



## WESTERN COOPERATIVE ELECTRIC NEWS

### FROM THE MANAGER

# Learning About Co-ops One Bite at a Time



Darrin Lynch

The original seven cooperative principles set forth in 1844 contained the simple phrase, "Promotion of Education." Principle Five states that all cooperatives should promote "Education, Training, and Information." As such, Western operates to educate, train, and inform its employees, members, and the communities in which we live and serve, in general.

Principle Five is based on the simple premise that if people know more about the cooperative business model, they will be in a much better position to understand the benefits of cooperative membership and promote better use of their cooperative's resources.

While there are almost one million people in the United States

who work for cooperatives of all types (agriculture, housing, credit unions, and others, in addition to electric cooperatives), very few of us learn about cooperatives in school. That creates a challenge when trying to explain the cooperative difference. People understand an investor-owned business is designed to make a profit or that a non-profit, like the Red Cross, is designed to serve the community. Cooperatives have both an economic and a social purpose. Western Cooperative Electric operates on a not-for profit basis so that we can provide the most reliable electric service, keeping safety always at the forefront of what we do, at an affordable price.

Due to the fact that the cooperative business model is normally not taught in schools, it is up to us at Western, to ensure that you know about the benefits of your cooperative membership. Consumer

surveys consistently affirm that people prefer to do business with a cooperative, when given a choice.

So, why not teach about cooperatives in school? One reason is that the cooperative community is so diverse that teaching about it can generate confusion. This can be countered with the age old question, "How do you eat an elephant?" to which the answer is "One bite at a time!" At Western, we choose to take our "bites" using a number of means such as: website, annual meeting, Facebook, Kansas Country Living magazine, and simply visiting face-to-face and on the phone with Western's Trustees, employees, and fellow members.

By knowing more about how Western operates, you are in a better position to participate as a member. Keeping our members, employees, and communities educated, trained, and informed is the cooperative way of doing business.

## Western's Payment Options

Western's members can make payments through our website or by phone using a credit card or electronic funds transfer. To pay by phone, call our automated service at 800-330-1025 or call our main office to speak with a Western employee. Through our website, you can also view your account or enter your meter reading. Check this feature and other services at [www.westerncoop.com](http://www.westerncoop.com)



## Trustee Nominating Committees to be Announced

The 2015 Western Cooperative Electric Association Annual Meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, May 13, 2015.

Prior to the meeting, the Western Trustees will appoint nominating committees. The committees' responsibility is to prepare a list of nominations for Trustees in the districts which have terms expiring and present these nominations for election by members at the Annual Meeting. Article IV, Section 4.06 of Western's Bylaws states the following concerning nominations:

*"At least 60 days prior to the annual meeting, the president shall, with the approval of the Board of Trustees, appoint a nominating committee of three members from each of said three Trustee districts, and each of said nominating committees shall nominate one or more members from its respective district for each trustee to be elected from the district, and within 30 days from the date of their appointment said nominating committees shall report their nominations to the secretary of the cooperative who shall cause the list of nominees to be mailed to the members*

*of the cooperative at the time the notice of annual meeting is mailed.*

*Any 15 or more members of the cooperative, acting together, may make additional nominations in writing over their signatures, in like manner showing clearly which committee-nominated candidate(s) are being opposed, not less than 20 days prior to the*

*the names and addresses of all nominees, showing separately those nominated by the Committees and those nominated by petition, if any.*

*The chairman, or the chairman's appointee, at such meeting, after all nominations so made have been duly announced, shall call for additional nominations from the floor, and shall ascertain and announce, after any nominations made from the floor, the particular Trustee District from or with respect to which any additional candidates have been nominated. The Member making a nomination or nominations shall designate the nominee(s) of the committees and/or the nominee(s) by petition, if any, and/or other nominee(s) nominated from the floor, if any, against whom his nominee(s) shall run.*

*Notwithstanding the provision contained in this Section, failure to comply with any of such provisions shall not affect in any manner whatsoever the validity of any action taken by the Board of Trustees after the election of Trustees."*

### Positions Up for Election are Currently Served by:

- ▶ **District 1:** Graham, Osborne, Rooks, & Sheridan counties  
**MELVIN O. KELLER**
- ▶ **District 2:** Ellis, Lincoln, Russell, and Trego counties  
**CRAIG CROSSLAND**
- ▶ **District 3:** Barton, Ellsworth, Gove, Ness and Rush counties  
**LARRY J. EVANS**

*meeting, and the secretary shall post such nominations at the same place where the list of nominations made by the Committees is posted.*

*The Secretary shall mail to the Members with the notice of the meeting, or separately, but no less than 10 days prior to the date of the meeting, a statement of the Trustees to be elected from specific Trustee Districts, and*

## Democratic Member Control is Critical to Every Cooperative BY ADAM SCHWARTZ

While the national elections of the past November may be fading from your memory, voting for politicians is not the only way as cooperative members can practice democracy.

Every cooperative—whether it's Western Cooperative Electric, your credit union or a farm cooperative—follows the basic principle of one member, one vote. Most often you are asked to vote and elect individuals that will represent you on the board of directors. These folks are your friends, neighbors and fellow residents of our community. Occasionally, you may be asked to vote on a policy, such as a bylaw change (this is like the constitution for your cooperative).

Every member in good standing of the cooperative may run for the board. This is one of the key differences between a cooperative member and a customer of an investor-owned utility (IOU). Most IOUs are not too interested in customers' opinions of how the company should be run.

Cooperatives invite participation. In fact,

it is critically important to the survival of the cooperative. Most cooperatives serve far fewer people than IOUs. Cooperatives measure the number of members in the thousands, IOUs in the millions. If you are not actively involved with the cooperative, we all suffer. As the electric utility industry evolves, having interested members who are willing to take an active role is critically important.

Several of colleagues have developed the following scenario to encourage member participation in consumer cooperatives such as rural electric cooperatives. It is called the Own, Use, Serve and Belong model.

**Own** Refers to each member truly believing and feeling that they do indeed share in the ownership of the cooperative. This can come from attending the Annual Meeting, voting, receiving a capital credits check or participating in other cooperative events.

**Use** For electric cooperatives this means that you use

the cooperative's resources wisely (after all, you are an owner of those resources). You use energy-efficient appliances, weather strip windows and doors, use LED or CFL lights—and you turn them off when you leave the room. Share that one with the kids!

**Serve** If we are successful with "own" and "use," perhaps you will feel called to serve your cooperative—maybe as a board member, volunteer, committee member or community contributor through the cooperative.

**Belong** We all seek to belong to something. In the early days when the cooperative was just getting started, neighbors helped neighbors. While our lives seem busier and more electronically driven than ever, the need to connect and belong is necessary for us and our communities to thrive.

There is great power in the human connection, and at Western, we strive to do that every day.