



## Men of Steel

**A**s AMEGA West General Manager Tommy Smith explains it, Warren Woodcock was the man who founded a little machine shop in the Piney Woods of Winona on the outskirts of Tyler. At that time, it's probable that Woodcock did not have an inkling that the future technological advances in the machine shop industry would come so far or that his shop would become so sophisticated. But now, from the foundation that he initially laid and through various partnerships, mergers and acquisitions, AMEGA West has now become a Carpenter Technology Corporation. And the multimillion-dollar business tucked into a rural nook of East Texas is booming.

Providing background, Smith says that Woodcock ran a very successful small machine shop for many years, and then eventually sold it to another business. When the economy and new construction flattened, the business lost viability. As the founder, Woodcock could not let that happen, so he bought the shop back and started another business with five others. Over time, they built the business back up and regained a reputation for quality work. In 2007, Reddy Godula, who had worked for Woodcock in the 1990s, joined the team. And, Smith says, that's when things really took off.

Since the '90s, Godula, an engineer, (and now AMEGA West president) had progressed through his career working with various companies across the United States and world. He'd attained extensive knowledge and contacts in the oil field business, the target market for AMEGA West prod-

ucts. Products sold and leased by AMEGA are mostly for what Smith calls "down-hole" use, an oil industry term meaning they are used in the operation of directional drilling and subterranean work. Therefore, these products must be machined and manufactured to exacting and precise standards. That's what the company does.

With attention to detail, and Godula's leadership, in just a few short years AMEGA West has become a leading manufacturer of drilling equipment including drill collars, stabilizers and other tools used for directional drilling. The company has also become a highly regarded equipment rental source with an extremely well-positioned rental fleet offering quick response times. Smith says it's hard to believe how the company has grown in such a short time and indicates it's all been possible because of the great reputation and respect that Godula and Woodcock have in the industry, and because of the team of dedicated employees who take pride in craftsmanship and quality.

In January 2011, this growing reputation led manufacturing giant Carpenter Technology with facilities throughout the United States, Europe and Asia to acquire AMEGA West. Carpenter Technology is globally known for stainless steel and specialty alloys, tool steels and titanium used in many applications across a spectrum of industries including automotive, aerospace, consumer, energy, defense, industrial and medical.

Carpenter is also celebrated for embracing best-in-class

**TOP: General Manager Tommy Smith of AMEGA West, second from right, works alongside some of the most talented machinist and craftsmen in the industry. From left are Terry Warnell, Troy Smith, Jay Rozell, Tommy Smith and Eddie Garza.**

## WOOD COUNTY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

manufacturing practices, and Smith says that the benefits of the Carpenter acquisition have been phenomenal for both AMEGA West and the employees.

“They provide us anything we need to get the job done,” he said. “For example, they’ve built two new buildings within the last year. Those buildings are all climate-controlled for worker comfort and productivity during extreme winter and summer months, and they are filled with the latest state-of-the-art computer-controlled machines,” Smith said. He added that Carpenter has a very robust safety program, and while the company concentrates on getting the job done precisely and on time, worker safety remains at the forefront.

The machines themselves at AMEGA West are some of the most technologically advanced on the market. They can machine parts from 6 inches to 31 feet long using various robotics, five-axis vertical and horizontal machining centers, and more than 30 computer-controlled turning and milling machines.

Smith has worked as a machinist and programmer for more than 20 years in various shops, so he knows very well the sense of pride and job satisfaction that comes from that career. Looking back at his career he says, “It’s satisfying to be able to take the idea of an engineer as it sits on paper and turn it into an actual working part.” He also says a talented and well-trained machinist can make a very good living in a high-demand market. Accordingly, employment opportunities abound. As an example, in just a few short years, AMEGA West grew from six employees to 65, and Smith says it is not finished growing yet.

He says machining has almost become a lost art, and AMEGA West just can’t hire enough qualified machinists, so it has developed an in-house program to cultivate its own. Currently, the company has several students in an apprenticeship program that involves hands-on work in the day and classes taught at the facility on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 4 to 6 p.m. The instructor is AMEGA West employee Dean Bradshaw, who is a renowned master machinist. Classes include some math, machine language and coding classes, lessons in quality control, manual machining and CNC machining. Also, Smith says, the com-

pany is currently in discussions with Trinity Valley Community College and hopes to complete a partnership to advance the apprenticeship program even further.

