What's Inside



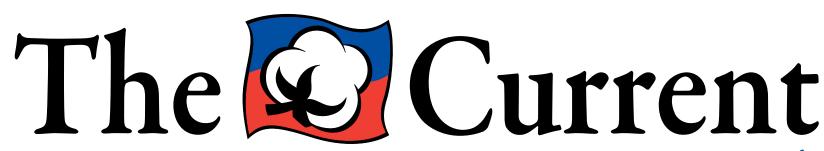
VOLUME 67

2023 CECF golf tournament proves to be successful again Page 5



Growing independence in the community Page 9





A Publication of Cotton Electric Cooperative Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative K



NUMBER 4

"The Current - Informing Our Members Since 1957"

From our family to yours Merry Christmas wishing you joy and happiness this holiday season and in the coming year.

December 11, 2023

Preparation is power when weathering winter storms

-THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES AND EMPLOYEES OF COTTON ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

Winter can bring high winds, subzero temperatures, and ice to many parts of the country. Such dangerous winter weather can cause hazardous road conditions, downed power lines, and extended power outages. Be sure to stay safe before, during, and after a winter storm hits.

Heavy snow and accumulating ice can easily bring tree limbs down onto power lines, cutting off power to homes and businesses. To be truly prepared, members need to know what to do when a storm strikes.

Anyone who has weathered prolonged outages due to a winter storm will tell you it is more than inconvenient. Such an outage during very cold weather creates an additional set of challenges and safety requirements. Prepare now to ensure you're not left in the cold when the next one happens.

Cotton Electric Cooperative and Safe Electricity recommend assembling an emergency kit with essential items and more, such as:

- Flashlight, portable radio and extra batteries
- First aid kit and essential medicines
- Nonperishable food
- Bottled water
- Basic tools and related materials
- Extra blankets and clothing to dress in layers
- Outerwear at the ready, including hats, gloves and scarves
 - Rags or duct tape to seal air leaks

If you have a wood stove or fireplace, have plenty of extra wood on hand; and if you have a fuel-based heater, have extra fuel and the means to vent the fumes.

Know how you can get area weather updates, such as a weather radio, mobile notification system you can enroll in, mobile app, etc. Visit state and local websites for emergency outage plans in your area. Develop an emergency plan with your family so everyone knows what to do in an outage. Keep your mobile devices fully charged and ready to use when a storm is headed your way.

Additional tips for weathering a cold-weather out-

- Stay inside and dress in several layers of warm clothing. Wear a hat to avoid the loss of heat from your head.
- Reduce the amount of wasted heat during an outage by closing doors to rooms not being used,

and securing curtains and blinds to reduce heat loss from windows.

- Never use an oven or charcoal grill to heat the
- Reduce the risk of spoiling food during an outage by lowering the temperature of your refrigerator as low as possible, and avoid opening the refrigerator doors unless it becomes necessary. By doing so, you can keep your food cool for up to 24 hours.
- When the power is restored, there will be a power surge. To protect your circuits and appliances, switch off lights and unplug appliances and electronics. Leave one light switched on as a quick reminder that the power is restored.
- Be aware of the temperature in your home. Infants and older people are more susceptible to the cold. You may want to stay with friends or relatives or go to a shelter if you cannot keep your home
- Be alert to the signs of frostbite, which can include loss of feeling in the extremities, and hypothermia, such as shivering, memory loss, incoherence, or drowsiness.
- Use caution if you have to go outside. Downed power lines could be hidden by snow or ice. If you see a downed power pole or line, stay far away and report it to your electric utility.
- If you are a motorist caught out in the storm, never drive over a downed line because that could pull down the pole and other equipment, causing additional hazards. If you see a downed line, do not get out of your car. The safest place is inside the vehicle. Contact the utility immediately.

If you use a standby generator for temporary power, make sure it has a transfer safety switch to cut off power at the breaker box before you operate it.

A portable generator can provide power in the event of an outage. Have an electric cord long enough to keep the generator at least 20 feet from any door, window, or vent to keep carbon monoxide out of the home. Read your instruction manual before use, and operate your generator in well-ventilated areas.

Never use a portable generator in the home or garage - and never plug it into a home wall outlet or connect it directly to the home's electrical system. Install battery-powered or battery-backup carbon monoxide detectors near floors on each level of the home. These precautions prevent backfeed, which is when electricity travels from the generator back through the power lines. Back feed creates danger for anyone near lines, particularly crews working to restore power.

For more information on electrical safety, visit www.cottonelectric.com or www.safeelectricity.org.



Power Cost Adjustment Calculated

The power cost adjustment now being applied to bills mailed after December 1, 2023, is \$0.00487 per kWh.

On a member's average bill of 1,300 kilowatt hours (kWh), this will amount to a charge of \$6.33 on the December bill.

November 2025 Temperature Extreme								
Day	High	Low	Avg.	Day	High	Low	Av	
1	56	24	40	16	$7\bar{1}$	39	5.5	
2	67	30	49	17	59	40	50	
3	74	33	54	18	69	35	52	
4	76	50	63	19	63	51	51	
5	75	47	61	20	66	51	59	
6	84	49	67	21	59	31	4.	
7	89	46	68	22	62	28	45	
8	90	49	70	23	68	29	49	
9	60	51	56	24	57	38	48	
10	65	41	53	25	50	34	42	
11	64	42	53	26	50	25	38	
12	69	35	52	27	55	21	38	
13	72	37	55	28	62	23	43	
14	69	34	52	29	65	27	46	
15	71	37	54	30	58	39	49	
Source:	www.srh.	noaa.gov/o	un/					

Average Daily High: 67 Average Daily Low: 37

Did You Know?

