

The Current

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A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

“The Current - Informing Our Members Since 1957”

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Any time, any device

SmartHub gives members broader access to account data

By Karen Kaley

Cotton Electric has rolled out another tool to better serve the co-op's members. SmartHub is not so much new as it is an improvement for those wanting to manage their Cotton Electric accounts online.

For many years, we have offered a way for members to monitor Cotton Electric accounts, look at billing histories and monthly energy use and pay

power bills electronically via E-Bill, a third-party provider.

Members who have been using this feature will notice the switch right away when they next log-on. The landing page will have the Cotton Electric and SmartHub logos on a bright blue background.

Accounts already set up to use E-Bill will automatically migrate to SmartHub. Established user names and

passwords should work at the new log-in page.

Members who have not set up an electronic account can do so simply by visiting CottonElectric.com.

Those using a traditional computer can click on buttons labeled View & Pay Bill or Pay Online. SmartHub is optimized for mobile devices, so those using a smart phone can click on the Pay My Bill button.

There is also a free app for smart phones and tablets that bypasses the Cotton Electric website and takes a user straight to SmartHub. Look for it at the iTunes App Store or Google Play.

A Cotton Electric account number is necessary to get an online account set up. New users will also be asked to provide an email address and a password of his or her choice.

See SmartHub, Page 11



WHAT IS THIS?

Power cost adjustment explained

We receive many questions from our members about why bills vary from month to month. The primary reason is usually due to an increase or decrease in the kWh used by the member. Another reason why bills vary slightly is the Power Cost Adjustment, also called the PCA.

The PCA reflects the increase or decrease in Cotton Electric's cost of power purchased from our wholesale power provider, Western Farmers Electric Cooperative. The fluctuation in the PCA is typically caused by changes in the cost of fuel

for generating power.

Cotton Electric's cost of wholesale power is typically more than 70% of our total expenses. As a not-for-profit utility, it is critical that we recover all of the Cooperative's wholesale power cost from the members who used power. Our goal is to break even, and our rates are designed to accomplish that task.

Part of your monthly kWh rate includes the PCA. Residential members on Cotton Electric's General Service rate pay \$0.088923 per kWh. The rate includes 6.25 cents per

kWh to cover the cost of wholesale power. Cotton Electric maintains your electric system and distributes electricity on the small difference of 2.6423 cents per kWh.

When the cost of purchased power is more or less than 6.25 cents per kWh, the Power Cost Adjustment is increased and shown as a charge in order to recover the price we paid for power. When the cost of purchased power is less than 6.25 cents per kWh, we return the difference, and members receive a credit.

See Power cost, Page 2

Power Cost Adjustment Calculated

The power cost adjustment (PCA) applied to bills mailed after May 1 is \$0.01240 per kWh.

On a traditional bill, average use of 1500 kilowatt hours (kWh) would include a PCA charge of \$18.60 on the May bill.

On a MyChoice account, PCA is added to the base rate of \$0.088923 per kWh, making the rate appear to be \$0.1013 from April 18 through May 16.

April 2014 Temperature Extremes

Day	High	Low	Avg.	Day	High	Low	Avg.
1	75	53	64	16	73	44	59
2	85	63	74	17	65	49	57
3	81	45	63	18	73	45	59
4	66	40	53	19	80	44	62
5	60	40	50	20	71	57	64
6	50	46	48	21	81	58	70
7	69	47	58	22	81	54	68
8	73	42	58	23	86	55	71
9	85	36	61	24	78	50	64
10	92	45	69	25	84	42	63
11	83	49	66	26	90	58	74
12	87	62	75	27	84	63	74
13	93	43	68	28	78	53	66
14	55	29	42	29	65	51	58
15	66	24	45	30	67	38	53

Source: srh.noaa.gov/ou/

Average Daily High: 76 Average Daily Low: 47

Did You Know?

Cotton Electric offices will be closed Monday, May 26 for the Memorial Day holiday. Emergency calls will be answered at 580-875-3351 or 800-522-3520.

The June issue of The Current should arrive in mailboxes on June 16, 2014.

Contact Us

Do you have a story idea for The Current or do you need to place an ad? If so, let us know.

We can be reached at 580-875-3351 or by email at info@cottonelectric.com.

You can also drop us a line at Cotton Electric Current, 226 N. Broadway, Walters, OK 73572.

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More news at cottonelectric.com

Co-op membership: What's in it for me?

Exploring the unique benefits of cooperative membership

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

You set up your electric service account with Cotton Electric Cooperative and you think to yourself, "That's done. Now I just have to pay my monthly bill." But the truth is, we're more than just a utility provider that you pay each month for electricity. We have more to offer – and we want you, our members, to know about these benefits.

There are more than 900 electric cooperatives in the U.S. that serve 42 million members. Cotton Electric Cooperative, your local electric cooperative, serves 22,000 meters with lines stretching across 5,100 of miles. So what makes being a member of an electric cooperative unique?

We're all in this together. You are a member of Cotton Electric Cooperative, not a customer. And that means you have a voice when it comes to the

way we do business. Each fall, you have the option to vote for your board of trustees. These trustees play a key role in making important decisions for our co-op, which is why members' voices must be heard.

We're local. It's likely that you know an employee of Cotton Electric. Our employees – your friends and neighbors – share the same concerns for our community that you do.

Each year, Cotton Electric provides safety demonstrations for area schools, sponsors Youth Tour and Energy Camp, and serves as a sponsor for many community events.

In addition, your Operation Round Up fund that is administered by the Cotton Electric Charitable Founda-

tion has donated more than \$745,000 to our local communities.

To learn more about our mission to strengthen our community, visit our website.

We're not-for-profit. Cotton Electric Cooperative, Inc. doesn't offer profits to investors – we return money over and above operating costs to you, our members, based on electricity consumption. Annually, electric co-ops nationwide return millions of dollars to members through this capital credits process. Last year, Cotton Electric members received \$300,000 in the form of capital credits.

We're here for you. At Cotton Electric Cooperative, our mission is to provide you with safe, reliable, and

affordable electricity. We care about our members' quality of life, which is why our employees are continuously finding innovative ways to improve our service.

This month, we are launching a new service called SmartHub. SmartHub provides account access and two-way communication with Cotton Electric online or via your mobile device. You can manage payments, notify customer service of account and service issues, and check your power use, all at the touch of a button. SmartHub is available on Android and iOS smartphones and tablets.

These are just a few facts about electric cooperatives that make us unique. For more information about Cotton Electric Cooperative and the services we offer, visit www.CottonElectric.com.



Charles Spencer, second from left, was recently elected as assistant secretary-treasurer for the Western Farmers Electric Cooperative (WFEC) Board of Trustees. Spencer is a member of the Board of Trustees of Cotton Electric Cooperative in Walters. Other officers are, from left, Mike Lebeda of Kay Electric Cooperative, secretary-treasurer; Charles Hickey of Northfork Electric Cooperative, vice president; and David Ray of Kiamichi Electric Cooperative, president.

