

# Shelby Electric Cooperative

## *Architects of Rural Progress*

Early rural electrification leaders such as Shelby County farm adviser W.S. Batson and longtime co-op director Le Rue Tice, Shelbyville, wouldn't believe their eyes today. The cooperative they helped to start and nurture in 1938, Shelby Electric Cooperative, has developed into a complex business entity, providing electricity, propane gas, satellite television and wireless broadband internet, radio communications, energy audits and a host of other services through the co-op and its subsidiary organizations.

Shelby Electric's original purpose was to provide central station electricity in those parts of its central Illinois territory the investor-owned utilities wouldn't serve. Today the cooperative meets that original goal and has broadened its scope. Improving the lives and lifestyles for its consumer-members is the co-op's goal today.

The cooperative has a colorful history full of success stories relating to its service in Shelby County and parts of eight surrounding counties. The Shelby Electric story dates back to 1937 when the Shelby County Farm Bureau and Extension Service sponsored informational meetings on a rural electrification project. W.S. Batson, farm adviser in Shelby County, spearheaded the initial efforts. Farm Bureau named 24 prominent farm leaders, one from every Shelby County township, to attend the meeting. That meeting was attended by more than 150 interested farmers.

"The response was very encouraging and informational survey blanks were distributed," recalled Batson. The survey was launched to determine the extent of interest in the project.

Not everyone who responded to the survey was positive about the rural electrification project, he added. Tice, who would go on to serve as an incorporating director of the co-op, recalled some of the reservations.

"Don't think for a minute that all our farm people in Shelby County wanted electricity. Many did not – for a variety of reasons. Some were afraid of electricity," he said. "We had a monthly minimum bill of \$3.25 ... Judging from the comments we heard on every side, we might just as well have been asking for \$35 a month. The times were so blamed hard in those days that \$3.25 seemed like a great extravagance to many people."

Despite the lack of unanimous support, most people were behind the project. With their support, a group of leaders met in the Shelby County Courthouse on the evening of Jan. 18, 1938, bringing the new co-op to life. Verl Shutt of Shelbyville was elected President, Tice was elected Secretary and Irvin McBride of Shelbyville was chosen as Treasurer. Other directors elected at the meeting included Paul Welsh, Bethany; George Lumpp and

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H.M. Yantis, both of Findlay; and Roy Hockaday, Tower Hill.

A Shelbyville lawyer and local farmer, Robert Dove, was chosen as Co-op Attorney. Lester Boys, a young farmer from the area, was named Project Superintendent.

The task facing the group of local leaders was immense and they quickly learned about the challenge facing them. "We were amateurs, but we did have the benefit of some sound advice from REA fieldmen and the men from the state committee. The fact that the Farm Bureau had backed the project from the start was a big help too," recalled incorporator Tice.

Shelby Electric members meet with co-op staffers at Shelby's front counter at the cooperative's business.



The first major project was the signing up of members. Longtime Director Neil Pistorius of Blue Mound recalled traveling as a youngster with his father while he would try to sign-up potential members.

"My father was really quite interested in electricity. From early on he wanted it for the farm," Pistorius said. "In fact, he tried to bring electricity to the area about 15 years earlier. He wanted Illinois Power to build a line down alongside the railroad right-of-way and then serve the farms on both sides of the tracks. But Illinois Power wasn't interested in that."

As in other areas, local farmers sometimes weren't too interested in signing up for electric service either. In addition to the \$5 membership fee, members were responsible for a \$3.25 monthly minimum bill – for a minimum 40 kilowatt-hours of electricity. "Plenty of farmers figured they would never use that much electricity," noted W.S. Batson, local farm adviser and co-op advocate. "They could visualize the use of electric lights but seldom foresaw the possibility of electric appliances playing a big role in rural home-making and farm operations."

To sign up the members, the fledging co-op held a sign-up campaign, holding informational meetings in local churches and schools. The co-op's initial goal was to sign up 450 members in order to construct 200 miles of line. The campaign succeeded and on March 21, 1938 – just two months after organization – the cooperative received its first loan of \$176,130. Announcement of REA's approval of the loan set off a celebration.

"It was a real milestone in the cooperative's history," noted W.L. "Lefty" Walker, who was named Manager in 1945, succeeding Boys. "It would enable us to build a line serving 430 members in the county. Even the skeptics finally had to agree it looked like the cooperative would be a success."

