

WCEC Invites All Members to the

74th Annual Meeting

NOTICE OF MEETING

Friday, October 5, 2012

Governor Jim Hogg City Park • Quitman, Texas

ENTERTAINMENT 12:30 P.M. • MEETING 2 P.M.

The 74th Annual Meeting of Wood County Electric Cooperative, Inc., will be held Friday, October 5, 2012, at Governor Jim Hogg City Park in Quitman, Texas, at 2 p.m. All members are invited and encouraged to attend.

Beginning at 12:30 p.m. there will be musical entertainment by the award-winning Quitman Community Theatre. Attendees are sure to be entertained, as the theatrical troupe plans to perform music vignettes from some of their most popular past productions. There promises to be laughter along with some toe-tapping fun.

Once again, this year's election for directors will be by mail-in ballot. It includes candidates for WCEC Districts 1 and 4. Members currently serving on the board of directors in these districts are: Pat Lindley, District 1, and Brent Glenn, District 4.

All members should look for their ballots to arrive in the mail soon. Be sure to detach and mail the postage-paid ballot to arrive by noon on October 4. Members who mail in a ballot will automatically be entered into a drawing from which four members will be randomly selected to receive a \$250 credit toward their electricity bill. Please **DO NOT** drop off or mail your ballot to WCEC with your bill. Only ballots received before noon October 4, 2012, at the designated mailing address (pre-printed on the ballot), will be counted and entered into the prize drawing.

Be sure to save and bring the other half of the card with you to the annual meeting. This card will be used for participation in door prize drawings for those present. As always, there will be many prizes, with this year's grand prize being an HD flat-screen television.

We hope to see you at the annual meeting!



About the Board of Directors Elections

The Wood County Electric Cooperative Board of Directors is composed of seven member-elected trustees, each residing in the WCEC district they serve. These board members are all local residents who are members of the cooperative and represent the needs of their neighbors and communities. The board meets monthly to determine guidelines for management and to approve policies and procedures.

As a qualification to serve on the board, each candidate must receive electric service within the WCEC district they wish to serve within the nine-county service territory. WCEC directors' terms are for three years each. Elections are held annually for alternate districts to allow for a continuity of business knowledge from year to year. WCEC's bylaws contain exact details about director qualifications and the nomination/election process. The bylaws are posted on wcec.org, and paper copies are available at the cooperative.

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Teaching Kids the ABCs of Electricity Safety

School bells are ringing across East Texas, and parents and teachers are likely reminding students about important safety tips, such as remembering to look both ways when crossing an intersection, minding crossing guards and not talking with strangers. It's also a good time for parents to teach their kids about electricity. To help start those conversations, here are a few tips for safe travels to and from school, for play time or any time.

- ▶ Always keep clear of power lines and never climb trees or ladders near power lines.
- ▶ If you see downed power lines, stay far away from them and call the electric utility to report them.
- ▶ If you are in a vehicle that comes into contact with a downed power line, stay in the vehicle. Caution others to stay away from the vehicle and ask them to call the power company and emergency officials.
- ▶ If you must leave the vehicle, remove and leave all loose items like handbags, loose clothing, etc. Then, jump clear of the vehicle and avoid touching the car and the ground at the same time. Land on both feet at the same time, keeping your feet as close together as possible. Then shuffle or "bunny hop" away from the car.
- ▶ Never fly kites or model airplanes near power lines. Only use dry string, not metal wire, to fly a kite.



Routinely, WCEC presents safety demonstrations to schools within the cooperative's service territory. Here, Power Quality Technician Jay Murdock demonstrates what can happen when a mylar balloon contacts a power line.

- ▶ Don't release metallic balloons. They can get caught in power lines and cause outages.
 - ▶ If you do see a kite or balloon snagged on overhead lines, do not try to remove it; call Wood County Electric Cooperative.
 - ▶ Never play near or on utility substation fences or pad-mounted transformers.
 - ▶ Always look for and obey DANGER signs displayed on high-voltage equipment.
- Learn more at wcec.org, and look for the Safety and Consumer Tips link that offers a wealth of information.