WFEC board elects 2014-15 officers

Officers for the Western Farmers Electric Cooperative (WFEC) Board of Trustees were elected during an Organizational Meeting, hosted Wednesday, April 16 at the cooperative's Anadarko headquarters. The Board's Organizational Meeting followed the Annual Meeting of Members.

These meetings were hosted after the regular monthly Board of Trustees meeting. The WFEC Board meets monthly to discuss and approve business operations conducted by their generation and transmission cooperative.

David Ray (right), who serves on the Board of Kiamichi Electric Cooperative in Wilburton, was re-elected as WFEC Board President for the coming year. Other officers include (from left) Mike Lebeda,

a trustee from Kay Electric Cooperative in Blackwell, who was re-elected as secretary-treasurer; Charles Spencer, a member of the Board of Cotton Electric Cooperative in Walters, who was elected as assistant secretary-treasurer; and Charles Hickey, a trustee from Northfork Electric Cooperative in Sayre, who was re-elected as vice president.

Other Board members, listed with their respective cooperative, include: Colin Whitley, Alfalfa Electric Cooperative; Herman Myers (alternate), Caddo Electric Cooperative; Gary Crain, Canadian Valley Electric Cooperative; Charles Wagner, Central Valley Electric Cooperative (NM); Bob Holley, Choctaw Electric Cooperative; Gene Peters, Cimar-

ron Electric Cooperative; Jerry Rempe, East Central Rural Electric Cooperative; Donnie Bidegain, Farmers' Electric Cooperative (NM); Bob Allen, Harmon Electric Association; Ralph Cunningham, Kiwash Electric Cooperative; John Ingle, Lea County Electric Cooperative (NM); Ray O. Smith, Northwestern Electric Cooperative; Rusty Grissom, Oklahoma Electric Cooperative; King Martin, Red River Valley Rural Electric Association; Jerry Partin, Roosevelt County Electric Cooperative (NM); Gary Jones, Rural Electric Cooperative; Lloyd Owens, Southeastern Electric Cooperative; Don Ellis, Southwest Rural Electric Association; and Heath Sirmons, Altus Air Force Base (non-voting member).

Energy Efficiency



Tip of the Month

Use shade trees in landscaping design to block the sun and reduce cooling costs. Deciduous trees shed leaves in winter to let heat in. Source: Energy.gov

Power cost adjustment explained

Continued from Page One

The PCA has been a credit 16 times in the last 24 months. However, increased natural gas prices and demand for electricity during the extreme winter weather resulted in increased fuel prices. This month's PCA is a charge of \$0.01240 per kWh. If a member used 1,000 kWh, the PCA charge would be \$12.40.

Members monitoring power consumption through MyUsage.com may notice the rate adjusts around the middle of every month when the PCA credit or charge is applied and included with the kWh charge.

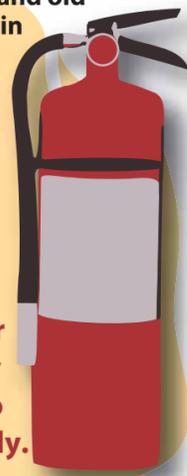
If you have any questions about the Power Cost Adjustment or your bill, please call us at 875-3351 or 800-522-3520.

March 2014 Operating Stats

	2014	2013
Total Amount Billed/Accrued	\$6,189,683	\$5,202,102
Cost of Purchased Power	4,946,073	3,647,807
Taxes	120,040	93,866
Total Operating Expense Per Mile	1,253	973
Average Farm and Residential Bill	149	135
Average Farm and Residential kWh	1,408	1,251
Total Meters Billed (farm, residential)	18,137	17,982
Miles Energized	5,138	5,135
Density Per Mile	3.53	3.50
New Service Connects YTD	69	93
Services Retired	58	69

Electrical Fire Safety

About 28,600 home electrical fires occur during a typical year, leading to \$1.1 billion in property losses. Faulty electrical outlets and old wiring are the main causes of electrical fires, as are damaged cords, plugs, switches, and light fixtures.



The number one priority in a fire is to escape safely.

Only use a fire extinguisher if:

- 🔥 The fire department has been called. Everyone has exited the building.
- 🔥 The fire is confined to a small area, such as a wastebasket, and is not growing.
- 🔥 The room is not filled with smoke.

Not all fire extinguishers are alike. Only a Class C extinguisher can be used on an electrical fire. Remember the word **PASS**:

Pull the pin. Hold the extinguisher with the nozzle pointing away from you and release the locking mechanism.

Aim low. Point the nozzle toward the base of the fire.

Squeeze the lever slowly and evenly.

Sweep the nozzle from side-to-side.

Remember: Know when to go.

Make sure you have a home fire escape plan and working smoke alarms.

Source: U.S. Fire Administration, National Fire Protection Association

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COTTON
ELECTRIC CO-OP

Mission Statement

Our mission is to be the leader in providing the most reliable and innovative electric system, with affordable rates, through the positive, enthusiastic and professional use of its resources and people.

Community Spotlight

If you would like your community event listed in the June issue, please submit information by June 3 by calling 580-875-4255 or send an email to info@cottonelectric.com.

LETRA hosts fishing tournament

The final spring fishing tournament at Lake Elmer Thomas Recreation Area will be May 17. Registration begins at 6:30 a.m. and fishing begins at 7 a.m. Cost is \$10 per participant and the event is open to the public.

Participants can fish from shore or from a boat. A valid Oklahoma state fishing license is required. Slot limits apply. Weigh-out is at noon.

Prizes will be given in two categories: Biggest fish determined by weight, and overall weight of fish caught.

For information, call Mark Houseman at 580-442-5858.

Armed Forces parade is May 17

Lawton's annual Armed Forces Day Parade begins at 10 a.m. May 17 at the intersection of Seventh and C avenues. Participants will march west on C to 11th Street and turn north to Ferris. The procession will head east until it reaches Elmer Thomas Park.

For information, call Tanna Vu at 580-355-3541.

Freedom celebration set in Hobart

The sixth annual Gen. Tommy Franks Leadership Institute Celebration of Freedom is set for May 23-24 in Hobart. This Memorial Day celebration recognizes what past and present military members have done to protect our nation's freedom.

The musical festival format will offer five free concerts on three stages, including a Battle of the Bands, quilt show and Arts on the Square. Participants can take part in Oklahoma's largest silent auction, enjoy the Bar-B-Q Cook-off and parade, watch the fly-in and stick around for the 6:30 p.m. concert with headliner Bo Bice, of "American Idol" fame.

For information, call the Gen. Tommy Franks Leadership Institute & Museum at 580-726-5900 or visit CelebrationOfFreedom.com.

Red Dirt Ball starts summer

Medicine Park's sixth annual Mayor's Red Dirt Ball features live performances by up-and-coming Red Dirt artists from Oklahoma City, Fort Worth and points in between. Performances will run throughout the Memorial Day weekend.

Performances begin with Tear Stained Eye at 7 p.m. May 23 at Mainstage. Allen Biffle follows at 8:30 p.m., and Bobby Dale Band at 10:30.