Cotton Electric offices will be closed on Dec. 25 and 26 for Christmas and Jan. 1, 2024 for New Year's. Emergency calls will be answered at 580-875-3351 or 800-522-3520.

Current should arrive in mailboxes on Jan. 12, 2024.

Contact Us

Do you have a story idea for The Current, or do you need to place an ad? If so, let us know.

We can be reached at 580-875-3351 or by email at TheCurrent@ cottonelectric.com.

You can also drop us The next issue of *The* a line at Cotton Electric Current, 226 N. Broadway, Walters, OK 73572.



Mission Statement Our mission is to

safely deliver reliable and affordable power, provide excellent member service, and improve the quality of life in the communities we serve.

From the CEO

Reliable power for today-and tomorrow

resparks a sense of renewed hope and optimism about the future. As the CEO of Cotton Electric Cooperative, for me, it's a time to reflect on where we are and where we're going. At the heart of this reflection, I think about ways we can better serve you, the members of the cooperative.

Our team at Cotton Electric is always looking ahead, exploring ways to innovate and utilize new technologies to improve our services. As our nation increasingly relies on electricity to power the economy, keeping the lights on has never been more important. We're committed to powering—and empowering—our community at a cost local families and businesses can afford.

So how are we working to ensure reliable and affordable power while adapting to a changing energy landscape and our community's evolving needs?

One critical component of reliable power is the mix of energy resources used to generate the electricity that keeps the lights on across Southwest Oklahoma. You may not realize it, but Cotton Electric doesn't generate electricity. Instead, we purchase it from our energy provider, Western Farmers Electric Cooperative, and from there, we distribute it to homes and businesses throughout our community. Our current energy resource mix is made up of coal, natural gas, wind, solar and hydro. We're increasingly using more electricity generated from renewable energy sources, but we still depend on a diverse energy mix to ensure reliable power that's available to our members whenever they need it.

You expect the lights to stay on at a price you can afford, and our national energy policy must embrace this fundamental promise. However, there are five issues currently impacting the reliable delivery of electricity across our nation. They are:

- 1. Increasing demand for electricity as other sectors of the economy are electrified.
- 2. Decreasing electricity supply due to the disorderly retirement and insufficient replacement of existing generation.

- 3. Permitting delays that prevent new electric infrastructure from being built and connected to the grid.
- 4. Supply chain challenges, particularly electric transformer availability and costs.
- 5. Problems with natural gas availability.

We are advocating for a national energy policy with affordability and reliability at the core and educating our policymakers about the need for time, technology development and new transmission infrastructure before taking our nation down an energy path that prioritizes speed over practicality. You can also help by joining Voices for Cooperative Power (VCP), a network of electric co-op members working together to influence elected officials who are making those energy policy decisions. Sign up at https:// voicesforcooperativepower.com.

At the local level, we established Cotton Electric's Service Quality Team (SQT). The SQT is a cross-departmental collaboration whose mission is to work together to address



Jennifer Meason, CEO

service-quality concerns and improve service. The SQT meets regularly to review outages that have occurred, discuss the cause of the outage, and develop plans of action to prevent their reoccurrence.

The SQT also monitors reliability standards, trends and leading practices from other electric co-ops in Oklahoma and across the country. Learning from other co-ops is one of the many benefits of the cooperative business model because for us, it's about cooperation, not competition.

As we turn our focus to 2024, Cotton Electric will continue working to provide the reliable, affordable electricity you expect and deserve—for today and tomorrow. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at 580-875-3351.





Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Get smart with a better way to heat and cool your home! Smart thermostats are Wi-Fi enabled and automatically adjust heating and cooling temperature settings in your home for optimal performance. Smart thermostats learn your temperature preferences and establish a schedule that adjusts to energy-saving settings when you're asleep or away.

For maximum energy savings, look for smart thermostat models with the ENERGY STAR® label.

Source: www.energy.gov

October 2023 Operating Stats

	<u>2023</u>	<u>2022</u>
Total Amount Billed/Accrued	\$5,834,173	\$6,518,431
Cost of Purchased Power	3,886,278	4,486,620
Taxes	128,344	156,151
Total Operating Expense per Mile	1,114	1,158
Average Farm and Residential Bill	130	140
Average Farm and Residential kWh	1,013	922
Total Meters Billed (Farm, Residential	19,526	19,304
Miles Energized	5,264	5,247
Density per Mile	3.71	3.68
New Service Connects YTD	376	491
Services Retired	168	119

Upcoming Deadlines for The Current

January

Ad Sales Deadline Dec. 29
Classified Deadline Dec. 29
Publish Date Jan. 12

February

Ad Sales Deadline Jan. 26 Classified Deadline Jan. 26 Publish Date Feb. 9

The Current

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Energy Efficiency

Save some green on energy bills this winter

ow can you save on heating costs this winter? question are basic: turn down the thermostat a few degrees from where you would normally keep it, and dress in layers. Keep your feet warm, and have plenty of extra blankets around.

Most people like to pull up the covers at night when it's cold outside. Add extra blankets or use flannel sheets and a thick comforter so that you can turn down your thermostat while you sleep. It also helps to use insulated or lined curtains to keep the cold air out, not your home.