Wood County Electric Cooperative

501 S. Main St. • P.O. Box 1827
Quitman, TX 75783

CEO/GENERAL MANAGER

Debbie Robinson

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Pat B. Lindley, President, *District 1*
 Dennis Wright, Vice President, *District 3*
 Lewis D. Young, Secretary-Treasurer, *District 7*
 Burke Bullock, *District 2*
 Brent Glenn, *District 4*
 Jane Roberson, *District 6*
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MEMBER BENEFITS AND SERVICES

- Online account access and bill payment
- Paperless E-Bill services
- Visa, MasterCard, American Express and Discover accepted
- SmartPower prepay electric system
- SmartGuard surge protection system
- Scholarships and youth programs
- Safety and energy conservation programs

MOBILE CONVENIENCE CENTER

Monday, First Methodist Church, Van
Tuesday, Family Dollar, Mount Vernon
Wednesday, City National Bank, Hawkins
Thursday, Brookshire's, Winnsboro
Friday, Economy Drug, Grand Saline



Contact Us

CALL US
(903) 763-2203

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OUTAGE HOTLINE
1-866-415-2951

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wcec.org



An Open-Door Attitude Fetches Rewards

When opportunity knocks, Don Gilchrist opens the door. Then he opens another and another, not only for himself, but also for his family, his employees, and the community at large. In fact, since late 1972 Don has been opening doors both literally and figuratively, and it started this way ...

ABOVE: Don and Sharon Gilchrist stand in the opening of a revolving door that is part of the world-class door controls training and certification center at Door Control Services, Inc., headquartered in Ben Wheeler.

Don Gilchrist was born in Grand Saline and raised in Ben Wheeler. He was also in the very last graduating class at Ben Wheeler, before the school annexed with Van. After graduation he went to Tyler Junior College to study petroleum engineering. But before he could finish those studies, that first opportunity came knocking in the form of a fellow Ben Wheeler resident, Lee Pyle.

Don knew that Lee was very well known and respected in the town. Lee had seen Don grow up and knew him to be a hard worker at haying, hoeing watermelons, hauling vegetables and other odd jobs in the truck-patch farming community. Pyle, Don said, wanted to grow his current business of servicing manual doors and he was looking for a coworker. So he approached Don with the idea of partnering, with Don working as an apprentice of sorts. The plan was for them to grow the business together, and then when Lee was ready to retire he'd sell the business, Door Control Services, to Don.

Starting in January 1973, Don and Lee would load all of their tools and parts into a big truck that they had, and they would travel all week servicing doors. The truck was outfitted with a bunk, and there was a cot that Don would sleep on every night until they came home on Friday evening. Such was the partners' lives for a year. Then, Lee became ill and was no longer able to travel. Don said, "We decided then that I would go ahead and buy him out. It was much earlier than either of us expected, but he just could not go on."

The next door was opened for Don by the store manager at a Safeway grocery store in Tyler. Don said he'd done a little repair work there, and the store manager asked him if he could also work on the automatic door. Heretofore, Don had only serviced manual doors, but he said he worked on this door simply because he was asked to, and he added, "I got lucky and fixed it." That one store manager told all of the other store managers that Don could repair automatic doors, and when they called he said, "I wasn't afraid to try!" From there, he picked up all of the work for the Safeways in East Texas to work on their sliding and swinging doors, and as his confidence built, he started handing out business cards. That learned talent helped him secure an account with Brookshire's and then several other chain stores.

About this time, Don swung wide the next door himself, at a Tyler honky-tonk. Behind that door he met Sharon, who became his wife and his lifelong business partner. About her personality, the former Sharon Lee Burnop of Tyler says, "I'll tell you right quick how the cow ate the cabbage." Don, for his part, must have liked how she told it, because that first night they talked for hours at a diner called The Hot Biscuit. Through the years, he has also come to like her business acumen and he is the first to say, "I would give her credit for where we are today. When she started working with me, that's when the business really took off."

In the early '80s, in addition to adding DCS's first full-time employee, Bob Burnop (Sharon's dad), Sharon quit her insurance company job and joined Don. She explains that Don was making out invoices while driving, and there were some near-misses with other vehicles. So, to keep him safe, Sharon adeptly

took over the invoicing. She eventually put on many other hats to help the business succeed and ultimately skyrocket. She started sending out marketing literature and correspondence, began making cold calls, and was dispatching, all while having four babies in five years. About that time, she laughingly says, "After I took over, Don asked me if I wanted him to bring the typewriter up to the hospital after I'd just had a baby." (In case you are wondering, she did tell him she thought it could wait until she got home.)

By 1986, business was steadily increasing, and DCS was also growing with the addition of three more full-time employees. The Tyler office was becoming very cramped, and that's when Don and Sharon started thinking of their next move. Don said, "To continue to grow, we knew we had to move west, reaching into the DFW area." Of that move, Don tells about how he went to the bank to get a loan: The loan officer told him he thought it was not a good strategy to expand west and refused the loan. Don had a cattle operation on the side, and an agricultural loan officer suggested he call his new construction a horse barn and he'd loan him the money.

