The emphasis on safety during the 69th Annual TEC Loss Control Conference March 17–20 was not lost on the 431 attendees at the Sheraton Arlington Hotel. The messages came from co-op executives, safety experts, law enforcement officials, injured linemen and the widow of a fallen lineman.

“The second you drop your guard, it could happen to you,” said Dennis Ferguson, from Guadalupe Valley EC. He summed up the cautionary lessons about the constant hazards of his profession imparted during the conference’s 20 sessions.

The conference also featured a trade show of more than 40 representatives demonstrating products and services essential to the utility industry.

The annual auction and golf tournament raised nearly $35,000 for the scholarship fund available to children of employees who participate in TEC’s Loss Control program.

Linemen injured on the job shared emotional tales during sessions titled “Don’t Think It Can’t Happen to You.” Zeke Ybarra, a first-class lineman at Victoria EC, suffered severe burns on his face and arm after making electrical contact. “One second can change your life forever,” he said. “I got careless.”

Fifteen co-op employees won Lifesaving Awards, and the stories of their heroism were told in seven poignant videos shown during general sessions.

Fifteen breakout sessions focused on industry issues and practices, including fall arrest system regulations, RESAP and identifying hazards, formation of a safety committee, accident investigations and the dangers of meth labs.

Mike Williams, TEC president and CEO, spoke about the practical, political and technological challenges facing the industry. Copper theft continues to hinder operations and costs co-ops money. In some cases, drug cartels have been implicated in the thefts. “It’s inconvenient, it’s expensive and it’s dangerous,” Williams said.

A panel discussion featuring co-op executives stressed that safety must be built into organizations’ culture. “Safety is an essential job function,” said Rayce Cantwell, Wise EC general manager. Mark Stubbs, Farmers EC general manager, and Ray Beavers, CEO and general manager at United Cooperative Services, joined Cantwell on the panel.
TEC Applauded for ACRE Participation

TEC won the ACRE Special Achievement Award for enlisting the third-highest number of ACRE members in the nation and the most Century Club members in the nation in 2014. Bartlett EC General Manager/CEO Bryan Lightfoot accepted the award for TEC from the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association’s outgoing board president Curtis Nolan Feb. 25 during the NRECA Annual Meeting.

Transformer Repair Facility Tour Benefits UCS Line Personnel

Seven United Cooperative Services employees toured the TEC/Solomon Corp. transformer repair and remanufacturing operations in Georgetown in February for an up-close look at equipment they would encounter in the field.

The warehouse tour supplemented United’s single-phase transformer and regulator classroom training. “United takes the opportunity to give our line personnel as much info as possible about the equipment they maintain on a daily basis,” United Senior Foreman Jerry Scott said. “The idea was to allow trainees to view the internal parts of transformers and regulators.”

United has sent two groups for tours in the past six months and is planning another tour this year.

“We always stand ready to assist and support our member co-ops in any way we can,” said Johnny Andrews, TEC’s Manufacturing & Distribution Services COO. “Any time one of our member co-ops wants to take a tour, they can give us a call, and we will be happy to accommodate them.”
Interconnected members of Pedernales EC now receive 69 percent more money for surplus energy generated and sold to the co-op. The board of directors voted for members to be paid $0.05826 per net metered kilowatt-hour, effective December 2014. The price, also known as “avoided cost,” will be reviewed and updated annually.

“This $0.058 is more commensurate, more indicative of the actual cost of electricity that we are buying from our energy providers today,” PEC CEO John Hewa said.

PEC announced the update at the 2014 Hill Country Solar Tour last fall, during which about 350 members toured four solar installations in the Georgetown and Leander areas. The tour also featured a solar installer fair and a children’s solar car workshop while providing information on energy-efficiency loans, conservation tips and PEC’s interconnection policy.

Rita Blanca EC Donates to Hospitality House

Thanks to a donation from Rita Blanca EC, residents of far North Texas can find support during times of medical need. In December, the cooperative donated $3,750 to Amarillo’s Medical Center League House.

The League House, a nonprofit hospitality house, provides lodging to anyone traveling to Amarillo for medical needs. RBEC’s donation can be used to cover the lodgers’ expense of $45 per night, which rents a private room and shared facilities such as a kitchen, laundry room and prayer garden. The house is walking distance to hospitals, a cancer center and medical buildings.

“Rita Blanca Electric felt a sincere need for the League House, as our members travel a great distance to the medical facilities in Amarillo,” said Brent Wheeler, RBEC CEO/general manager. “Being able to stay at the Medical League House lessens the burden of expenses for our members.”