May 24 lineup at the General Store stage beside the Old Plantation includes Brandon Peregoy Band at noon and Josh Lamle at 2 p.m. At 4 p.m., performances move to Mainstage, beginning with The Captain Ledge Band. The Tequila Songbirds follow at 6 p.m., Ken Morrow & Hired Guns at 8 p.m., and The Thieving Birds at 10 p.m.

The weekend finishes up with May 25 General Store stage performances by East Cache Creek at noon and The Blaine Gillespie Band at 2 p.m. Mainstage performances begin at 4 p.m. with Rider's Ford, followed by The Handsome Devils at 6 p.m., Carter Sampson at 8 p.m., and The Red Dirt Rangers at 10 p.m..

There is no admission charge, lawn chairs are encouraged and ice chests are forbidden. For information, visit MedicinePark.com.

Tour de Meers marks 25 years

The 25th Tour de Meers, an annual bicycle ride through the Wichita Mountains beginning and ending in Meers, will be May 24.

Registration forms can be down-

loaded at tourdemeers.org. Registration the day of the event begins at 6 a.m. at Meers Volunteer Fire Department station, one mile north of the Meers Store on Oklahoma Highway 115.

The ride starts at 7:30 a.m. and features a variety of distances from 10 to 63 miles.

For information, visit the website, call 580-704-6002 or email tourdemeers@gmail.com.

Carp tourney at Duncan Lake

Duncan Lake is the place to be when the 15th annual Carp Tournament begins at 5 p.m. May 30. There will be a youth division for anglers under 16, and an adult division.

When the tournament ends at 2 p.m. May 31, prizes will be awarded for the most fish and the largest fish caught.

For information, call 580-255-9538.

Reunion set for Koch employees

Former Koch Oil Industries employees are gathering for a reunion from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. May 31 at Stephens County Fairgrounds.

Those interested in attending should plan to bring a covered dish.

For information, call Hugh Gardenhire at 580-606-0706, Dwight Sanford at 251-0741 or Evelyn Wortham at 606-0065.

Fish, tackle show set for June 6-7

Antique lures and reels will be among the displays at the Duncan Fishing and Tackle Show from noon to 6 p.m. June 6, and 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. June 7 at the Stephens County Fair & Expo Center.

In addition to raffles and fishing and tackle vendors, this World Association Tackle Collectors Show will welcome special guest Danny King, two-time catfish angler of the year. There is no admission fee.

Boot & Bling Scoot benefits ACS

Registration has opened for the fifth annual Comanche County Boots & Bling Scoot on June 7 in Medicine Park. A one-mile Fun Run begins at 8:30 a.m., and 5K Color Run follows at 9 a.m.

Entry fees are \$25 for the Fun Run and \$35 for the Color Run. All proceeds benefit the American Cancer Society.

Interested participants can register online at www.signmeup.com/99278 or between 8:30 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday at the American Cancer Society office, 1320 NW Homestead Drive in Lawton.

Those interested in volunteering or making a donation to the event can call E'Lise Spencer at 580-585-7490 or Amber McNeil at 580-574-9343

For more information, visit the Facebook page www.facebook.com/ccbandb or email bootsnblingscoot@gmail.com.

Domino tourney set for June 7

A fundraiser Domino Tournament has been set for June 7 at the Vimy Ridge Fellowship Hall in Rush Springs, 5.5 miles east of the flashing light on U.S. Highway 81. Registration will be from 8 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. and play will commence at 10 a.m. A consolation tournament will follow the main tournament.

Entry fee is \$5 each or \$10 per team. Payback will be \$200 to first place and \$100 to second place.

The event will include a silent auction and raffle on gas tickets. Breakfast, lunch and other concessions will be available.

Proceeds benefit the Rush Springs cheerleaders, who will use the funds for safety equipment, scholarships and uniforms. For information, call LaDonna Sanders at 580-656-2449 or Garry or Cathy Jackson at 580-467-6076 or 470-9390.

Photo of the Month



Ruby Murray was photographed on April 24, her 98th birthday, by her daughter, Merle Kirkby. The photo was submitted to our Mom-themed photo contest by Ruby's granddaughter, Vickie Combs. Ruby has been a Cotton Electric member for more than 65 years.

Enter your "best shot" in our Photo of the Month contest. Theme for June is Old Glory. Entries can be emailed to info@cottonelectric.com or mailed to The Current, 226 N. Broadway, Walters, OK 73572. Winners will receive a Cotton Electric prize package of CEC goodies.

LCT closes with 'La Mancha'

"Man of La Mancha" is the final show of the 2013-14 Lawton Community Theatre season. This award-winning staple of American musical theater features the classic song, "The Impossible Dream." It is the passionate and poignant tale of Don Quixote, a noble knight on a holy quest to find compassion not for him, but for others.

Performance dates will be June 6-8 and 12 at Lawton Community Theatre, 1316 NW Bell Avenue.

For information, visit LCT-OK.org or call 580-355-1600.

More Community Spotlight on Page 7

HARD HATS FOR THE JOB. SOFT HEARTS FOR THE COMMUNITY. People need their power. But the strongest communities share more than just reliable electricity; they share simple values. The linemen of your co-op are proud to have helped members pass along both for generations. Learn more about the power of your co-op membership at TogetherWeSave.com.



Cotton Electric demonstrates perfect definition of cooperation



Shayla Barber
Marlow High School

Editor's note: Four area high school juniors recently won a trip to Washington, D.C., in Cotton Electric's annual Youth Tour essay contest. Each of the essays will appear in The Current.

"One, two, ready, breathe," the conductor whispers to the choir as they begin to sing. The soft, angelic music pervades the crowded auditorium building. One wrong note could destroy the entire performance. It is immensely crucial that each individual sings his or her own part: tenor, baritone, alto or soprano. Having the ability to listen to one's section, as well as the others, and blend one's voice with the people around one's self is equally important. One voice should not be louder or softer than another; they all need to be balanced. Members of a choir need to cooperate with one another in order to present an outstanding performance. They must focus on their common goal and work together as a team for the sake of achieving that resolution; they need cooperation.

Cotton Electric is a phenomenal cooperative that demonstrates the perfect definition of cooperation. Cotton Electric displays mutual support that helps cooperatives improve services, bolster local economies, and deal more effectively with social and community needs.

Cotton Electric espouses mutual support that helps cooperatives improve services. In the 1990s, Cotton Electric

Services took an interest in the Internet to stay involved with the new trends of the world. Cotton Internet was designed to supply consumers who live in highly populated local areas, such as Lawton and Duncan, with Internet access.

Cotton Electric and other cooperatives around the country united with Touchstone Energy in 1998. Touchstone Energy is a nationwide group of cooperatively-owned utilities that contributes the best services to customers and their neighborhoods. Just like members of a choir must deeply support and encourage one another to improve their performance, cooperatives need to assist other cooperatives and their own customers to advance their services.

In addition to mutual support, Cotton Electric bolsters local economies. The cooperative is involved in numerous organizations to help its eight-county service area. For instance, Cotton Electric and its workers are keen participants in Chambers of Commerce. The cooperative also supports more than 30 schools in the area with tax money and donations, volunteer work, and activities for the students. Cotton Electric's engagements with the local economies have existed for many years and will continue.