The spring and summer of 1938 were busy seasons for Shelby Electric. Following the loan approval, the co-op board hired Young and Stanley Engineering Co., Muscatine, Iowa, as its engineering firm. Herman Wacker was the Resident Engineer for the inaugural project. The construction contract for Shelby's "A" section was awarded to W.D. Phalen Construction Co., Davenport, Iowa, for \$126,934.

The first poles were set on Aug. 29, 1938 and line construction progressed rapidly throughout the fall. Some 430 members patiently awaited the coming of electricity to their homes and farms that year, many hopeful of getting service by Christmas. The lines were energized on Jan. 1, 1939.

As quickly as line construction had progressed, new projects were born in adjoining areas as others realized that rural electrification was more than just a dream. A group of



Christian County farmers, who had earlier requested an REA loan, had their financing approved with one contingency. Their loan was approved under the condition the group join with Shelby Electric since the Christian County territory was limited. This project, totaling about 200 miles of lines, became the “B” section. The third expansion, or “C” section, developed in Shelby County and consisted mainly of feeder lines connecting the initial co-op lines.

Within a couple years, the cooperative was serving more than 1,000 farms and rural homes, with plans to continually extend service ... building additional sections of lines to rural people who still dreamed about the day when the lights would come on. For many, the wait was a long one.

The war years of 1943-45 effectively shut down the flow of line-construction materials and common items like truck tires and fuel to most cooperatives. Shelby Electric was no different, remembered Gene Boldt of Stewardson, who would later serve as a co-op director.

When Gene and his wife, Gail, were married in 1940, the co-op was building lines in their area. “We moved to a rented farm in the area and the tenant who was there before us didn’t want the power. So we moved into the farm, assuming that we’d be able to get service fairly soon. We had the house all wired and my wife even got a new Electrolux for

Christmas,” he recalled. “But it took us nine years to get electricity. The war came along and the co-op couldn’t do anything. All the neighbors around our farm had power and there we sat. It was a long nine years.”

The Boldts and thousands of others finally received the long-awaited power in the post-war years of the late 1940s. During this period the cooperative saw its greatest membership growth.

For every farm family the coming of electricity brought many changes. While electricity made farm work much easier, many of the changes took place in the home where lights, refrigeration, stoves, radios, fans and indoor plumbing made rural life a lot more tolerable. But sometimes the sudden change in lifestyle was a shocker.

Pistorius repeated the tale of a co-op member who was one of the first to receive service from Shelby Electric during the early years. “When they threw in the switch at this man’s home it was well after dark. The guy who wired the house had left every light turned on and the fellow who lived there let out a ‘whoop’ and went tearing out the kitchen. He went right through the screen door ... didn’t even take the time to unhook it. People have gotten a big charge out of that story.”

The vast majority of the Shelby Electric system was completed during the late 1940s and early 1950s. During those years

The cooperative sponsored a float in a 1963 parade in downtown Shelbyville.





Pete Miner, Windsor, was one of the cooperative's first linemen. He's shown with the cooperative's first line truck, which was purchased in 1938.

Manager Walker hired many new employees, including many who would go on to lengthy careers with the co-op. Lewis Houston, Dick Simmering, Homer "Mac" McCabe, Norma Yoder, Floyd "Sparky" Sphar (who retired in 2007 after 59 years of service), Clara Mae Carter and Carl Furry were among those hired during this period who would go on to serve as the core of the co-op's staff.

Ironically, many of them were hired initially as temporary help. For most of them, the temporary assignment grew into 30 or 40 years of service.

Lewis Houston recalled his first year on the job in 1948.

"I started out as a groundman on a three-man wire stringing crew. We were expanding all the time, building more and more distribution lines and transmission lines to the substations. Some of the days could be really long. One summer we built 500 miles of line," he remembered.

The linemen all recalled the hard work of those early days, digging many of the holes by hand with a spade and a spoon, or crumbing shovel.

"We used our old highway digger a lot too," said "Sparky" Sphar. "The digger is right off the back of the truck and you had to be able to get the truck right next to the hole in order to dig." Even today the co-op still maintains the digger unit, mounted on an ancient four-wheel-drive truck chassis even though it's been replaced by modern line trucks for daily service.

Of course, the lineman's best friend was the hydraulically-powered bucket truck. Shelby was one of the first cooperatives in Illinois to purchase an aerial truck, in 1959. The co-op purchased a McCabe-Powers unit that year and a second unit in 1965. Both served the co-op crews for many years.