For now, during the day, the apprentices receive pay and benefits as they learn from experienced machinists who help the students with setups until the student has the skill and knowledge to program, set the material up and machine by themselves. Of the work environment, Smith says, “The older, more experienced guys love to teach, and the younger guys soak it up.”

Currently, AMEGA West is running two shifts, and Smith says the first shift is about 90 percent staffed, and the second shift is only 30 percent filled. He says there is plenty of work, and the current employee is expected to work 104½ hours every two weeks. Employees work 9½-hour shifts for six days one week, and then five days the next week. That schedule gives employees every other Saturday off and also allows for some good overtime.

He also can’t talk enough about the benefits of working at AMEGA West, especially now that it’s a Carpenter company. He says AMEGA did not outgrow its friendly family atmosphere of employees helping each other. But with the new ownership, they gained all of the advantages of working for an industry leader, including benefits, health and savings plans, and vacation. It’s now a place where a person can go to work and expect to have a viable career for years to come.

“We are extremely proud of our facility now, and the faith that AMEGA West headquarters in Houston and now our parent company Carpenter have given to us,” Smith says. “We began as six [people], and we’ve exceeded all expectations. We have a worldwide customer base and are affiliated with a world-class operation.”

As the AMEGA West “men of steel” strive to teach the next generation of machinists, they are not necessarily looking for superheroes. They just need good, solid individuals with an outstanding work ethic and the willingness and ability to learn, because they are willing to teach them.

AMEGA West, a Carpenter Company, is a member of Wood County Electric Cooperative. It’s located at 8044 CR 313 E., Tyler, TX 75706 in the community of Winona.



**FROM LEFT: Apprentice D.J. McMillon enjoys learning from Victor Solomon, a first-class machinist. Joel Hall, a first-class machinist, turns, bores and threads on a Computer Numerical Controlled (CNC) lathe. The products manufactured at AMEGA West must perform in extreme conditions, and Quality Control Inspector Troy Smith checks to ensure that all specifications are met before a shipment is sent.**



## Happy New Year

FROM WOOD COUNTY  
ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE



*We wish you and yours  
a happy, healthy  
and prosperous 2012.*

# Cooperatives Are the Fabric of Your Community

The United Nations General Assembly has designated 2012 as International Year of Cooperatives. As a result, cooperatives everywhere are celebrating our unique not-for-profit, member-owned and member-controlled business model.

If you've read this publication before, then you know Wood County Electric Cooperative (WCEC) is an electric cooperative. That means you and everyone else who receives electric service from us is a member, not just a customer.

Because you and your fellow members govern how WCEC operates, our primary goals are service-driven, rather than profit-driven. Our top priority remains providing safe and reliable electric service and keeping your bills for that service as affordable as possible.

Local control also means we're in the business of improving the quality of life in the communities we serve. We support youths through a variety of organizations, offer college scholarships, provide advice on making your home or business more energy efficient, offer speakers and safety presentations to local groups and provide much, much more.

Electric co-ops are just one type of cooperative operating in America. Dairy cooperatives produce nearly 90 percent of our nation's milk. Credit unions? They're cooperatives, too, with more than 8,000 across the country serving 91 million members. You can also find housing, hardware and even funeral co-ops throughout

the United States.

Some agricultural marketing cooperatives have become household names: Sunkist, Ocean Spray and Blue Diamond Almonds, for example. And, we have other cooperatives for dairy farmers, produce farmers, poultry farmers and telecommunications right here in East Texas.

Together, we are a key part of our local economy. We provide good jobs to folks who live right here—your neighbors and friends. We deliver goods and services that keep our communities humming. We're happy to lend a hand when we're able, and we enjoy being involved with schools and community organizations.

At WCEC, we return any excess profits, called margins, to you in the form of capital credits. That money then gets reinvested locally—perhaps at a grocery store or other retail outlet, which in turn allows the owners to hire more people.

The cooperative business model is not a new concept. Benjamin Franklin started the first U.S. cooperative, the Philadelphia Contributionship for the Insurance of Houses from Loss by Fire, in 1752, and it still operates today! Through businesses like

WCEC, the cooperative form of business continues as an integral part of our lives each day.

Throughout 2012, look for information in these pages about the unique and successful cooperative business model and how it benefits you.



