

A Million Local Christmas Blessings

ONE MILLION DOLLARS IN CHECKS WILL SOON be sailing into the hands of our members. This is possible because Wood County Electric Cooperative is a nonprofit entity. These checks, generated through capital credits, are just one of the many benefits that set cooperatives apart from investor-owned, for-profit utilities. As is our annual tradition, these checks—all greater than \$10—will be mailed this month.

Wouldn't it be nice if those checks were all spent close to home?

Supporting local businesses is an investment in your community and in your neighbors. When you buy local, you participate in advancing someone's dreams and supporting their hard work. You help build a strong neighborhood with your local patronage. And when the money stays close to home, the tax dollars trickle out to provide for local schools, help to build and maintain local roads and infrastructure, and empower our first responders as they care for and protect us. Buying locally

builds local wealth, which in turn sustains and improves our local communities.

In this day and age, it's often perceived as cheaper and more convenient to buy distant goods through the Internet and have them shipped directly to your door. In rural locales, it can even be a challenge to find the item being sourced. Sometimes it requires intentional actions and interactions to purchase products and goods locally. Picking up the phone or visiting to inquire at a local store about their goods and services entails the investment of a small amount of time.

That investment, though, helps unify and strengthen



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our neighborhoods, and you could be pleasantly surprised by the level of commitment your neighborhood business will exhibit. It takes cooperation among neighbors to enhance our communities. It takes cooperation among neighbors to build something that is worthwhile. And that cooperation does make a positive difference.

There's no better example of that than your local electric cooperative. We were formed by locals to serve locals. Initially, the purpose of WCEC was to power lives with electricity. But over the years, through our commitment to economic development and many other actions, we've also proved that we are in the business of improving the lives of our members and our neighbors.

By living in the serenity, beauty and neighborliness of East Texas, we are all blessed already. And when your portion of another million blessings comes in the form of a capital credits check, consider the notion that we all prosper together. Together we can spin a joyous, homegrown Christmas story by buying local when we can.



About Capital Credits

CAPITAL CREDITS ARE A MEMBER'S

share of Wood County Electric Cooperative's annual revenue minus expenses. These are also known as margins. Once the annual financial books are closed, the margins are allocated to each member based on their percentage of shares and past annual electricity purchases.

Capital credits represent ownership in WCEC and grow with electricity purchases and length of membership. The co-op uses capital credits as a source of capital for operations and improvements to providing service.

Annually, the board of directors decides whether to retire capital credits, based on the financial status of the cooperative.

WCEC capital credits are usually paid in December in the form of a check to those who have a capital credits balance. The amount is determined by several factors, including federal guidelines, financial ratios, system goals and objectives, interest rates and co-op bylaws.

Checks are mailed in mid-December to those who have a capital credit balance large enough to generate a \$10 or greater check. Credits are set aside for those accounts that don't have a balance large enough to generate a \$10 check. Those members will receive a check the next time capital credits are allocated and retired and they've built up enough to reach the \$10 threshold.

BRANDON ALMS | iSTOCK | THINKSTOCK

The Power Is in Our Members' Hands ... And They LIKE It



IN 2004, WOOD COUNTY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE instituted the SmartPower program. This is a prepaid electricity program designed to give members control of their payment schedules. The SmartPower system is similar to a prepaid phone card. Members prepay for electricity by visiting one of nine kiosks and downloading credit onto a SmartCard. Then they take the loaded card home and insert it into a digital SmartPower in-home unit that accepts the payment. This unit then keeps a running tabulation as the credit is used, and displays the current balance. This unit also displays current power usage and average daily usage, and it projects the amount of time left before more credit is needed.

When it is time for more credit, SmartPower consumers can revalue their SmartCards in 11 convenient locations. They can do this at WCEC's main office in Quitman and at the mobile unit. Or they can revalue at one of nine kiosks located in Grand Saline, Hawkins, Lindale, Mineola, Mt. Vernon, Quitman, Van, Yantis or Winnsboro.

Currently, WCEC has more than 3,300 members who use this system. In June, the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association initiated a survey of prepaid electricity users and asked WCEC members to be a part of that survey. The NRECA's purpose was to collect data to seek Department of Energy funding. At WCEC, we thought the results of the survey were interesting, so we wanted to share them with our members.

The NRECA interviewed 90 prepaid and 80 non-prepaid WCEC members online and by phone. In these interviews, non-SmartPower members, on a 10-point scale, rated WCEC at 9.05. SmartPower users rated the co-op at 8.55. More than 70 percent of SmartPower users rated their experience with SmartPower "excellent."

The reason members gave for choosing SmartPower were varied, but at the top of the list, 69 percent of the users said it was to better manage and track their electric bills. Others said it was to avoid big surprises from end-of-the-month bills. And others chose it to help them monitor and reduce their electricity use.

Because SmartPower users can display real-time energy use, it gives members the knowledge to conserve. When a SmartPower user turns on and off appliances, the kilowatt-hours being used become apparent because the numbers are right there to see. So people are more motivated to turn off lights, computers, gaming systems and appliances when no one is using them because they can see the actual cost.

This heightened awareness has even proved, over the years, to be able to help these members lower electric bills by 12 percent. Consider this: If your bill averages \$250 a month, with a 12 percent savings you could reduce that bill by \$30 a month, or \$360 annually.

