



More Power to You

Co-op Month Theme Symbolizes True Spirit of Your Cooperative

By Shane L. Larson,
Chief Executive Officer

“Thank you for calling (insert business name here). Your call is very important to us. Please press 1 for customer service, press 2 for accounting, press 3 for directions, press 4 for a company directory, press 5 to speak to a real human being, press 6 to hear this message again, and press 7 to hear number 6 again.”

While the above is fiction, it’s not too far from the truth. When I have a question for a company or a problem with service, the last thing I want is to get trapped in a never-ending maze of telephone prompts. While any business is subject to technology challenges, when you call Rock Energy Cooperative, we will do everything we can to ensure you receive the best service possible with an actual person.

During regular business hours, the person on the other end of the line is located in either our Janesville or South Beloit office. And the phone is always answered by a real, live, breathing human being. For after-hours and weekend calls, we contract with TAS of Madison. The representatives who answer our calls are specialists, trained to handle electrical and natural gas situations.

Our commitment to member service is best described by the Co-op Month 2010 theme: “Local. Trusted. Serving You.” If you’re a regular reader of this column, you might remember that October is Co-op Month. We share our monthly celebration with chili, canines, physical therapy, popcorn, right-brainers, roller skating, seafood, spinach, dental hygiene, and a whole slew of others.

The first Co-op Month was established in 1930 to celebrate the cooperative way of doing business. Today, 48,000 cooperatives exist in the United States, representing a diverse group of industries: agriculture, food, hardware, health care, finance, utilities, bottling, recreational equipment, and communications.

In the energy business, about 900 cooperatives operate nearly half of the electric distribution lines in the United States, covering three-quarters of the land mass.

They provide electricity to more than 37 million people in 47 states. We exist for the sole purpose of benefiting our members.

Here at Rock Energy, we take the word “local” seriously. Only our members have an equity ownership in the co-op, and the directors on the board are members who are elected by you, our members. Unlike the boards of investor-owned utilities who keep an eye on generating profits for some people living far away, your co-op’s directors are focused exclusively on Rock Energy members.

While operating a utility represents many tasks and challenges, our primary goals are simple: keeping lights on and gas flowing safely and reliably, providing terrific member service, and maintaining affordable energy costs.

Our service territory has grown over the years, and we have grown with it. When we expanded into Illinois in 2007, we decided that our one Janesville office wasn’t local enough to serve the needs of our Illinois members. To better meet the needs of our newest members, we initially leased space in South Beloit and then opened a brand new office and warehouse on Willowbrook Road in South Beloit in 2009.

The second part of the Co-op Month theme—“trusted”—is something we have earned over the years. We’ve been in business for almost 75 years. In fact, the co-op was founded by rural residents who banded together to bring the conveniences of electricity to their communities when investor-owned utilities would not extend service.

We think the most important part of the theme is “serving you.” Of course, we supply electricity and natural gas. But our mission goes beyond that. We are dedicated to serving our members and the communities in which they live. We help them manage their energy usage, sponsor safety programs, support local charities, and provide scholarships and other youth opportunities, like the Youth Tour to Washington, D.C., which is featured on page 5.

October may be the official Co-op Month, but at Rock Energy, we believe every month is Co-op Month. It truly is a pleasure to serve your energy needs. If we can improve our service, please let us know. ■





U.S. Capitol, Co-op Principles Highlight Rockton Teen's Trip

Rachel MacDowell had never been to Washington, D.C., so she jumped at the opportunity to visit the nation's capital on the 2010 Youth Tour.

Rachel, who represented Rock Energy Cooperative on the trip, is the daughter of co-op members Martin and Susan MacDowell of Rockton. She toured Washington with about 1,500 young leaders from across the nation and returned with a greater appreciation of the political process and a better understanding of cooperative business principles.

While on the bus trip, students established their own chip and soda co-op to learn the principles required to keep members working together for the cooperative's success. Rachel served on the nominating committee that interviewed candidates to run for positions on the co-op's board of directors.

"A few years ago, I couldn't tell you what a co-op was or even that it was a part of my life," Rachel said.

That changed in June 2008 when she attended a youth leadership conference sponsored by Wisconsin cooperatives and was reinforced this summer. She not only



Rachel MacDowell meets with U.S. Rep. Donald Manzullo.

learned about the history of electric cooperatives but also discovered the "fantastic leadership opportunities and the contributions a co-op makes to a community."

The U.S. Capitol was one of Rachel's favorite parts of the Washington trip. "Every citizen should know what's happening there and have a decent grasp of the issues," she said.

While at the Capitol, she and other tour participants from Illinois' 16th Congressional District met with Rep. Donald Manzullo. In addition to the Capitol, they also visited Arlington National Cemetery, Washington National Cathedral, several Smithsonian Museums, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, World War II Memorial, Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, National Archives, Newseum, and a number of other historical sites.

"I liked exploring all those different museums," Rachel said. "I thought that was really cool."

The trip also was an opportunity to meet some awesome people and make new friends with diverse backgrounds. "Everyone has something they can contribute and teach others," she said.

The weeklong June trip was a great way to kick off summer vacation, Rachel said. Her summer also included lots of running to prepare for this fall's cross-country season at Hononegah High School, where she holds two running records.

