

What are the three most important things your co-op does for the community?

Wharton County Electric Cooperative (WCEC) was established in Wharton County in 1938. Since that time, the co-op has been extremely important in the development of Wharton and surrounding counties. Much could be said regarding what the most important aspect of the co-op is. However, the WCEC mission statement says that the three most important things the co-op does for the community is to provide reliable electric energy, provide products, service, and leadership, as well as having a positive impact on the economy.

WCEC is a member distribution cooperative that provides reliable electrical energy for members in Wharton, Colorado, Jackson, and Matagorda counties. This power provided is what allows rural communities to flourish. According to the WCEC website, prior to 1935, only 3% of farms in Texas had electric service. After the first movement to secure rural electrical power during a meeting in Danevang in 1937, the 1938 committee members held a meeting in Wharton and applied to the state of Texas for a charter. The membership was granted and in 1938 the movement to secure electric power for Wharton County was on its way. Since that time, electric power has been provided and has allowed Wharton County to flourish and become prominent in agriculture, industry, and technology.

Products provided by WCEC include water heaters, electric grills, as well as outdoor security lights. Internet service may also be defined as a product bringing internet

service to many of its members at a much lower rate and better quality than most larger companies.

Service is provided from their staff of approximately 40 people which include lineman, service reps, IT personnel, and so on. The services also include maintaining over 1,270 miles of line for its 4,126 members. Whether it is day to day business or in the event of a service disruption from bad weather to power outages, these people get the job done.

WCEC, led by its Board of Directors, provides numerous leadership roles in giving back to the community. One example of leadership is through Operation Roundup, which through the WCEC Charitable Fund donates to local non-profit organizations. Since 2003, over \$300,000 has been given to a number of nonprofits including the 100 Club of Wharton County, Blessing Cup, and the Wharton County Youth Fair just to name a few. WCEC employee volunteers are also involved in many local charities including the Rotary Club, Lions Club, Knights of Columbus, 100 Club and many others. Members have also taken part in serving meals to storm victims, donating money during Christmas, and holding blood drives to increase depleted supplies. Other ways that WCEC provides leadership include the Co-Bank Sharing Success Program, the Town and Country Christmas Lighting Contest, and presentations for schools, communities, and business groups.

WCEC has a positive impact on the economy of Wharton and the surrounding counties. Business, industry, education, agriculture, and home life all need energy to flourish.

Besides their own employees that live, thrive, and survive in the community, the energy services provided by WCEC is a money multiplier that keeps the economy going.

What else should co-ops do to improve the quality of life of their members?

If possible, WCEC should research providing fiber optic cable for all members. Fiber optic cables provide users the ability to operate internet services at the highest speeds possible. This could be a great asset in today's world of rural farming and business, especially with the rising cost of fuel and the ability of many to work from home with efficiency.