What Participating Members Are Saying About SmartPower

- 96%** It's easy to keep up with the balance on the account.
- 88%** I'd sign up for SmartPower again, given the chance.
- 85%** It's easy to manage my electric bill so that it fits in my budget.
- 76%** Since choosing SmartPower, my view of WCEC is more favorable.
- 72%** Since enrolling, I waste a lot less electricity.
- 66%** My electric costs are noticeably lower than they were before I chose SmartPower.
- 46%** It's inconvenient to have to continually monitor my account.

Would you like to learn more or sign up?

To learn more, request a free copy of our SmartPower brochure or informational DVD by calling or emailing our member service representatives today. Call Monday through Friday, from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., by dialing 1-800-762-2203, or send an email to info@wcec.org.

Cut Lighting Decoration Costs

HOLIDAY SHOPPING FLYERS AND GLITTERING LIGHTS can mean only one thing: The holiday season is upon us! This year, consider giving yourself the gift of energy efficiency as you decorate your home for the holidays.

Holiday lighting takes many shapes and forms. Whether you prefer simple lighting or something more elaborate, it all starts with your selection of lights. If you are shopping around for new holiday lighting this year, be sure to check out a safer and smarter lighting option: light-emitting diodes, or LEDs.

With LED holiday lighting, you can save money by using less energy. Although LED lights may be a little more expensive to purchase, they use less energy and last longer than regular lights. In fact, they can last up to 100,000 hours indoors. Plus, LED lighting comes in a huge variety of shapes and colors.

Because LED lights do not run as hot as incandescent mini-lights, they are not as dangerous, so you can string more strands together safely. There are also LED lights that are made for both indoor and outdoor use.

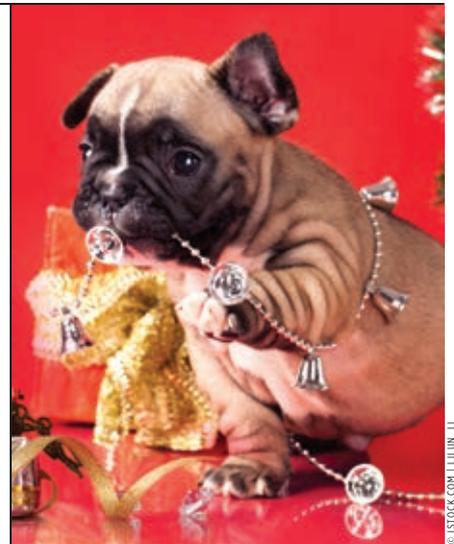
Additionally, you may want to consider solar lighting. Although solar lighting is more expensive to purchase than LEDs, its operation will not add to your electric bill. The lights charge during the day when the sun is out, and they light up at night.

No matter what lights you choose to buy, look for the blue Energy Star label. Energy Star states that the products it certifies can use up to 70 percent less energy and can last up to 10 times longer than other products.

Another way to save energy is to turn off the lights when they are not needed. For example, turn off lights during daylight hours, when you are away from home, and before you go to bed. For your convenience, consider investing in a timer that will automatically turn your lights on and off at set times.

The cheapest, cleanest and greenest energy is the energy not used. Therefore, consider using other decorations that do not require electricity. You can use garlands of popcorn, reflective ornaments, tinsel, ribbons and wreaths to help you decorate more efficiently.

For more tips on energy efficiency, visit energycouncil.org.



‘Paws’ To Keep Pets Safe

EVERY YEAR, THOUSANDS OF PETS

around the country are given as gifts during the holiday season. If you are thinking about joining this tradition, please “paws” to prepare your home before bringing a furry friend home for the holidays.

Puppies and kittens are naturally curious and can turn unexpected household items—not to mention shiny, dangling ornaments—into toys. To keep your new pet and your family safe, follow this safety checklist:

- ▶ **Keep electrical cords** away from puppies and kittens so they don’t chew on them. What may seem like a mild shock to an adult may be enough to kill a small pet. Cover the cord with a heavy plastic sleeve, or ask your pet store for a bitter-tasting product to put on the cord.
- ▶ **Halogen lamps** should never be used in play areas. Halogen bulbs reach very high temperatures and, if knocked over during play, could easily start a fire.
- ▶ **Playful pets** can knock radios, curling irons and other items into the water. All appliances near sinks or bathtubs should be plugged into outlets equipped with ground-fault circuit interrupters.
- ▶ **Do not allow pets** to curl up for a nap behind a decorated tree or warm computer equipment. They need to learn to stay away from all electrical connections.



Using LED or solar lighting options, plus a timer to turn them on and off, can help your holiday decorations cost less.



Merry Christmas

The directors, management team and employees of Wood County EC wish you and yours a richly blessed season.



Wood County Electric Cooperative

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CEO/GENERAL MANAGER

Debbie Robinson

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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MEMBER BENEFITS AND SERVICES

- Online account access and bill payment
 - Paperless E-Bill services
 - Free bill-paying app
 - Visa, MasterCard, American Express and Discover accepted
 - SmartPower prepay electric system
 - Scholarships and youth programs
 - Safety and energy conservation programs
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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, *Winnsboro*
Friday, Economy Drug, *Grand Saline*



Contact Us

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