

HCEC Uniquely Focused on You



MESSAGE FROM
GENERAL MANAGER KATHI CALVERT

WE GET TOGETHER EVERY YEAR in late October or early November for the co-op’s annual fish fry. It is actually the Houston County Electric Cooperative Annual Membership Meeting, but the truth is I really like thinking about it as the Houston County EC Annual Fish Fry.

What’s not to love about neighbors sitting down together, visiting and enjoying a good meal? It sounds much better than a meeting. A meeting conjures up images of numbers and agendas. A “meeting” does not do justice to what makes us Houston County EC.

HCEC is unique, and I’d like to share with you the principle behind our cooperative business model and what a cooperative means for you, our members.

I see the struggle in our country; I feel this struggle. Who can we believe? What can we trust? Who really cares about me? The answer is simple: We do.

HCEC has only one agenda—to serve you. You see, cooperatives are somewhere between the public and private sector. We are not funded by tax dollars, yet we serve a diverse group

of members for the collective good of our communities. We do not operate to maximize profits; therefore, we differ from the private sector. We operate at a modest 2 percent rate of return.

We operate under the simple principle that progress and success are better when shared equitably among all. On the flip side, we believe in sharing risk, and collectively, we are more resilient together.

Most companies would not even consider operating in similar conditions. They are focused on maximizing profit. The consumer is only a part of the equation to achieve profit. So the consumer is not exactly ignored—but the consumer is not the ultimate priority, either. I saw this firsthand at another utility where we once considered a strategy labeled “Western Façade.” The name came from old Western shows where movie sets were created to look like a town, but it was simply the front of a building. The entire strategy was based on the “façade” of caring about the customer while spending the absolute bare minimum to serve them.

You aren’t consumers to us. You are our member-owners.

Our only focus is providing you better service.

A cooperative means you have faith in the power of a community. It means you trust your neighbors, and you want our communities to thrive by providing local jobs and building local infrastructure. Your phone calls could be answered by a call agent overseas, but at what price? Would the agent understand your situation? Would they remember speaking with you previously and listen with compassion while trying to assist you?

Similarly, we could outsource our meter exchange project at the cheapest possible cost, but there is always a price to pay. Our linemen have firsthand knowledge of our 5,000 miles of distribution line, and you can trust them to respect your property. They are the ones serving you daily and answering the call when the power goes out. The meter exchange project provides an opportunity to patrol our system and perform preventive maintenance.

Our commitment to our community extends to improving our infrastructure. We are embarking on the development of a new transmission line in the southern portion of Houston County. This is a weak area of our system, from a reliabil-

BY THE NUMBERS

HCEC Member Center

15,348

ACTIVE MEMBERS
AS OF SEPT. 2016

22,548

ACTIVE METERS IN
SEPT. 2016

6,823

NUMBER OF TREES CUT
FROM SEPT. 2015 TO SEPT. 2016

MONTHLY AVERAGE:

1,272

OF PAYMENTS MADE WITH
MEMBER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVES

1,122

MOBILE APP DOWNLOADS
AS OF SEPT. 2016

\$800,001

CAPITAL CREDITS
RETIRED IN 2015

ity perspective. It operates on the seam of three regional transmission organizations—the Midcontinent Independent System Operator, Southwest Power Pool and Electric Reliability Council of Texas—and it has largely been ignored because population density is low. It is very similar to why some rural areas do not have cellular coverage or high-speed internet access: Companies do not see the profit potential. However, as a cooperative, we have a long-term vision. Our focus is on service and building infrastructure to support current and future members and provide growth opportunities.

We are embracing our future as the energy sector continues to change and develop with solar, batteries and energy-management solutions. We have joined Touchstone Energy Cooperatives as another resource for networking and information. We have unbelievable access to information at the touch of the button, but how can all this data help you? We want to bring you tools and products that add value to your life.

One small example is the Co-op Connections card, offering discounts on prescription drugs, hotels and a variety of businesses. We will be reaching out to local businesses for their participation to continue to support our local economy. We will also work to develop products to serve your future energy needs.


Our cooperative business model is unique. We don't have shareholder meetings or earnings calls for investors. We have a fish fry, where we sit among our friends and share what is happening with your business, how we are doing and what the future looks like. I could provide statistics and review intricate details of the energy industry, but HCEC is more than numbers and facts. HCEC is a cooperative made up of thousands of unique individuals collectively supporting their community and building a brighter future.



WE WISH YOU AND YOUR LOVED ONES A
MERRY CHRISTMAS
AND A
HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Our offices will be closed Friday, December 23, and Monday, January 2, in observance of the holidays.

