



Co-assistant fire chiefs of the Midway Volunteer Fire Department show off their brush truck, which they were able to outfit with a grant from WCECF.

155,000 Reasons—and Counting— To Love Operation Round Up



WOOD COUNTY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LAUNCHED OPERATION Round Up in October 2017. And what a resounding success it has been! Our members have overwhelmingly supported this charitable program to the great benefit of our communities.

Through Operation Round Up, members donate pennies each month by volunteering to have their electric bills rounded up. On average, a member donates about \$6 a year and no more than \$11.88. Members' contributions fund the Wood County Electric Charitable Foundation, whose purpose is to uplift our region by awarding grants to organizations within WCEC's nine-county service territory. The foundation is run by a seven-member board of directors made up of WCEC members who review grant requests and issue awards.

In the first quarter of this year, the board distributed \$64,000 to eight organizations that breathe life into our communities. And since 2017, it has granted a total of \$155,000. This money has gone to enrichment programs that meet the basic needs of individuals and to fund equipment that saves property and lives. Here's a brief sampling of local needs that have been met.

Midway Volunteer Fire Department

The nine-member, all-volunteer Midway Volunteer Fire Department covers 35 square miles in the southeast corner of Van Zandt County. Like most volunteer departments, Midway VFD offers mutual aid to other departments, thus expanding its effective area of coverage to Van, Ben Wheeler, Edom and

Dixie in Smith County. When emergency calls come in, these firefighters and first responders race to the scene, whether a vehicle crash and extrication, swift water rescue, house or other structure fire, brush fire or many other types of emergencies. What's more, many emergencies send them traveling down unpaved or bumpy roadways.

Most of the volunteer crew members at Midway VFD work full-time jobs elsewhere, and often, only one member is available to respond to a call. Unfortunately, they didn't have a truck that could be effectively operated by a single member—or that could handle off-road conditions.

To acquire such a vehicle, the department purchased a basic flatbed truck they could customize on their own. As funds slowly trickled in, they began outfitting it as a brush and crash truck. To accelerate the process, they applied for a \$5,000 WCECF grant, which they received in October 2018.

Since then, they've added all the bells and whistles to their vehicle—or in this case, a siren, light fixtures, a winch, a 350-gallon water tank with pump, fender level fire nozzle to combat pasture and brush fires, and equipment for car crash extractions. They also built toolboxes to hold chain saws, axes, shovels and other tools.

"This truck can now do so much more than the rest of the trucks, and we can take advantage of going off-road when need be," said Spencer Doubet, co-assistant fire chief. "The Forest Service has helped us with this truck and then this grant. Anytime we can get a helping hand, we appreciate it."

Bob Harvey, co-assistant fire chief, added his appreciation. “It may have taken us a longer time to put this all together because we are funded solely by donations,” he said, thanking WCEC members for their contributions. “Now that it’s finished, I can handle this truck all by myself.”

“We needed it!” Doubet said.

With Operation Round Up to the rescue, the heroes at Midway VFD can do even more of what they do best—something Sheri Booth, a resident of Van Zandt County, can attest to. As Booth tells it, a contractor, who was performing some tree and brush work at her home, had started a bonfire to incinerate some of the trees, but the wind unexpectedly picked up and the fire quickly grew out of hand.

“I called Chief Doubet, and he immediately responded, along with another truck,” she said. “They came over and saved the day, quickly putting the fire out. I could not be more grateful. And I’m glad they had the equipment to do it with.”

No property was damaged, but that very well could have happened without the swift help of Midway VFD.

Forever Young Activity Center

The Forever Young Activity Center is a hub of activity for seniors 55 and older. The volunteer-run center provides a place for adult fellowship and enrichment. Twice weekly, on Wednesdays and Fridays, activities include educational programs, entertainment, exercise, nutritious group meals and volunteer opportunities. The center hosts classes that include chair yoga, painting, crafts and health fairs.

FYAC is privately funded through donations, and its board of directors and volunteers are able to cover much of its operating costs by holding charitable bingo games every Tuesday and Friday. Bingo also funds the seniors’ humanitarian efforts, such as support for the local food pantry and a Christmas toy drive.

For several years, the center needed a facelift to help it continue to attract the seniors it serves, as well as the bingo players who support its mission. In addition to a new paint job, the facility needed new flooring to replace its 30-year-old carpet. To help fund this big expense, the organization applied for a WCECF grant and was awarded \$7,000 for the project.

“To get the carpet has been unbelievable,” said Daisy Bennett, FYAC treasurer. “Everybody that comes here has commented on how much it has refreshed this building. And it’s so much easier to keep clean.” She noted that bingo nights are more active than ever, with 75–90 patrons each night. And, she said, many of the patrons drive from Sulphur Springs, Winnsboro, Lindale, Hawkins and surrounding areas to join the locals.

