

Intertwined Celebrations

Give thanks for veterans this November—and always



**MESSAGE
FROM CEO
AND GENERAL
MANAGER
DEBBIE
ROBINSON**

I think it's very fitting that Veterans Day is celebrated in the same month as Thanksgiving. Is there anything greater for which to be thankful than the freedom we enjoy because of the tremendous sacrifices of those who served in our military?

Generations of Americans (and Texans) have signed on the dotted line and given years of their lives to ensure that you and I can live as we please. Sadly, in far too many cases, they have literally given their lives, never having the opportunity to enjoy that freedom as a veteran.

While we may disagree on the right or wrong of a particular conflict, all Americans can agree that serving in the military, whether at home or in the heat of battle abroad, is a sacrifice worth being thankful for, remembering and honoring.

Let's not rush past November 11 in

our haste to celebrate Thanksgiving. Make time to say "thanks" to the many who have served.

Visit a local VFW post or VA hospital to shake a few hands, share some kind words and listen to a few stories. Make a donation to an organization that benefits veterans. It doesn't have to be much, and it doesn't even have to be money. Deliver magazines and snacks to a veterans group or donate clothing. Donations to or volunteering at an organization that assists the homeless can help improve the lives of veterans, as many find themselves on the streets.

Why not set an extra plate (or two or 10) at your annual Thanksgiving get-together and include some local veterans who might not have family with whom to share the holidays?

If there are young people in your life, give them opportunities to develop an appreciation for the sacrifice veterans have made for them and always have a special place in their hearts for those who have served our country.

I know my list of "thanks" this year is going to be a little longer. As I share the holidays with family and friends, I'll be making time to thank those who helped assure I have so much for which to be thankful.



*'Not what we say
about our blessings,
but how we use them,
is the true measure
of our thanksgiving.'*

—W.T. Purkiser



THINKSTOCK

Wood County Electric Cooperative wishes you and yours a richly blessed Thanksgiving holiday.



Downed trees near power lines illustrate the importance of a vigilant right-of-way program. A well-maintained clearance greatly reduces interference with the delivery of electricity.

Tree Woes?

You Are Not Alone.

Last year's harsh winter coupled with the extreme summer drought have left countless East Texas trees battered and bruised. With that damage, large limbs are steadily breaking, and even whole trees are falling in record numbers. As our readers well know, one of the principal contributors to electrical outages and blinks is trees and vegetation.

Because of this, at Wood County Electric Cooperative (WCEC), we've always maintained an aggressive right-of-way (ROW) program where we mow and trim to keep trees and vegetation from impeding or interrupting electrical service. But even so, because of the unprecedented recent weather damage to our East Texas trees, there is an enormous backlog for tree-trimming requests. In recent weeks, we have seen triple the number of calls as in the past. As always, we welcome member calls, but we want to inform you that it may take us a little longer to respond based on the increased number of calls we are receiving.

Currently, upon receiving a tree report from a member, in about two to

three days from the call, either ROW Coordinator Chuck Baucum or ROW Assistant Daren Turner will visit the location and analyze the work and the urgency of the response needed. Upon review, they will prioritize the work based on how critical it is. Because of the backlog, it may take a month to six weeks before a crew can be assigned to trim trees and limbs that are not deemed critical.

Of note, WCEC will only trim trees that jeopardize WCEC lines and encroach on WCEC right-of-way. Additionally, trees threatening primary lines get priority, as damage to those lines can be more costly to repair. Also, if that service goes out, it is likely to affect larger numbers of members.

At WCEC, we believe the ROW program is a vital function in maintaining reliable power. Therefore, it is important that our members also understand the critical nature—as well as the enormous challenge—we are currently facing. First, safety is the primary concern as trees, brush, vines and shrubs all conduct electricity,

which can have fatal consequences.

As a reminder to all members, for primary distribution line the ROW clearance is 15 feet on both sides of the lines (30 feet total), all the way to the ground. For secondary line (the lines leading to your meter), 4 feet on either side of the lines and to the ground should remain clear. This is not only our policy, but also follows industry standard guidelines that help ensure that electricity remains reliable and safe for all.

One thing that many people fail to realize is the importance of keeping a clear path all the way to the ground under power lines. The reason is that if an energized line falls during a storm, or because of a tree or tree limb, it will energize whatever it contacts, be it a tree, plant, shrub, fence or living creature. A live line can also cause a fire by igniting whatever it contacts.

WCEC is grateful for and depends on members warning of dangerous situations. We are always glad to receive such information; and someone will go out and inspect and then determine the action needed.

Need To Report a Tree Hazard?

If a member does wish to report a situation that warrants attention from our ROW crew, information is an essential part to a successful outcome. When notifying us of a hazard, the more information a member can relay helps our team target an issue and speeds response time. Some things to note include:

- Do you currently have power?
- If you do have power, are your lights dimming or flickering?
- If there is a limb or tree making contact, is it on the distribution line or on the line from the main feeder to your meter?
- Is the tree limb causing electrical arcing or burning?