Another way to make sure your energy costs by up to 10 percent. home as energy efficient as possible is to get a home energy evaluation before the cold winds hit. These evaluations are free for Cotton Electric members. The changes you make based on the evaluation could help you save energy costs this winter.

Other energy-saving tips include:

- Get your heating system regularly Some answers to that maintained and serviced by an HVAC professional so that it is working at peak efficiency. Keep your furnace clean, and change the filter monthly.
 - Regularly vacuum or clean vents.
 - If you have a fireplace, keep the damper closed when not in use. If you do not use your fireplace, plug and seal the flume.
- Do not heat an empty home. A programmable or smart thermostat can help this become automatic. According to the Department of Energy, only in your bedroom, but throughout lowering the temperature by 7 to 10 degrees for 8 hours a day can reduce
 - A leaky house is expensive to heat. According to www.Energy.gov, sealing uncontrolled air leaks can save from \$83 to \$166 a year. Weatherstripping double-hung windows can save \$42 to \$86 annually. Windows, doors, attics, attic access, outlets, walls and chim-

neys, as well as pipes entering or exiting your home are common sources of air leaks.

- Let the sun shine in your home during the day to use Mother Nature's warmth. Close window coverings after dusk, however, to reduce heat loss.
- Run your ceiling fans in a clockwise direction. Doing so will push down and redistribute warm air that naturally rises.
- Consider turning down your water heater to 120 or 125 F. Also install a water heater blanket to help insulate the water heater to give it a step up in warming your water.
- When it comes time to replace your furnace or any part of your HVAC system, consider replacing it with an energy-efficient version by looking for the EnergyStar designation.
- Decrease the use of the built-in ventilation fans in your kitchen and bathrooms. In the colder months, they do a good job of transferring heat from



Heath Morgan, **Energy Efficiency** Coordinator

inside your home to the backyard. Use the fans only when needed, and turn them off as soon as you can.

• Bring in the moisture with a humidifier, or research other ways to do that. Dry air makes the air feel colder, and increasing moisture in the air causes indoor air to retain more heat.

For more information about home energy evaluations and efficiency, visit www.cottonelectric.com/energy-efficiency or call at 580-875-3351.





NOVEMBER

YEAR CDD HDD

2023 16 376

492 2022 17

> 2021 346

Degree days measure how cold or warm a location is by comparing the average of the high and low (mean) of the outdoor temperatures recorded in that location to the standard U.S. temperature, which is 65 F. The assumption is that we don't need heating or cooling to be comfortable when this is the outdoor temperature.







Cotton Electric Charitable Foundation

CECF announces fourth-quarter grant recipients

Pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters - set enough of them aside on a regular basis, and the coins add up to dollars. That's how Operation Round Up (ORU) works.

Most Cotton Electric members participate in ORU, in which power bills are rounded up to the nearest dollar. The amount rounded up can be as little as 1 cent and is never more than 99 cents. On average, each participating member contributes about \$6 each year.

The funds are pooled and administered by the Cotton Electric Charitable Foundation (CECF), a Board of Directors that meets quarterly to consider grant applications from individuals and organizations in the area. The Board consists of Jennifer Meason, the co-op's CEO; Shan Files, president of the co-op's Board of Trustees; and three representatives from the Cotton Electric service area: Cindy Zelbst, Danny Marlett, Carter Waid.

The Board met in November to review grant applications. Grants totaling \$26,818.99 will be distributed to 10 of the applicants. Fourth-quarter grant recipients include: Town of Chattanooga, Duncan Area Literacy Council, Duncan New Beginnings Methodist Church, Indiahoma Fire Department, Stephens County Humane Society, Temple Public Schools, Terral Volunteer Fire Department, Von Hawks Rising, Inc., Walters Senior Citizens Center and Waurika Senior Citizens Center.

First-quarter applications are due Feb. 13, 2024. The Board of Directors for CECF will meet again on Feb. 27 to review applications for the quarter.

CECF grant guidelines and applications can be downloaded and completed at www.cottonelectric. com/grant-applications. Applications can also be submitted by email to zyoung@cottonelectric.com or by mail to 226 N. Broadway, Walters, OK 73572.

Grants Awarded

Town of Chattanooga

\$3,000 for a generator

Duncan Area Literacy Council

\$608.99 for a printer

Duncan New Beginnings Methodist Church \$780.00 for construction of a Blessing Box

Indiahoma Fire Department

\$3,680 for Air-Paks

Stephens County Humane Society

\$1,000 for facility repairs **Temple Public Schools**

\$2,500 for Chromebooks

Terral Volunteer Fire Department

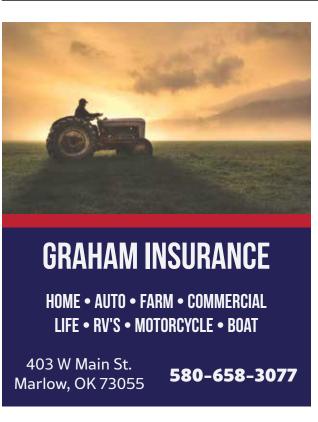
\$3,500 for a stream power portable pump Von Hawks Rising, Inc.

\$3,750 for an enclosed trailer

Walters Senior Citizens Center

\$4,000 for roof repairs

Waurika Senior Citizens Center \$4,000 for a roof replacement





At this time of year, we want to thank all our valued clients and many friends, and wish everyone a very blessed Christmas and a happy, healthy, and prosperous New Year.