Not only does Cotton Electric show mutual support and bolster local economies, but it deals more effectively with social and community needs. Some of the cooperative's employees offer their

own time after hours to perform community jobs. These consist of firefighters, teachers, coaches, church staff, city council workers, and much more. At ordinary community meetings in the Cotton Electric service district, the cooperative is represented by its members. They lend a hand in any way they can to figure out a solution to any possible issue they are able to as their electric company.

Cotton Electric Cooperative began an extra community service when it accepted a program called the Operation Round Up. This program simply allowed customers to voluntarily round up their monthly bills to the next dollar to donate the extra cents into the Operation Round Up fund. These are only a couple of ways Cotton Electric deals more effectively with social and community needs.

In conclusion, the remarkable Cotton Electric Cooperative brings forth mutual support that helps cooperatives improve services, bolster local economies, and deal more effectively with social and community needs. Cotton Electric cooperates with its consumers to better the company and increase the performance by the employees. The wonderful cooperative is also active in organizations in its service area. Meeting the needs of its customers is another way Cotton Electric is involved with the public. It is an extremely caring cooperative that will go out of its way just to help its customers.

Eighth-graders selected for 2014 Energy Camp announced

Eight lucky eighth-graders from across the Cotton Electric service area will be headed to Youth Power Energy Camp May 27-30. The students wrote about why they would like to attend the camp and were selected after an interview.

Students selected to represent Cotton Electric at this year's camp include Toby Denny, Randall Higdon and Cassidy Randall, all of Chattanooga; Cy Ulloa and Naomi Robinson, both of Indianola; Devin Mitchell of Comanche; Kimberly Spoonemore of Waurika; and Shalyn Bowles of Geronimo.

Youth Power Energy Camp is designed to help students develop their leadership skills,

have summertime fun and at the same time learn about one of rural America's most important industries – rural electrification.

Teens from all over Oklahoma will spend a week at Canyon Camp near Red Rock Canyon east of Hinton. At Energy Camp, which is sponsored by Oklahoma's electric cooperatives, students learn first-hand the world of electric co-ops through demonstrations by electric crews. Campers will have opportunities to climb a pole and ride in a bucket truck. Plus, they will set up and run their own cooperative business.

Activities will include nature hikes, games and other outings.



A trip up in a utility bucket is one of many activities at Youth Power Energy Camp.

Start Saving Today for Tomorrow's College Bills

Another school year is drawing to a close. If you have young children, you might be planning for their summer activities. But you also might want to look even farther into the future — to the day when your kids say "goodbye" to their local schools and "hello" to their college dormitories. When that day arrives, will you be financially prepared to pay for the high costs of higher education?

Consider this: For the 2013–2014 academic year, the average cost (tuition, fees, room and board) was \$18,391 for an in-state student at a four-year public college or university, and \$40,917 for a private school, according to the College Board. And these costs may well be considerably higher by the time your children enter college.

Of course, these are just the "sticker" prices; some families pay less, thanks

to grants and tax benefits, such as the American Opportunity Tax Credit and the Lifetime Learning Tax Credit. Still, you may encounter some hefty college bills down the road.

But college is still a good investment in your child's future. Over an adult's working life, an individual with a bachelor's degree can expect to earn, on average, nearly \$1 million more than someone with only a high school diploma, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. So you're saving for a good cause.

Unfortunately, you may not be saving enough — or you might not be making the most of your savings. To save for college, more parents use a general savings account than any other method, according to Sallie Mae's How America Saves for College 2014 study. These types of accounts carry two significant

drawbacks: They typically earn tiny returns and they offer no tax advantages.

However, you do have some attractive college-funding vehicles available, one of which is a 529 plan. Your 529 plan earnings accumulate tax free, provided they are used for qualified higher education expenses. (529 plan distributions not used for qualified expenses may be subject to federal and state income tax and a 10% IRS penalty.) Furthermore, your 529 plan contributions may be deductible from your state taxes. But 529 plans vary, so be sure to check with your tax advisor regarding deductibility.

A 529 plan offers other benefits, too. For one thing, the lifetime contribution limits for 529 plans are quite generous; while these limits vary by state, some plans allow contributions well in excess

of \$200,000. And a 529 plan is flexible: If your child decides against college or vocational school, you can transfer the unused funds to another family member, tax and penalty free.

While a 529 plan is a popular choice for college savings, it is not the only option available. You also might want to consider a Coverdell Education Savings Account, which, like a 529 plan, can generate tax-free earnings if the money is used for higher education expenses. You can typically only put in a maximum of \$2,000 per year to a Coverdell account, but it does offer more flexibility in investment choices than a 529 plan.

Your children may be young today, but, before you know it, they'll be packing their bags for college. So, no matter which college savings vehicles you choose, put them to work soon.

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DES-8207-A

Member SIPC

Community effort builds Kidtopia; still going strong a decade later

By Karen Kaley

Youth Park in the middle of Walters may be owned by the city, but it flourishes because it has a godmother. Janell Philpott will blush and tell you, no, that she only notices when things need straightening up

“The whole community takes care of the park,” she’ll say.

Ask her about the history of Kidtopia, the playground in the middle of the park, and her eyes light up. She becomes quite enthusiastic when she talks about its beginnings. Again, she gives complete credit to the entire community, including Cotton Electric, for making the playground dream a reality.

“It was remarkable,” she recalled recently.

“We had committees for everything. Dollie Glenn, Linda Lev-erett and I were co-chairs. The Walters Herald had articles every week. The kids at school were doing things all the time ...

“It was just fun. All of the people got involved. It was really a community thing.”

The first hurdle was to raise enough money to purchase equipment. The Comanche Tribe made a significant initial contribution that really got the fundraising going. Some of the money came from simple efforts, some from grants, some from community partners.

By October 2003, the community had raised \$100,000. It was time to build.

Before the massive wooden beams of the playground structures could be placed, holes had to be dug. Really deep holes.

Philpott said a community partner took care of that job.

“Cotton Electric crews and digging equipment spent a day digging holes for the posts,” she said.

Then, the community came together and built the playground in five days. Volunteers brought their own tools and worked in four-hour shifts. Some groups built, some groups brought food for the builders.

“I don’t think there was a person in Walters who wasn’t involved in making Kidtopia happen,” Philpott said.

“Men, women and children ... all participated. It was a sight to behold.

“And now, everybody feels like they own this park.”

And Philpott watches over it from her vantage point nearby. She tells of days when the park is so full it is hard to find a parking place. She tells of ball teams from other towns coming to play in the park’s diamonds and younger siblings reluctant to leave Kidtopia when the game is over.

She tells of transplanting pecan trees that had volunteered in neighbors’ yards and hauling buckets of water to the park until faucets were installed. She tells of rounding up help when the ground cover of wood chips in Kidtopia needs raking and redistributing.

She rounded up even more help late last year when the wood chips had deteriorated with age and just had to be replaced. Some of that help came from her friends at Cotton Electric.

During the December 2013 meeting of the board of direc-

tors of Cotton Electric Charitable Foundation, a \$5,000 grant was approved to help purchase new wood chips.