To make such a report, members may call our member service department at (903) 762-2203 or they can now go online to WCEC.org, select the member services tab, and select and fill out the online tree trimming form.



Riding With Respect

Standing for those who stood for us

Even when they are a great distance away, you can hear them. When they are still miles and miles away, you can feel them. The nearer they approach, the collective voices of their Harley Davidsons, Kawasakis and Hondas growl and reverberate like rolling thunder. As they draw closer, their American flags whip and snap in the wake of their iron horses. They are riders from every walk of life, with one passion in common: their abiding respect and honor for those men and women who serve our country. They

are the Patriot Guard Riders (PGR).

The PGR's mission is simple and solemn, and it is always executed with patriotism and devotion. The riders have two objectives: They ride to show sincere respect for fallen heroes, their families and communities, and shield mourning families and friends from any interruptions during funeral services. Initially, the group was founded in 2005 by the American Legion Riders Chapter 136 from Kansas, in response to the practice of fringe individuals who protest funerals of U.S.

military members. Since its inception, the PGR has grown into a national group of more than 200,000 members with chapters in every state in the U.S.

The same year the organization was founded, a group met in Dallas to form the Texas chapter. Since then, the Texas Patriot Guard Riders has grown to encompass seven regional groups. Of local interest, the East Texas Patriot Guard (ET PGR) is comprised of 1,200 members and serves 35 counties in East Texas. "What we do is very healing and cathartic for the family mem-



LEFT: ET PGR members enjoy each other's company before an annual social event. ET PGR Assistant Deputy State Captain Shelia Manning (lime-green shirt) sits in the center of the gathering. **ABOVE:** Manning leads the way on a PGR mission ride. **BELOW:** PGR members form a flag line during a funeral.



DREAGON JOINER, ET PGR

bers of fallen heroes. Our guys help others," says Shelia Manning, a Longview real estate agent, Harley Sportster rider and assistant deputy state captain of the ET PGR.

And, what they do is powerful. It sounds simple, and for the most part it is, at least for the family. First, a family member of an active or veteran service member or any first responder must ask the PGR to participate in a loved one's memorial service. A requestor can do this through the national PGR, the Texas PGR, or even contact the ET PGR directly. Once done, the PGR will send out a call for all riders, coordinating the time and place for the support mission. And then a cadre of PGR members will seemingly appear from nowhere, sometimes well over 100

motorcyclists strong, to escort and offer respect for a fallen hero.

The PGR appropriately calls its actions missions, and while seemingly effortlessly executed, there are many details to be organized and disseminated to ensure safe, timely participation. They always begin with a prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance. After that, the missions are all different. Missions can be miles or hundreds of miles long and can even be broken into several parts and last for a day or two. A mission can encompass a motorcade to meet and escort a fallen soldier from the airport to a funeral home. Or it can take place during visitation and include a solemn flag line. An escort can also be given to the funeral, where there may be another flag line, and

then there can be an escort to the final resting place. Just like military missions, the services the PGR provides are planned not for the convenience of the PGR, but for whenever and wherever they are wanted and needed.

It's not uncommon for a mission to unfold on a 102-degree day, or in rain, sleet or freezing weather. And Manning says that those missions are some of the most rewarding. "We never know when and where we will have a mission," she says. "My fear is that when the call comes and it's 20 degrees outside, nobody will come." But, she says in awe, her fears have always been unfounded. "They just ALWAYS come. It's amazing. It's such a powerful experience."

Those who come are volunteers from all walks of life. Manning says

there is a mixture of all ages, and the ET PGR members are both veterans and civilians, a diverse group of professionals and blue collar workers and bikers—and even non-bikers. They have members who participate in escorts in cars, or they just come and stand on the flag line. There are no politics and no special prerequisites to be a member of the PGR. The only condition for a member is the desire to honor and offer respect to service members and first responders.

Manning says that ET PGRs do not just support memorial services, and they also work hand-in-hand with another organization, Welcome Home Soldiers, out of Tyler. In a support role to that organization, the PGR will form a mission to welcome home troops or attend troop sendoffs when there is a deployment. Additionally, the PGR makes other appearances at veterans' events. The group recently completed a big mission, helping to escort the Code of Support, a scroll that was signed by hundreds of thousands in support of current military members. In a very coordinated effort, the Texas chapters and East Texas riders met the scroll at the state line and escorted it in relay fashion as it made its way across the state, headed to Washington, D.C., to be delivered to lawmakers.

"The PGR is not for everyone," Manning says. "It can really wear on you because it is so emotional. But, at the end of the day when you go home, your heart is so very full. For me personally, it's a way of giving back just a little bit, for those that have given all." She also says that most of the PGR never actually meet a family member or talk to them. They just show up to honor and respect, and she says, "We just pray that we have helped a little."

Sometimes a family member may come over to thank the riders, and she says that it's just so overwhelming because in reality, the PGR is there not to be thanked, but to thank the family members who have given so much.

