High school sweethearts Lee Ann and Rod Martin are a distance from their roots in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, but they are certainly growing where they planted themselves—Hawkins. Their journey started when Lee Ann was 16 and Rod was 18. They had a first date, and that’s when he asked her to the senior prom. It must have been magical, because they’ve been married for 38 years now. In between, they’ve raised three children, a boy and two girls, and they are now also proud grandparents of four.

Rod is more of the analytical type, with Lee Ann leaning toward creative pursuits. Rod’s skills are what in 1974 sent the very young newlyweds to Germany. Rod was stationed there with the Air Force as a meteorologist. Lee Ann recalls that it was quite the adventure as they immersed themselves in the local culture of a small town, Kitzingen, which the Main River bisects. Lee Ann also notes that Germany is the place where her appetite for gardening, and specifically herb gardening, blossomed.

“In life you have to learn to find your passion,” she said. “All of a sudden, something births inside and a passion begins to grow.” Of herbs, she said, “They season for flavor. They smell good. They aid in your health. But most of all, they are beautiful.”

“In Germany you see beautiful gardens everywhere,” she
“They mix vegetables, flowers and herbs, and use those herbs for their kitchens.”

When they moved back state-side, they were stationed near Niagara Falls and the North American Aerospace Defense Command. To accommodate their nomadic Air Force life, Lee Ann said she started small, creating little container gardens.

After six years of service, Rod left the Air Force with a good bit of knowledge about air traffic. So, after a stint at a lumberyard, he passed the test to become an air traffic controller with flying colors, and worked in Buffalo and then the Philadelphia airport as a controller.

In Philadelphia, Lee Ann learned as much as she could about gardening by working at Bittersweet Herb Farm and taking classes and workshops at the Rodale Institute to hone her knowledge of organic gardening. Eventually, Bittersweet Farm owners Allan and Stephanie Berk put Lee Ann in charge of the show garden.

With her passion growing and knowledge gained, the Martins moved to Fort Worth, where Rod took a career position as an air traffic controller at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport. Lee Ann immersed herself in learning everything she could about gardening in the new climate.

“When we first moved to Fort Worth, I reached out to The Greater Fort Worth Herb Society. We’d only been here about two months when I went to my first meeting,” Lee Ann said. “They helped me understand the soil amendments, and it sure would have taken me a lot longer to figure it out on my own.”

Through the years, Lee Ann pursued her thirst for knowledge from propagation, to growing, to culinary uses, aromatic uses and household applications. Somewhere along the way, even while remaining a lifelong student, she also became a noted expert.

In 2003, she was elected president of the Fort Worth Herb Society, and she has taught many classes and workshops over the years. She’d also become a desired speaker for
A Fragrant Life

I would desire that the fragrance offered by my life be filled with pleasant, sweet-smelling herbs. The perfumes of love and kindness, grace and friendship would scent my actions and be planted deep within the motivations of my heart.

—LEE ANN MARTIN

The bounty from Lee Ann’s herb garden is apparent wherever the eye alights in her herbery.
stocks a good selection of herb-related books and sells candles and other related goods, such as local artist Bart Soutendijk’s floral notecards. She also sells much of the dried harvest from her own gardens, as well as herbs she buys wholesale.

Increasingly though, she’s been catering her workshops and classes to garden clubs, Master Gardener classes and even those seeking a fun “girls’ day out.”

The classes, which are $10 per person, are educational, and students can learn about the legends and lore of herbs, tips for starting an herb garden, elements of a medieval garden, moon gardening or even medicinal uses for herbs. The workshops are much more hands-on and usually include lunch and all the materials to make something that participants can take home such as a wreath, topiary or a dream pillow. Those run around $50 per student.

Lee Ann also offers guided group tours starting at about $25. Increasingly, she also invites others with shared interests and expert advice to teach classes in subjects such as soap making and basket weaving. While not typical of her business, during some of the special events, Lee Ann may also sell a selection of live plants such as lamb’s ear, sage and verbena.

When asked which herb is her favorite, she says it’s hard to nail down because there are so many wonderful things you can do with each. But, she does finally settle on lavender, likely hailing to her Pennsylvania roots where it grows a little bit easier. She says it likes a dry and hot or cool and moist climate and ashy soil. It can be grown in East Texas, but perhaps takes a little more work. But, she says it’s so versatile it’s worth it. It makes a great pest repellent, a wonderful fragrance for linen sprays, and also great for flavoring baked goods. Importantly, it’s also pretty in the garden and attracts beneficial insects like bees and butterflies.

For East Texas, she says, some of the easiest herbs to grow include bronze fennel, rosemary, Mexican mint, marigold, Artemisia, lemon verbena, marjoram, lamb’s ear—and roses. Say what? Roses are herbs? You betcha. Who would have thought all that beauty, grace and glamour actually has substance underneath? The petals can be eaten and also dried to make potpourri. The rose hips (seed pods) that form after the bloom is spent can be used to make all sorts of culinary delights, and, of course, the rose is well known for fragrances for perfumes and aromatherapy. Since ancient times, the rose has also been used for medicinal purposes.

“If you want something wonderful in your garden to help with pollination, herbs are the best,” Lee Ann said. And, if you need any encouragement in gardening, Lee Ann says, “It’s just what the doctor ordered. Seeing things grow does something to your spirit.”

Lee Ann believes that all people respond to herbs and plants in general. “After all,” she said with a smile, “mankind first began in a garden.”