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Power Tip

Electric bills increase during the winter for a variety of reasons: holiday gatherings, houseguests, and shorter days and longer nights. Small measures such as turning down your thermostat, replacing incandescent bulbs with light-emitting diodes and washing clothes in cold water can help control energy costs.

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Houston County Electric Cooperative

P.O. Box 52, Crockett, TX 75835

GENERAL MANAGER

Kathi Calvert

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Contact Us

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BUSINESS HOURS

Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

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(936) 544-5641 local

1-800-657-2445 toll-free

To report an outage or other problem with electrical service, press 1.

To make a payment over the phone or speak with a member services representative in the billing department, press 2.

For electrical connects, transfers and disconnects, press 5.

For directions to our office, mailing address or fax number, press 6.

For satellite Internet services, press 7.

For staking and construction, press 8.

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houstoncountyelec.com



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Stay Safe and Warm This Winter

HEATING A HOME TYPICALLY ACCOUNTS FOR 45 PERCENT of energy bills, making it the largest utility expense for most consumers, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. Being aware of potential hazards and using the device that's most efficient for your needs can make a big difference in safety and comfort. Houston County Electric Cooperative offers tips for heating your home in safe and smart ways.

Furnace: Check your furnace at least annually. Removing built-up debris can reduce the risk of fire and make your furnace run more efficiently. Also remember to replace your furnace filter regularly during the winter. Replacing a dirty filter will increase the airflow and make your home more energy efficient.

Thermostat: Turning the thermostat down a few degrees when you are away from home or sleeping also helps reduce your monthly utility bill. To help you do this automatically, consider investing in a programmable thermostat, which can lead to a 10–15 percent reduction in energy costs.

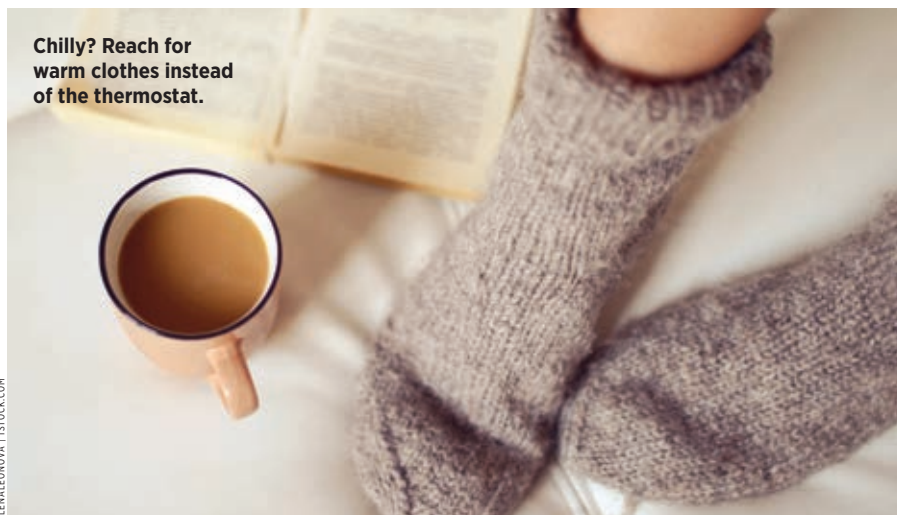
Space heaters: Space heaters are not cost-efficient when used to heat more than one or two small areas. However, they are a smart option when only one room needs to be heated. Make sure that you consider safety first and purchase only certified models that have been tested by an independent laboratory. Always place your space heater on a steady surface away from foot traffic to prevent it from being knocked over, and be on the lookout for units with a tip-over switch.

Electric blankets and heating pads: Make yourself aware of manufacturer's instructions, and use the product only as it is intended. Never use an electric blanket that is wet, or folded so that the wires are crimped. Perform regular checks to look for scorch marks or visible damage.

Fireplaces: Always make sure that your chimney is clear, and open the damper if there are warm ashes in the hearth that could lead to a dangerous build-up of poisonous gases.

Small-scale strategies: Remember not to overlook minor changes to help you stay warm this winter. When possible, dress in layers, with clothes that are tight and close to the skin so that they can trap heat near the body. Switch the rotation of your ceiling fan that so it circles in a clockwise direction, blowing rising warm air downward. Additionally, use curtains to help block out the cold air when closed at night and to let in the sun's heat when parted during the day.

Chilly? Reach for warm clothes instead of the thermostat.



