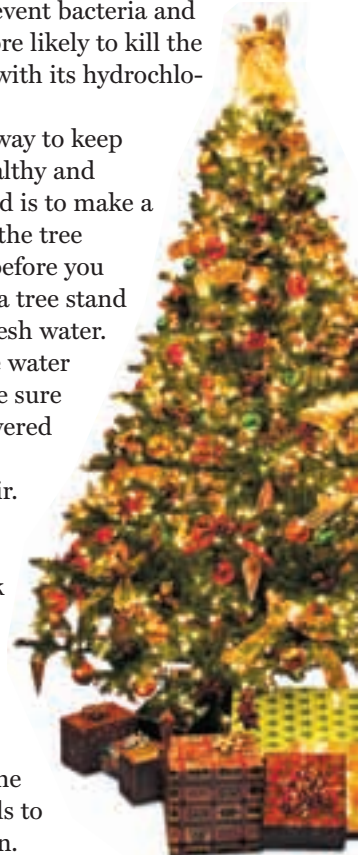
So it seems. Yet it's an urban myth, and it's not true.

Adding acidity to the water doesn't help the tree take in moisture. Sugar does act as a nutrient, but the tree doesn't need food. It just needs water. And sugar can cause bacteria to grow in the water and make it smell bad.

Although some believe bleach may help prevent bacteria and mold, it's more likely to kill the plant tissue with its hydrochloric acid.

The best way to keep your tree healthy and smelling good is to make a fresh cut on the tree trunk right before you dunk it into a tree stand filled with fresh water.

Check the water daily to make sure the cut is covered and never exposed to air. Once it's exposed to air, the trunk will start forming a cap that will prevent the tree from soaking up the water it needs to last all season.



Holiday Conservation

The house with the most lights used to be the “best.” But times have changed and so have Christmas lights. Here are some great ways to display festive decorations without feeling “bah humbug” about your electric bill.

- If you’re buying new Christmas lights, there are many new energy-efficient lights available, often at a comparable price. These energy-efficient bulbs deliver the same amount of light as their higher-wattage counterparts, at lower cost, as well as being easier on the environment.

They also give off less heat, making your lights safer. A 100 mini-light string will typically use less than 20 watts.

- For maximum energy savings, try new LED Christmas lights. LED (Light Emitting Diode) Christmas lights use up to 90 percent less energy than larger, traditional Christmas

bulbs and last up to 100,000 hours when used indoors. (Most can also be used outdoors—check the manufacturer’s instructions). LED lights also emit significantly less heat than conventional lights.

As an added bonus, if one of the LED lights burns out, the rest of the strand will stay lit.

- Over a 30-day period at Christmas, allowing for lights to be on for eight hours a day, three sets of 100 mini-lights would cost half as much to burn as a similar number of traditional lights.

- To save energy and money, use fewer light strands on your tree. The



more lights you use, the more power you’ll use. But whether you use only one light string or many, you’ll be rewarded with a lower power bill if you use energy-efficient lights.

Portable Generator Safety

During wintry periods when the potential for electrical outages increases, portable generators are used more often. These generators are extremely useful anytime temporary or remote electricity is needed, but they can be hazardous when caution is not exercised.

One of the primary hazards to avoid when using a generator is the generator “backfeeding” power into the electric system. Never try to power the house by connecting directly to household wiring and then opening the household circuits. This is an extremely dangerous practice that can present electrocution risks to cooperative utility workers as well as neighbors served by the same transformer. What’s more, it’s illegal.

Instead, plug appliances into the generator directly through a properly sized UL-Listed three-wire electrical

cord rated for outdoor use. Or, if preferred, use a double-pole/double-throw transfer switch installed by a qualified electrician. These should then be inspected and approved by the cooperative to ensure safety.

Keep in mind these other safety tips when using a generator:

- Never use a generator indoors or in an attached garage. Place the generator in a well-ventilated area away from home air intakes. Exhaust fumes contain carbon monoxide, which can prove fatal when inhaled.

- Protect generators from rainfall and other moisture sources to avoid electrocution. When operating, keep your hands dry and stand in a dry place.

- Keep the generator unit clean and in good running order. Dust and dirt accumulations can cause overheating.

- To prevent electrical shock, make sure the generator is properly

grounded by following instructions from the manufacturer’s manual.

- Turn the engine off and allow it to cool before adding fuel. Have an ABC-rated fire extinguisher in the immediate vicinity.

- Do not tamper with the factory-set engine speed settings.