Houston County EC Conducts Survey

To improve load forecast and understand co-op issues from a member perspective, Houston County EC recently conducted a member survey. The co-op then shared preliminary responses with its members to maintain transparency.

“We want to better understand our members’ needs,” HCEC General Manager Kathi Calvert said. “If we are truly committed to service, our entire focus needs to be on the member—not just how they use energy, but how we interact with them. I also want to know how we are viewed in the community, what we do well and what we need to improve.”

Calvert shared the results in her March 2015 Texas Co-op Power column. Her message focused on written comments—including negative comments—in four areas: reliability, general service, rates and member service. She explained that because co-op members are more than customers, they deserve to know the business’ successes and areas needing improvement.

“Communication and education are critical during this transformational time of our industry, and it is a complex industry,” Calvert said. “We need our members to believe in us and know that our goal is to serve them.”

TEC Launches Discussion Lists

The TEC Communications & Member Services Department launched nine TEC member discussion lists in March. Each list is built around a specific cooperative group, or community, and will serve as another communications tool for co-op employees to connect with peers across the state.

To kick off each list and populate the communities, TEC is emailing invitations to co-op employees to register. Once confirmed, those signed up can manage their lists and preferences via the TEC member website under Member Resources. Visit members.texas-ec.org to sign up for any of the following discussion list communities: Accounting, Administrative Professionals, Communicators, Emergency Response, Engineering, Human Resources, Information Technology, Member Services, Safety and Loss Control.

Kari Wilmeth, left, Trinity Valley EC public relations representative, presents a check to Yadira Chairez, center, Athens ISD parent liaison, and Diana Vaughn, AISD federal programs director, for the Hornet Backpack Program.

Rita Blanca EC Donates to Hospitality House

More hungry students of Athens ISD can take home food through the Hornet Backpack Program, thanks to a $3,000 grant from the Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative Charitable Foundation.

The program provides nutritious meals and snacks to children whose primary source of food is the school cafeteria, Toni Garrard Clay, AISD public information officer, wrote in the Athens Daily Review. Sponsoring one child for a year through the East Texas Food Bank costs $162 a year.

PEC UPDATES INTERCONNECTION POLICY

During the 2014 Hill Country Solar Tour, Pedernales EC announced an update to its interconnection policy that allows members to be paid more for surplus power generated for PEC.
A new generation of solar panels could create the cheapest household solar energy yet, Reuters reports. The ultrathin panels are made of the mineral perovskite and can be attached to windows. Perovskite panels are 40 percent cheaper and 50 percent more efficient than today’s commercially produced panels.

A Disney executive recently declined the idea of using characters from “Frozen” to teach children about climate change. The Washington Post reports that a U.S. special representative for the Arctic asked if Disney would assist with making urgent public service announcements to disseminate the message of climate change to American children. The Disney executive said the business of the company was to “tell stories that project optimism and have happy endings.”

Arkansas Electric Cooperatives, Inc., created Today’s Power, Inc., a subsidiary formed to provide renewable energy solutions, energy-efficiency programs and emergency backup generators for large commercial, industrial or utility customers, according to Arkansas Business. Today’s Power, Inc., will sell tenKsolar products in six states through an exclusive distribution agreement.

Five earthquakes shook Irving in January, and residents expressed concerns that natural gas drilling caused them, National Public Radio reports. The earthquakes ranged in magnitude from 2.2 to 3 and occurred within about seven hours. Thirty-six earthquakes have been reported in that region since October. At an Irving town hall meeting, residents expressed fears that hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, caused the seismic activity. The City of Irving produced handouts that said fracking had not occurred there since 2010 and no wastewaster was injected within city limits. In early February, the U.S. Geological Survey recorded a 3.1 magnitude earthquake northeast of Amarillo, according to News Channel 10.

“Life on the Line,” a movie starring Academy Award nominee John Travolta, is expected to be released this year, according to Deadline Hollywood. The independent film tells the story of the often-treacherous conditions linemen face while working to maintain power. Film production began in October 2014 in Vancouver, British Columbia. Marro Films and Elite Film Productions are producing the movie. A Marro Films executive said, “It’s an honor … to tell this modern-day story about these unsung heroes.”

Electric use in the Electric Reliability Council of Texas region increased by 2.5 percent in 2014 compared to 2013, while peak demand during the hottest part of summer decreased by a little more than 1 percent, ERCOT shows in its 2014 Demand and Energy Report.