VISIT US ON THE WEB AT [WWW.WCEC.ORG](http://WWW.WCEC.ORG)

# Facilities Planning for Optimum Performance

There comes a time in the life of every building when its caretakers must weigh the cost of maintaining an older, poorly functioning and inefficient building against the cost of building new facilities. Usually that's after a few renovations, expansions and repairs.

For Wood County Electric Cooperative's (WCEC) headquarters, that time has come. After a facilities review and planning process that took into account compliance with current codes and laws, work efficiencies, and costs and benefits of new construction and/or renovation of existing facilities, the board of directors has approved the construction of a new headquarters building.

Today's Quitman headquarters building at 501 S. Main St. is actually a conglomeration of several buildings from different eras. These buildings were constructed and designed for purposes other than the ones they are being used for today. The main building is a number of buildings connected by several remodels and general repurposing.

For example, the lobby was once the entire cooperative building, and it was heralded as "one of the best constructed and equipped in the entire southwest." But that was 70 years ago, when it was introduced in 1942.

Much smaller then, the lobby itself was 17 by 17 feet, and the building consisted of a large main office and three smaller offices. This building and offices were located right beside the Quitman Refrigeration Cooperative (QRC), a slaughterhouse, ice producer and provider of cold storage lockers for public rent. Those QRC buildings were made from the same brick as the WCEC building. So about 20 years later, when QRC closed, WCEC took over those buildings and connected to them to enlarge the co-op's facilities. Dispatch, engineering and some of the administration offices are still using those original refrigeration cooperative structures.

Another crucial space, this one built in 1960, is still in use today, but also for a very different purpose than it was designed for. It's called Arnold Holley Hall and was designed as a public education building and meeting space. Little by little, as technology advanced, the space was converted to house the meter department, SmartPower personnel, the computer room and the billing department.

Through the years, Holley Hall has served

well but now requires frequent attention and quite a few maintenance dollars. The foundation has become unstable, and the walls are cracking, the roof has sprung a leak or two, and the building has been termite-infested and had various plumbing problems. As this building further degrades, crucial functions that happen there are jeopardized. The computer servers that contain all the information used to serve members cannot be moved to the main administration building because of inefficient electrical capacity to meet the load.

Little by little, the main building along Highway 37 continued to grow. Eventually, a ware-



house was added on its southern side. Later, that warehouse became a meeting space and more offices and another warehouse were added, along with an entrance bay. Today, what was once multiple buildings, has become a loose construction of '40s-, '60s- and '70s-era buildings that have all been reshaped to suit modern needs as best they can.

As the buildings have aged, even with good care and maintenance, they've become increasingly inefficient, both in terms of employee work efficiency and dollars required to maintain them. Increasingly, the older plumbing and older electrical wiring, which was designed for less demanding service, has been requiring costly repairs and patches. Also, the piecemeal HVAC system has reduced effectiveness, causing much more energy to be used. Elsewhere, many parts of the building are requiring increased maintenance. And, importantly, as building add-ons have occurred, while the facilities were adequate, departments that interact have had reductions in workflow.

Considering all of the above, the directors approved a new building design by Fitzpatrick Architects in Tyler. This firm employs architects

that are accredited in Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), which is an internationally recognized green building system. LEED-certified buildings reduce energy and water use. They also have improved indoor environmental quality and, importantly, are built with sensitivity to the environmental impacts of various materials used. Jackson Construction Co. of Quitman has been retained to provide construction management to ensure quality as well as budget control.

Ultimately, the new building will have a greatly reduced footprint and be much more efficient and cost-effective to operate while offering

enhanced service for members. For example, the drive-thru will have two lanes instead of the one available now. With up to about 600 drive-thru customers a day, many times traffic backs up on Highway 37. A two-lane service drive will alleviate these dangers while allowing quicker service. Additionally, member parking will be much more convenient and logical, and the building will have a very apparent entryway.

One other feature of the new building will harken back to the days of old. Off the front foyer, there will be a large public meeting space for cooperative business.

The new building is expected to reduce the strain on local resources while also decreasing operational costs. With a public meeting space, a better-designed, higher-volume drive-thru, a good workflow design and energy-efficiency measures, the building will allow better member service and increase operational excellence.

There's not a better time in the current economy to take a look at and plan for the future of the cooperative. Construction costs are at an economic low point. And, the local economy will benefit from the new construction work while we build a better cooperative.