“Forever Young Activity Center is a vital part of our community,” said Sandra Hallman of Quitman, a frequent visitor to the center. “Many of us need the benefit of the exercise classes they offer. The nicer the facility looks makes it a much more pleasant environment to invite people to participate. It’s great to have a place in our community where everybody knows your name!”

The Forever Young Activity Center is a vibrant spot for seniors to enjoy social activities, keep their minds sharp with programs and games, exercise, enjoy crafting and join friends for a good meal.





The Texas Ramp Project

The team at Texas Ramp Project likes to say its program changes lives in a single day. And it does. By building ramps, it gives people with disabilities and seniors with difficulties navigating steps mobility and freedom—free of charge. The organization serves individuals in more than 200 counties in Texas, including Camp, Franklin, Hopkins, Smith, Rains, Titus, Upshur, Van Zandt and Wood counties—all part of WCEC’s service territory. The organization has built more than 16,500 ramps that, if laid end to end, would span more than 83 miles. More than 100 of these ramps have been built in our region.

TRP’s volunteers can build a ramp for about one-third the cost charged by a retail contractor. Still, materials for each ramp can amount to considerable costs, about \$600–\$700. For this nonprofit, that money comes from corporate sponsors, donations and grants. Adding to that list, WCECF awarded TRP a \$5,000 grant in 2018.

Tom Lewis of Holly Lake Ranch is an area coordinator for TRP in East Texas. He said there is plenty of work to be done for his volunteer construction teams made up of the Holly Lake Kiwanis Club and a men’s Bible study group from Liberty Unity Methodist and Broad Street Church of Christ. The need is so great, Lewis said, that the program could even use another volunteer team in the area.

“It’s very rewarding to help other people and especially

those that need a ramp just to be able to get out of their home,” he said. “To see the smile on their faces makes it all worthwhile.”

Jennifer Covington is one of those grateful and smiling recipients. Diagnosed with peripheral arterial disease at 36, Covington is a recent amputee, which made it almost impossible for her to get in and out of her home before she received a ramp. She said she is very grateful to the ramp project and others who have helped her during her illness.

“I am so blessed to have had help from Christus Mother Francis Hospital in Tyler, Dr. Kent Webb and the Texas Ramp Project,” she said. “Now I can go to the store, doctors’ appointments and anywhere else easily. The ramp has also benefited our elderly aunts, who come to family get-togethers.”

Surrounded by the volunteers that built her ramp, Jennifer Covington smiles to know she now has the freedom to enter and exit her home with ease.

As relayed in these stories, it’s clear that the small change donated to Operation Round Up adds up to big and positive change. It has a direct impact on individuals and our communities. And it would not be possible without the generous hearts of our members.

To learn more about how your community can benefit from this program, and to download an official grant application, visit WCEC.org.

Congratulations to Our Schlitterbahn Prizewinner

YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED A

special giveaway Wood County Electric Cooperative promoted recently in honor of *Texas Co-op Power's* 75th anniversary. As we reach the midpoint of this celebratory year, we'd like to congratulate the winner of five season passes to Schlitterbahn: **Lea Reynolds** of Alba. Enjoy this fun summer excursion on us!

To our members who didn't win, don't worry—there are still plenty of opportunities to try your luck. We have more prizes up our sleeves as we celebrate with you for the remainder of 2019.

Every month, members of Wood County EC will have a chance to win a uniquely Texan treasure. These giveaways complement some other commemorative features *Texas Co-op Power* showcases this year. We have print and video versions of recipes pulled from the archives and updated for modern tastes, a 12-month Hit the Road series with *The Daytripper's* Chet Garner and thought-provoking *Currents* timelines each month that mark significant events spanning the magazine's history, across a broad swath of topics.

Amid the anniversary festivities, don't forget our themed monthly recipe and photography contests, which we hope you take advantage of, too. We can't wait to see the fruits of our members' creativity.

The Reynolds family is excited to use their Schlitterbahn season passes this summer.

"We love the water and we love the opportunity," said Lea's husband, Scott, to which Lea added, "This will be a great vacation spot for us."

And the Reynolds family really must love the water, as Scott works at Golden Water Supply Corporation, while Lea is employed at Jones Water Supply. They also must love cooperatives, as both water corporations are cooperatives, too!



Lea Reynolds of Alba is the proud winner of five season passes to Schlitterbahn. She celebrates with her husband, Scott, and sons Xander, 7, and Christopher, 6. The family looks forward to spending time this summer at the park.

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MOBILE CONVENIENCE CENTER

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

TEXAS CO-OP POWER 
CELEBRATING 75 YEARS