Cooperatives have access to discounts and incentives for utility-scale solar projects, thanks to a program supported by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, Electric Co-op Today reports. The Solar Utility Network Deployment Acceleration, or SUNDA project, was developed by the NRECA’s Cooperative Research Network with a grant from the Department of Energy. Program details can be found on cooperative.com.
MVEC Reaps Results of Bilingual Efforts

To meet the needs of the Rio Grande Valley’s diverse population, Magic Valley EC aims to become the nation’s first fully bilingual, biliterate and bicultural co-op. The co-op’s efforts over the past several years have increased member engagement and satisfaction, said MVEC Communications Coordinator Luis J. Reyes.

“MVEC’s Spanish-speaking members are more engaged with the co-op than before,” Reyes said. “We receive compliments not only from Spanish-speaking members but also from bilingual members who are reading MVEC’s news in Spanish.”

Forty-five percent of MVEC’s membership prefers to receive information in Spanish, according to a member survey. The co-op has employed bilingual member service representatives since the 1980s, but a campaign rolled out in 2012 emphasizes the use of Spanish across myriad marketing and communications platforms.

Cooke County EC Installs Educational Solar Array

Cooke County EC installed a 2-kilowatt solar panel in its service center yard March 31 to study the costs and benefits of solar generation.

Output information transmits directly from panel equipment outside to a computer and display station just inside the CCECA business office. The co-op intends to run the study indefinitely, to examine variables and viability, and to educate members interested in small-scale residential solar installations.

“Members want to know, is it viable? So we installed the solar system to gather info on the costs and production output,” said John Walterscheid, CCECA member communications coordinator. “We’re still new in the study, but in a few months we’ll have enough information for members to calculate how much an installation might cost and how long their payoff period might be, and make a decision from there.”

CCECA conducted a 2014 survey that asked members whether they were willing to pay a premium of 1-2 cents per kilowatt-hour for solar service. The results surprised co-op staff: From among the 251 members surveyed, “Yes” and “No” responses were split evenly at 41 percent each, indicating a much stronger interest in solar than anticipated.

Installation of the test system cost the co-op approximately $7,500, including cooperative labor and additional hardware. The display station yields daily output information such as the levels of power produced, monetary yield in dollars and carbon dioxide savings. CCECA plans to distribute the information to members via its website and Texas Co-op Power.
This year marks Texas Electric Cooperatives’ 75th anniversary, a milestone many in this program have already celebrated. And like many, I’ve realized this is not simply a milestone but rather a celebration of 75 years of passionate and purpose-driven people. It is these people—past and present, members and employees alike—who have made TEC.

Last month, TEC employees and their families traveled from all over the state, from Jasper to Lubbock, to come together in Georgetown for fun, food and fellowship in honor of this occasion. It wasn’t the barbecue, games or bragging rights from winning tug of war that made this time special. It was the opportunity to have all the hands and hearts that serve you together in one place.

I was humbled to stand before the employees and thank them for their dedication to this organization. No matter the tenure, department or office location, without each and every one of them, our successes would not be possible.

It was 75 years ago under the philosophy “in unity, strength” that the membership created TEC. And I’m proud to report that 75 years later, this statement holds true. Together, all 191 TEC employees and 70 member-systems collectively work to serve the 3 million-plus member-owners of Texas’ electric cooperatives.

This unity is something worth celebrating.

Best Regards,

MIKE WILLIAMS

Texas House Honors Bluebonnet EC Lineman

The Texas House of Representatives recognized a Bluebonnet EC lineman and community leader in March with a memorial resolution.

The resolution, sponsored by Rep. Armando Martinez, recognized Kennedy Clay Roland for his contributions to his community, family and church. He was the first African-American elected to the Lockhart City Council and worked for BRC for about 35 years. Roland died unexpectedly in January.

“It was a fitting tribute for the Texas House of Representatives to honor Bluebonnet’s lineman Kenny Roland with a memorial resolution,” said Mark Rose, Bluebonnet’s general manager. “Kenny was a natural leader his whole life and gave so much to his family, friends and community.... No one will ever be able to replace Kenny, but his legacy will be carried on by his friends, family and co-workers.”
Facebook Contest Home Run for CoServ

Members of CoServ Electric can learn more about their electricity provider and win bill credits through a social media trivia game hosted during baseball season.

CoServ sponsors the Frisco RoughRiders and provides electricity to Dr Pepper Ballpark, where the Texas Rangers’ Double-A affiliate plays. Before each home game, the co-op asks members a #CoServTrivia question on Facebook that can be answered by visiting CoServ.com or reading Texas Co-op Power. The names of members who answer correctly or “like” the post are entered in a random drawing to win a $100 bill credit. The winner is selected at the end of every homestand and announced on Facebook.

