

WCEC Leaders Across the Ages



1. Virgil B. Shaw, general manager, 1938–1968.

2. Juan D. Nichols, general manager, 1968–1997.

3. Debbie Robinson, general manager, 1997–2020, and Trey Teaff, general manager as of April.

ON APRIL 6, IT WILL BE OFFICIAL: WOOD COUNTY ELECTRIC

Cooperative will begin a new era as Debbie Robinson hands over the keys of the CEO and general manager's office to Trey Teaff, who will become just the fourth person to serve in that position since WCEC's founding in 1938.

Virgil B. Shaw was the first general manager and a founding member of the cooperative. He managed the system through its early development, starting when the first pole was set between Golden and Quitman. At the humble beginning, he and three others shared an office on the town square. In 1941, under his leadership, a new WCEC building was constructed on Highway 37 in Quitman—the same property where the cooperative stands today.

Juan D. Nichols guided the cooperative through growth and expansion for three decades. He's most known for his work establishing transmission lines and substations to ensure the provision of dependable wholesale power. That early planning paved

the way for the robust power delivery system still in place today.

Robinson managed the cooperative through an era of volatile utility restructuring legislation, rapid technological advancements, economic shifts and enormous growth. To leverage new technologies, she oversaw the construction of a new building capable of integrating those technologies and then invested in a state-of-the-art metering system to enhance efficiencies and reliability. Furthermore, she managed the launch of Operation Round Up, a charitable giving program that will ultimately feed millions of dollars in uplifting grants into East Texas communities.

Trey Teaff, a 23-year WCEC employee, has contributed greatly to the cooperative already, with his strong and conservative financial management practices. As he moves into the general manager's office, his experience—aided by the firm foundation laid by the strong leaders who have come before—will serve him and the cooperative well.



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*
Cathy S. Roberts, Vice President, *District 5*
Jane Roberson, Secretary-Treasurer, *District 6*
Burke Bullock, *District 2*
Kenneth Langley, *District 3*
Brent Glenn, *District 4*
Lewis D. Young, *District 7*

Contact Us

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wcec.org

MEMBER BENEFITS AND SERVICES

- Online account access and bill payment
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- Free bill-paying app
- Visa, Mastercard and Discover accepted
- SmartPower prepay electric 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*



Elections Committee To Meet

THE ELECTIONS COMMITTEE OF WOOD COUNTY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE WILL MEET AT the cooperative office at 501 S. Main St. in Quitman at least 40 days prior to the annual meeting. The committee is composed of the following members:

DISTRICT 1 Glenn E. Morris 268 FM 900 E. Mt. Vernon 75457	DISTRICT 2 Bobby Rhea 3777 CR 2403 Winnsboro 75494	DISTRICT 3 Clarence Meiske 1547 FM 2659 Hawkins 75765	DISTRICT 4 Carolyn Bryant 201 E. Oak St. Yantis 75497
DISTRICT 5 Beverly Waddleton P.O. Box 996 Quitman 75783	DISTRICT 6 Judy Peoples 1646 VZCR 1222 Grand Saline 75140	DISTRICT 7 P.A. Geddie P.O. Box 608 Ben Wheeler 75754	

Nomination and election of directors is defined in Article V, Section 3 of the bylaws. Copies of the bylaws are available upon request by calling the cooperative at (903) 763-2203 and at wcec.org. The elections committee shall make nominations for directors for districts 2, 3 and 7. Directors whose terms are expiring are Burke Bullock, District 2; Kenneth Langley, District 3; and Lewis Young, District 7.

The annual meeting of Wood County EC will be held **October 9** at **2 p.m.** at Gov. Jim Hogg Park, 101 Governor Hogg Parkway in Quitman.

Fond Farewell to a Tall Legacy

In her 37 years, Robinson put WCEC on promising path for continued success



PETITE IN STATURE, DEBBIE ROBINSON HAS RARE-ly made a grand entrance. Yet, when she steps into a room, people always know she's there. Her voice, equally unassuming, is quiet and calm. But when she has something to say, folks listen to her measured authority. It may not have always been that way, but she's grown into an accomplished and admired leader in her 37 years of service at Wood County Electric Cooperative—24 of which she worked as CEO and general manager.