That bought 280 cubic yards – two semi-truckloads – of wood chips from Riverside Ranch LLC in Norman.

Robin Parker, a spokesperson for Riverside Ranch, said the chips begin as virgin pine and hardwood lumber that has been cured, kiln-dried and heat-treated – no chemicals.

After grinding, the chips are run through a screen that sifts out the chips too large for use in a playground. The shaking and sifting also removes sawdust and other fine particulates.

Parker said this process makes for a lightweight, soft-impact product that keeps children safe and does not deteriorate quickly.

The chips are about a foot deep, kept inside the playground area by a wooden border that is a little bit deeper.

Philpott said the children seem to enjoy the wood chips as much as they enjoy the slides, swings, tunnels and turrets of the playground equipment. She can tell by the hills and valleys created by little hands and big imaginations.

She knows that the tire swing is the most favored feature of the playground, pointing out how the wood chips are always kicked thinnest beneath it.

“We need to get back in here with some rakes,” she said, looking over the playground she knows so well.

It’s hard to say who enjoys Kidtopia more, the children or the park’s godmother, Janell Philpott.



Download CECF grant applications at cottonelectric.com.

Deadline for 2014 second-quarter grant applications is May 21.

Operation Round Up is a voluntary program and members may opt out at any time by calling or sending a letter or email stating the account holder’s name, account number and the request to be removed.



Janell Philpott said the tire swing is a popular part of Kidtopia in Youth Park in Walters.



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Try to avoid getting 'hangry'

No, that's not a typo. "Hanger" and "hangry" are buzzwords that resurfaced in April, thanks to a study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America. The study done by Bushman and colleagues looked at aggression among couples.

One-hundred and seven married couples participated in the study. Researchers measured their blood glucose levels and aggressive impulses for 21 days. The study supported a known biological mechanism for survival. When your blood sugar is low, you tend to be cranky. When study participants were angry, their blood sugar was low.

Low blood sugar happens when your body is running low on fuel, and anger or crankiness is often an outward signal that your body needs some fuel. Even if you do not have diabetes, you can experience low blood sugar. It is one of your body's natural defenses against starvation. Of course, you cannot blame all of your anger on low blood sugar, but knowing this tendency could save you from some needless arguments.

Your body does best when it gets some fuel (aka food) every four to five hours. If you think about your normal



Kim Bandelier, MPH, RD, LD

Food For THOUGHT

eating routine, you probably tend to go longer than five hours between lunch and dinner without eating. If you often walk through the door and feel cranky, angry or so hungry you cannot think straight, a late afternoon snack may help.

Make it a balanced snack – some protein, carbohydrates and healthy fat. Examples include peanut butter and fruit, cheese and fruit, yogurt, nuts and dried fruit, and vegetables and dip. Keep portion sizes snack-like or else you may not be hungry for dinner.



A balanced late afternoon snack such as peanut butter and fruit may help you through your evening routine without getting hangry.

Avoid snacking on candy or desserts, as these can result in rapid increases in blood sugar and then rapid declines in blood sugar, defeating the purpose of the snack.

Also, avoid drive-up windows on the way home. Even the "snack size" menus offer more calories than you need and rarely offer balanced snack options.

It is best to bring a snack from home. Stock up a lunch box and ice packs

that can keep your healthy argument prevention intervention at the appropriate temperature.

A snack will not solve all of your problems, but it may help you get through your evening routine without a fight.

Make the snack count by eating something healthy, and adjust your intake at other meals accordingly.

Your waistline and your spouse will thank you.

Fuel an active lifestyle, boost fitness with dairy

(Family Features) Many people are taking advantage of warmer temperatures and increased hours of sunlight to get fit for the fun season ahead. As they do, they'll be looking for ways to fuel their efforts. Enter dairy, a protein powerhouse that provides numerous benefits to active individuals.

More protein per ounce

The perfect addition to snack or mealtime, dairy foods offer a convenient way to add the protein needed to help you achieve your fitness goals. While helping your body build and repair muscle, as well regulate metabolism, it also keeps you satisfied longer. In fact, just one serving of milk, cheese or yogurt provides approximately 8 grams of high quality protein, including all essential amino acids. When it comes to smart snacking, dairy really packs a protein punch.

Protein-packed whey

Whey protein is a high-quality protein found naturally in dairy foods, and it provides the nutrients that help promote better health.

Need a helpful way to remember this beneficial nutrition source? Think "Y-M-C-Whey" when you're looking to fuel your fitness efforts:

•Y is for Yogurt: Enjoy this versatile food at any time of day. Double up on protein with Greek yogurt, which often contains twice the amount as regular yogurt.

•M is for Milk: Reach for low-fat chocolate milk after exercise. The protein it provides supports healthy muscles and the carbohydrates help refuel you with energy.

•C is for Cheese: Grab a slice, wedge or stick when you need something to tide you over between meals. The protein in cheese can curb hunger, which makes it a great tool for weight management.



Rainbow Fruit and Cheese Kabobs are a colorful way to stay curb hunger and keep fit.

•W is for Whey: Add whey protein powder to your post-workout smoothie or cereal, which can help build and maintain lean muscle.

It's simple to power your fitness goals – whatever they may be – with dairy. Find more nutrition information and recipes to power up at www.dairy-makessense.com.

Rainbow Fruit & Cheese Kabobs

Servings: 6 Prep time: 15 minutes

- 6 straws (8-inches or longer)
- 6 ounces Monterey cheese, cut into 18 cubes
- 1/2 cup strawberry halves
- 1/2 cup cantaloupe, cut into 3/4-inch cubes

- 1/2 cup pineapple, cut into 3/4-inch cubes
- 1 kiwifruit, peeled and cut into 6 pieces
- 1/4 cup blueberries
- 6 purple grapes

To make a rainbow for each kabob, thread onto a straw a piece of cheese, a strawberry halve, a cantaloupe cube, a pineapple cube, another piece of cheese, a piece of kiwi, 2 blueberries, a grape and another piece of cheese. Repeat pattern with remaining straws.

Nutritional information per serving: 135 calories; 9 g fat; 7 g protein; 8 g carbohydrates; 1 g dietary fiber; 25 mg cholesterol; 135 mg sodium; calcium 22 percent of daily value.

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Community Spotlight

DLT presents 'Always, Patsy Cline'

Duncan Little Theatre presents "Always, Patsy Cline," a show based on a true story about Cline's friendship with a fan from Houston. The two maintained a correspondence from the time they met in 1961 until Cline's tragic death in 1963. The show's title comes from her letter closing, "Love always, Patsy Cline."

Musical numbers include "Crazy," "I Fall to Pieces" and "Walking After Midnight."

Performances will be at 7:30 p.m. June 12, 13 and 14 in the chapel at First Baptist Church, 901 W. Ash. For information, visit DuncanLittleTheatre.com.

Duncan Lions open rodeo is June 26, 27, 28

Duncan Noon Lions will present the annual open rodeo at 7:30 nightly June 26, 27 and 28 in Claud Gill Arena, just south of the Stephens County fairgrounds.