“The game gives CoServ members an opportunity to interact with us on social media during baseball games,” said Oscar Martinez, CoServ’s director of marketing and communications. “Long term, the biggest benefit is to create a better understanding of what ‘the cooperative difference’ is all about. Many CoServ members don’t even know they’re in a co-op, so #CoServTrivia is a good way to educate and inform them about the benefits of being in a co-op.”

For the first homestand in April, trivia questions focused on CoServ linemen in connection with National Lineman Appreciation Day on April 13. Martinez said that more than 150 members logged more than 350 interactions with the co-op’s Facebook page. Future #CoServTrivia questions this baseball season will highlight and help explain the role of each co-op department.

Live Chat Opens Windows for VEC Members

Victoria EC introduced a live chat feature through its updated website in March.

The goal of live chat, an option through utility software developer SEDC, was to make members’ experience on the site easier and more convenient. Since the launch of live chat, VEC’s member service representatives have received two to three chats a week.

“Live chat is a way to communicate directly with one of our member service representatives to ask questions electronically, rather than having to call or come into the office,” explained VEC General Manager Blaine Warzecha in a Texas Co-op Power column.

TEC CONFERENCE QUOTABLES

The TEC Accounting Conference April 15–17 brought together cooperatives’ staff for lessons on distributed generation, property taxes, industry updates, electronic records, capital credits and more. Here are notable quotes from the event:

“We’re going to see people reducing their load need, but that still means we have a valuable grid because we’re going to be providing system stability for members even though their load may be going down.”

—BILL HETHERINGTON
General Manager, Bandera EC

“In a paperless environment, we’ve got a lot of systems that give us access to data . . . that allows us through the course of the year to be looking and performing audit procedures as we plan them on a perpetual basis. So when year end rolls around, we’re that much further ahead.”

—JEFF MARSHALL
Partner at Bolinger, Segars, Gilbert & Moss

“There is a move throughout business to move to virtual servers to store documentation.”

—STEVE LATHAM
IT Manager, South Plains EC

“Most companies underestimate how much risk they face from cybercrime and how quickly they become at risk.”

—NATHAN PADEN
Partner at Bolinger, Segars, Gilbert & Moss

View 2015 Accounting Conference photos on Flickr at http://tinyurl.com/teclf05.
Co-op People

Coleman County EC Director Daniel Redman plans to retire after 15 years of service.
Taylor EC Director Hollis Ellis died April 9. He served on the board for 13 years.
Jackson EC General Manager Roy D. Griffin plans to retire June 1 after 32 years of service.
TEC hired Jeff Marshall as chief financial officer effective June 1. He has been with Bolinger, Segars, Gilbert & Moss since 1997 and has been a partner in the firm since 2006.

Nueces EC donated $2,500 to the Greater Kingsville Economic Development Council in 2014. The donation will be used to assist the Greater Kingsville EDC with general operations costs and Naval Air Station Kingsville community relations. Since 2010, NEC has donated $2,500 a year toward economic development for a total of $12,500. “NEC has been such a great partner because they understand,” said Dick Messbarger, Greater KEDC executive director. “They understand we look to grow the community population, and they support our efforts by ensuring the greater demand of electricity is met.”

IN THE BUSINESS

SolarCity recently introduced a program to allow Dallas-Fort Worth homeowners to have solar systems on their rooftops without an upfront fee, reports the Fort Worth Star-Telegram. The California-based company installs, insures and maintains the solar panels. The homeowner must agree to a 20-year contract to buy the power generated by the system on their roofs for 10.9 cents per kilowatt-hour. The contract also requires that the homeowner buy any needed power beyond what the panels produce from retail electric provider MP2 Energy at 12 cents per kWh. MP2 buys back excess power generated by the solar arrays at 12 cents per kWh.

Opower entered the utility customer service sector to help power companies save on call-center expenses, reports Utility Dive. The cloud-based demand management and response company stores billions of meter reads and provides detailed data to utilities about how customers are using power. The information helps utility call centers reduce call time and save money. Opower also makes power data available to consumers through its Billing Suite, which offers high bill alerts, bill notifications, descriptions of main energy users and marketing. Shifting customers to online customer service can also save utilities money.

A Chicago utility received Federal Aviation Administration approval in February to use drones to identify grid damage, reports EnergyWire. Commonwealth Edison will work with the Illinois Institute of Technology to deploy the unmanned aircraft to assess location and extent of damage. ComEd is the first utility to get approval to use drones on an operational basis. San Diego Gas & Electric, Southern Co. and NextEra Energy Inc. have also received FAA approvals while additional utilities, including Xcel Energy Inc., have requests pending.