- Do not operate appliances and equipment with loads greater than the output rating of the generator.

- Turn off or disconnect all appliances and lights before operating the generator. Once the generator is running, turn these on one at a time to avoid overloading the unit. Don’t forget to allow for the extra start-up power required for some equipment. And, before turning the generator off, be sure to turn off all the lights and appliances.

- Keep children away from portable electric generators at all times.

If the Trees Could Talk

If the pines in East Texas COULD whisper, they'd likely tell about a 50-acre resort campground, nestled in the Red Springs community just on the edge of Tyler. They'd say, "Come one, come all. We have a spot for just about anyone's style of camping. And it's here where relaxation and recre-

ation rule." And it would be true.

Rhonda and Larry Brown, two of the resort's full-time employees and residents, will tell you the same thing. And they should know, as both first came to Whispering Pines RV & Cabin Resort as guests. Larry adopted it as home in 1999, and in 2003, owners

and longtime friends Randy and Sheri Smith offered him a full-time job. In 2005, Rhonda arrived in a little less relaxing manner—to escape the after-effects of Hurricane Rita and to be close to medical care in Tyler. Here she met Larry, and about a year later, they were married. Rhonda says, "I fell in love with a husband, and I fell in love with Whispering Pines, too!"

The campground has 140 sites for guests to bring their own RVs, with 40 of those extended-stay sites. If you don't have your own RV but would like the experience, there are 14 rental trailers. For those wanting a little bit more luxury, there are 15 fully furnished cabins in a mix of styles. For the more rustic and adventurous at heart, there is an area near the banks of a pond to pitch tents and build campfires. While these folks enjoy the full outdoor experience, cooking by campfire and sleeping under the stars, the nearby shower houses and laundry rooms add an appreciated level of comfort.

The expansive and picturesque pond is near the back end of the property surrounded by nature trails and heavy woods. It's specially designed and reserved for fishing and is stocked with catfish, bass and perch. If swimming is the desired activity, there are two salt-water pools just for that. The kid-friendly family pool has some nifty water features, and then there is the more serene adults-only pool with an accompanying hot tub. These are both near the snack bar, which operates on weekends.

Looking for something to do after an afternoon of swimming and fishing? There is no shortage of activities for any level of physical exertion. Available without charge to guests are shuffleboard, tennis, horseshoes, bocce ball, basketball, volleyball, croquet, pingpong and miniature golf. There's also a playground for the youngest set. For nominal charges, there are golf carts for touring the



TOP: One of the newest fully furnished loft cabins at Whispering Pines Resort rests under a canopy of trees. It boasts cathedral windows, as well as a deck, for guests to enjoy the serene water view from inside or out. **BOTTOM:** Rhonda Brown, standing, head of house-keeping at Whispering Pines Resort, enjoys some good-natured chitchat with guests who have congregated poolside to while away a bit of a recent afternoon.

extensive property as well as bicycles. And, in the well-stocked gift shop, there's a current selection of DVDs for rent and an array of snacks and cold drinks. What's more, a pizza parlor is set to open in the spring.

Like a landlubber's cruise ship, the resort is also chock-full of planned activities, with a themed event just about every weekend. Activities run the gamut and are inclusive of just about any style. For example, there's a celebration of chocolate that includes cookie stacking, pie eating, taste tests and a chocolate pudding tug-of-war slip-and-slide. There is the more flamboyant pink flamingo weekend, a patriotic Armed Forces weekend, and even a weekend that harkens back to the Renaissance.

Of the resort, Rhonda Brown says, "We have a lot to offer, whether a guest is young or young at heart." For example, there is wireless Internet for those who need to stay connected and five large meeting rooms with kitchens. One of these rooms has a big-screen TV, and guests are welcome to hook up their own gaming systems. These rooms, in addition to hosting RV rallies, are also ideal for family reunions or group picnics, of which the resort is booking more often.

Larry Brown, the head of maintenance, has been kept busy this past year with many of the modernizations and new construction taking place at the resort.

To do this, he says, on occasion he's had to consult with the engineers at Wood County Electric Cooperative, which serves the resort. Of the experience, he said, "They have worked with us to preserve nature while we were under new construction." And that really is the whole point of the place: immersion in the natural beauty of East Texas while relaxing, refreshing and recreating, with a few modern conveniences to boot.

The resort's motto captures the spirit of Whispering Pines perfectly, in this form:

"Take nothing but pictures, waste nothing but time, leave nothing but footprints!"



**Best Wishes for a
Joyful Holiday Season
from Wood County
Electric Cooperative**