

Cooperative Principle 7

Discover the seven principles that guide the way we do business.

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Choctaw Electric summer programs empower local students.

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Go Paperless

Sign up for paperless billing for your chance to win \$100!

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For members of **Choctaw Electric Cooperative**

JULY 2024

CEC **inside** *your* **co-op**



Agritourism in southeast Oklahoma

Savor summer's sweetness with a slice of Woolsey watermelon

Many people wonder: How do you pick the perfect sweet and crisp watermelon? Bill Woolsey, owner of Woolsey Watermelon based in Valliant, has an answer.

"I can usually tell a ripe watermelon from here," he says, pointing to a spot several feet away.

How does he do it? It's a skill that's been 52 years in the making.

Watermelon farming happened into Bill's path as a summer job to earn money for college. "I partnered with an older gentleman. I liked it and I made more money than I had working construction the year before," he says.

After graduating with an education degree, Bill would teach carpentry during the year and grow melons during the summer. The business grew over the years and has evolved as the industry has changed.

Nowadays, Bill is farming 30 acres of

watermelons. He grows a mix of varieties including seedless, seeded, yellow flesh and his favorite—the blackjack watermelon. He explains that although Oklahoma is not a top watermelon producer in the nation (leading states include Florida, California, Texas and Georgia), the sandy soil of southeast Oklahoma makes it an ideal growing location.

Contrary to what one might expect, watermelons don't need much water to grow. They need hot and dry weather—which often aligns with Oklahoma's climate.

But there are the weeds, and bugs, and fungus to contend with—not to mention that watermelon farming is very labor intense. These days, his grandsons do a lot of the picking because it's often difficult to find workers.

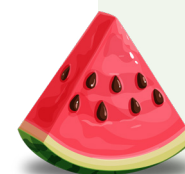
"Farming is a tough deal. It's like going to Las Vegas—it's a gamble," Bill says.

To diversify, Bill has recently added a new crop to his mix: pumpkins. Along with jack-o-lantern pumpkins, he grows ornamental pumpkins, in several colors and shapes.

To those looking for the perfect summer fruit, Bill offers these tips: "Look for a melon with a bottom that's a creamy color—not white. The rind will look dull, not shiny. Make sure it has a good ringing sound. If it sounds hollow, it might be overripe."

To avoid an unripe melon, find one that's locally grown. He says many of the major national producers pick their melons when they're 3/4 ripe, but they won't get sweeter once they're off the vine.

If your mouth is now watering, you can get your own Woolsey watermelon in many southeast Oklahoma grocery stores. They'll also make an appearance at the Valliant Watermelon Festival in August. 🍉



Above left: a Woolsey watermelon on the vine. Center: Bill Woolsey's grandsons help harvest melons. Right: the harvest.

MANAGER'S REPORT



Cooperative Principle 7 Concern for Community

BY KOONEY DUNCAN, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

This month, we conclude our series exploring the Seven Cooperative Principles that guide co-ops of all types worldwide, including Choctaw Electric. These principles, established by the International Cooperative Alliance in Rochdale, England, in 1844, serve as the foundation of our values.

The seventh principle, Concern for Community, emphasizes the commitment of cooperatives to sustainable community development through member-supported policies. Choctaw Electric was founded 84 years ago with the mission to serve. We have never been driven by profits, but by the needs of our communities. We were established to provide families in rural Oklahoma with the resources to live and thrive on their family farms. Without our foresight and commitment, many of these communities might not have developed as they have today.

Years later, our mission remains unchanged as we continue to support and develop our communities. Electric co-operatives like Choctaw Electric are still dedicated to serving rural communities,

enabling their growth and prosperity.

As highlighted on Page 3, our involvement in the community is unwavering. Our member service employees frequently engage with the community, educating children about electrical safety and participating in local events. This interaction is a cornerstone of our values, distinguishing us from many other businesses.

It's important to us that we remain closely connected to those we serve. After all, *you* are why we exist.

Not only do co-ops support local economies by providing a vital service, but our employees, who live in these communities, also contribute by coaching little league teams, judging live-stock shows, serving on school boards and volunteering at community events like the recent Oklahoma Special

Olympics Summer Games in Stillwater.

Our commitment to the community is also evident in our open door policy. We always welcome members to call in or stop by. It's important to us that we remain closely connected to those we serve. After all, *you* are why we exist, and why electric co-operatives operate differently from other utilities, always putting the needs of our members first. ☺

Choctaw Electric Cooperative

Serving members in Choctaw, Pushmataha, Atoka, McCurtain, Bryan and LeFlore counties.