For Carl Furry, who retired in 1978 after 35 years of service, the fiberglass hot stick was the biggest technical improvement for electric line personnel. "The glass sticks were longer and thinner, stronger and safer. Back in the old days we only had two wooden sticks for the whole co-op. When it was raining, you'd put your rubber gloves on and sparks would fly off the top of the glove when you'd touch the stick. You didn't feel





anything, but you didn't understand why. There was no way to keep the stick dry."

Shelby office staffers have seen as many changes as the line personnel over the years. From its early years in various old downtown buildings, to present times in the co-op's efficient headquarters on Shelbyville's edge, the inside staff has worked to keep pace with technological changes and consumer trends.

The co-op was originally housed in a building on North Morgan Street in downtown Shelbyville. After several years there, the business office was moved to larger quarters in the Masonic Hall, also located downtown. Materials and equipment were stored in an old livery stable located near the Shelby County Courthouse. In August, 1959, the co-op headquarters was moved to the current location on Shelbyville's northwest side, near the county 4-H fairgrounds. Over the years the headquarters facility saw several additions, the largest coming in 1995, nearly doubling the amount of office space to house the co-op's subsidiary operations.

Longtime staffer Simmering, who served nearly 40 years as Co-op Engineer, recalled

the very early years, when line materials, equipment and vehicles were housed in the livery stable. "We had to watch our step. If we laid cable on the ground there, the residue from the horses that had been in the stables tended to rot the bottom layer of cable," he remembered.

The major change in operations came in 1959, when the staff moved to the new headquarters facility, Simmering said.

"It changed everyone's jobs. It was a big improvement. Being in one location made for a quicker, more efficient operation. We could get out into the field more quickly in the morning. At the old livery stable we could only load one truck at a time and many of the materials had to be brought out of the basement with a hoist," he said. "Before we had the new building, it was slow getting the trucks out on the road in the morning."

Norma Yoder joined the staff in 1948, working in billing. "Everything was set up by hand. We hand-posted at that time and each month we sent out little cards with circles. Then people would mark the hands on their dial and we would have to read the

Three Shelby linemen participated in the 1967 Hot Line School sponsored by the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives in southern Illinois. From left are Len Douthit, Homer "Butch" Walden and Hal Anderson.

One of the first digger-bucket trucks used by an Illinois electric co-op came about by Shelby Electric staffers. This unit, demonstrated by co-op crew members in July of 1969, was built specially for Shelby Electric by McCabe-Powers Body Co. and Chevrolet. The truck was the co-op's first that incorporated a hydraulic bucket truck with a power digging unit. The result was that a single crew, with one truck, could do the work that previously took two crews and two vehicles.

meter cards when they came back in," she said. "Everything was hand-billing. But then we got a billing machine and that helped. Today, of course, everything is done with a computer."

The co-op staff used a Burroughs billing machine to handle the monthly billings until the early 1970s. At that time, Shelby was one of several cooperatives that participated in an unsuccessful data processing operation which had developed at the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives. By the late 1970s the cooperative had joined Central Area Data Processing, transmitting data through a paper tape teletype. In 1989 the co-op went on-line with CADP.

Simmering, one of the cooperative's pioneers with developing computer technology in the 1960s and 70s, recalled some of the early attempts at data processing. Shelby Electric was one of the first cooperatives in Illinois to develop a complete pole record-keeping system.

"We wanted to have a complete record of every pole on the system so we could be

The co-op worked to maintain a reasonable working relationship with area investor-owned utilities over the years. Although at times there were some differences with Central Illinois Public Service, the CIPS-Shelby relationship was fairly good.

alerted to future problems. But we didn't know how to record the information. So we came up with the bright idea of putting the information on Addressograph plates. We had a pile of 43,000 Addressograph plates ... one for each pole," he said. "This was our first attempt at data processing. We could

take out these plates and print a listing of every pole on our system. This way we kept a running record of all our poles and treatments."