ET PGR RIDE CAPTAIN ED WILKINSON, CHANDLER



JIM EATON



FROM TOP: A Patriot Guard rider flies the PGR flag alongside Old Glory as he participates on a mission. Rural Texas citizens are known by the PGR to be some of the most patriotic and caring people. When a mission is in progress, they can be counted on to line the streets in support and thanksgiving.

Manning says that many times she gets calls from those not in the PGR. "A lot of people want to do something, and they just don't know how or what to do," she said.

She says that anyone can come out to support and honor the family by lining the streets in the towns through which the processions are traveling. She encourages all to bring flags to hold and make encouraging signs of thanks and tribute. People lining the streets in respect are one of the actions that anyone can take, and this action that may seem so simple brings untold comfort to families.

"Just come park on the side of the road. Come stand on the flag line. The only thing you need to bring is

respect," she says.

Manning says she remembers every mission, but there is one in particular that struck a chord with her. During an escort of a soldier from Dallas on a route several hundred miles long, the PGR traveled through many small East Texas towns. In every one, they were met by streets lined with people, standing in respect and honor. Many held flags and had tears in their eyes, and all were there to support a soldier who had paid the ultimate price for the freedoms all Americans enjoy. Manning says, town after town, it was just the same.

"They all came out," she says. "Rural America is the best."

And, she said, when you have an experience like that, and see the outpouring of support, even with the bad news you hear daily, "It makes you realize that our country really is OK."

There are no dues to join the PGR. Their slogan says it all, "Freedom isn't free, but membership in the Patriot Guard is." Anyone can be involved, as little or as much as they want. Each member is responsible for his or her expenses on a mission. If they join a mission, they'll pay for their own gas and other costs.

However, the ET PGR does always have a support vehicle that they try to send along. It carries water or drinks for the hot summer rides and coffee for the times when it's cold. It also carries flags for the flag line and first aid kit and other items.

The support vehicle travels light, but there are costs associated. So any and all donations of water or money for fuel are always welcome.

WCEC members wishing to learn more about the Patriot Guard Riders should visit patriotguard.org, or watch the YouTube video *Life of Duty: Patriot Guard Riders*, produced by the National Rifle Association. Anyone wishing to contact the East Texas Patriot Guard Riders to join, donate or to request a mission, can contact Shelia Manning at sheliamanning@aol.com or call her at (903) 240-4000.

Pole Patrol

Attaching Objects to Poles Puts Lives on the Line—And It's a Crime

What do yard sale signs, basketball hoops, deer stands, satellite dishes and birdhouses have in common? They're often found illegally attached to utility poles. But this isn't only a crime of inconvenience. Safety issues caused by unapproved pole attachments place the lives of lineworkers and the public in peril.



ALLAMAKEE CLAYTON ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

A birdhouse perches illegally on a utility pole below an equally illegally placed sign.

It might seem innocent, but a small nail partially driven into a pole can pierce a lineworker's glove, stripping away crucial protection from high-voltage electricity.

Wood County Electric Cooperative's line crews climb utility poles at all hours of the day and night, in the worst of conditions. Anything attached to utility poles can create serious hazards for our line personnel. Sharp objects like nails, tacks, staples or barbed wire can puncture rubber gloves and other safety equipment, making linemen vulnerable to electrocution.

Wood County EC lineworkers have reported more poles used as community bulletin boards, satellite mounts and even support legs for deer stands, lights and carports.

Not only do these attachments put line crews at risk—anyone illegally placing these items on poles comes dangerously close to energized power lines with thousands of volts of energy pulsing overhead. It's always wise to keep any structure at least 10 feet away from utility poles.

Unauthorized pole attachments violate the National Electric Safety Code. In Texas, it is a crime to attach any unapproved item to a utility pole and doing so can result in a fine of up to \$500 per day.

Please help us keep our linemen—and our community—safe. Remove any unauthorized items attached to utility poles.

—Megan McKoy-Noe



NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Give Thanks for Rural Electric Pioneers

They did their work over 70 years ago, and most of them have passed away by now. But the legacy of the men and women who petitioned, paid for and built Wood County Electric Cooperative, which serves your neighborhood, lives on every time you turn on the lights, watch TV or charge your cellphone.

This holiday season, give thanks for the pioneers who helped bring electricity to the rural communities and farms that the big electricity companies refused to serve. Perhaps your grandparents or your neighbors' relatives were involved in collecting membership fees or signatures. Maybe you've heard their stories.

Thanksgiving is an appropriate time to recall their sacrifices, their pre-electricity lifestyle and their foresight, which laid the foundation for the at-your-fingertips electric, phone and Internet service that you enjoy today.

When you take your turkey out of your electric oven this season, or when you switch on your electric furnace or heat pump for the first time this fall, remember those who lived without the convenience of electricity—and that they wanted it so badly they literally took matters into their own hands.



Did You Know ...

Electric cooperatives own and maintain 2.5 million miles, or 42 percent, of the nation's electric distribution lines, covering three quarters of the nation's landmass, but deliver only 10 percent of the total kilowatt-hours sold in the U.S. each year.

Source: National Rural Electric Cooperative Association

ILLUSTRATION BY CARL WIENS