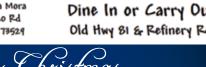
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2023 CECF golf tournament proves to be successful again

By Carli Eubank

On a cool, fall day, more than 80 golfers showed their support for the Cotton Electric Charitable Foundation (CECF) and Operation Round Up (ORU) during the 15th annual Not-So-Summer Classic golf tournament fundraiser on Nov. 13 at The Territory Golf and Country Club in Duncan.

After postponing the golf tournament a couple weeks prior due to weather, golfers were able to enjoy the rescheduled event with a beautiful, blue sky.

The tournament drew 22 teams, which were divided into three flights. A scorecard playoff determined the winners in each flight.

With a score of 55, the City Mart team, represented by Darell Smith, LL Humphreys, Clayton Keck, and Brent Bostick, won first place in the A flight.

Representing the Power Services team and claiming second place in the A flight with a score of 56 were Monty Powers, Orville Sturdivant, Monty Bean, and Craig Franagan. Also scoring 56, third place was awarded to Adam Red Elk, Jimmie Dedmon, Gary Rainey, and Doug Stephens, representing the Comanche Nation team.

The winners of the B flight were Ron Hubble, Eric Bean, Bryan Hubble, and Tyler Johnson, representing United Sales Agents of Oklahoma, with a score of 59.

Second place went to representatives of Tilley: Steve Root, Jared Lovett, Vance Taft, and Jeff Johnson, who had a score of 60. Team members, Taylor Scott, Alex Jones, Nancy Lott, and James Purcell, representing Duncan Regional Hospital, won third place with a score of 61.

Winners of the C flight with a score of 66 and representing Valmont Utility/PSA were Dave Seat, Abram Potter, Dillon Newby, and Heath Morgan.

With a score of 68, second place was awarded to Scott Crew, Stacey Abbe, Gordon King, and Quaid Ogletree, representing the Cotton County Drug team. Third place went to representatives of Targa: Jeremy Carlton, Danny Brooks, Shane Price, and Austin Ferguson, who had a score of 68, as well.

"We would like to express our appreciation to the players who took time to support this great cause and to the hole sponsors and contributors who continue to help make the tournament a success," said Bryce Hooper, Cotton Electric COO. "We would also like to thank the staff at The Territory for having the course in excellent shape and always going out of their way to take care of our tournament participants."

Proceeds from the golf tournament will be distributed by CECF Board of Directors to local organizations and individuals throughout the cooperative's service territory.

For more information about CECF and ORU, visit www.cottonelectric.com/operation-roundup.



UNCOMFORTABLE?

Does your home have any of these symptoms?

- □ Rooms that get too hot or too cold?
- □ High utility bills?
- □ Thermostat wars with your spouse?
- □ High humidity in summer?
- □ House just never seems comfortable?
- ☐ There doesn't seem to be enough airflow?
- □ Dust buildup within 2 days of dusting?
- □ Problems with your system since it's been installed?
- □ Anyone with allergies or asthma?
- □ AC starts and stops frequently or runs all the time, and house is still not cool?
- $\ \square$ Have been told by other contractors that the problem cannot be fixed?

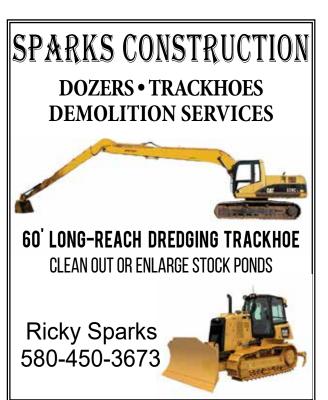
If you answered <u>YES</u> to any of these questions, we can help!

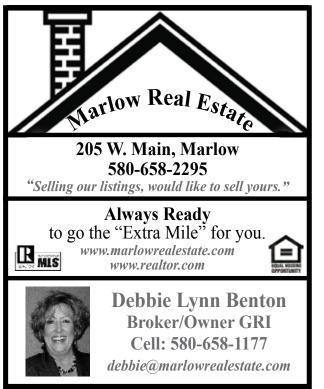
Pippin Brothers has specialists that can pinpoint and correct these problems and, in many cases, you don't even have to replace your equipment, with the solution usually being easier and costing a lot less than you may think. There is no other contractor in Lawton more qualified than Pippin Brothers at diagnosing and correcting these annoying, inconvenient, unhealthy, comfort-compromising and energy-wasting concerns. Call us today and let us make your home **Feel As Good As It Looks!** After all, your home is your largest investment and you and your family deserve to be comfortable - don't you?



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Co-op employees recognized for completed apprentice training

By Carli Eubank

Several Cotton Electric employees were recently recognized by Oklahoma Association of Electric Cooperatives (OAEC) for completing all schooling requirements for electric cooperative lineworkers. Cotton Electric employees Conner Daniel, Braylin Dowlen and Keeton Sallee graduated from the Northwest Linemen College, promoting them to journeymen lineman. Ty Logan was certified as a staking and line inspection engineer from the Utility Training Services Program.

Earning these accomplishments demand many hours of studying, training and dedication to the job. Northwest Linemen College is a four-year course consisting of four modules with 10 books covering various topics and a proctored test at the end of each book. Training schools hosted by OAEC are mixed into the course, covering a wide range of material from the basics of climbing to advanced metering, to name a few.

"The majority of the course is hands-on learning and learning from other linemen," said Cotton Electric Journeyman Lineman Keeton Sallee. "Evaluations are also conducted quarterly to determine if you are eligible to proceed in the program."