A great amount of responsibility has rested on her shoulders, and she has stood tall through all of the challenges.

Among her many accomplishments, Robinson is a graduate of Texas A&M University, where she earned a Bachelor of Business Administration in accounting. She went on to become a certified public accountant, which, along with accounting work in the oil and gas industry, paved the way for her to join WCEC as an accountant in 1983. Just seven years later, in 1990, she was selected by then-General Manager Juan D. Nichols to serve as assistant manager.

In that role, Robinson gained additional management responsibilities that prepared her for the day in 1996 when the board of directors called for applicants for the general manager position. She was awarded the position from among several applicants, thus becoming one of the first women in the nation to head an electric cooperative.

"Looking back, I'm confident we made the right decision for WCEC and its members," Board President Pat Lindley said. "We couldn't have hired a more invested and conscientious manager. Throughout her tenure, she's served the members and employees of WCEC well. And she's done it on a local, statewide and national scale. She never backed down from a hard decision when it was in the best interest of our members and the cooperative's bottom line, and because of this, the future of WCEC is in good stead, and she has set up the next manager for success."

Robinson worked hard to secure sound contracts for WCEC, to embrace technology and to manage \$195 million worth of WCEC assets in members' best interests. She led the cooperative to strengthen its operations and distribution system, enhance safety, control costs to keep rates affordable for the members and contribute to economic growth. For example, she negotiated and secured a membership agreement that helped bring a Sanderson Farms feed mill and electric load to the region, which brought enormous positive regional economic impact.

Other significant key accounts she secured include Trans-Canada and Dallas Water Utility, among many others. As important, the economies of scale on large projects reduced the cost burden for every cooperative member.

On the technology front, Robinson has embraced hardware and software that have ensured a high level of service for members. Under her leadership, WCEC was one of the first utilities in the nation to offer a prepayment solution. This convenience eased a financial burden for many members while helping them save on their bills. More recently, she and her team deployed an all-new meter system that yielded many enhancements to reliability and member information.

Also under her leadership, WCEC constructed a state-of-the-art building to allow for continued technological growth. While some of Robinson's decisions and projects may have been unpopular at the time, history has proved them to be wise.

At the state and regional level, Robinson has been active in industry and cooperative trade associations, often serving in top leadership positions.

She was the president of East Texas Electric Cooperative, the secretary of Tex-La Electric Cooperative and a board member of Northeast Texas Electric Cooperative. The long-range plans, power contracts and investments made by these generation and transmission cooperatives—which provide wholesale power to distribution cooperatives such as WCEC—impact member prices for decades.

Robinson also served as chair of the board of Texas Electric Cooperatives, a statewide association that represents and advocates for electric cooperative interests before the Texas Legislature, United States Congress and regulatory agencies. She was also a member of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's Capital Credit Task Force. Most recently, she was a board member of the National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation, which offers low-interest loans to electric cooperatives.

Whether she was working at a national, state or regional level, Robinson always represented the members of WCEC.

"Debbie Robinson was always focused on how she could make people's lives better in the communities where she lived," said Mike Williams, TEC president and CEO. "But she was so good at what she did that state and national organizations wanted her involvement. She was board chair of the statewide organization of electric cooperatives, a director of a national cooperative bank with over \$25 billion in assets and

board chair of a regional generation and transmission cooperative, to name a few. She never sought the spotlight, but it always seemed to find her because of her genuine concern and ability for making things better."

When not working on cooperative business, Robinson also worked hard for the community.

She has served as a director of the Quitman Chamber of Commerce, East Texas Workforce Development Board, Wood County Extension Program Council, Wood County Peace Officers Training Advisory Board, and Wood County Industrial Commission. She also served as the Wood County A&M Club Muster chair for many years and is currently enjoying membership in the Pilot Club of Quitman, where she has served as an officer and president.

