In just two years, Wood County Electric Cooperative members have donated a total of $230,890 to local charitable groups through their participation in the co-op’s Operation Round Up program.

Since 2017, the program’s board has handed out 62 checks to 56 local charities.

Operation Round Up is a voluntary program in which participating members’ bills are rounded up to the next dollar each month. Those extra pennies are then donated to organizations working for the betterment of our communities.

It’s amazing how much money can accumulate, and good can transpire, from the fractions of a dollar that members contribute each month, which on average is about 50 cents. No member donates more than $11.88 a year. The money goes directly to the Wood County Electric Charitable Foundation, where volunteer board members review grant applications and award the funds to deserving organizations.

During the most recent grant dispersal, the WCECF Board of Directors awarded $75,200 to 11 worthy organizations. The recipients represent a broad cross section of causes, interests and demographics, including youth, veterans, those with special needs, rodeo fans, law enforcement, the economically disadvantaged and seniors. What each organization has in common is its positive effect on our region and the members of Wood County EC.

Let’s take a closer look at each of the grant recipients and their missions. After all, you may need their services one day—or better yet, you may want to serve our community as one of their volunteers.

1. East Texas 100 Club
   The East Texas 100 Club was established in 2017 by the East Texas Police Chiefs Association. This nonprofit provides financial support to the families of officers killed or catastrophically injured in the line of duty in 20 East Texas counties.
   Families of fallen officers may face many challenges, including medical bills and burial expenses. The club immediately steps in with relief funds to ease those burdens. It also provides law enforcement personnel with equipment and educational opportunities that can’t be secured through governmental funds.
   WCECF awarded a $5,000 grant to the East Texas 100 Club.
   “This donation will help support families that suffer tragedy and line-of-duty officer deaths,” said Wayne Isbell, Mount Pleasant chief of police and the club’s founder and treasurer.
   “The East Texas 100 Club is extremely appreciative of the Wood County Electric Charitable Foundation.”
   Learn more at easttexas100club.org.

2. Friends of the Arboretum
   Friends of the Arboretum is an all-volunteer organization dedicated to the development and maintenance of the Wood County Arboretum, which comprises 23 acres of walking trails, woodlands, a historic bridge and numerous gardens as well as the historic James A. Stinson house. The arboretum offers many community, educational and social programs and is a great outlet for volunteerism.
   FOA will use the $5,000 it received from WCECF to ensure upkeep and continued functionality of the Stinson house, which serves as a venue for civic and private events as well as the FOA’s headquarters.
   “We are very grateful to the Wood County Electric Charitable Foundation for their support and to WCEC’s members for donating so generously through Operation Round Up,” said Deanna Caldwell, FOA president, upon receiving the grant check from WCECF board member Jeannette Giles.
   “The Stinson House is the heart of the arboretum and a Wood County historic landmark. This award is a long-term investment that will help preserve it for future generations to enjoy.”
   Learn more at quitmanarboretum.com.

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WCEC members’ generosity continues to grow
3. Forever Young Activity Center

Forever Young Activity Center provides a place for senior adult fellowship and enrichment activities, including educational programs, entertainment, health screenings, chair yoga, painting, crafts, games and volunteer opportunities. FYAC is sustained completely by fundraising and donations. The center has become a major hub for active seniors, and as its popularity has grown, the organization realized it needed to expand its paved parking lot. The $5,000 donation from WCECF will help pay for that expansion.

Before a crowd of celebrating onlookers, WCECF board member Giles presented a grant check to John F. Johnson, FYAC board president.

“We are really looking forward to the extra parking, as it will make the building much more accessible,” said Daisy Bennett, FYAC treasurer. “We appreciate the support and vote of confidence the WCECF board has shown us, which will allow us to continue to serve the community.”

Learn more at quitmanseniors.org.

4. Texas Ramp Project

The Texas Ramp Project’s mission is to establish and support regional wheelchair ramp-building programs across Texas to provide free ramps to elderly and disabled clients in need. Ramps are built exclusively with volunteer labor from individuals, local service clubs and churches. In 2018, TRP received 343 referrals in WCEC’s service territory and built 175 ramps. The organization’s goal is to foster independence and improve the quality of life for clients as well as provide relief to caregivers.
TRP relies on donated funds to purchase lumber and other building materials. The $2,500 donation from WCECF will fund the materials for four ramps.

Tom Lewis, East Texas area coordinator for TRP, accepted a grant check on behalf of his organization from Giles at a ramp construction site. “We would not be able to provide the joy and relief these ramps bring to our clients without the financial support,” Lewis said. “We are very grateful for this donation.”

Learn more at texasramps.org.

5. Winnsboro Rodeo Association
The Winnsboro Rodeo Association provides for the upkeep of the rodeo arena at Winnsboro City Park. The arena is used by the chamber of commerce and other nonprofits, free of charge, and is a vibrant center of activity in the region. It also is home to the local United Professional Rodeo Association chapter and the Tri-County Barrel Racing Association.

The Winnsboro Rodeo Association was granted $10,000 from WCECF, which it will use to maintain and upgrade the bleachers, bucking chutes and stock pens.

“It is a great honor for the Winnsboro Rodeo Association to receive this donation from the Wood County Electric Charita-

ble Foundation,” said Amanda Crump, WRA secretary-treasurer. “This donation will help us continue sharing the Western heritage and great sport of rodeo for future generations. Winnsboro Rodeo Association has been keeping this tradition going on 60 years, and with this donation, we hope to keep the tradition moving forward.”

Learn more at facebook.com/winnsbororodeo.

6. CS Food Pantry
CS Food Pantry provides emergency food for individuals and families in the Quitman area who are struggling financially. The pantry, which also serves areas in Wood County that don’t have access to food pantries, is funded by donations from churches, organizations and individuals. In 2018, it served more than 1,438 people.