“I just love seeing things grow in my little corner of the world,” she said. She also confesses that her garden is also where she does her private singing. While she does not invite others to hear her sing (because that’s between her and the garden) she is always delighted to speak to groups, hold tours and host workshops. She likes nothing more than to share her knowledge in the same fashion that gardeners pass along plants. Lee Ann is also the current president of the Fannie Marchman Garden Club in Mineola, and they also welcome new members.

Bittersweet Herb Farm is served by Wood County Electric Cooperative. For more information, call the business at (903) 769-5962. Lee Ann also invites people to send her an email at thymepost@yahoo.com, and she’ll add you to her email list for class and workshop schedules or to learn more about the garden club.
What’s Old Is New

For as long as there have been Wood County Electric Cooperative members, there have been member/account numbers. These numbers are used to manage member accounts and also ensure that we adhere to one of the true cooperative principles: one member, one vote.

You can rest assured that nothing is changing in that regard. But we are making a conversion that affects the actual member/account numbers. As we’ve grown, and our members’ needs have grown, some members have required the use of 99 meters or more.

No matter how many meters for which a member is responsible, he or she still only gets one vote. But the employees at the cooperative must be able to account for each of those meters. We do that by adding an account number that appears after the member number. Until recently, that number has only been two digits. Now, there’s an added digit in the member/account numbers. This affects members in a few ways.

When making calls to the outage hotline or when a member wants to discuss a specific meter on the account, instead of a two-digit account number, a three-digit number will be required. It’s also important for those members who use their bank’s online service to pay bills to be aware of the extra digit. Payments will no longer transmit with the old number, and they will be kicked back to the bank. For all members with 99 meters or fewer, a zero will be added at the beginning of the account number. An example follows with the old and new numbers illustrated in gray and blue:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>OLD NUMBER</th>
<th>NEW NUMBER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Member No.</td>
<td>Account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House</td>
<td>123456</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barn</td>
<td>123456</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shop</td>
<td>123456</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We hope you’ll agree that growing pains are not really such a bad problem to have. Even though we’ve grown to serve more than 33,000 meters, we’ll always remain steadfast in following the cooperative model to bring our members reliable and affordable electric service.

Want to beat the heat? Run appliances like dishwashers and dryers late in the evening to keep the heat from affecting your comfort. Use ceiling fans to circulate air even when the air conditioner is on, and remember to unplug electric chargers, televisions and any appliances when you are not using them.

As you spend time working or playing in your yard this summer, use caution with electric tools and power lines.

- Call 811 if you plan to dig in your yard. Whether you’re putting up a fence, planting trees or digging a foundation for an addition to your home, you run the risk of hitting a buried utility line. Don’t guess; damaging utility equipment can leave you and your neighbors without service and could wind up costing you big bucks for repairs. 811 is a free service that can advise you on the presence of all buried utilities.

- If your trees need trimming, avoid utility lines overhead. Hire a professional to trim trees that are within reach of an overhead electric line. If the lines are close to your roof, call Wood County Electric Cooperative to work out a safety plan that might include temporarily shutting off the power.

- Educate your children about the dangers of playing around electrical equipment. Forbid them from flying kites near overhead lines, climbing utility poles or playing around substations.

- Assume every fallen power line is “live” and deadly. Stay far away—and keep your children away. Call 811 and Wood County EC for help if you see one.

- Before you use your power tools, clean them and inspect them for cracks, frayed cords and damaged plugs.

- Always remember that water and electricity don’t mix. Avoid using electrically powered tools if the ground (or grass) is damp.
Electric Bills Reflect Weather Patterns

Minimizing movement of conditioned air can cut costs

Electric bills vary with the seasons, driven by weather and consumer-use patterns. Weather matters. When it’s cold outdoors, family members generally want the house warm. When it’s hot outside, air conditioners make living areas pleasant.

How much weather affects your electric bills depends on many factors, including your home’s original construction materials, insulation and air leaks. Personal comfort plays a role too, as does the difference between the thermostat setting inside and temperature outdoors.

When a house stays at 68 degrees, but the outdoor temperature varies from minus 20 degrees in winter to more than 100 degrees on a muggy summer’s day, demand for heating and cooling can be significant. Cooled air leaving a home essentially wastes the money spent to cool it. The same is true for air a homeowner has paid to warm.

R-value offers a way of measuring insulation’s effectiveness (a higher R-value indicates more effective insulation). For example, on a 28-degree day, hourly heat loss from a residence set at 68 degrees could hit 2,464 British thermal units even through an 80-by-10-foot exterior wall packed with R-13 insulation. Reverse that situation on a scorching day—100 degrees outside—and heat gain indoors will still reach 2,464 Btu per hour.

To save money, set your thermostat 5 degrees closer (higher in summer, lower in winter) to the outdoor temperature. This simple change could result in a savings of 90 watts per hour of electricity—about 197 kilowatt-hours in three months.

In the meantime, adjust the thermostat. Keep blinds and drapes on the sunny side of your home closed in summer and open in winter. Find mysteriously “hot” or “cold” spots in the house and solve them by installing gasket seals around outlets and weatherstripping along doors and windows, replacing old windows, and upgrading insulation. When practical, adjust landscaping to provide shade for your property in summer and sunlight in winter.

Weather doesn’t have to play havoc with electricity bills. There are a variety of tools, appliances and resources available to solve all sorts of energy challenges. Some, such as new windows or a roof, require significant financing. But there are a lot of options that are inexpensive and simple that offer rewarding benefits. Find more ways to save at www.wcec.org.