In 1988, with the loan secured and building constructed, DCS moved from Tyler to the 6,000-square-foot "horse barn" in Ben Wheeler, a good strategic position for their expansion west. Business, Don said, started to boom as they added a host of chain stores and other important clients in Dallas and throughout Texas, including Winn Dixie, Minyard's and even Baylor Hospital. Then, in addition to repair, the company also started performing new installations.

Once the repair business was steady and Don and Sharon had hired a host of technicians in DFW, they decided to expand the business even further to include a rebuilding operation. Don said, "This is the ultimate in green programs." Rather than throw parts away, they tear down the gearboxes, motors and controls and rebuild all of those components. They first started doing this for their own repair work, but then other door companies asked to buy their parts. Today, this segment of DCS is now three to four times larger than that of their closest competitor.

More recently, the company added two more divisions, because Don and Sharon recognized opportunity knocking. The first came in the form of a phone call from a gentleman in North Carolina who worked for a hardware manufacturer. He'd heard about DCS and called Don to see if he would be interested in expanding into hardware manufacturing. Don flew out to meet Dave Shomette, and then invited Dave to come visit the facility in Ben Wheeler. Convinced of the viability of a market, Don decided to open a hardware parts division. In a departure, he located this business unit outside of Texas—in North Carolina. Mainly, he said, he did this because Dave had a settled family life with children attending school in North Carolina, and also it's a good strategic location because the bulk of their new hardware business is on the East Coast.

The fourth division, Door Top Alarms, came about when one of DCS's salesmen, Danny Brockway, was on a sales call at a VA hospital in Dallas. As he was visiting, he noticed everyone was very gloomy and he asked why. The reason was, they'd just

lost a patient to strangulation suicide. The hospital staff said they wished there were an alarm to install atop doors to help prevent these tragedies. A challenge to the team at DCS, they developed an innovative door-top alarm. So far they've manufactured and sold over 1,000 to VA hospitals and behavioral clinics. In visiting those hospitals and clinics, they've also listened and learned of another need.

A deviation from door controls, Pinpoint is a device for nurses to wear while working where patients can exhibit hostile behavior. When help is needed, a nurse can just pull a cord to send a notification signal to several people simultaneously, while also pinpointing the exact location of the nurse. This is but another example of how DCS employees develop solutions to customer requests. Like the founder, "because they are not afraid to try," their successes have led to growth.

Grown from a tiny 1,600-square-foot space in Tyler, DCS's Ben Wheeler operations and headquarters is now 95,000 square feet of office and warehouse space. And that does not include the other facilities they've acquired in Austin, San Antonio and Carrollton, and the new hardware parts operation in North Carolina. Also, growing from a one-employee-truck business, DCS now has more than 200 full-time workers, including 48 service technicians based in Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas and Puerto Rico. The company also boasts 1,240 different products. The payroll is about \$60,000 a week, and Don says that this year, "Annual sales will burst \$30 million." Not bad for a little business that only grossed \$17,000 the first year.

When asked if he ever dreamed that his business would reach this level of success, Don said, "I wanted it to grow but I never imagined it to be this big." But in almost the same breath he says, "We have ambitions of growing this company into a \$100-million-a-year company." And he's making plans to pave the way for that ambition by planning a facility expansion that

FROM LEFT: Together, the Gilchrists have built a thriving business that offers locals the opportunity for steady employment with great benefits in an environment where a good attitude pays off. During the refurbishing process, DCS employee Jordan Melton prepares controls for later diagnostics. Chris Saxton works in order fulfillment at DCS, carefully packaging door parts as they go out to customers across the nation.

will add another 10,000 square feet of air-conditioned space and another 40,000 square feet for assembly and machining.

All of the building and business successes are minor, though, compared to the pride Don and Sharon take in their employees and what they have all accomplished together. He says, "I believe we have the finest people in the country working here." Sharon, like a true matriarch, seconds that with, "We are family." In talking about his employees, Don says, "We have extremely little employee turnover." And that probably has a lot to do with his hiring philosophy. On hiring, he says, "If you are healthy and have a good attitude, I'll teach you the job." He says he stole that line from Tom Landry, but, he really means it and underscores with, "We hire more on attitude than on education. A good attitude wins every time. Also, when I hire somebody, I want them to know that they have a deal with me." With two employees already over the 25-year mark and one over 20, it looks like they do know they have a deal.

For new hires, the "deal" includes "The Farm Club," which is DCS's version of an apprenticeship program to grow employee careers. Employees who hire in and prove themselves can expect a progressive career path. All full-time employees can also expect 95 percent paid health benefits and a 401(k), because Don says, "The very heart and soul of our company is our people. They are our customers."