An everyday philosophy of Robinson's has always been to adopt technology and equipment when it makes sense, enhances safety or productivity, and cuts costs without sacrifice to service.

When she first became general manager, the co-op had 3,533 miles of line, 21,355 meters and 82 employees. Today, WCEC has 5,100 miles of line, serves 36,352 meters and has 93 employees. These numbers demonstrate that her prudent investments in tools, training and technology have allowed the cooperative to maintain a lean and effective workforce, even in the face of significant growth.

Robinson never imagined at 18 or 22 years of age that her career path would lead her in the direction that it has, but she said she's glad it did.

"The career I've had, and the wonderful opportunities afforded me and my family, are beyond anything I could have dreamed of," she said. "I've met and made lifelong friends in my co-workers and industry colleagues, as we've performed extremely important work and accomplished results. I have to brag just a little because WCEC employees are, bar none, some of the most dedicated, ethical and hardworking people I know. I'll miss them, but I'm confident they'll remain true to their core principles and continue to serve with the best of their abilities.

"Lastly, I offer grateful thanks to Juan D. Nichols, the past general manager, for preparing me for the role and to the board of directors for allowing me to serve the membership in this position for the last 24 years. It's been one of my greatest joys and a distinct honor."

Robinson is a native and lifelong resident of Texas, having grown up in Bryan. She's been a resident of Wood County since 1982, where she lives with her husband of 38 years, Troy. They're the parents of two boys, Alex and Clayton (Abigail). She and Troy are members of St. Peter the Apostle Catholic Church in Mineola. They love to travel, garden and cook, so Robinson's retirement plans are sure to include much of that.

But her newest and most anticipated adventure is just beginning, as she and Troy anticipate the birth of their first grandchild this spring. With that happy event, the tall legacy will continue.

New GM Steps Up to the Plate



TREY TEAFF HAS BEEN NAMED BY the board of directors as the next CEO and general manager of Wood County Electric Cooperative, and he comes to that position with a legacy of cooperative spirit in his blood, as well as a long and upwardly progressing career in the industry.

As a lifelong Texan growing up in a small town in West Texas, Teaff says his knowledge of cooperatives came early. His family was a member of both a telephone and electric cooperative, and his mother worked at a telephone co-op for 40 years. “My mom’s experience played a big part in me choosing my career path. I was able to see first-hand the impact a cooperative can have on its employees and the communities they serve.”

As a working accounting student at Texas Tech University, Teaff was able to secure a part-time position with accounting firm Bolinger, Segars, Gilbert & Moss. This job segued into a full-time position when Teaff earned his Bachelor of Business Administration in accounting in 1990. Once at BSG&M, he spent his time conducting audits of electric cooperatives in Arizona, New Mexico and Texas.

After a short stint working for the city of Lubbock, Teaff started his first electric cooperative job, at South Plains Electric Cooperative in Lubbock. During this time, he also earned his certified public accountant license. After three years as the accounting supervisor at South Plains EC, Teaff left West Texas for the accounting manager position at WCEC.

He now has 26 years of cooperative experience under his belt, with 23 at WCEC. In 2003, Teaff was named chief financial officer, and over time, his responsibilities grew to include oversight of the information technology, billing, member services and maintenance departments.

Teaff's proven experience as the CFO has uniquely prepared him for this next step. He's been instrumental in leading several initiatives that have saved the cooperative time and money through careful analysis and adoption of appropriate technology solutions. He has also been responsible for budgeting, conducting cost-of-service studies, financial forecasting and long-range planning, thus ensuring the cooperative remains financially sound and rates are appropriate, not only now but in the future.

Working alongside Robinson in what can be a volatile market, together the two executives managed to introduce just three rate adjustments since the 1990s.

"Trey is a well-proven man of integrity and strong skill sets," said Pat Lindley, WCEC board president. "He also has a strong cooperative background that will serve the membership of the cooperative well. After a unanimous vote, we're confident in our choice and his ability to lead the cooperative."

