

OHIO'S ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES CURRENT

Rebuilding Together

As businesses begin piecing back together the shattered U.S. economy, it is helpful to reflect on the foundation we are building on. Principles are the pillars that remind us to act in alignment with our values, especially during challenging times. Ohio's Electric Cooperatives' principles were forged by survivors of the Great Depression and have guided the organization for nearly 80 years. This month we are sharing inspiring stories of local cooperative actions supporting rural development that exemplify our principles.

Project Ohio team works through pandemic for rural development

Around the world, more than 800 million people still live without electricity. No electricity means no clean water, no refrigeration, limited education for children, and limited economic opportunities for all.

In Ohio, the principles of cooperation among cooperatives and concern for community go far beyond our community, state, and national borders. Our commitment goes international.

In March 2020, 16 lineworkers from electric co-ops across the state volunteered for a two-week trip to a rural, mountainous village in Guatemala to bring electricity to the residents there for the first time. It was the third such trip by Ohio electric co-op lineworkers to the Central American country since March 2016.

This time, though, the team had COVID-19 to contend with. When they left John Glenn Columbus International Airport on March 9, infections were under control in Guatemala and travel restrictions had yet to be put in place around the United States. One week later, the world was a different place.



The Ohio lineworkers worked efficiently and quickly to get an entire week ahead of schedule, and they were able to leave the last leg of the work to local linemen. The lights came on in Tierra Blanca Sebol the next day, as the team hustled to Guatemala City, but they were too late. Guatemala's borders were closed.

It took the furious efforts of Ohio's Electric Cooperatives' leadership and government affairs teams, working with Ohio lawmakers, to finagle a charter flight out. On March 18, they boarded a flight for Miami and, worn out and grateful to be home, arrived at the Columbus office of Ohio's Electric Cooperatives the next day.

While the pandemic prohibited the planned airport reception and celebration, the pride and satisfaction of cooperation among cooperatives and concern for community continues to resound among Ohio electric cooperatives.

"The team traveled far from the security of their homes, families, and jobs to improve the lives of the people of a remote village," says Pat O'Loughlin, Ohio's Electric Cooperatives' president and CEO. "Even getting caught in the throes of a global pandemic didn't diminish the guys' commitment; if anything, it fortified the crew's perseverance to get the job done. It's the same dedication that they, and their cooperatives, show every day here in Ohio. We're grateful for the linemen's service, and we look forward to the next trip abroad, whenever it's safe to go."



Supporting the communities that built them

Ohio's electric cooperatives were founded in the 1930s by the communities that needed them to thrive. Because of their roots, they're deeply embedded in the communities they serve, especially as the COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed the way we live, work, learn, and play.



You don't have to look far to find the evidence. In central and western Ohio, The Energy Cooperative (Newark) and Paulding Putnam Electric Cooperative (Paulding) turned their parking lots into Wi-Fi hotspots, while Consolidated Cooperative (Mount Gilead/Delaware) leveraged its fiber

internet network to do the same in school parking lots. So much of rural Ohio lacks the high-speed internet required for online learning, working, banking, and generally conducting a socially distanced life.

To the north, North Central Electric Cooperative (Attica) and Lorain-Medina Rural Electric Cooperative (Wellington) released capital credits back to their current and former members in May, seven months ahead of their normal December return. Capital credits represent the money members pay into the cooperative, in proportion to how much electricity they "buy," and a cooperative typically keeps a portion of the money as operating capital, some for emergencies, and anything beyond that is returned to members. North Central returned more than \$1.2 million and LMRE returned \$2.2 million to boost their communities.

Cooperative Principles

Seven core principles form the basis of the cooperative business model and guide electric cooperatives' decision making

1. Voluntary and open membership

Anyone able to receive electric service and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership is welcome.

2. Democratic member control

Each member has one vote and is able to use his or her vote to elect trustees and to vote on policy.

3. Members' economic participation

Co-ops strive to provide at-cost service, and unused capital is returned to members.

4. Autonomy and independence

All decisions made ensure the continued self-reliance of the cooperative.

5. Education, training, and information

Co-ops help members use electricity safely and efficiently and empower their employees and trustees to provide exceptional service.

6. Cooperation among cooperatives

Working with other cooperatives helps support the sound, sustainable co-op business model.

7. Concern for Community

Co-ops sponsor and promote worthwhile local causes in their service territories.

In southern and eastern Ohio, South Central Power Company (Lancaster) also expedited the return of \$4.5 million in capital credits while donating \$20,000 to two food banks, as exponentially more people need help to feed their families.

In the southwest corner of the state, the charitable arm of Butler Rural Electric Cooperative (Oxford) awarded its biannual Community Connection grants several months early. Eleven organizations—including churches, food banks, family resource centers, and energy-bill assistance programs—received \$1,000 grants, funded solely by co-op consumer-members who voluntarily round up their electric bills to the nearest dollar and contribute the change to the Butler Rural Community Connection fund.

And in Columbus, Ohio's Electric Cooperatives made a \$500 donation through its employee-funded foundation to LifeCare Alliance in support of its many programs, including Meals on Wheels, which has become a fundamental program for the most vulnerable people who stay home to stay safe.

"Taking care of our communities is who we are. It's not if we'll act; it's when and how," says Pat O'Loughlin, president and CEO of Ohio's Electric Cooperatives. "We're really proud of how co-ops have stepped up to fill in gaps created by the pandemic, and I have no doubt this is just the beginning."

OEC is ready to serve

While some economic development activity is paused due to the coronavirus pandemic, we want to reassure you that our cooperatives are strong and stand ready to partner in sustaining and rebuilding the communities we serve. Cooperative-served sites with reliable and affordable energy and easy access to transportation corridors and customers are available throughout the territories served by OEC's 25 electric cooperatives. If your organization is searching for sites, contact Dennis Mingyar at 614-430-7876 or dmingyar@ohioec.org.

Look for Us:

IAMC Fall 2020 Professional Forum
September 12-16, 2020
Boise, Idaho

Site Selectors Guild Fall Forum
September 21-23, 2020
Richmond, Virginia

National Rural Economic Developers Association (NREDA)
November 4-6, 2020
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Buckeye Power and Ohio's Electric Cooperatives can help with:

- Comprehensive site and building portfolios
- Preliminary site studies
- Site search tours
- Assistance in identifying financial incentives
- Electric rate analyses
- Community profiles
- State and local government contacts
- Contractor introductions

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