February 2004

Power Talk

A monthly publication for members of United Cooperative Services

Your Touchstone Energy Cooperative

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Burleson's Eddie Nunez Wins "Lineman of the Year"

Linemen and operations personnel who work as United Cooperative Services have a very tough job. They come out to restore electricity and repair power lines during every hour of the day and night and through all kinds of adverse weather conditions. They make a lot of sacrifices but take pride in doing whatever it takes to get power back on for United members.

Given these circumstances, it's no small honor no be named best of the best when it comes to this elite group of hard working men. For 2003, Burleson lineman Eddie Nunez received the respect of his peers when he was named United Cooperative Services' first "Lineman of the Year."

Mr. Nunez's outstanding job performance over 2003, especially in the areas of safety, work productivity, leadership ability and his general professional representation of the cooperative, earned him a nomination for the award in the latter part of last year. A group consisting of United's division foreman, the Vice President of Operations and United's Chief Operating Officer selected Mr. Nunez as the winner and Ray Beavers, United's General Manager/CEO announced their choice during a presentation to the board and employees of United on Dec. 5, 2003.

"I'd received a number of compliments on Eddie from our field safety coordinator about how well the jobs were going and how he is continually consciences about safety and helping his crew avoid work-related accidents," said Danny Nichols, United's VP of Operations. "Eddie led productivity for our benchmarking criteria and always made himself available during critical scenarios after-hours to get our member's power back on quickly. He also stepped into leadership roles and helped demonstrate safety procedures to local school children and our co-op members."

Mr. Nunez received a standing ovation when he accepted his reward. He was also presented with a bronze electric lineman sculpture with an engraved base, which he now proudly displays on the mantel at his home.

Paul Woodall, Burleson's district foreman, said he recommended Mr. Nunez for the award and witnessed his dedication, loyalty, safety and productivity while on the job.

"Ed spent 13 years at our Possum Kingdom Lake office and about a year in Cleburne before coming to Burleson," Mr. Woodall said. "It goes without saying how everyone looks up to Ed as a person. Watching him grow and the effect he has had on our team is a true blessing. He's a team player, has great maturity and is really dedicated to United."

Several of Mr. Nunez's co-workers also praised him for a job well done. Groundman Travis Ashworth said Mr. Nunez promotes safe work habits and taught him a lot about line operations by setting a good example as crew foreman. Apprentice Lineman Mike Easter said Mr. Nunez is dedicated to working hard and shows how much he loves his job through his good-natured personality.

Mr. Nunez said he was very surprised and humbled to receive the award.

"This award isn't just mine — it belongs to everyone on my crew," he said. "Things couldn't get done without a great crew and these guys help make my job easy. It's a group effort and if they don't do their job, I couldn't be successful in mine. Thanks to United for the recognition... I'm deeply honored by this award."

Eddie Nunez (center) accepts a bronze statue from General Manager/CEO Ray Beavers (left) and District Foreman Paul Woodall (right).

Operation Round Up Aids United Members After Recent House Fires

Operation Round Up funds help United members across the service area, but there are only a few times each year when the grant money actually helps a family rebuild their life. In late 2003, two members saw how a small flame can become a major fire in a matter of minutes and fill a home with thick black smoke.

On the morning of Dec. 13, 2003, the home of Trey and Kim Judge in DeCordova Bend Estates near Granbury was decorated for Christmas and presents for their three children were wrapped and hiding in closets. By the evening of Dec. 13, the house and most of its contents had been destroyed by a blaze started at an outlet in the family's living room.

"The fire alarm went off while Trey and my two youngest children were in the master bedroom," Mrs. Judge said in a January 2004 interview. 'There were about 50 people helping fight the fire. Neighbors were checking in on our family to see if we were OK and if we needed anything. It was all so overwhelming for me!'

The Judges and their three children, ages 13, eight and two, watched from a neighbor's house while firefighters put out the flames.

"The firefighters asked me if there was anything they could salvage… so I had them retrieve my wedding rings," Mrs. Judge said. "I felt more affected by our loss that evening, when the fire was over… but I can't really explain the sadness I felt. You're almost in shock but honestly, I was just grateful that my family was out."

After the fire, the Judge family received a $500 Wal-Mart gift card from Operation Round Up and to purchase groceries for their new rent house, clothes for the kids, radio alarm clocks, shoes and school supplies.

Mrs. Judge said the children's schools also donated new clothes for the kids and their DeCordova neighborhood bought toys for the children and helped collect monetary donations to replace some of the Christmas gifts lost in the fire. Other local Christmas charity organization donated a Christmas tree, a television set and a box of presents for each child.