Teaff has spent his career continuing to invest in his studies, in the co-op arena and in the local community. He's a graduate of the Lake Country Leadership Program and an alumnus of the Texas Agricultural Lifetime Leadership Program, an intensive two-year training program of domestic and international study focused on leadership in rural and agricultural areas.

He's been active in industry and cooperative trade associations, serving on the planning committee for the accounting association of Texas Electric Cooperatives, Texas advisory committee for Touchstone Energy and the accounting advisory committee for SEDC, an industry accounting software cooperative.

Teaff also has a strong record in helping to shape the community through volunteerism and by serving in leadership capacities. He was elected to serve on the board of Quitman Independent School District, where he worked on the budget and facilities committees and served as secretary and president.

A supporter of young people, Teaff coached for the Quitman Youth Foundation and Upward Youth Basketball. He was a president and vice president of the Quitman Development Corporation and served on the board of the Greater Quitman Chamber of Commerce. Teaff has been a member of the Rotary Club, serving in various leadership roles, including president. He was recognized for his work in the greater Quitman area with the Community Builder Award, presented by the Masonic Grand Lodge of Texas.

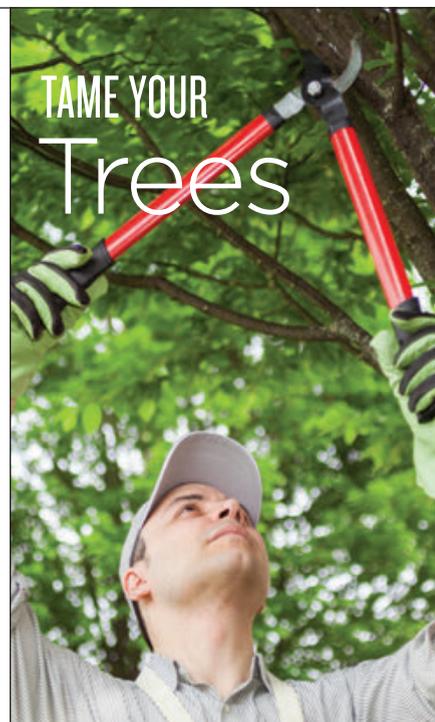
Teaff has always taken to leadership roles.

"I knew early on in my cooperative career that I wanted to be a co-op general manager one day. I am beyond grateful for the opportunity and the trust given to me by the board to be the next CEO/GM of WCEC. Along the way I've been blessed to have crossed paths with people who've provided me encouragement to get me to where I am today. I'm grateful to each of them. For me, this new journey a gift. To be able to serve the employees and the membership is truly humbling."

Teaff's leisure activities include physical fitness and spending time with his family. He and his wife, Stacey, have lived in Wood County since 1996. They are the proud parents of a son, Rowdy, and this past year, they proudly gained a new daughter-in-law, Brianna.

Debbie Robinson, whom Teaff is set to replace, is confident in Teaff's abilities.

"Our cooperative has a solid foundation, with many talented, skilled and dedicated employees," she said. "Of those, Trey has been an admired team member, a thoughtful leader and a strong cooperative advocate for many years. He's always stepped up to the plate, whether it's been at the co-op or in our community. He's demonstrated his care and concern, and he'll be an excellent manager."



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We love our trees, but when branches are too close to power lines, they can cause power outages, fire hazards and other safety concerns. Here are some rules to follow:

If a tree or a large branch is touching—or falls on—an electric line, call your electric cooperative immediately.

Never trim trees that grow close to power lines; that is a job for professionals. Call your electric cooperative for assistance and guidance.

Use extreme caution when doing any overhead trimming. Branches often fall in unexpected places.

Don't allow children to climb trees or build treehouses close to power lines.

Plant at appropriate distances from all power lines.

When planting a tree, consider how tall the tree will grow. At maturity, trees should be at least 10 feet away from power lines.

Wood County EC encourages you to always practice safety.