In time, Simmering and others began using personal computers – then developed programs

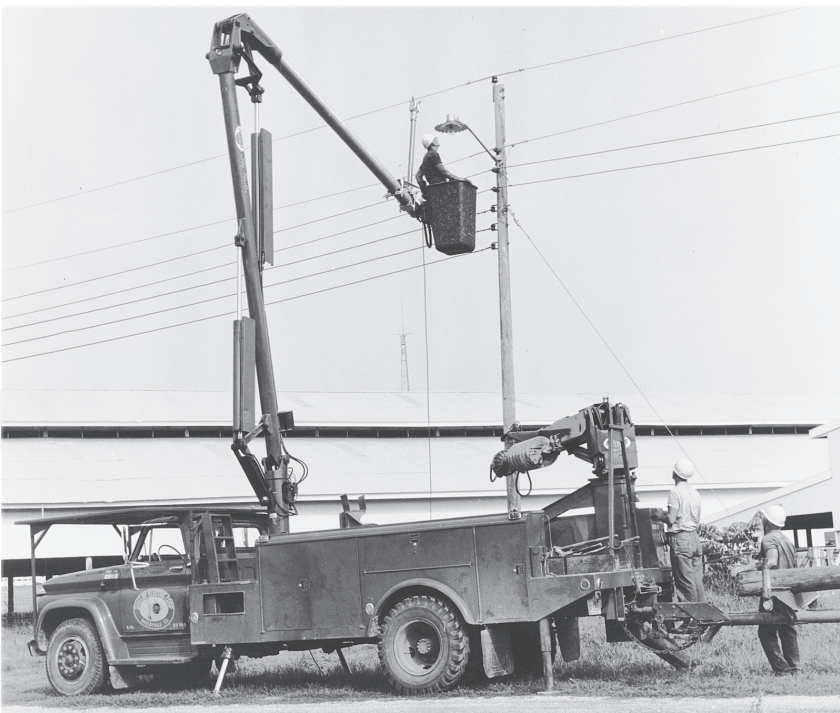
and helped other staffers to use the new technology. Not everyone was so quick to embrace the new machines, he remembered.

"We developed some very easy programs for the employees, some of whom were afraid to use the computer. My secretary used to say 'a trained monkey could do that.' So that program became our trained monkey program. One of the first ladies here who had to use a personal computer was very concerned about it. She was the person most afraid of the computer and we programmed it just for her. Until she retired, she used the same exact program," he added.

The co-op worked to maintain a reasonable working relationship with area investor-owned utilities over the years. Although at times there were some differences with Central Illinois Public Service (now known as Ameren/CIPS), the CIPS-Shelby relationship was fairly good. In fact, Shelby Electric had the first territorial agreement signed with an IOU under the Electric Supplier Act of 1965.

Boldt emphasized that electric co-ops had to learn to be firm with CIPS. "We've found with CIPS that if you stand your ground and have got a legitimate argument that they'll go along with you," he said.

The agreement with CIPS dates back to the mid-1960s when Lefty Walker was still manager, Pistorius noted.





"We serve these good loads today because of our good agreement with CIPS. Walker saw to it that we had a good territorial agreement and got it signed as quickly as possible," he said. "We're fortunate as a co-op, to have some of these good loads on our lines."

Today the co-op's major accounts include: International Paper, which manufactures paper products; Oak Terrace Resort, a hotel/resort/golf complex in Pana; a State of Illinois medium-security prison near Taylorville; IHI Turbo, a Shelbyville turbo charger manufacturer; the Johnstown Mall, a Shelbyville shopping center; CF Industries, a supplier of anhydrous ammonia to farmers and the Super Wal-Mart development areas in Shelbyville and Taylorville.

If gaining a good electric load is a co-op highlight, then the worst nightmare for a utility, co-op or IOU, comes from a major storm and the damage that ensues. Shelby veterans recalled several major ice storms over the years. In 1967, 1985 and 2006, the co-op had to get help through the IEC Emergency Work Plan to help with line repairs. But everyone agreed that the Good Friday storm of 1978, the one that knocked out service across the state's midsection, was the granddaddy of them all.

Some 1,100 poles were broken during the storm, which dumped sleet and ice on trees and lines during the Easter weekend. After the initial storm, the wind began bringing tree limbs crashing into the lines still standing. Longtime employee Delmar Brunk, who retired as Operations Superintendent in 1999, was a lineman in 1978 and remembered the storm very well.

"We were going out to replace a broken pole by Moweaqua. The farther we got up there the worse the ice was. The conditions were terrible. I had to crawl up the screen to get into the bucket – the wind was blowing that hard," he said. "We got that pole changed out and about that time things really started happening. They didn't stop for the next 10 days. The thing I remember most is that even this new pole broke off later in the storm."