Beyond giving credit to Sharon and his employees, Don says there is another contributing factor to their success. "I run this company just like I did when I first started." That means service technicians operate 24/7. "We are absolutely on call 24 hours a day." And, he says, that's what he believes has set their business apart from the others. There are many companies that are open Monday through Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., but that's not really helpful to the grocery or department store manager who has an issue in the middle of the night or on a weekend. If they have a problem they want it repaired immediately. and DCS is very willing to do that—anytime.

Looking back, Don says one of the biggest challenges to growing his business was getting potential customers to realize the capabilities DCS has. When he and his team made sales calls, it was hard to convince people that such a modern and



sophisticated facility was located in little Ben Wheeler, Texas. He said, “Many people were tying the size of the company to the size of the town. To get them to visit, Don would hop on a plane and go visit them, and then extend an invitation to Ben Wheeler, and they’d feel obligated to visit him. Almost always, after coming to DCS, Don explained, “Those that were already doing business with us increased their business, and those that had not done business with us started.”

Touring the facility, it’s evident that the business is all about quality control. DCS warranties every single item they build for a year. Before every unit goes out the door, it’s tested at a minimum of 500 cycles, and an employee must sign off on the quality. At 9 a.m. every weekday, Don heads a meeting to discuss any doors that did not get repaired the day before, or doors that need special attention. He said, “I believe in meetings and communications. If you are going to succeed, you have to PLAN to succeed.” Remarkably, at those meetings, the subject of warranties must not take very long since failures and rates of return on DCS products are incredibly low. For example, in 2011 of rebuilds on 33,736 units, just more than 1.4 percent failed. For electronics, the failure rate was just 1.1 percent for 25,165 units.

In addition to sales and service, the company also has a state-of-the-art training facility, and it has evolved to be the largest door controls training school in the United States. The company offers two segments of training 10 times a year, with a quick-start automatic door controls class that teaches the basics of repair and an American Association for Automatic Door Manufacturers Inspector Certification class.

While the company has been on a progressive growth track, so has the town of Ben Wheeler. In the early days when DCS invited guests, there were late nights dining in Tyler because the DCS hometown did not have any restaurants or entertainment. Now, Don and Sharon are increasingly proud to host visitors since entrepreneur Brooks Gremmels and the Ben Wheeler Foundation have begun investing in and revitalizing the town. Now there are two restaurants for client meetings and there is generally an option for live music. Don and Sharon have also built their own lodge to house guests, and they can feed 150 people there. In the beginning days of the company,

Don traveled significantly to visit potential clients in the hopes of getting them to agree to visit DCS headquarters in Ben Wheeler. In recent years, he’s committed to spending \$100,000 a year to fly visitors in to see their world-class operations.

You’d think with the massive success they’ve accomplished in such a short time that the Gilchrists would not have time for much more. But, together with their employees, they support the local volunteer fire department in many ways. And since 2004, DCS has hosted an annual benefit golf tournament for the Texas Scottish Rite Hospital for Children in Dallas and they’ve raised more than \$91,000 for the hospital. Don says his employees are always having taco breakfasts, garage sales or other events to raise money for the hospital, as well as donating time and money to other causes such as Relay for Life.

Along with the approximately 115 employees who work at DCS headquarters, three of the Gilchrists’ children work at the business, too. Son Paxton is in research and development, Summer heads up marketing, and Shea is a service dispatcher. Stacey, another daughter, also worked there before she moved to Colorado. Since Don is not traveling quite as much for work as in the early days, he enjoys spending his free time on his deer ranch in Pearsall (served by Medina Electric Cooperative), bass fishing, guiding bird hunts and playing a little golf. Sharon still has an office at the business and gives input but is semi-retired to spend her time doing the things she loves best. Foremost, that’s taking care of the apple of her eye, her 3-year-old grandson, Reed (who, by the way loves automatic doors). Sharon is also a prolific painter and enjoys creating art in a studio she has on DCS grounds.

It was Charles Dickens who said, “A very little key will open a big door.” The Gilchrists have one of those keys and they’ve been using it with abandon to unlock some hulking big doors for themselves, along with some wonderful possibilities for others. That key is multifaceted and includes the truths that they’ve “planned to succeed,” they’ve “never been afraid to try” and they’ve done every single task with a can-do attitude.

Both the Gilchrists and DCS are members of Wood County Electric Cooperative, and readers can learn more about the company by visiting doorcontrolservices.com.