Admission price at the gate is \$8 for adults and \$3 for children.

Proceeds from the event are used in Stephens County to promote vision conservation, provide scholarships and support other local charitable efforts.

Bray, Bray-Doyle plan all-classes reunion

All former and current Bray and Bray-Doyle students and teachers should mark June 28 on their calendars as the date of the All-Classes Reunion. The event will be from 4 to 7 p.m. in the Bray Community Center.

Finger foods and drinks will be provided at the come-and-go reception, where classmates can visit and catch up with old friends.

In addition to a \$5 attendance fee, there will be a silent auction and a raffle of a handmade quilt. All proceeds will go to the Bray-Doyle Scholarship fund.

Information is available by calling or texting Marie Whaley at 580-656-0868 or sending her an email at mariewhaley@cableone.net.

Food pantry open twice monthly

Walters Community Food Pantry is open from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. on the second and fourth Saturdays of each month. The pantry is in the old City Hall, 131 1/2 W. California Street.

Pantry organizers try to provide a two-week supply of basic staples to anyone with identification.

For information, call Roger Noland at 580-591-6826.

Rocketeers launch monthly

Red River Rocketeers (RRR) has a new launch location. Wolfe Field is in the Bray area, southeast of Clear Creek Lake. A map to the site is posted on the RRR website, RRRocketeers.homestead.com.

RRR, a sport model rocketry club based in Duncan, hosts rocket launches when the weather permits. The next launch will be a noon May 31.

All RRR launches are open to the public. No model rocket is required. Rockets are available for newcomers to launch.

Club meetings are held at 6:30 p.m. on the second Thursday of each month at Red River Technology Center in Duncan.

For information about the group, its meeting and launch dates, visit RRRocketeers.homestead.com.

WMASC offers regular weekly activities

Wichita Mountains Area Senior Citizens offers a variety of activities and sponsors weekly and monthly events at the Legion Building near Medicine Park.

Potluck dinners, games and TV are offered every Monday from 6 to 10 p.m.

Cecil Gardner's famous homemade Indian tacos are featured at the Indian taco sale held on the second Saturday of each month. Drinks and desserts are included at \$5.50 per plate.

A dance is held each Friday. Doors open at 6:30 p.m., dancing begins at 7.

For information about other activities, visit WichitaMountainSeniors.org.

All activities are held in the Legion Building on Wildhorse Road near Medicine Park. From Interstate 44, take Exit 45 to Oklahoma Highway 49. Traveling east, bear right onto Wildhorse. The building is on the right.

Honor guard serves southwest Oklahoma

Seeing a need in the area, military veterans formed an honor guard to provide services at funerals for all military veterans. The guard is made up of veterans from all branches of the armed forces and three veterans' organizations.

The uniformed guard furnishes a 21-gun salute, plays taps and folds a flag for presentation to the family. The guard travels anywhere in Stephens, Cotton, Comanche and Jefferson counties.

There is no charge for the service, but donations are accepted.

For information about joining the guard or securing its services, call L.D. Williams at 580-439-8244.



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ACROSS

1. Italian cheese city
6. Fed
9. Rights activist Parks
13. Bitter aloe compounds
14. Octagonal motif in oriental rugs
15. Maple genus
16. Shabby (slang)
17. Chopping tool
18. Shakespeare's epithet
19. Regain
21. Mega-electron volts
22. Unhappy mood
23. NY pharmacy Duane ____
25. Metrical foot
26. 1950's Nash automobile
31. Digits
33. Affectional
34. Engine additive
35. Any small tubular structure
36. Lifted something heavy
41. Liquefied natural gas
43. ___ of Avila, Saint
44. 2nd Greek letter
45. Assumed the existence of
46. Actress Rooney
49. Claudio __, Chilean pianist
51. Turkish leader titles
52. Don't know when yet
53. Rectangular groove joint
59. Mythological birds
60. Type or kind
61. White bear

1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8		9	10	11	12	
13							14				15			
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59						60				61				
62						63				64				
65						66				67				

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|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| 62. Native American group | ment | 40. Father |
| 63. V | 9. Jewish spiritual leaders | 42. Disjointed |
| 64. Author Walker | 10. Central Florida city | 43. Yearly tonnage (abbr.) |
| 65. Back talk | 11. Any watery animal fluid | 44. Lowest male singing voices |
| 66. Doctor of Education | 12. 198 L Egyptian dry measure unit | 46. Jacobs, Ribot & Gasol |
| 67. Jazz trumpeter Malik | 20. Prophylactic | 47. Athens' marketplace |
| | 24. Before | 48. Contests |
| | 26. Drench | 50. Gathered fall leaves |
| | 27. ___ River | 54. Three banded armadillo |
| | 28. Disorderly crowd | 55. A cord necktie |
| | 29. Heat unit | 56. Spot on a radar screen |
| | 30. Medieval capital of Flanders | 57. Components considered individually |
| | 32. Fencing swords | 58. Elm, maple or oak |
| | 37. Weekday (abbr.) | |
| | 38. Vietnamese offensive | |
| | 39. Point midway between E and SE | |

DOWN

1. Henry's last wife Catherine
2. Wings
3. College army
4. Myth (Spanish)
5. Hungarian word for mum
6. Old World lizard genus
7. Dinner jackets
8. Last possible mo-



With 231 255-watt photovoltaic modules on the roof, Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge Visitors Center (WMWRVC) is the largest distributed generation solar installation in the Cotton Electric service area. The Audit Committee for the Cotton Electric board of trustees met there in mid-April and got a tour of the facility and how the solar array powers the center. In the photo at left, Larry Phillips, Cotton's superintendent of technical services, points out the day's meter readings for Cotton trustees Dewayne High, center, and Marvin Scherler.

At right, Cotton Electric CEO Warren Langford discusses the solar array control panels inside the visitors center. Those listening, from background left, are Larry Phillips, Cotton VP Jeff Simpson, trustee Dewayne High and Tim McCary, president of the board of trustees.



Ralph Bryant, deputy refuge manager, left, and Joe D'Arrigo, maintenance supervisor, meet with the Audit Committee to discuss their experiences with the solar installation.

Photos by Jennifer Meason

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On the Hill Gypsy Horses

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Clockwise from top right: Randy Lee, Warlock and Linda Lee pose in front of the Lee home. Randy Lee gets an affectionate greeting from Warlock's Fancy Lady, a Gypsy sport horse. A blustery wind blows the feathers and mane of Dancer, a Gypsy horse. Smokey would like to remind everyone that Warlock's is not the only pretty face at On the Hill Gypsy Horses.



Gypsies live in Stephens County

Lees offer breeding, training of flashy, gentle horses

By Karen Kaley

Warlock's magic worked on Linda Lee the first time she saw him.

Linda and her husband, Randy, have owned and trained horses for a very long time. About five years ago, they decided to make a business of breeding and selling horses. Randy told Linda to pick a breed to focus on.

Research on the internet led her to the Gypsy breed, developed from foundation stock in the United Kingdom and relatively new in the United States. Photos of the showy horses had Linda mesmerized.