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How to Apply for 2011 Trip

Rock Energy Cooperative will fully sponsor two high school juniors to participate in the 2011 Youth Tour to Washington, D.C., which will take place June 11-17.

Applicants must be children of Rock Energy members and reside in the co-op's service territory. The all-expense-paid trip includes transportation, lodging, meals, and admissions to events. Round-trip travel is by motor coach from Springfield, Ill. Travel to Springfield is not included.

Current high school juniors who would like to be considered are asked to write a letter explaining why they should be selected. Mail the letter to Rock Energy Cooperative Youth Tour, P.O. Box 1758, Janesville, WI 53547, by Feb. 14. If you have questions, please call Barbara Uebelacker, communications specialist, at (608) 752-4550 or (866) 752-4550. You can also e-mail her at BarbU@rock.coop.

Time Running Out to Claim Energy Efficiency Tax Credits

If you want to take advantage of energy efficiency tax credits authorized under the federal stimulus bill, now is the time.

Measures that qualify include replacing windows, doors, or roofs with materials that reduce your home's heat loss or gain; adding insulation; replacing certain air conditioners; and installing heat pumps, hot-water boilers, and biomass stoves.

"We want to make sure our members know about these tax credits and can take advantage of them before they expire on Dec. 31," said Shane Larson, CEO of Rock Energy Cooperative. "This is an incredible opportunity for folks to invest in residential energy efficiency and see energy bill savings right away."

You can recover 30 percent—up to \$1,500—of costs

associated with buying and installing heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems, and biomass stoves. Installation costs are not covered for windows, doors, roofing, and insulation.

ENERGY STAR, a joint program of the U.S. Department of Energy and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, provides guidelines on what qualifies for the tax credit at www.energystar.gov/taxcredits. Tax credits are especially beneficial as they directly reduce, dollar for dollar, any taxes you owe.

"These are tough times, and we know it's important for our members to keep their monthly electric bills as low as possible," Larson said. "Making home energy efficiency upgrades offers a great way to save energy and money, and these tax credits can help make that a reality."

If you're interested in renewable energy, the government also offers a renewable energy tax credit that expires Dec. 31, 2016. That credit covers 30 percent of the cost of materials and installation for solar panels, solar water heaters, and geothermal heat pumps, for both new and existing homes.

Be sure to keep your receipts and your Manufacturer's Certification Statement (a signed statement from the manufacturer certifying that the product or component qualifies for the tax credit) for your records. Then claim the credit on your 2010 taxes using IRS Form 5695.

Illinois members who install geothermal heat pumps also are eligible for a \$1,500 rebate through the HomeE program. In addition, Rock Energy allows members to borrow up to \$7,000 at a low interest rate to fund a geothermal project. Call (608) 752-4550 or (866) 752-4550 for details. ■

Time's Running Out...



...to take advantage of federal Energy Efficiency Tax Credits!

Incentives provided by the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to help you make energy efficiency improvements to your existing home expire **Dec. 31, 2010**. Don't miss your chance to save!



You can receive a tax credit for 30 percent of the cost of materials for qualifying improvements—up to \$1,500 over 2009 and 2010.

Saving with the STIMULUS

For a full list of qualified improvements visit:

www.energystar.gov/taxcredits



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Energy Efficiency

Tip of the Month

It may be time to replace your refrigerator. A fridge made before 1993 could cost more than \$100 each year to operate. A new ENERGY STAR qualified model could cut your related energy costs in half. In addition, new models keep food fresher longer.

Source: U.S. Department of Energy

Director Nominations Open

The Rock Energy Cooperative Nominating Committee will be selecting candidates to run for board of director positions that will be up for election at the March 28, 2011, annual meeting.

Districts up for election are:

- **District 6:** Beloit and Rock townships in Wisconsin and Rockton Township in Illinois.
- **District 7:** Newark and Plymouth townships in Wisconsin.
- **District 8:** Avon, Spring Valley, and Spring Grove townships in Wisconsin and Durand, Laona, Shirland, Rock Grove, and Rock Run townships in Illinois.

Active members who are interested in running for a position on the REC Board of Directors must permanently reside in one of the areas up for election and meet all other qualifications. Please contact REC headquarters at (608) 752-4550 or (866) 752-4550 or send an e-mail to questions@rock.coop by Dec. 1. ■

2010 Youth Tour

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Rachel is now a senior at Hononegah, where she is ranked in the top 25 of her class. She also is taking an anthropology course at Beloit College this semester through the Porter Scholars Program, which allows outstanding high school seniors to take one tuition-free course each term for college credit.

Youth Tour was a fantastic opportunity that Rachel highly recommends to others. She even has some advice for young leaders who will be on next year's trip:

- Be outgoing. Go up to people, and get out of your comfort zone.
- Spread yourself out. Make an effort to meet as many people as you can.
- Be well rested before the trip. "It's a long week."

"If you do these things, keep an open mind, and pay attention to everything that's going on around you, you'll have a good time," she said.

To see a photo gallery of Rachel's trip to Washington, visit www.rock.coop and click on the Youth Tour logo. ■