The storm knocked out service to thousands of Shelby members for up to 10



days, with seven of the co-op's 13 substations at one time going down. Overall, the storm left more than \$1 million in damage to the cooperative's system. Bill LeCrone, longtime Member Services Director and then General Manager, told cooperative members at their 1978 annual meeting that they could thank a good staff of employees and 30 men from other cooperatives in Illinois and Kentucky for their efforts in restoring service.

"We are very, very fortunate in having a group of personnel such as we have. Each and every one of them worked their hearts out to restore service to you," LeCrone reported at the meeting. "This has been one of the worst winters ever for Shelby Electric. This was by far the worst storm we ever experienced. We estimate that our other ice and sleet storms cost in the neighborhood

Shelby members Dorothy Fleshner, right, and Ralph Reel receive their capital credits checks at the co-op's annual meeting in 1962.

This photo was taken at the cooperative's first annual meeting in Shelbyville in 1938. The meeting was held in the Shelby County Courthouse.





of \$50,000 each. Compared to this last one, that was peanuts.”

Unlike the 1978 annual meeting, many of the Shelby Electric gatherings over the years have been gala, happy events with good news. The Shelby annual meetings have always been known for big crowds, cookouts and entertainment. “Our annual meeting format has gone through many changes over the years,” remembered Gene Boldt, longtime Director and Board President. “We’ve used the tent caravan from the AIEC, the high school auditorium and changed our meetings from afternoons to evenings and back,” he said. “But in recent years we’ve had a day meeting with a big meal. Now we really feed a lot of people, more than 500. People come to the annual meeting and they want to be fed and entertained. So that’s what we try to do.”

The co-op has had great success in another area as well: budgets and finances. Shelby directors credit fiscal conservatism for the cooperative’s financial successes. “We had conservative managers over the years and they watched their spending pretty well while still providing good service,” noted Boldt.

Fellow director Kenneth Kensil of Tower Hill agreed with Boldt, but emphasized that the Shelby boards of directors have been

conservative as well. “We would always like to break even, or be just a little in the black,” he said. “Then there have been a few years where the co-op has shown quite a margin and over a few years this builds up.”

During its nearly 75-year history, Shelby has had only four managers. Lester Boys, a local farmer, was the initial Project Superintendent, serving until 1944. W.L. “Lefty” Walker, who had worked at Central Illinois Public Service and Edgar Electric, was named Manager in 1945 and served in that capacity until his retirement in 1974. He was succeeded by Bill LeCrone, who had worked in member services at Shelby for many years. LeCrone was Manager from 1974 to 1988, when he retired and was replaced by Jim Coleman, a native of the Flora area and veteran of Clay Electric.

Walker, an engineer by training, was remembered as a hard-working, sometimes-blunt general manager who was a good businessman. “He was a very good manager for his era, but his style and philosophy probably wouldn’t be very effective today,” noted Boldt. “He ran the whole show around here.” LeCrone was “just the complete opposite” of Walker, remembered Kensil. “He was great in public relations and in working with the cities, political groups and local organizations. He really thought highly of our employees and was proud of them. He was a very conservative man and did a good job for us.”

Coleman is a much different manager than all the others, the directors agreed. Under Coleman’s leadership, Shelby Electric modernized and developed a variety of subsidiary operations, offering services ranging from energy audits and wireless broadband internet, and propane gas to direct broadcast satellite television. The co-op was also the primary supporter of a start-up water cooperative, Lincoln Prairie Water Co., which merged with EJ Water Cooperative in 2012. The co-op, along with three other cooperatives, EnerStar, Adams Electric and McDonough Power, at one time owned and operated Alert Security. The firm provided home, farm and business security systems in central Illinois.

Manager Coleman said he doesn’t see Shelby Electric as just an electricity supplier

Some of the cooperative’s first staff. Shown outside the first Shelby Electric office in downtown Shelbyville are, from left in front, Helen Prosser, Harriett Howe, Lola Riley, Pauline Wol-lums and “Tommy” Thomason. Behind them, from left, are Jess Neihls, Bill LeCrone and Hal Jarnagin.



to the rural areas. “We’re a service company,” he emphasized. “We want the co-op to be all things that members need. Our members deserve everything that people who live in town should have. If you live in the country there is no reason you should live like a pioneer. We try to provide services we can offer in a cost-effective way.

“Ideally, Shelby’s many subsidiary operations should provide quality services to members and non-members alike, while helping to provide a subsidy for the electric operation,” the manager said. “That will help keep electric costs down for everyone.”

