

# The Value of Your Membership

By Susan Parrish

The benefits that Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative member-owners receive is far more than being able to buy competitively priced electricity.

Union County Commissioner Donna Beverage sits on the OTEC nominating committee for its board of directors. Asked about the benefits of OTEC membership, Donna cites the capital credit checks members receive annually from OTEC, and OTEC donations to local charitable causes.

“OTEC is invested in our communities,” Donna says.

She also cites OTEC’s college scholarship programs, including scholarships for lineman school and its new trade school scholarship program.

OTEC operates under the guidelines set forth in the Seven Cooperative Principles. The sixth principle is Cooperation Among Cooperatives. In fulfilling this principle, OTEC works with other cooperatives for various services. That is another benefit to OTEC members.

“The co-op network is very valuable,” says Sandra Ghormley, OTEC director of member services. “When you become a co-op member, you have access to large co-op resources through the network. As electric cooperatives, we own our bank, insurance company and marketing firm, among many other resources, creating economies of scale and helping us deliver services to our member-owners at the lowest price possible.”

OTEC is a member-owner of other cooperatives that provide these services, and shares in benefits, such as capital credit distributions and economies of scale.

- OTEC’s night answering and after-hours dispatch service, Cooperative Response Center in Austin, Minnesota, provides live agents who answer OTEC’s phones after hours.



**One benefit of being a member-owner of Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative is the co-op’s energy-efficiency rebate program. Forrest and Jennifer Keady benefitted from several rebates as they restored two commercial properties in Burns, including Central Hotel.**

Photo courtesy of the Keadys

- OTEC recently rejoined Touchstone Energy Cooperatives in Arlington, Virginia. Touchstone Energy supports the advertising, member engagement, business development, employee education and cooperative performance needs of its members.

- OTEC’s insurance carrier, Federated Rural Electric Insurance Exchange in Kansas, insures only electric cooperatives and helps co-ops and their members reap benefits of having excellent safety records.

- OTEC’s provider of access to employee benefit plans—including health insurance and retirement benefits—as well as research is the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association in Virginia. NRECA also represents the interests of more than 900 electric cooperatives in the U.S., including OTEC, to various legislatures.

- OTEC’s bank, the National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corp. in

Dulles, Virginia, provides low-interest loans to OTEC.

OTEC Chief Financial Officer Anthony Bailey says OTEC receives many benefits by financing through CFC.

“When CFC gets done with their year, their net margins distribute back to OTEC,” he says. “We’re getting our loans at net cost. In turn, that’s a benefit to our member-owners.”

In 1987, at the beginning of OTEC’s existence, citizens of Baker, Grant, Harney and Union counties secured a \$33 million loan with \$7 from CFC to establish OTEC and improve the electrical system. As a CFC member, OTEC can secure flexible financing solutions quickly and at competitive rates. CFC provides access to capital to operate and upgrade OTEC’s systems to ensure reliability and high standards of service.

## Energy-Efficiency Rebates

Another benefit for OTEC members are the co-op’s robust energy-efficiency rebate programs. OTEC recently launched a new incentive program for members to upgrade wood-burning devices with more efficient heating options, such as electric heat pumps.

In the past five years, OTEC members Forrest and Jennifer Keady have restored two historic commercial properties on Main Street in Burns: the Masonic Lodge and Central Hotel.

Susie Snyder, who oversees OTEC’s energy-efficiency rebates, told the Keadys which rebates were available. As a result, the Keadys are receiving rebates for replacing old windows with energy-efficient windows, replacing incandescent lighting with LED lighting and adding mini-split heat pumps on the upper level of the hotel.

Since the Keadys opened the hotel in June 2018, “the Main Street of Burns is seeing more activity and renovation,” Jennifer says. “With that project, OTEC was an integral part of the change.” ■