Solar and wind company SunEdison acquired Solar Grid Storage, a company that packages batteries and solar projects, reports Greentech Media. SunEdison plans to provide a broad array of storage-based services to support solar and wind power. The company plans to expand all over the U.S. and abroad, broadening Solar Grid Storage’s focus on frequency regulation to include additional ways to turn stored energy into revenue and serve grid needs.

A CoBank report states that solar power will continue to become more cost effective because it is a technology, not a fuel, reports Electric Co-op Today. Solar technology will experience innovation via increased efficiency and better construction, as most technologies do over time. For co-ops, that means member interest in solar panels will likely continue to grow. “As it does, utilities need to consider the impact of net energy metering, a state policy allowing bill credits for net excess generation,” according to ECT.coop.

About 17 percent of U.S. coal-fired power generation will retire in the coming years, reports Bloomberg News. Factors facing coal plants include their age, increased use of cheap natural gas and the Environmental Protection Agency’s Mercury and Air Toxics Standards under the Clean Air Act. The Supreme Court soon will consider the EPA rules. Even without the new rules, many old plants are fated for closure or conversion to natural gas.
Tornadic Spring Strikes Texas Co-ops

Two deadly tornados and spinoff storms twisted the electrical infrastructure of Texas co-ops in mid-May. Facing structural damage, flooding, lightning, straight-line winds and hail, co-ops rallied their crews to restore power.

A tornado touched down May 10 near Van. The EF-3 tornado was 700 feet wide and traveled 9.9 miles, causing an estimated $40 million in damage, killing two people and injuring 43, according to Van Zandt News. About 3,400 Wood County EC members experienced power outages as the storm damaged 71 poles and 2.1 miles of conductor, transformers and crossarms from Van to Ben Wheeler and throughout the Jamestown community. WCCEC restored power by May 13.

Another tornado hit near Cisco on May 9, killing one person, and damaging 3 miles of Comanche ECA line and breaking 50 poles. CECA had repaired about half of the damage by May 19.

In CoServ Electric’s service territory, a tornado was seen near Sanger on May 7. Heavy rain then pelted the region, washing out roads and causing floods so severe that CoServ supplied its crews with life jackets. Crews responded to outages affecting 6,000 members. More than 2 million lightning strikes registered in the co-op’s area over four days—more than the total for all of 2013, reported Oscar Martinez, CoServ’s marketing and communications director.

One Fayette EC member sustained damage from a tornado that touched down near La Grange on May 18. Lightning and high winds caused outages for almost 1,000 FEC members. Five crews and two contractors restored power.

Yet another tornado ran through Grayson-Collin EC’s service territory, starting near Gunter and ending near Cherry Mound. The co-op escaped serious structural damage despite flooding. GCEC reported that nearly every available employee was called into service May 8–11.

Severe storms also affected Upshur Rural EC and Deep East Texas EC in May.

Texas Co-ops Win Communications Awards

Eight electric cooperatives and TEC brought home accolades for communications from the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association’s 2015 CONNECT Conference in May in Minneapolis.

Bluebonnet EC claimed six individual awards in its category and earned the esteemed Edgar F. Chesnutt Award for its overall communications program.

The following co-ops also won recognition for their communications efforts: CoServ Electric, Guadalupe Valley EC, Magic Valley EC, Pedernales EC, Sam Houston EC, Taylor EC and United Cooperative Services.
**Calendar**

**Conferences**

- **June 15–17**
  - TEC Information Technology Conference
  - Austin, Embassy Suites Arboretum

**Save the Date**

- **Aug. 2–5**
  - TEC 75th Annual Meeting
  - Austin, Renaissance Austin Hotel

**Training Events**

- **June 11**
  - Public Speaking Without Fear and Anxiety
  - Register by June 4
  - Webinar

- **June 16–19**
  - Regulator Recloser Capacitor School
  - Register by June 8
  - Livingstone, Sam Houston EC

- **June 23**
  - C·O·R·E Training
    - Microsoft Office: Excel for Intermediate Users
    - Register by May 22
    - Victoria, Victoria EC

- **June 23–26**
  - Metering School
  - Register by June 15
  - Tahoka, Lyntegar EC

- **June 24–25**
  - C·O·R·E Training
    - Microsoft Office: Excel for Super Users
    - Register by May 25
    - Robstown, Nueces EC

- **June 30–July 1**
  - Basic Electricity School
  - Register by June 22
  - Karnes City, Karnes EC

Visit texas-ec.org for the complete calendar and registration.