Daniel, Dowlen and Sallee held positions as crewmen for six months before entering the program, as this is a requirement for all lineworkers before enrolling into the program. Four years and many trainings later, each achieved a great milestone in their careers and graduated from the program.

"I think this is something we should all be proud of," said Cotton Electric Journeyman Lineman Braylin Dowlen. "I look up to all of the linemen, and I am thankful for everything they've taught me."

In the previous year, Cotton Electric Staking and Line Inspection Engineer Ty Logan began working through the Utility Training PLUS Program offered by OAEC to receive his certification.

The course was mainly online broken into four sections with weekly assignments and quizzes to complete, and a test at the end of each section. Lessons included the basics of tools and GPS coordinates, tensions on wire, applying calculations in the field, loading and wire sizing, and how to apply these topics in real situations.

"When I was able to apply what I was learning in the books to what I was doing at a job, that helped me more than anything," said Logan. "I also appreciated being able to ask my coworkers who have been through this before for help when I was struggling with a topic. They were able to offer me advice on how to figure out some of the problems."

Logan completed the first three tests online, and the final one was proctored. The 4-hour-long final test consisted of a mix of topics from the course, including lengthy, detailed math problems. Finally, Logan was recognized for his certification for staking and line inspection this past month.

"To be able to go through all the courses and the math problems, and to be able to do it successfully, was a proud moment for me," said Logan.

Education, Training and Information is one of the Cooperative Principles that Cotton Electric employees strive to follow every day while providing safe and reliable power for our members. Congratulations to Braylin, Conner, Keeton and Ty.



Congratulations to Ty Logan for his staking certification. Photo courtesy of Oklahoma Association of Electric Cooperatives.



Congratulations to Keeton Sallee on graduating from Northwest Linemen College. Photo courtesy of Oklahoma Association of Electric Cooperatives.



Congratulations to Braylin Dowlen on graduating from Northwest Linemen College. Photo courtesy of Oklahoma Association of Electric Cooperatives.



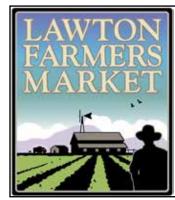
Congratulations to Conner Daniel on graduating from Northwest Linemen College. Photo courtesy of Oklahoma Association of Electric Cooperatives.

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Know the key benefits of Roth IRA

As you save for retirement, you'll want to take full advantage of the investment vehicles available to you — and one of the best is a Roth IRA. But what sets it apart from other accounts?

Three key factors distinguish the Roth IRA: Tax-free earnings

When you invest in a Roth IRA, your earnings can grow



tax free, provided you don't begin taking withdrawals until you're 59½ and you've had your account at least five years. If you don't meet these criteria, withdrawals of earnings will be subject to taxes and a possible 10%

 No penalties on withdrawals of contributions You fund a Roth IRA with after-tax dollars, which

means you can withdraw your contributions — not the earnings — at any time for any reason, without facing taxes or penalties. So, you could use some of your Roth IRA money for nonretirement purposes, such as helping pay for a child's college education.

• No required withdrawals at age 73 – With a traditional IRA or a 401(k), you must start taking withdrawals called required minimum distributions, or RMDs

once you reach 73. But this rule doesn't apply to a Roth IRA — you can keep it intact as long as you like. You may need to tap into it for some of your retirement income, but if you don't use it all, the remainder could benefit your beneficiaries.

A Roth IRA does share one similarity to a traditional IRA: It can be funded with virtually any type of investment, including stocks, bonds, mutual funds, certificates of deposit (CDs) and so on.

However, unlike a traditional IRA, a Roth IRA

does have income limits. For the 2023 tax year, if your modified adjusted gross income was less than \$138,000 (for a single filer) or \$218,000 (married filing jointly), you can put in the full amount of \$6,500 and an additional \$1,000 catch-up contribution if you're 50 or older. The amounts you can contribute will gradually decline at higher income levels and are phased out entirely at \$153,000 for single filers and \$228,000 if you're married and file jointly. These income ranges will likely change for the 2024 tax year, so you'll want to consult with your tax

advisor for details.

Still, even if you've contributed to a traditional IRA or a 401(k) for many years, you may have a chance to eventually "convert" some, or all, of these funds to a Roth IRA and gain its benefits. It's not hard to do this conversion it involves minimal paperwork from your traditional IRA or 401(k) provider — but it does come with tax issues. Any money that's converted from a traditional IRA or 401(k) to a Roth IRA will be treated as ordinary taxable income. This can trigger a large tax bill, so, unless you have the money available from other accounts to pay the taxes,

the conversion may or may not make sense for you. But you don't have to convert all the funds at once. By spreading the conversion over several years, you could reduce the effect of a large tax hit in any single year. You may want to consult with your tax advisor before converting any funds to a Roth IRA.

If you can find a way to contribute to a Roth IRA, either directly or through a conversion, consider it carefully — you'll find a lot of upsides to this investment account

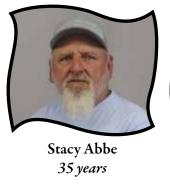
Edward Jones, Member SIPC

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It's a year-end tradition at Cotton Electric to honor Board members and employees for their years of service.