The Lees traveled to a breeder in Texas, with plans to purchase their first Gypsy horse. They came home with two mares and a surprise: Warlock.

"I always said I wouldn't have a stallion until I met Warlock and the gypsy breed," Linda said.

Warlock is quite spellbinding. The black and white piebald coloring makes one think of a pinto but his long, flowing double mane, thick tail and feathered legs, coupled with his powerful build, tell first-time observers he is something else.

He's attractive and he knows it.

"When we are out anywhere, people start taking pictures. Warlock will hear camera shutters and stop to pose," Linda said.

Move in for a closer inspection, and one finds Warlock is more than a pretty face and muscular body. He's a sweet and gentle fellow, as drawn to people as they are to him. He offers a kiss and a nuzzle, searching for pockets filled with hidden treats.

"Warlock is so calm, my grandbabies can crawl all over him," Linda said.

That gentle temperament is a standard of the Gypsy horse, along with the sturdy build and flashy appearance. They were developed to work, to pull gypsy wagons carrying families. They had to be up to the task physically, get along with elders and youngsters, and blend in with the gypsy persona.

These qualities make the Gypsy horse a versatile all-around horse, Randy said. A Gypsy can be a pampered show horse or work cattle. They are good for trail rides or pulling carts and work implements.

Warlock and other Gypsy horses pass all of those traits to their offspring. The Lees have six other Gypsies, some from Warlock, and all are beautiful, gentle and powerfully built. They also have a couple of Gypsy sport horses, crosses between Warlock and a quarter horse.

The Lees train horses with natural horsemanship and imprinting, a method that begins within hours of birth. Photos and video of Randy handling and bonding with newborn Gypsy sport foal Warlock's Fancy Lady can be found on the couple's Facebook page named for their business, On the Hill Gypsies.

They have a website, too – www.On-the-Hill.net – where there are more pictures of the foal and other horses that are for sale. There is a lot of information about Gypsy horse standards and about how to arrange for breeding with Warlock.

While Warlock is an import and comes from foundation stock that carries an oral lineage, he has been DNA-tested and is listed with the Gypsy Horse Registry of America.

The Lees guarantee a live foal as long as contractual obligations are met. Warlock has sired about 20 foals since the Lees have owned him.

The website also has fee information, but Cotton Electric members can present a Co-op Connections Card to get a discount of \$100 on the breeding fee or purchase cost of a horse.

Visiting On the Hill Gypsy Horses is by appointment only. Give Randy or Linda a call at 580-656-2475 or 641-2022 or send an email to lee@on-the-hill.net.

You will soon learn about the magnificent Gypsy horse from a couple in the business of raising the finest of the breed right here in southwest Oklahoma.

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SmartHub puts power of data in hands of Cotton members

Continued from Page 1

Registration does not obligate a member to make payments online. This tool is a great way to check on the current status of accounts. Information available includes the amount of a current bill and past due dates.

SmartHub has a My Usage tab that provides access to a variety of historical information about an account. For example, members can compare month-to-month power use or see a year's worth of kWh use on a bar graph overlaid with high, low and/or average temperatures.

SmartHub puts all the power of managing personal information in the hands of members who use it. Email addresses and phone numbers can be updated any time online or with the app, eliminating the need to call Cotton Electric offices during business hours.

Members can set up multiple contact points, too. Separate phone numbers and email addresses for each member of the household can be added. Additionally, members can choose to have a variety of notifications delivered to all or some

of the contacts in a ways that work best for them. For example, from the Notifications tab, users can elect to have a Bill Available, Payment Confirmation or DQ (delinquent) Notice sent via email, text message or both.

SmartHub is a secure website and app, which protects sensitive personal information. Users can safely store checking account and/or credit card information to make payments.

To eliminate the need to keep track of due dates, the Billing & Payments tab has a link called Auto Pay Ac-

counts that members can use to set up automatic payments. This SmartHub feature also eliminates having to submit paperwork to the co-op.

These are just a few of the enhancements SmartHub offers. Visit CottonElectric.com or download the app to see more and keep an eye on The Current for announcements about more ways SmartHub can help you.

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FREE Lung Screening For High Risk Individuals

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

- Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death for both men and women worldwide.
- Nearly 160,000 Americans die of lung cancer each year.

Based on findings of the National Lung Screening Trial (NLST), we know that CT lung screening can save lives of people at high risk for developing lung cancer.

Low-dose CT (LDCT) lung screening is quick and easy and results in a minimal amount of radiation exposure. The Cancer Centers of Southwest Oklahoma is determined to raise awareness and improve access to this testing for all people at high risk. Therefore, Cancer Centers of Southwest Oklahoma and Jackson County Memorial Hospital are now offering in conjunction **FREE LDCT lung screening** to individuals who meet the established high-risk criteria.



QUALIFICATION CRITERIA

You may qualify for a free LDCT lung screening if you fall into one of these categories:

Category 1

- You are between 55 and 74 years of age
- You are currently a smoker or have quit in the last 15 years
- You have a 30+ pack-year* history of smoking

Category 2

- You are between 50 and 74 years old
- You have a 20+ pack-year* history of smoking
- You have one additional lung cancer risk factor (not to include secondhand smoke exposure)

*pack-years are calculated by multiplying the number of packs a day you smoke by the number of years you have smoked.

Example: 2 packs a day for 15 years = 30 pack-years

**Call to schedule a screening
1-877-231-4440 to see if you qualify.**

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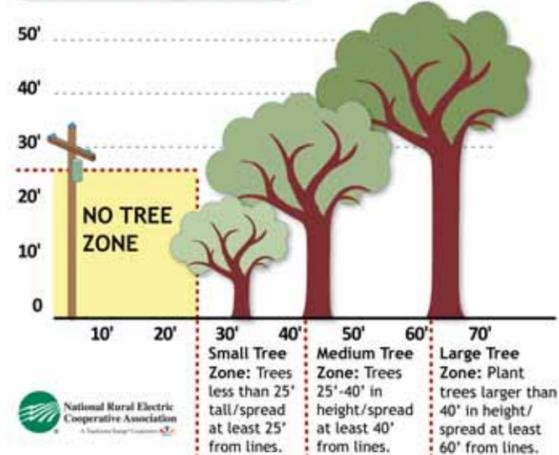
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Always look up before planting a tree. To keep safe, remember to Call Okie, 1-800-522-OKIE, before digging for any reason.

Tree Planting Guide



Trent Marlett points out the benefit of planting deciduous trees in strategic locations. This Bradford pear blocks summer sun on the south side of a Cotton Electric building, giving air conditioners a break. During winter, leafless branches allow passive solar heat to come in the windows.

Summer foliage offers shade, bare limbs let winter sun in

By Trent Marlett

Now that we are in the middle of spring and the weather outside is really nice, some people have started planting flowers. This is also a good time to start planting some trees.

Trees offer more than eye-appeal, though. They also can function as energy-saving additions to our homes. If planted properly, trees can make a dramatic impact on our energy consumption.

On hot, sunny days, we all know to look for the shade of a tree, where temperatures can be as much as 20 degrees cooler. With that in mind, consider how hot a home gets in the summer and how hard the air conditioner has to work to keep it cool. Imagine how much less the air conditioning would need to work if the house was in that 20-degree-cooler shade.