**Legislature Honors Texas Youth Tour**

Texas Electric Cooperative’s celebration of 50 years of participation in the Government-in-Action Youth Tour included the adoption of House Resolution 2553 last month, congratulating member cooperatives and the program for sending thousands of high school students to Washington, D.C.

Rep. Brooks Landgraf of Odessa sponsored the resolution. He was joined at the dais by 10 representatives who have electric co-ops in their districts and wanted to support Landgraf in presenting the resolution on the House floor May 20.

Landgraf attended Youth Tour as an Odessa Permian High School student in 1998, one of 3,719 Texans who have made the trip since 1965. “I’m proud to say I’m one of them,” he said. “In fact, that was one of my first experiences with public service.”

Eric Craven, TEC’s senior vice president of government relations and legal affairs, said the resolution shows the Legislature recognizes co-ops’ commitment to helping develop future leaders. “Rep. Landgraf and the others who joined him showed their support not only for the Youth Tour but for electric co-ops generally,” he said.

Youth Tour 2015 kicks off June 10 in Austin, where 125 teens will join past participants for an anniversary celebration. The next day, they’ll tour the Capitol and other sites before heading to Washington for a week.

**Clean Air, Coal Ash, Chickens Among Top Texas Concerns on Capitol Hill**

Texas cooperative leaders visiting national elected officials focused on three pieces of legislation during the 2015 National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Legislative Conference May 3–5.

First is the Ratepayer Protection Act to provide a “safe harbor” period while the courts evaluate the Clean Power Plan and determine whether it complies with the Clean Air Act. The legislation would enable cooperatives to avoid making irrevocable billion-dollar decisions in the next few years while the Environmental Protection Agency’s plan is challenged in federal court.

The second piece would turn back the EPA’s proposed rule to revise the definition of Waters of the United States under the Clean Water Act. The legislation would allow co-ops to avoid necessitating permits for more activities, which would make electric transmission and distribution construction take longer and cost more.

The third piece would preserve the EPA’s nonhazardous designation of coal ash to overcome the review required every three years under current law. The beneficial use of coal ash reduces greenhouse gas emissions, extends the life and durability of the nation’s roads and bridges and reduces disposal in landfills or surface impoundments.

Cooperative representatives also met with U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service representatives, including Gary Frazer, assistant director for endangered species, to discuss problems with the reinterpretation of the range-wide plan for the lesser prairie-chicken.

**TEC Holds Conferences for Administrative and Human Resources Professionals**

The 31 educational and networking sessions at the Administrative Professionals and Human Resources conferences May 19–22 in Dallas helped equip the 80-plus attendees to meet the challenges of that shift in the electric cooperative program. “Regulations, technology and consumer expectations are converging to create a dynamic shift in our industry,” said Houston County EC General Manager Kathi Calvert during a panel discussion at the Administrative Professionals Conference.

View Human Resources Conference photos at tinyurl.com/tec15-hr and Administrative Professionals Conference photos at tinyurl.com/tec15-admin.
Texas Hosts Youth Tour Reunion

This year, electric cooperatives in Texas celebrate 50 years of the Texas Youth Tour, and to mark the occasion, Texas Electric Cooperatives is throwing a party. The Texas Youth Tour Anniversary Celebration and Reunion Dinner will be held June 10 at the Sheraton Austin Hotel at the Capitol from 5 to 7:30 p.m.

“The purpose of the reunion is to connect past and present Youth Tour participants with their cooperatives and memories by providing an opportunity to reminisce about this life-changing trip,” said Martin Bevins, TEC vice president of Communications & Member Services. “These people shared something unique, and it’s time we brought them together.”

The event commemorates Texas electric cooperatives’ sponsoring youths on the Government-in-Action Youth Tour every year since 1965. The national program, sponsored by local co-ops and coordinated by TEC and the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, sends high school students to Washington, D.C., for a fun and educational trip.

“For the past five decades, electric cooperatives have been empowering young people to improve the quality of their lives, their communities and their futures by sending them to Washington, D.C., to represent their hometown cooperatives and see their American heritage,” said TEC President/CEO Mike Williams.

All generations of Texas alumni are invited to join the 2015 delegation of Texas youths the night before they embark on their journey, which has been called the trip of a lifetime. The evening features guest speakers, including Youth Tour alumni from Texas’ inaugural trip, last year’s Youth Leadership Council member and Williams.

Dinner is complimentary for all Texas Youth Tour alumni. Guests are welcome with the purchase of a $47 ticket payable in advance. Please RSVP with your name, Youth Tour year, name(s) of guest(s), total number attending and corresponding check made out to: TEC/Youth Tour, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701 or email YouthTour@texas-ec.org. Please RSVP by June 3.