Scott Crew



Mike Ottinger TJ James 20 years 15 years



Justin King



Cody Pennington 15 years



15 years

Shelly Sehrt



25 years

Greg McComber 10 years



Ryan Noland 10 years



Quaid Ogletree 10 years



15 years

Zach Smith 10 years



James Apriesnig 5 years



Conner Daniel 5 years



Jake Lawler 5 years



Heath Morgan 5 years



Danielle Quickle 5 years



Shayne White 5 years

Employees recognized for their commitment to safe service



Safety is the focus of everything we do at Cotton Electric. It's even in the mission statement: to "safely deliver reliable and affordable power."

As Cotton's Safety and Loss Control Director, Jarrod Hooper coordinates all safety policies, procedures and training. His focus on safety is echoed by CEO Jennifer Meason and supported by the cooperative's board of trustees.

"Some may say it's keeping the lights on, but I say safety is job number one for everybody at the co-op," said Hooper.

Providing electric service requires equipment ranging from computer keyboards to large digging augers. About 90 Cotton Electric employees carry out tasks as varied as pushing reams of old documents into a paper shredder to riding a bucket 60 feet in the air to repair a high-voltage line.

Every piece of equipment and every task presents a potential accident, yet Cotton Electric employees have a pretty good record of safe work that extends over quite a bit of time. That is an important accomplishment, so import-

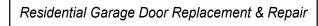
ant that once a year the co-op recognizes the employees whose safe work records have passed fiveyear increments.

In 2023, six Cotton Electric employees achieved those five-year marks for a combined total of 80 years of accident-free service.

Employees recognized include Braylin Dowlen and Keeton Sallee, who have each worked five years with a safe work record. Rex Hiebert has worked safely for 10 years, while Clint Ingram, Ashley Shortt and Vickie Smith have a 20-year safe working record.







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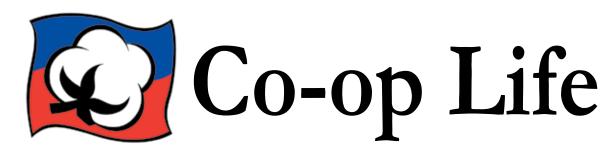


If your home is currently listed, this is not an attempt to secure a listing. Each office is independently owned and operated.





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Growing independence in the community

By Carli Eubank

Located within Cotton Electric's service territory in Stephens County is a nonprofit making great impacts in the community since 1980. Over the next few months, their focus will be on the Christmas tree and poinsettia sale, but Think Ability Inc. works year-round to help those with developmental disabilities to grow their independence.

Think Ability Inc., originally named Power Shop, started as just one workshop where people with intellectual disabilities, individuals with an IQ of 70 or less who were diagnosed in their developmental years, could work and earn income. A couple of years later, Duncan Group Homes was established with its own board of directors. Fast forward to 2014 when the two nonprofits merged to create Think Ability, Inc.

"I love the name of this organization because it perfectly describes what we do," said Sheila DeCarlo, Think Ability Inc. Community Garden manager. "The name describes how we encourage these individuals to think positively about what they can do."

In the same year, Think Ability Inc. acquired additional property on Beech Ave. in Duncan where Power Shop, now known as Power Print, was located. Power Shop was a great launchpad for what was to come for the organization, but they wanted more opportunities for their employees to be part of the community. This goal sparked the idea for the Community Garden.

"Everything we do is to provide opportunities for people with developmental disabilities and for them to interact with people not paid to be with them and become part of the community," said Robin Arter, Think Ability Inc. executive director. "The Community Garden was a perfect opportunity for our employees."

Employees maintain the vegetables and flowers growing in the many hoop houses of the Commu-

nity Garden during the growing season. Garden bed spaces are available for the public to rent for \$50 a season if you take care of it, and \$95 if Think Ability Inc. employees maintain it. When people select to take care of their own garden bed, it allows employees more interactions with community, keeping in line with Think Ability Inc.'s focus. The most recent business addition is the Garden Café, located on Main Street in Duncan. Produce from the Community Garden supplements other ingredients, adding to the local dining experience.

Think Ability Inc. has expanded their presence in the community through many other businesses and programs. Next to the Community Garden is the Garden Hub, an indoor farmers market open six days a week with local produce and other food items for sale. Power Print is a T-shirt screen printing business located in the building next to Adult Day Services, an activity center for those with intellectual disabilities.

Employees also water and maintain flower pots on Main Street in Duncan and several streets in Marlow, and litter crews work with the Oklahoma Department of Transportation to help clean up state highways in Stephens and Comanche counties. The organization's Oklahoma City office also employs a janitorial staff that cleans the Oklahoma State Capitol and a number of additional state-owned buildings.

"Our goal is that our employees grow and develop their work skills and leave us to go work in the community," said Arter. "We are still there for them to provide support and benefits, acting as a rep payee and providing whatever advice we can."

When a position opens at Think Ability Inc., individuals fill out applications through the Oklahoma Developmental Disability Services where they are deemed eligible or not. If they are eligible, they are approved for any provider in Oklahoma.

Think Ability Inc. employees go through an assessment for the first 30 days so staff can learn what the employee's needs are and what they need to know to become more independent. The assessment helps staff target their training with employees, such as taking appropriate break times, helping them break habits, and staying focused on their tasks. Employees are also taught how to manage their money and budget for bills, groceries and other expenses.

Staff also go through training before interacting with Think Ability Inc. employees. Individuals must complete CPR and first aid trainings, and complete a series of online classes with the College of Direct Support, which teaches foundations of being involved with someone with an intellectual disability. If a staff member has to give medication to an employee, the staff member must take a medication administration class as well.

"The smiles, laughter and constantly being happy is what I love most about working with Think Ability," said DeCarlo. "The employees are completely appreciative of everything that happens, and they give back so much to me every day."