Monday-Friday • 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.

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Local: (580) 298-3201

On the web:

www.choctawelectric.net



24 Hour Outage Hotline
800-780-6486

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Concern for Community

Co-op programs and volunteers empower local students

Concern for Community is one of our guiding principles as an electric cooperative. We're more than a utility provider; we strive to support the communities we serve through involvement with our members. Here are four of the ways we've been active and engaged in our service area this spring.

1. Kilowatt Kids Camp

On June 5 and 6, Choctaw Electric hosted Kilowatt Kids Camps for young students in our service territory. The luau-themed camps in Hugo and Idabel focused on electrical safety outside the home as well as summer safety. Students had a great day playing games, hula hooping with linemen and enjoying gourmet snacks at the Flip Flop Shop. We were grateful for the opportunity to invest in local youth during a wonderful day of summer fun.

2. Energy Camp

More than 80 students from across Oklahoma gathered in Hinton for Energy Camp 2024. Three of them represent

ed Choctaw Electric: Jacob Brunette, Aiden Pound and Kylie Butler. During the four-day camp, May 28-31, students learned about rural electrification, electrical safety, had a chance to climb a pole and ride in a bucket truck and experienced a live wire demonstration. Students created their own cooperative and Pound and Brunette were elected to the eight-member board. Butler was selected by her community group as a General Manager candidate.

Brad Kendrick, Choctaw Electric member service representative, served as a counselor for his 16th year. "I always enjoy seeing these students grow and gain leadership skills while learning the history of what cooperatives are truly about," he says. "They had a lot of fun learning about electricity and creating friendships with students from all over the state of Oklahoma."

3. Idabel Public Library

One June 3, Choctaw Electric employees partnered with Idabel Public Library's summer program to teach

students about electricity. Participants enjoyed a day of adventure with Kato the Safety Cat as he showed young friends all the ways to be safe around electricity indoors and out. Kato also taught his friends about the benefits of electricity and how it's generated and distributed. If you need a program designed to fit your curriculum needs, call us at 800-780-6486, ext. 241.

4. Special Olympics

Volunteers from Choctaw Electric and electric cooperatives across Oklahoma participate each year in the Oklahoma Special Olympics Summer State Games in Stillwater. This year, co-ops set a new participation record with 160 volunteers supporting 4,600 athletes during the three day competition, May 15-17.

For three decades co-op employees, directors, managers and retirees have volunteered with Special Olympics, typically making up one of the largest volunteer groups at the games. Congratulations to the athletes and thank you to the volunteers! 🙌

GO PAPERLESS

Win a \$100 bill credit!

The price of stamps is increasing again in July. You can help us keep our costs stable by enrolling in paperless billing.

Any member who signs up during the month will be entered into a drawing for a chance to win a \$100 bill credit!

Sign up for paperless billing via the free SmartHub or call Choctaw Electric at 800-780-6486.

Efficiency Tip of the Month

Electricity used to operate major appliances accounts for a significant portion of your home energy use. Here's an easy way to lighten the load on your clothes dryer. Before you dry a load of damp clothing, toss in a clean, dry towel. The towel will absorb excess water, shortening the drying time. If your dryer does not include an autosense feature to determine drying time, remember to reduce the timer to about half of what you normally would. Remove the towel about 15 minutes after the cycle begins. Shorter drying times will extend the life of your dryer and save energy.

Source: homesandgardens.com

Summer peak hours

A summer peak alert may be called between June 20 and September 9, from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. We will announce peak alerts on our Facebook page, via the SmartHub app and on the radio. Please help us reduce electricity use during peak hours as it helps keep our cost stable.

Buddy Ball

The Buddy Ball kickoff game has been rescheduled for September 14, 2024. We hope to see you there!



SAVE THE DATE

July 30

Trustee candidate filing for CEC
Districts D, E and F due at CEC by 5 p.m.

August 14

Revisions due to proposed amendments.

August 29 - September 3

Mail-in ballots delivered to members.

September 28

Choctaw Electric Annual Meeting,
McCurain County Fairgrounds, Idabel

2024 Annual Meeting Vendor Booth Reservation Form

Saturday, September 28 | McCurtain County Fairgrounds

Organization: _____

Contact person: _____

Daytime Telephone: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Products to be displayed/sold: _____

Number of booth spaces: _____

Booth spaces are available first come, first serve. Vendors must bring their own tables, chairs and electrical cords.

Deadline to reserve booth: September 20, 2024

Send booth reservation form to: Jia Johnson
Choctaw Electric Cooperative, P.O. Box 758, Hugo, OK 74743