GVEC To Co-Own Generation Facility

Guadalupe Valley EC announced May 1 that its subsidiary, GFS Electric Cooperative, agreed to 50 percent ownership of a peaking power plant to be built in Marion. GFS is partnering with Calpine Corporation for the business venture.

“The partnership is an integral part of the cooperative’s long-term strategy to build diversity in its power supply options and gain additional control over power costs beyond June 2016,” said GVEC General Manager and CEO Darren Schauer. “The future calls for diversification of our power supply resources in order to maintain affordability as well as flexibility to respond to changing market, technological and political environments.”

The Guadalupe Peaking Energy Center will be a 418-megawatt natural gas-fired plant that features two fast-ramping combustion turbines. The facility is expected to begin commercial operation between June 2017 and June 2019.

GVEC agreed to a two-year power purchase agreement with favorable rates for 270 MW from Calpine’s Texas power plant fleet effective June 2017 in exchange for the two-year flexibility in construction timing. To avoid construction risk, the cooperative will not take any ownership of the plant until it reaches commercial operation.

“With careful consideration and affordability at the forefront of every decision we make, we are confident this agreement will serve the overall best interests of the GVEC membership well into the future,” said GVEC Board President Lewis Borgfeld.

PEC Linemen Volunteer in Haiti

PEC linemen Marshall Verette, Andrew Ridge and Mark Moreno volunteered with NRECA International in Haiti last year to help build the country’s first electric cooperative to serve 1,600 consumers, many of whom have never before had access to reliable electricity.

Their work constructing parts of the electrical distribution system and training local linemen touched not only locals’ lives but also their own. Speaking at the NRECA CONNECT Conference in Minneapolis in May, Ridge said the trip was “truly a life-changing experience.”

Ridge explained that seeing how Haitians maintain a positive outlook while living in impoverished conditions reminded him of how fortunate U.S. citizens are. “There are billions without lights still,” he said, “and we just take it for granted.”

In acknowledgment of “their service and for putting into action Cooperative Principle No. 6—Cooperation Among Cooperatives—in Haiti,” U.S. Rep. Lamar Smith recognized the linemen before Congress in March.

Red Gate Power Plant To Serve South Texas

South Texas EC initiated construction of a 220-megawatt natural gas-fired power plant near Edinburg. The facility will help meet the region’s growing energy needs, increase grid reliability in the Rio Grande Valley and provide energy and services to Electric Reliability Council of Texas.

The Red Gate Power Plant features 12 Wärtsilä spark-ignition, lean burning, natural gas-fired reciprocating engines that are capable of starting and reaching full load in 10 minutes. The facility’s modular design allows the plant to run at peak efficiency or peak output while meeting emissions standards and limiting water consumption.

Construction began March 30, and the plant is expected to begin commercial operation by the end of May 2016.
Co-op People

East Texas EC named its recently completed biomass facility the Hilton Lively Biomass Facility, in honor of his 22 years of service to the generation and transmission cooperative's board. Lively, who also served for 31 years on the Jasper-Newton EC Board of Directors, died July 2014. Clif Royal was elected to fill the vacancy.

Clif Royal was appointed to the Karnes EC Board of Directors in March. He replaced David Davidson, who retired in December after almost 23 years on the board.

Lea County EC Trustee Dean Kinsolving retired after 31 years of service. The nominating committee nominated C.J. Kinsolving, and the members elected him at the LCEC Annual Meeting April 24.

North Plains EC Director Jerel Norris retired April 20 after 21 years of service. Allen B. “Trey” Webb was elected to the board of directors.

Trinity Valley EC Communications and Marketing Coordinator Jeff Jordan was elected mayor of Kaufman May 18.

IN THE BUSINESS

Energy Future Holdings Corp. continues restructuring attempts in one of the largest bankruptcies in history, The Wall Street Journal reports. The company was affected by falling energy prices and is attempting to address its debt. After a year in court, creditors have failed to reach consensus for a restructuring plan. Now investors are considering the sale of Oncor, the prize asset of the former TXU Corp., which escaped financial trouble and is profitable through the transmission business. Oncor could be worth $17 billion or more.

San Antonio’s CPS Energy plans to set itself up as a “utility of the future” by focusing on renewable and distributed energy, reports SolarEnergy.net. Part of the municipal utility’s New Energy Economy initiative is to create more jobs and invest in the economy. Therefore, almost all the components of CPS’ newly opened 400-megawatt Alamo 3 solar farm were manufactured in Central Texas. The solar farm is one of seven to be built from a deal between CPS and OCI Solar. More than 2,600 jobs have been created directly and indirectly through the effort.

