

Norris Electric *News*

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Norris Electric holds 74th Annual Meeting of Members

In the midst of one of the mildest winters the area has seen in several years, Norris Electric Cooperative held its 74th annual meeting of members, Saturday, February 18, at Newton Community High School. The members, who filled the gym floor seating, heard reports on the upcoming power contract with Southern Illinois Power Cooperative (SIPC), an explanation of future rate designs and yearly financial updates.

Board President Larry Seals of Mt. Carmel informed members that the cooperative was less than a year away from buying power from SIPC, the generation and transmission cooperative located in Marion.

“As mentioned last year, the board and staff of the cooperative requested bids and after careful consideration awarded the bid to SIPC because they presented the most economical bid to the cooperative,” said Seals.

Seals also pointed out that rates would be going up, but emphasized that the cooperative would still remain one of the lowest cost service providers out of over 30 in the state.

Cooperative Manager Keith McKinney echoed Seals statement adding, “In two years, out of 32 other cooperatives and investor-owned utilities we would be the fifth lowest for a typical residential consumer if no one else raises their rates.”

Tim Bohnhoff, Member Services Coordinator for Norris spoke briefly about programs the cooperative participated in to bring added benefits to the membership.

“The Co-op Connections card has been utilized by our members extremely well, especially for prescription drugs. In 2011, our members used the card for almost 3,000 prescriptions with a total savings of \$60,000,” said Bohnhoff.

In addition to the Co-op Connections program, the cooperative also joined with other electric cooperatives in the statewide Home program. Norris Electric distributed nearly \$90,000 to its members for energy efficiency



Re-elected board members (l-r) Larry Buser of Palestine, Dan Scherer of Bridgeport, Gordon McClure of Newton and Gilbert Garbe of Dietrich join Manager Keith McKinney for the 74rd annual meeting of members held Saturday, February 18, at Newton Community High School.



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"74th anniversary" continued from 16a

projects in 2010 and continued with nearly \$80,000 in 2011. These funds went to help fund members who installed higher efficiency heating and cooling equipment, as well as improving insulation, in existing homes.

During the meeting the results of the board of director's election were announced. Larry Buser of Palestine, Gilbert Garbe of Dietrich, Dan Scherer of Bridgeport and Gordon McClure of Newton were re-elected to three-year terms.

Norris Electric Cooperative is a member of Touchstone Energy® — an alliance of more than 680 local, consumer-owned electric utilities around the country. Norris Electric is committed to providing superior service based on four core principles: integrity, accountability, innovation and commitment to community. The co-op serves more than 19,068 members over 4,063 miles of line in parts of Clark, Crawford, Cumberland, Effingham, Jasper, Lawrence, Richland and Wabash counties. For more information visit www.norriselectric.com.



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Office hours: Monday — Thursday

7:00 a.m. — 5:00 p.m

My power is out, who am I gonna call?

Usually after the storm season or a major interruption in electrical service there are members commenting on the Cooperative's procedures and personnel for taking phone calls. In response to those questions and since the storm season is here it seemed appropriate to tell the members again a little about the call center, CRC.

Prior to 2003 there were two ladies that alternated their hours and covered all the non-business hours of the cooperative. They were able to receive one call at a time, record it and call a supervisor so he could dispatch whatever workers were needed to restore an outage. When she was on the phone and another member would call, that member would receive a busy signal. Each call would take about 5 minutes while it was being researched, recorded and a dispatcher notified. That would mean about 12 calls an hour would get through. On massive storms supervisors and call takers would come to the office and the phones would be switched back to the office. The cooperative has seven outside lines that are used for calls. If all of those lines were busy then the callers would get busy signals.

In 2003 the Directors and staff realized that the call taking procedures were not providing members the service they needed. Technology was quickly changing as well. After careful research the Board determined that CRC (Cooperative Response Center) was the best vendor on the market. The Board knew if it chose an inferior vendor to save a few dollars that the members would suffer. CRC had developed a great reputation and had state of the art technology. Since that time, CRC has grown to maintaining three call centers: one in Austin, Minn., another in Dunlap, Tenn. and the third in Abilene, Texas. If a particular location gets a high volume of calls they can divert the calls or part of the calls to one of the other call center locations that might be underutilized at that time.

CRC operates under the Cooperative Business Model just as Norris Electric

does. It is not making money for stockholders! CRC has 18 years of experience in performing this service. It has 103 operators and dispatchers across the three locations and provides service to over 260 organizations like Norris Electric Cooperative. During normal conditions most calls to the call center can go to a live call taker. When there is a high call volume an automated system helps answer calls. Even though very few members enjoy talking to an automated system, the alternative to an automated system for the high volume times would be to receive a busy signal. There are only a few calls that enter the automated system where the caller either hangs up or enters the wrong information because of confusion. Since the majority of the calls that are received by the automated system are usable calls, they help the Cooperative in diagnosing and correcting the problem to restore service.