“We allow people to come once a month. It’s truly an emergency shelter,” said Michelle Dobbs, president and director of Quitman Christmas Sharing, Plus. “Many clients are elderly and are taking care of their grandchildren. By the time they go to the doctor or pay for medicine, they are out of money.”

Giles presented CS Food Pantry with a $15,000 donation from WCECF.

“Thank you for the generous gift to CS Food Pantry of Quitman,” Dobbs said. “We are thrilled to have your support. Through your donation, we will be able to accomplish our goal of heating [and] cooling the pantry area and continue working toward feeding those in need. This truly will make a difference for us.”

Learn more at facebook.com/quitmanchristmassharingplus.
7. Hooves and Halos
Hooves and Halos presents twice-yearly events, called Playdays, for special-needs individuals, the elderly, veterans and their children, families and caregivers. Guests ride horses and enjoy a petting zoo, face painting, live music, games and a number of other activities. It’s free to all, and each guest, caregiver and volunteer receives lunch and a commemorative T-shirt.

Johnette Poole, Hooves and Halos executive director, accepted a $12,000 check from Giles. “The team from Hooves and Halos would like to thank all of the generous participants of the Operation Round Up program,” Poole said. “Your donations have gone toward making hundreds of people smile and know that they are precious. Everything that we do for our guests is donated by someone, and in this case, that is you! Every penny of our donations goes toward our Playdays and our guests. If you want to see those smiles for yourself, just take a look at our website.”

Learn more at hoovesandhalos.org.

8. Franklin County Community Food Bank
The mission of the Franklin County Community Food Bank, located in Mount Vernon, is to assist hungry families in that county. In addition to providing dry and canned goods, the food bank runs a program called Eggs for Everyone, which aims to provide the 170 families they serve with eggs.

WCECF awarded the food bank $4,550. “Franklin County Food Bank deeply appreciates the funds provided by the members of Wood County Electric Cooperative,” said Jim Stinson, the food bank’s board president. “This will provide eggs for everybody for a whole year!”

9. Lake Country CASA
Lake Country CASA volunteers help provide a voice for abused and neglected children. Their mission is to ensure the needs of children in the foster care system are met.

In 2018, 20,685 children in Texas were removed from their homes and entered into the foster care system. A child with a court-appointed advocate does not have to navigate the heart-breaking challenges alone.

Lake Country CASA received a $10,000 grant from WCECF. “Lake Country CASA appreciates Wood County Electric Cooperative and their members for their commitment to serving the abused and neglected children in Hopkins, Franklin and Rains counties,” said Gina Law, Lake Country CASA executive director. “This contribution ensures that the voices of all of our children in care are heard and their needs are met.”

Learn more at texascasa.org.
10. Van Zandt County Veterans Memorial

The Van Zandt County Veterans Memorial is one of the premiere sites in East Texas for retired military equipment and memorabilia and a place to learn about inspiring Texas veterans. The grounds are home to a Phantom F-4D fighter plane, UH-1E helicopter, 2.5-ton Army transport truck, U.S. Coast Guard boat and M114 medium towed howitzer. The memorial was built with the primary purpose of honoring all U.S. military veterans and especially those from Van Zandt County.

Run by volunteers, the site is beautifully landscaped and free to the public. Tours for schools and other groups can be arranged upon request.

WCECF awarded $2,500 to the memorial.

“The entire Van Zandt County Veterans Memorial board and the over 5,000 county veterans and their families greatly appreciate the generous donation from Wood County Electric Charitable Foundation,” said retired Air Force Lt. Col. Cary Hilliard, a member of the memorial’s board. “Your donation will be used to repaint our pavilion, which is used by civic and private groups for meetings and special events. Making the pavilion more attractive will bring more visitors to the memorial to learn about the many sacrifices our military personnel have made and are still making for all of us. Educating the public, especially the younger people, is one of our core missions, and your donation will help us achieve that goal.”

Learn more at vzcm.org.

11. Wood County Fire Marshal’s Office and Office of Emergency Management

The mission of the Wood County Fire Marshal’s Office and Office of Emergency Management is to provide for the health, safety and welfare of the citizens of Wood County, while also providing support and training to all fire departments and emergency management services in the county’s unincorporated areas. This office received $3,650, which Robin Johnson, WCECF board member, presented to Tully Davidson, Wood County fire marshal, at commissioners court.

“The donation will be used to purchase a drone with a camera and heat detecting technology, which will greatly aid in our emergency management efforts by allowing us to deploy modern technology in case of a missing person, checking for flooding and even help with firefighting efforts and investigations,” Davidson said. “Wood County is extremely appreciative of the donation and will use this equipment anywhere we are called. Thank you for your continued support, and we are always here ready to respond to our citizens at a moment’s notice.”

Giles, who presented many of the grant checks, talked about the joy she gets from participating in the Operation Round Up program and from being a WCECF board member.

“Thank you to all the members of WCEC who support Operation Round Up,” she said. “What a fantastic way for our pennies to be put together to benefit all nine counties served by WCEC. Those funds have been granted to such great local entities. I’d also like to say ‘thank you’ to my fellow board members, who serve with diligence, care and compassion to ensure the funds are used in the best manner. It’s a privilege to serve with them. Each application is reviewed and discussed in detail, before funding is granted. Lastly, I say ‘thank you’ to WCEC for providing a vehicle for the volunteer and charitable organizations to have access to this type of funding. All WCEC members can take pride in the benefit they have been to our region.”
“Not what we say about our blessings, but how we use them, is the true measure of our thanksgiving.”

—W.T. Purkiser, author

The employees of Wood County EC send warm wishes to all members for a healthy, happy and bountiful Thanksgiving!