As customers generate their own power, utility sales in the northeastern U.S. could decrease about half by 2030, reports Bloomberg News. A Rocky Mountain Institute report indicates that utilities in the Northeast could lose as much as $34.8 billion. Additionally, utilities’ inability to raise capital would affect investment into power-grid maintenance.

In recent years, residential solar system installations have increased by 50 percent annually, thanks to dropping prices of photovoltaics and availability of lease options. Utilities nationwide grapple with the change in various ways, with some offering payments for excess electricity generated and others charging grid connection fees. Experts say utilities need to delve into conversations about regulatory framework and rate structures.

Tesla Motors Inc. launched a line of large-scale home and industrial battery packs, reports The Wall Street Journal. The electric car company plans to produce “power wall” batteries with 7- to 10-kilowatt hour units for $3,000 to $3,500, as well as an industrial-level battery with 100 kilowatt-hours. Production will begin in California and then shift to Tesla’s $5 billion battery plant, dubbed the “gigafactory,” near Reno, Nevada. Customers will include Green Mountain Power Corp., a Vermont utility planning to sell Tesla packs to customers who have solar power, and TreeHouse, an Austin store planning to sell the Tesla packs with its solar systems. The smaller systems are marketed to customers who want to go “off the grid,” says Tesla CEO Elon Musk.

Solar leasing companies and other new market entrants aim to become a new kind of utility, reports Utility Dive. Companies not governed by the regulatory restrictions affecting utilities can get into customers’ homes, and the new relationships could have financial ramifications for existing utilities. To stay relevant, a report from the Edison Electric Institute suggests, utilities should get into the business of developing distributed technologies and services.

A drop in oil prices caused a decrease in jobs in March, reports The Hill. U.S. oil and gas companies set up 8 percent fewer drilling wells in the first quarter of 2015 than last year. Texas led the nation in oil-related job losses.

South Plains EC employees and CFL Charlie raised a record amount for the Lubbock Relay For Life in honor of Fred Helms, a co-worker who lost his battle with cancer.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>NRECA Voting Member Classification</strong> *</th>
<th>Statewide Associations, G&amp;T or Service Member</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category</strong> *</td>
<td>5. Best Internal News Publication</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Entry Title</strong> *</td>
<td>TEC Report</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>I wish to receive Judges' comments on this entry</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Contact's Name</strong> *</td>
<td>Charles Lohrmann</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cooperative</strong> *</td>
<td>Texas Electric Cooperatives</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mailing Address</strong></td>
<td>1122 Colorado St. 24th Floor Austin, TX 78701 United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contact's Email</strong> *</td>
<td><a href="mailto:clohrmann@texas-ec.org">clohrmann@texas-ec.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contact's Phone Number</strong> *</td>
<td>(512) 954–3166</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Name of entrant as it should appear on the award (if given)</strong></td>
<td>Texas Electric Cooperatives</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Is this the first time you've entered the Spotlight competition?</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Entrant's Email</strong></td>
<td><a href="mailto:clohrmann@texas-ec.org">clohrmann@texas-ec.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Names of others (freelancers or organizations) involved in the project, if applicable</strong></td>
<td>Suzanne Halko, Editor; Andy Doughty, Creative Manager; Martin Bevins, Vice-President of Communications and Member Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Describe your/the co-op's role in the project</strong></td>
<td>The association staff plans and produces this newsletter from start to finish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Describe others' role in the project (Reference outside sources of material, including templates; pre-existing Web tools and apps; information from outside groups, such as Straight Talk or Touchstone Energy; stock photos and music, etc.)</strong></td>
<td>This is a staff-only project.</td>
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<td><strong>Circulation or Number of People Reached</strong></td>
<td>1200</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Attendees</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Project's Budget</strong></td>
<td>$1000</td>
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<td><strong>Target Audience(s)</strong></td>
<td>Co-op leadership and staff across the state of Texas.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Project's Objective</strong></td>
<td>This project's objective is to inform stakeholders, primarily co-op membership and leadership, about the work that TEC is doing on behalf of all the association members.</td>
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<td><strong>Restrictions/Limitations</strong></td>
<td>The only restrictions on this project are those imposed by the print medium.</td>
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<td><strong>Describe why you chose this type of social media and how you used it</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Provide a brief summary that states the purpose of the event, how the program was implemented, and results and how they were measured</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Provide a brief summary that states the purpose, how the program was implemented, and results and how they were measured using the RACE framework. Each component has its own word limit noted below.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Research</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Action</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Communication</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Evaluation</strong></td>
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