Since CRC has three call centers in the United States it helps prevent catastrophes from shutting down the service. The odds of an earthquake, tornado, or hurricane striking all three locations are not likely. If major telephone trunks are cut for some reason it will only affect one location. By spreading out their call centers, CRC has protected themselves and the member cooperatives from major disasters that would affect a vendor with only one location. The Cooperative has access to the Call Metrics of CRC and that shows the number of calls answered in any way or lost as well as percentages of calls answered. Last year CRC answered 60% of the calls in February, the month we had the ice storm, and 97% in January. During the ice storm CRC received 18,929 calls. During 2011, CRC received 40,014 calls. The speed of the answer also changes depending upon the circumstances. For instance, during the ice storm the average wait to a member calling in was 110 seconds while compared to January the wait was 28 seconds. During the greeting and being transferred to a live call taker the telephone systems look for the caller's account information so that the

call taker can readily see what is going on with a member's account!

CRC does not only handle the outage calls but they can field a lot of regular calls during Cooperative non-working hours. As long as we have the telephone numbers of our members, CRC can also make calls to our members to provide important messages if needed. CRC is very proactive in keeping the linemen safe. Once it dispatches a lineman it keeps track of that lineman and makes sure he reports in regularly so that emergency crews, ambulances and law enforcement can be dispatched if needed.

You might wonder how you would ever get the automated system if CRC has 103 call takers! Under normal circumstances occasional interruptions go to the call centers and are answered by live call takers. Even when there are storms, the storms are usually not across all 260 CRC members/customers. There are times however that a storm may track across two to three states and across the territories of several cooperatives served by CRC. At those times, there are thousands of members trying to call CRC. At other times the transmission provider may have an unexpected interruption in their transmission service that might take as many as 6 Norris Electric Substations out of service. Norris Electric has nearly 19,000 metered services. De-energizing six substations could interrupt service to 3,000-4,000 Norris members. That many members calling in would quickly overload any system.

The Directors and staff have conferred with other cooperatives and are confident that the Cooperative is utilizing the best available call center for the members. The alternatives to using CRC or another call center are:

- Buy and use an "in-house" automated system. That type of system would be restricted by the number of lines that are available. Based on members' comments, most would

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Co-op Connections Card features local business

The Greathouse of Pizza - You won't have to travel far to satisfy your craving for truly great pizza any longer. After over 7 years of learning the art of pizza-making at a family-owned pizza institution in Charleston, Trent Groothuis (pronounced "Great House"... so that's where the name comes from!) is bringing his creative pizza-making skills back to his hometown of Casey.

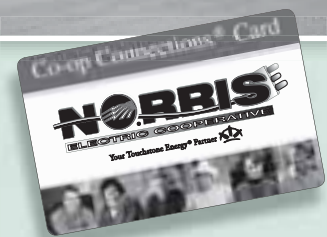
The foundation of our incredible pizza is our chef's dough, homemade daily, and topped with his special recipe sauce. Highlighting our wide selection of toppings is our Italian sausage, flavored with a perfected spice blend.

We create our own recipes with the freshest ingredients and just the right balance of toppings, cheeses and spices. We couldn't decide whether to get really creative or go with a traditional pizza menu, so we went with a little of both. Whether you're a fan of the classics or

ready to try one of our unique specialties, we know you'll leave the table happy.

While we advocate the all pizza diet, we realize that may not work for everyone. So The Greathouse of Pizza offers a variety of appetizers, sandwiches, pastas and salads. Don't feel like leaving the house? No problem. We'll deliver to your door in Casey or Martinsville.

The Greathouse of Pizza is located at 904 North Route 49 Casey, Illinois 62420. You may contact us at 217-932-2220, visit our website at greathouseof-pizza.com or find us on Facebook at Facebook.com/GreathouseOfPizza.



Use your Co-op Connections card from Norris Electric and receive \$1 off a large pizza, dine in only. Not valid with any other offer.

"My power is out" continued from 16c

not like this because it would be strictly an automated system. It would also tie our "call center" to one location and that would make it susceptible to major problems such as a phone line being cut.

- Hire more call takers for "in-house" call taking. Great idea if enough could be hired to do the job. With CRC, theoretically there could be over 100 call takers available. In reality, there would be 20-30 call takers taking calls from Norris Electric due to scheduling and needs of other cooperatives. If the cooperative hired an additional 20 call takers, it would cost in the vicinity of \$1 million dollars a year in payroll and benefits. If that much was spent it would still not be any better than CRC. Last year the charges from CRC in December averaged about \$6,200/month. If the ice storm did not occur the average would have been

around \$5,500/month. This would amount to about \$70,000 a year. To have an equivalent system in house would cost nearly 15 times that amount! To make it better in house, it would take even more dollars. It would be an unattractive cost for the members!

- Another call service could be utilized but they are all very similar in their call answering. CRC understands cooperatives because that is the majority of its clientele. The Directors and staff still believe that CRC is the best Call Center service on the market!
- There are probably more complaints over the automated system than anything. The alternative to that is to go to a busy signal if all the live call takers are busy. The automated system helps the Cooperative get important information but that portion of the CRC service could be

discontinued if there were enough members that wanted that change!

CRC is always trying to improve and has announced that in 2012 it will increase its number of call takers to 172, installing an updated automated system and implementing a new system where our members can text in an outage from their cellular phones. All of these things should help to make reporting an outage even easier and faster.

In closing, anytime there are interruptions in electric service tension builds and tempers flare. The Directors and the staff have tried to utilize the best available service for the members to report their interruptions. As in a lot of situations, the Cooperative will never make all of the people happy all of the time. However, hopefully this gives you a better understanding of how the call center works for Norris Electric! Remember, if you have a power outage, call toll free 1-877-783-3221.