The U.S. Forestry service offers guidelines on where and how to plant trees to reduce energy consumption. I'll outline some of what they are.

Because Oklahoma summers and winters can be so extreme, we have to keep both seasons in mind when planting trees to help with energy consumption.

During summer months, the path of the sun begins in the east and peaks almost directly overhead. This means there is a time of day when it is almost impossible to shade a home.

To maximize the power of shade,

plant trees with a maturity height of at least 25 feet on the east and west side of the home. A tree that tall should be planted at least 10 to 25 feet away from the house.

Also, trees can be planted on the southwest or south side of the home to help out even more.

For shade from the morning and evening sun, plant smaller trees with lower limbs on the northeast and northwest side of the home.

Summer shade trees need to be deciduous trees, which lose their leaves in the winter. We don't want shade over the home during cold weather.

For the winter months, we need the sun's energy to help heat our homes and take some of the load off our heating systems. If trees near our homes are bare in the winter, the sun can shine through and help heat the home.

The winter wind is another major contributor to increased wintertime energy use. The strong north wind finds ways to enter homes through small cracks in windows, bad seals around windows and doors, under floor plates, plumbing penetrations, and even electrical sockets.

If there is a way to block the wind, there will be less air leakage. This is where dense evergreen trees can really come in handy.

The ideal tree to plant for a windbreak is one that is very dense and keeps its foliage in the winter – evergreens. Op-

timally, the evergreen crowns should go all the way to the ground.

To get the most out of a windbreak, plant the trees upwind of the area to be protected, primarily to the northwest and north of the building. Windbreak protection can extend for a distance 10 times the height of the tree, so they don't have to be planted close to the home.

In other words, a row of 30-foot trees can be planted as far as 300 feet from the house and still provide a good windbreak.

These trees can be planted in straight or curved rows and close enough together that their crowns at least touch.

Forestry Department diagrams show what happens when a 35-mile-per-hour wind comes to a windbreak 50 feet away from a house. The wind rises over the break and the wind speed

between the home and the windbreak is reduced to just 10 miles per hour.

Always remember to plant trees a safe distance from your power lines. Trees that can reach heights of up to 40 feet should be planted at least 20 feet away, and trees that can grow over 40 feet high should be at least 50 feet away from power lines.

With properly planted deciduous trees for shade in the summer and evergreen trees to block the bitter north winter wind, the Department of Energy estimates that energy consumption can be reduced by 25 percent throughout the year.

So, while the weather is nice – and we hope to see some spring showers – think about planting trees. Not only will they enhance the appearance of your property, they can make your electric bill more attractive, too.

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Graham graduated from Southwestern Oklahoma State University in Weatherford. For the next ten years, he taught school, coached football, raised cattle, and farmed in Comanche County.

Upon graduating from the University of Oklahoma College of Law in 1981, he began working as an assistant prosecutor in the District Attorney's office in Comanche County. Later he entered private practice in Lawton and has represented clients from Comanche, Stephens, Jefferson, Cotton, Kiowa, Grady, Caddo and Jackson counties over the last 33 years. **Graham** and his family have been members of the Cotton Electric Cooperative for the last 40 years.

Graham and his family lived on a farm west of Indianola from 1973-2008. During this time, he practiced law in Lawton and his wife, DeDe, taught school in Lawton, Indianola and Snyder. In 2008, DeDe retired from Snyder Public Schools and they moved to Duncan, to be closer to their daughter, Dr. Demetra Cox, and her family.

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Dig it

Heavy equipment operator Chuck Ballard uses practiced touch to get hole job done

By Karen Kaley

Imagine digging a hole about five and a half feet deep and a couple of feet across. A post-hole digger would be the best tool, but what if you had to dig thousands of them?

Early-day Cotton Electric employees dug those holes with shovels. If poles were spaced about the same as they are today, it would have taken about 2,700 hand-dug holes to string the first 150 miles of line energized in 1939.

The co-op has grown quite a bit. Cotton Electric had 5,137 miles of energized line in February. At 18 utility poles per mile, that would be 92,466 holes. In many places, there are more than 20 poles per mile, so an estimate as high 100,000 would not be unreasonable.

We couldn't do it without digger trucks and heavy equipment operators like Chuck Ballard. Having been on the construction crew in that capacity for most of the 23 years he has worked for the co-op, Ballard has developed a practiced touch that is fascinating to watch.

A heavy-duty belt holds an orange-yellow remote controller about waist high on Ballard, easy for him to reach. He is so familiar with the device that he manipulates the levers and switches without looking.

The digger truck has a boom, a basket and a winch, is equipped with augers taller than most men, and a device that can clamp a pole and swing it into place. Ballard op-

erates nearly all of it standing on the ground, his head cocked back, eyes focused on the machinery movement.

Ballard said it is important to keep his eyes up, watching the action.

"I'm responsible for a lot. While I'm swinging poles around, picking up heavy objects, hanging transformers and setting poles on hot lines, I've got to watch what I'm doing.

"Everything I do has a potential danger to the rest of the crew," and like everyone else on the Cotton Electric crews, Ballard is always doing his best to get the job done safely.

"The part of my job I take most seriously is trying to keep these other guys safe. I consider everyone on this crew my friend and I don't want to hurt any of them."

He also does the job well. He's dug enough holes in enough different places that he is a bit of an expert.

"A lot of thought and knowledge goes into digging a hole and doing a good job of it," he said.

"Every hole is different. The soil type and whether there is rock or sand can make a difference. It takes a while to get the feel for everything."

Ballard said he can gauge the difference in the soil by observing things around him.

"I can tell by the sound of the truck. I'm usually standing pretty

close to the digging spot and get cues from the feel of the ground."

Some holes are harder to dig. Those in rocky areas can be really difficult and take a very long time to dig. He recalled taking two days to get through in a particularly tough spot in the Wichita Mountains.

The opposite is a problem, too. "Sometimes, the ground is too soft or swampy," Ballard said. "I'll pull the bit out and the hole collapses. I'll dig some more, the hole gets bigger and may collapse again."

Building power lines in the great outdoors of southwest Oklahoma suits Ballard just fine. He has lived in the Walters area all his life, fishing, hunting, tending cattle and raising a family.

He and his wife, Rita, have four children and eight grandchildren between them.

Austin Ballard lives in Walters, as do Jennifer and Ernie Herr, who are the parents of Haleigh Hull, 11, and Shooter Herr, 5. Lacy and Dustin Hill of Georgia are the parents of Maycee, 6, Jerzee, 8, Lane, 12, and Haylee, 13. James Barber of Fletcher plans to marry Melody in June.

"I'm claiming her kids as my grandkids," Ballard said.

The new family will include Rylee, 5, and Mercie, 7. Just the right ages to think about digging a hole to China.

With a Grandpa like Chuck Ballard offering advice, they may succeed.

Employee Spotlight

Chuck Ballard



Chuck Ballard has been a heavy equipment operator for most of the 23 years he has worked for Cotton Electric.

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