These subsidiary operations, and others the cooperative might develop, help position Shelby Electric for a future deregulated utility environment, Coleman added.

That future looks good for the co-op, noted longtime employees and directors, although several shared concerns about today’s members and the costs of running a rural utility.

Furry said that working for an electric cooperative was an excellent career position, but noted that co-op members have changed greatly over the years. Kensil said the cooperative’s “changing membership” will make it more difficult to provide service in the future.

“People really appreciated what the co-op did for them years ago. Now they just take it for granted,” Furry said. “The electric cooperative program has been a wonderful thing. If it hadn’t been for the REA, our country would never have come as far as it is today. The power companies weren’t going to do anything. Before we started, people had to beg the IOUs just to come on to their lines.”

In 2005, Two-Way Automatic Communication System Automated Meter Reading (TWACS AMR) was added. TWACS AMR allows Shelby to see when members are out of power – sometimes before they even know it. The co-op can communicate with the meter by “pinging” it to see if the cause of the outage is on the co-op side or the side of the member.

Coleman, now President and CEO, said, “The system also allows us to turn the generators on and off. We are able to switch to the generators during the peak time. By doing this, we are able to save members about 15 percent on their electric rates.”



Shortly after TWACS AMR was added, Shelby installed a Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) system. SCADA is a computer monitoring system. It can be used to control specific processes and collect data from within a cooperative or company.

In 2008, Shelby switched to the NISC iVUE system. The iVUE system is the next generation of software. The system can be used to integrate all of the different functions of the cooperative.

The co-op is finishing up a Geographic Information System (GIS). GIS is used to capture, store and analyze data linked to a location. The software allows the cooperative to view and interpret data integrated with a map or globe.

Four co-op staff members demonstrate the styles of the 1940s outside the Shelby Electric office in 1947. From left are Lola Riley, Harriett Howe, Bill LeCrone and Helen Prosser.





Co-op Manager Jim Coleman received a plaque for being chosen "Cooperative Manager of the Year" by the Illinois Cooperative Council in the fall of 1999. The award was presented by Earl Struck, president/CEO of the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives. From left are Joe Firlit, president/CEO of Soyland Power Cooperative; Robert Primmer, chairman of the board of Shelby Electric; Coleman and Struck. In addition to serving as president/CEO of Shelby Electric, Coleman is secretary on the Soyland Power Cooperative board of directors.

Shelby is also in the process of building wireless broadband internet over the whole system through a service called PWR-net. Through this, Shelby will offer wireless broadband internet to people, but it will also be used for a variety of applications in the cooperative's fleet vehicles, including computer mapping.

In addition to PWR-net, started in 2008, Shelby operates two other subsidiary businesses. The first, Shelby Energy, is a propane and energy services company. The other, Clear Talk Communications, a three-cooperative (EnerStar Electric Coop., Corn Belt Energy Corporation and Shelby Electric) subsidiary is a company that sells two-way radio service to farmers, emergency management personnel and other companies requiring push to talk capabilities. Shelby Electric utilizes the Clear Talk trunking system in its daily operations. In early 2010, the co-op became an authorized Motorola dealer through Clear Talk.

"Over the years, we were able to operate the electric side at a loss because our subsidiaries were making enough money. We finally had to raise rates, but we went from 1992 until 2009 without an increase," said Coleman.

Through the years the cooperative's biggest issue has been power supply. Shelby Electric Cooperative purchases its power from Prairie Power, Inc. (PPI) in Jacksonville, Ill. Originally named Soyland Power Cooperative, PPI is involved with the Prairie State Energy Campus (PSEC) located in Lively Grove, Ill. One way Prairie Power is looking to contain future power costs is through its involvement with PSEC.

Shelby Electric was one of the founding members of PSEC and has a 25-megawatt share of the power plant's output. This state of the art coal-fired power plant is one of the cleanest coal-fired plants in the United States.

PPI produces, purchases and delivers over 1.5 million megawatt-hours of electricity annually to its 10 member-owned electric distribution cooperatives, including Shelby Electric.

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Although Shelby raised rates for the first time in 17 years, the cooperative is preparing – and trying to prepare the members – for the rate impact of possible climate change legislation.

“How do we deal with environmental impact as it pertains to CO2? The science is one thing, but the political belief is that they need money. So, this is a good way of getting it,” noted Coleman. “If they don’t get it from CO2 regulation, they will get it from something else. We will just have to deal with more taxation issues. Climate change legislation will raise rates immediately and significantly.”