Job coaches at Think Ability Inc. help train and prepare employees to transition to jobs in the community. If a job becomes available, the job coach will learn about the position and work with the employees on how to perform the job, while providing additional support.

"Being involved in someone's life the way we are and seeing their progress in becoming more independent is so rewarding," said Arter, "and those rewarding moments feed your passion."

For more information about Think Ability Inc., search their Facebook page at Think Ability Inc. or visit one of their businesses. Their annual Christmas Tree sale at the Community Garden is open until all trees are sold.



Think Ability Inc.'s annual Christmas Tree sale is open until all trees are sold. Photo by Carli Eubank.



Think Ability Inc.'s Garden Hub has a wide variety of produce and products made by local vendors. Photo by Carli Eubank.



Several Think Ability Inc. crews maintain flowers pots along Main Street in Duncan and several streets in Marlow. Photo by Carli Eubank.



Sheila DeCarlo, Think Ability Inc. Community Garden manager, Robin Arter, Think Ability Inc. executive director, and other employees prepare poinsettias to be delivered to local businesses. Photo by Carli Eubank.



If you would like your community event listed in the January issue, please submit information by calling 580-875-3351 or sending an email to The-Current@CottonElectric.com by Dec. 29. Only events occurring after Jan. 12 will be published in the next issue.

Editor's note: We recommend checking for cancellations with local sources before attending any event.

Creative candle workshop

This holiday season, unwrap the gift of creativity with Kochendorfer Brewing Company and The Burrow Candle Co. at a candle making class. Expert guidance will be offered to help you craft your own 8 oz. candle. Class is \$40 per person and includes all materials provided. Must register by December 11. The event is set for 6:30 p.m. on Dec. 15 at Kochendorfer Brewing Company in Duncan. For more information, visit their Facebook page.

Coffee and Christmas movies

Get into the Christmas spirit at Viridian Coffee locations with their Christmas Movie Month. Their shops are transformed into winter wonderlands, complete with Christmas cheer and handcrafted beverages for guests to enjoy while watching a Christmas movie at no cost. Movies will play every Saturday starting at 5 p.m.: Santa Clause on December 16, Santa Clause 2 on December 23, and *Christmas Carol* on December 30. For more information, visit their Facebook page.

Holiday in the Park

Celebrate the holidays with family-friendly events at Lawton's Holiday in the Park. Throughout the season, Elmer Thomas Park will be completely decorated with colorful light displays, ornaments and cut-outs. Take a ride in a horse-drawn carriage, drive your own car or walk through the park to enjoy all of the holiday cheer. Additional activities include Stories with Santa, the Snider Petting Zoo, a living Nativity, hay rides, movie nights, holiday concerts and food trucks galore. For more information, call 580-355-3541.

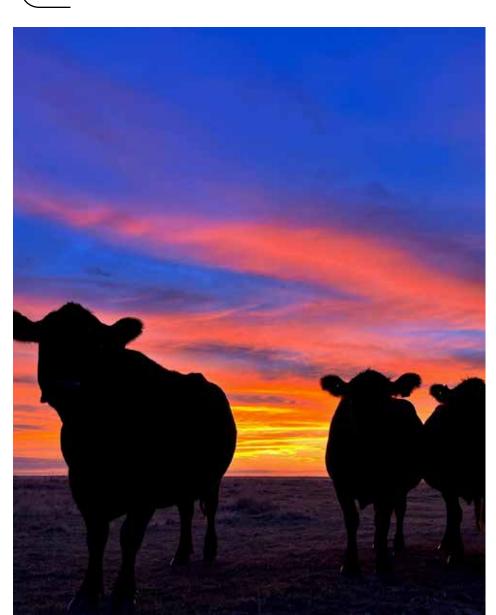
Food pantry open once monthly

Walters Community Food Pantry is open from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. on the second Saturday of each month. The pantry is in the old City Hall, 131 1/2 W. California Street. Pantry organizers try to provide a two-week supply of basic staples to anyone with identification and proof of Cotton County residency. Monetary donations may be sent to Food Pantry, c/o Paul Metcalfe, 211 E. Colorado St., Walters, OK 73572. For information, call Roger Noland at 580-591-6826.

Blessings Boutique open monthly

Marlow First United Methodist Church opens its Blessings Boutique from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. every first and third Tuesday of the month. Clothing donation drop-offs are Tuesdays, or donors can call the church at 580-658-2765 to make other arrangements.

PHOTO OF THE MONTH



Cotton Electric member Stesha Kerr snapped this photo while checking her cattle west of Walters one evening.

Enter your "best shot" in our Photo of the Month contest. The theme for January is Homemade! Entries can be emailed to TheCurrent@CottonElectric.com or mailed to The Current, 226 N. Broadway, Walters, OK 73572. Winners will receive a Cotton Electric prize.







Benefits of cranberry season



Kim Bandelier, MPH, RD, LD

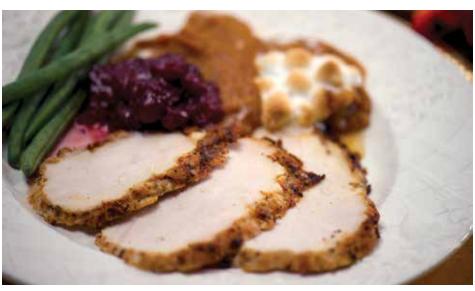
Food 2

While cranberry juice and cranberry extracts are available year round, fresh cranberries typically make their appearance around the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays. There are many reasons - these holidays coincide with the cranberry harvest timing, cranberries were a staple of Native Americans and were well known to the European explorers, but there is no record of cranberries being a part of the original "Thanksgivings". The first mention of cranberry and turkey can be found in a cookbook from 1796 called American Cookery by Amelia Simmons. In the 1800s, cranberries were farmed in the United States and soon companies like Ocean Spray figured out ways to marcranberry concoctions like juice and cranberry sauce.