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4 Ways To Waste Energy This Winter

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST MISTAKES

homeowners make when it comes to winter energy use? According to Lawrence Berkeley Laboratories, they are:

1. Buying big. Many homes have furnaces and air conditioners that are way too big. HVAC sales reps often try to sell big units because they cost more. An oversized unit wastes energy and will cost more on heating and cooling bills in the long run than a smaller one that is properly sized for your home and your family's lifestyle.

2. Overlooking leaks. When you replace your heating and air-conditioning system, get your ducts checked for leaks. Even the most efficient, most expensive system won't perform at peak if heated or air-conditioned air is escaping through the ducts.

3. Under-insulating. Heat rises, so it makes sense to insulate your home's attic. It's equally important to insulate floors over a basement or crawl space, and walls and windows. Conditioned air can leak out of your home from almost any uninsulated space.

4. Skipping fans. Ceiling fans and portable fans can help circulate heated or air-conditioned air, which gives your home's HVAC system a break—and allows you to turn the thermostat down in the winter and up in the summer. Fans use little electricity but can make a big difference in how comfortable you feel in the room where one is running.

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meet members of Congress



visit Smithsonian museums



tour historic sights



make new friends

"If anyone is hesitant about applying for the Government-In-Action Youth Tour, I would definitely start by saying that I was also hesitant myself, but after being given the opportunity to go on this trip, I can honestly say it was the highlight of my summer and certainly a trip I will never forget.

- Ty Stubblefield, Lovelady High School

"If you do anything this year productive make sure you register for the youth tour. It truly is a life changer. The people you meet and places you go are once in a lifetime opportunities. I feel the Youth Tour showed me how easy it is to get along with people that are not necessarily like you. My youth tour experience helped my people skills for real world situations."

- Grant Brannen, Crockett High School

Empower Yourself If the Lights Go Off

WITH COLDER TEMPERATURES, preparation is important to be able to stay safe and warm if the electricity goes out. Houston County Electric Cooperative has some tips to help you prepare for winter power outages.

If power lines go down because of a winter storm, you could be in for a prolonged power outage as co-op crews work to get the lights back on. Have an emergency kit prepared to help you and your family weather the storm and the outage safely and comfortably. Some of the items this kit should include are bottled water, nonperishable food, flashlights, a weather radio and extra batteries.

Before a storm ever begins, tune in to your local weather service for the weather forecast. It is important to know the differences among various watches and warnings.

Winter storm watches signify that a winter storm event, such as an ice storm, is likely within the next 24–72 hours.

Winter storm warnings are more urgent, calling for a winter storm event to begin within the next 12–36 hours. Consider canceling plans to travel away from home.

If bad weather is headed your way, it is a good idea to keep your cellphones and other electronic devices charged and ready for use.

When power is lost, notify your electric co-op of the outage. Unplug all sensitive electronics to avoid a surge when electricity is restored. Leave one light switched on as a quick confirmation that the power is restored.

Stay inside. Dress in warm, dry layers and wear a hat, which can help keep in heat. Close off unneeded rooms and place draft blocks at the bottoms of doors.

If you are using an alternative heating source during an outage, know how to use it safely. Never heat your home with stoves, ovens or grills.

If venturing out during an outage, be on the lookout for downed electrical lines or other equipment. Never go near or drive over a downed line because it might be energized. If you see a downed line, do not get out of your car. The safest place is inside the vehicle. Contact your electric cooperative immediately.

Plan ahead for winter storms by keeping flashlights and plenty of warm blankets ready to use.



Tamper-Resistant Outlets Provide Vital Safeguard

CHILDREN NEED TO BE AWARE of electrical hazards in the home—including electrical outlets. The results of electrical outlet accidents can include shock and electrocution.

Adults can help protect children by making sure outlets are tamper-resistant. Tamper-resistant outlets or receptacles have shutters that stay closed unless a plug with two prongs is inserted into the outlet. Both springs on the shutters must be compressed at the same time to allow an object to be inserted. If a child attempts to stick an object into the outlet, the shutter prevents electrical contact.

Since 2008, the National Electrical Code requires all new and renovated dwellings to be equipped with tamper-resistant outlets. If your home was built before 2008, there is a good chance your outlets are not compliant.

Tamper-resistant outlets are strongly advised for household safety, but there is another safety alternative. Both measures are simple and low-cost alternatives that cover up the outlet; however, they are not fail-proof. Outlet caps can be lost and pose a choking hazard for some children. Many children can also figure out how to remove the caps and sliding covers.

Tamper-resistant outlets are the best bet for outlet safety.



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