The cooperative is communicating with members to make it clear what is going on and why the rate increases may be happening. Like all of the other electric cooperatives, Shelby is the unfortunate bearer of bad news and the co-op wants to prepare its members so they are not blindsided with higher rates driven by legislative and regulatory mandates.

Coleman said, “We have proposed letting the government own the nuclear assets because private sector ownership is way too expensive due to the regulations, precautions and security needed. Right now it’s not financially feasible, but we hope one day it will be. Nuclear would be great, but unfortunately, society doesn’t respond well unless there is a crisis. It will probably take an energy shortage to really move forward.”

Shelby has a number of energy efficiency programs to help combat the possible rate increases. Recently, one of the co-op’s employees was certified by the Building Performance Institute to do home energy audits. Now the cooperative has a Flir infrared camera and a Minneapolis blower door allowing the coop to perform professional home energy audits, as well as detect hot spots at member locations.

Along with the rebates and incentives the statewide association (AIEC) offers, Shelby also offers in-house incentives for air source and geothermal heat pump systems and water heaters.

One other way the cooperative is helping its members learn about energy efficiency is through the website TogetherWeSave.com.

The interactive website allows people to take an energy efficiency home tour to learn what to do to make their home more efficient and the immediate cost-savings of those actions. Touchstone Energy Cooperatives – the brand for over 700 electric cooperatives across the United States – designed TogetherWeSave.com.

Shelby Electric Cooperative has been a member of Touchstone Energy since 1998 and is also one of 10 Illinois co-ops that own and operate the Touchstone Energy Hot Air Balloon program. Shelby Electric is proud to find solutions to today’s problems with Touchstone Energy as its partner and follows its core principles – integrity, accountability, innovation and commitment to community.

The cooperative is not only trying to help members become more energy efficient, but be more aware of the environment too.

The cooperative’s fleet of line trucks was lined up and put on display during a 1974 open house for Shelby members and guests. More than 400 people toured the co-op headquarters during the open house.





The cooperative's 1977 board of directors: Seated from left are Neil Pistorius, Blue Mound; Kenneth Ken-sil, Shelbyville; L. Eugene Boldt, Stewardson; and Victor Jostes, Nokomis. Behind them from left are Bill LeCrone, manager; Gerald White, Macon; Robert Primmer, Findlay; Philip Turner, attorney; and Lawrence Oller, Taylorville.

Through a matching grant received in March of 2010 from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), Shelby purchased two recycling trailers, fencing and security cameras to assist in a recycling program called the "Power of Green". The recycling program is based out of the PWR-net office east of Shelbyville.

Since the first collection date in July of 2010, about seven tons of recyclable items have been brought in. "People have been very receptive and appreciative of the program. We have tried to assist everyone when they come in to recycle. We want to make it a good experience and make sure everyone is recycling properly," said Tammy Carson and Chris French who help coordinate the recycling efforts at the cooperative's East Route 16 building where the Power of Green recycling is located.

Every Saturday and Tuesday morning and Thursday afternoon, people can participate in the Shelby recycling program.


In addition to making members more energy efficient and embarking on a new recycling program, Shelby has also been looking into renewable energy. Back in the 1990s, the cooperative started working on a hydroelectric project on the Lake Shelbyville Dam. While the co-op is still working on that today, the government does not call that hydro-project "renewable energy". State and Federal governments are leery to call hydro-projects with dams renewable energy because of the concerns from environmentalists. Environmentalists are concerned with the potential effects on the sensitive ecosystems living in places that are then dammed up.

"We are trying to get hydroelectricity recognized as a renewable energy source. We don't have wind resources in our part of the state. The wind we have would not economically support a wind turbine. We don't have any landfills in our service area to get landfill waste energy. We are, however, looking at some of our dairy farms for renewable energy sources. There is a possibility of working with digesters – a way to turn cow manure into renewable energy, biogas. But, right now, none of our dairies are big enough. A few guys are thinking about it if they can get their herds up [to a big enough size]," said Coleman.

"Shelby's future, at the distribution level, is continuing to provide services and a quality of life to rural people that urban people enjoy," said Coleman. "Like the access to high-speed internet and good drinking water. We would like to enhance the efficiency of our system with things like smart grids and the integration of more computerized electronics that 'talk' to the meters."



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