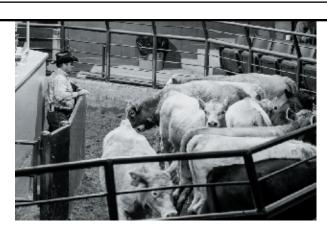
Raw cranberries pack a nutritional punch - a cup contains only 46 calories, 12 grams of total carbohydrates, 4 grams are fiber and 4 grams of natural sugar) and small amounts of various vitamins and minerals. Despite the nutrition features, the taste of raw cranberries (more tart than a lemon and slightly bitter) can be off-putting, hence most cranberry dishes include added sugar.

Cranberries can still add flavor and nutrition to a meal or dish. For example, roasting fresh cranberries with brussel sprouts and butternut squash, cooking fresh cranberries with pork roast or turkey, adding fresh cranberries to a smoothie with limited added sugar - these are all ways to harness the nutrition and taste of cranberries while limiting the empty calories of added sugar. Even cranberry relish and cranberry chutney can be nutritious and tasty as long as the amount of sugar added is limited. Dried cranberries can help naturally sweeten many recipes just remember they are now more concentrated sources of calories.

In the future, we may have a sweeter raw cranberry snack option. It has been reported that the University of Wisconsin has developed an experimental cranberry called "Sweetie" that doesn't require added sugar. That would certainly catapult the cranberry into the strawberry, blueberry, and black berry ket the fresh cranberry and different healthy snack category. Until then, enjoy this nutritious but tart fruit with as little added sugar as possible.



Cranberries are a great way to add nutrition and flavor to meals this holiday season. Photo courtesy of Metro Creative.



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Students make winning recipes

The annual Stephens County Cook-Off was held on Oct. 30. Participants included many Cloverbuds and 4-H'ers who entered more than 60 total recipes. The young cooks prepared recipes to be judged on taste and appearance.

Awards were presented to the top three in each category. First-place winners received a monogrammed apron, and second- and third-place winners received kitchen items. Cloverbud participants received a certificate and kitchen spatula. Awards were sponsored by Stephens County Farm Bureau Women.

Over the next several months, *The Current* will include recipes from the winners in each category.



Mini peppermint patty

Number of Servings: 24-36 patties By Katherine Gee

Ingredients:

2 1/2 cups sifted powdered sugar

1 1/2 tbsp. light corn syrup

1 1/2 tbsp. water

1/2 tsp. peppermint extract

1 tbsp. butter

1/8 salt (pinch)

10 oz. dark chocolate melting wa-

powdered sugar with corn syrup, 1/4 cup of powdered sugar. Knead ment sheet. Coat all patties. until smooth, then roll it out between it is 1/4 inch thick.

Freeze for about 15 minutes.

Take out of freezer, remove top parchment paper and dust with powdered sugar. Replace parchment paper. Flip it over and do the same to the other side. Take a mini round cutter and cut out as many patties as you can. Put them back on the parchment paper and freeze until firm.

Melt the chocolate wafers accord-On medium speed, beat 2 1/4 cups ing to their package. Remove the patties and, using a fork, submerge them water, peppermint, butter, and salt. into the melted chocolate, letting the Knead on work surface dusted with extra drip off. Return patty to parch-

You may need to rewarm chocolate two sheets of parchment paper until to coat all patties. Let patties stand until chocolate is set, about 1 hour.







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HOLIDAY EFFICIENCY WORD SEARCH

The holidays are a fun, festive time of year! We typically use more electricity during the holiday season. Read the holiday efficiency tips below, then find and circle the **bolded** words in the puzzle.





- Decorate your tree with energy-saving LED lights.
- Control home heating costs with a smart or programmable thermostat.
- Save energy by using a timer to turn off holiday lights when you're sleeping.
- If you have a fireplace, ask an adult to close the damper when a fire is not burning.
- Open blinds and curtains during the day to let sunlight in to warm your home.
- Lower the thermostat when you invite **friends** and **family** over. (The extra people in your home creates additional warmth.)

3					7			
6	2				9	7		
	9		4				1	
		8	2					
	4				6	1	2	
		1		7			9	
1	7				2	5	3	
	5		1	3			6	
				6	5	2	4	1

Level: Beginner

Fun By The Numbers

Like puzzles? Then you'll love sudoku. This mind-bending puzzle will have you hooked from the moment you square off, so sharpen your pencil and put your sudoku savvy to the test!

Here's How It Works:

Sudoku puzzles are formatted as a 9x9 grid, broken down into nine 3x3 boxes. To solve a sudoku, the numbers 1 through 9 must fill each row, column and box. Each number can appear only once in each row, column and box. You can figure out the order in which the numbers will appear by using the numeric clues already provided in the boxes. The more numbers you name, the easier it gets to solve the puzzle!

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Parting Shot



Cotton Electric Journeyman Lineman Dillon Wiygul tosses candy to the crowd at the Duncan Christmas parade. Photo by Carli Eubank.

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