"The holidays were pretty tough because our family is used to having a big Christmas celebration," Mrs. Judge said. "But all the assistance we received, especially from United Cooperative Services, was very helpful. When you lose everything, you find out there are so many necessity items you need like toothbrushes and hairbrushes. The aid from Operation Round Up helped me not to be stressed about the money part of it."

Looking back, Mrs. Judge said the fire has made her family more aware of not taking things for granted and appreciating the things they have. The family plans to rebuild on their same lot in DeCordova.

The Judges fire was the second in a year that affected members of United living in DeCordova.

It took only four hours for a fire to completely consume the home of Larry and Debbie Gafford, who had lived there for 28 years. A short in the electrical wiring above the laundry room sparked the 4 a.m. blaze on Sunday, Oct. 12, 2003 and the family lost everything.

"The sound of breaking glass woke me up," Mrs. Gafford said. "It was odd because there wasn't any smoke in the house when I got up to investigate the noise. The fire had burned for an hour in the attic before moving to the garage. When I saw the flames inside the garage, I remember thinking to myself, 'It's just a little fire, the firemen will be here soon.'"

In both the Gafford fire in October and the Judge fire in December, DeCordova Bend, Granbury and Pecan Plantation volunteer fire departments responded to the scenes within minutes of the 911 phone calls.

"The firefighters were unbelievable," Mrs. Gafford said. "They would come out of the house and just fall to the ground because the fire was so hot. Once the blaze was under control, the firefighters asked us where our medications, glasses and purses were so they could try to salvage them. They also asked if we had any pets."

In addition to the volunteer firefighters, many other people have been involved in the Gafford's recovery efforts. Mrs. Gafford said no less than 75 people helped the family sift through the rubble, washed laundry and delivered lunches and dinners.

The Chisholm Trail Chapter of the American Red Cross provided food and clothing to the displaced family only two hours after the fire began, area realtor Jack Martin donated a storage shed and John Hughes, a local attorney, provided a sofa, chair, dishes and clothing.

"I also remember a lady named Gretchen — whose last name I don't even know — who came by the morning after the fire," Mrs. Gafford said. "She looked at me, looked at the house then burst into tears. After we talked for a few minutes, Gretchen drove to her home around the corner, loaded clothes into her car and brought them back to us. I'm still writing thank you notes to everyone for their help and concern."

Members of United Cooperative Services' Operation Round Up program also helped the Gaffords recover from their loss. Their $500 grant has been used to purchase sheets, pillows, towels, toiletries and small household appliances, as well as replacing medications lost in the blaze.

As a contributor to Operation Round Up since it's inception in 1998, Mrs. Gafford said she's both appreciative and grateful for the program.

"I view Operation Round Up assistance as a hand up, not a hand out," Mrs. Gafford said. "It's not much to give… at most, 99 cents a month. When we first joined Operation Round Up and received our bill, I recall thinking, 'Sure, let's give.' I never thought I'd ever really use it."

After receiving the grant from Operation Round Up, Mrs. Gafford was eager to help other families who had been affected by fires or storm damage. But Landy Bennett, United's vice president of marketing and customer service, explained how she had already helped others.

"By participating in Operation Round Up, the Gaffords have already provided assistance to fellow United members struck by similar tragedies," Mr. Bennett said. "Operation Round Up is the way for members to help other members in need."

One the most poignant memories Mrs. Gafford recalls from the morning of the fire was talking to a neighbor who recounted the recent loss of his son 12 months earlier. The neighbor reassured Mrs. Gafford that she and her family were so very fortunate to have escaped the fire unharmed.

"Losing family photo albums and Christmas decorations our children made in elementary school was very upsetting," Mrs. Gafford said. "I've discovered it's just not relevant anymore. The most important thing is that our family is safe. The young man hired to bulldoze our home said he's seen fire similar to ours where people lost their lives. It helped put things into perspective."

Now that the house has been leveled, the Gaffords have elected to rent

a house for the next several months until they decide to either buy or rebuild their home. However, they say Granbury is home and they plan to continue living in the area.

Both Mrs. Judge and Mrs. Gafford have stressed to neighbors, friends and other United members how important it is to photograph or videotape your home and possessions.

"Structure fires are a lot more common than you think," Mrs. Gafford said. "Photograph your possessions and give the photos or video to your insurance agent and keep copies in your safe or safe deposit box. Also, remember to check the batteries in your smoke detectors and make certain that your house and contents are insured for their correct value."

For more information about the Operation Round Up program, please contact Franki Hilton, United's public relations director, at (817) 556-4035.

Photos clockwise from top:

Debbie Gafford's home of 28 years burned in an October 2003 fire.

Ash, rubble and splintered wood makes up most of what remains from the Gafford's living room and kitchen.

Vickie Schlittler, Granbury customer service office manager, presents United member Kim Judge an Operation Round Up grant after her family's December 2003 fire.

What is Operation Round Up?

Operation Round Up is a program funded by the members of United Cooperative Services who "round up" their monthly electric bill to the next dollar amount. In the true cooperative spirit of people helping people, the program provides United's members a simple and rewarding way to raise money for local charities, service organizations and members in need. The average donation per year is about $6 and a member can opt in or out at any time.

Manager's Message

Ray Beavers,
General Manager/CEO

Dealing with Diversity

Four years ago, when my family moved to this area, we encountered a whole new environment. Facing the combination of more people and a fast growing economy, it was a contrast to where we lived before. The change was a welcomed sight for me and my wife Pat, but for my youngest son Blake, it was a whole different story.

Blake left a school with a class of only 30 students and enrolled in a large school with more than 500 students in his grade. Blake was totally confused with all the diversity with a larger school — which includes a variety of students and school activities.

It took a couple of years for Blake to realize that even with diverse situations, your basic values don't need to change. Rather, your principles will guide you through challenges and help you to understand how everyone has a different viewpoint or philosophy based on their own set of values. It was a life changing lesson for Blake that will make it easier for him in the future to deal with continued diversity.

Diversity can also present challenges when working for a large company. I was recently asked by another cooperative manager how we deal with the tremendous variety of members at United Cooperative Services. He was speaking about the many different types of services the cooperative serves, ranging from large industry to water wells and from large housing additions to a farm home three miles from their nearest neighbor.

"The basic values we want our members to enjoy don't change — we want to provide the very best service at the lowest possible cost."

My reply to the question was that it really didn't matter in the big picture. Even though each different service provides its own unique circumstances and impact to the cooperative, the basic values we want our members to enjoy don't change — we want to provide the very best service at the lowest possible cost.

Here in Texas, we have entered into a time where there is much uncertainty in the energy sector. Primarily, this uncertainty deals with the restructured market due to our state's deregulation law. This entire concept is new and unproven in the electrical utility industry. We have seen failures like in California, but we haven't seen any real successes. Texas hasn't experienced the failures like in California, but the real objectives (as I have understood them) for achieving deregulation have not been met.

Couple that with the volatile natural gas markets that have placed even greater pressures on the electrical power markets, causing electricity to escalate in price, hasn't helped the cause any. All these issues just seem to bring further diversity to our industry. But it is still the responsibility of this cooperative to continue to protect our member's value.

United constantly deals with diversity in financial markets as we work to keep your cooperative's financial condition strong. As an example, we try to capitalize on opportunities to acquire capital with the least cost interest expense as possible. Political diversity also continues to have great impact on our industry. No only do we face deregulation laws, we also deal with the political environment as laws have been introduced that would limit our abilities to provide service in order to meet your expectations as a member /owner.

Again, the difference of viewpoints and philosophies brings this diversity but when it interferes with our members values, it is important we do our best to limit its affect. That is one of our most important responsibilities as your cooperative and we don't take that duty lightly.

"Value" is a term we have heard a lot in the last few years. The dictionary says value means a fair return or the relative worth or importance of something, but from my perspective, value also means doing the right thing. If your values are based on doing the right thing and representing those relying on you in a positive way, you can't go wrong. In the end, the best way to do things is to stick with the values you've always had.

Even in spite of the differences in opinion and philosophies that may be expressed with employees, consumers and politicians in the electric utility industry, not deterring from those basic values and principles established and adopted by the members of United Cooperative Services will always be the right thing to do for this cooperative. And we will work through diversity to reach the best possible outcomes for our members.

Blake has made a wonderful transition in his life. He has involved himself in areas where he can achieve and grow from his experiences. He has learned that even though there are a lot of opinions and philosophies that may be different than his, it is still alright to go in the directions his value system leads him. However, the greatest lesson he has learned is that when it is time for him to make an important decision, he should make a judgment on what he believes is the right thing to do and then **dealing with diversity** is not so hard after all.

United Implements Infrared Technology

United Cooperative Services has recently incorporated a new form of digital technology to test electrical connections and enhance predictive maintenance — an estimate of when electrical equipment will need to be repaired or replaced.

A specialized infrared camera and thermal imaging software package is aiding engineers in making forecasts for the efficiency of underground connections.

According to Joe Balentine, United's Technical Services Manager, the equipment is easy to operate but the process of deciphering what you see in the images is fairly complicated.

"United uses this equipment and technology on underground primary equipment installations and connections," Mr. Balentine said. "We look for temperature variances and analyze a color palette scaling temperature gradients to the hottest point."

All objects radiate heat and United's infrared camera converts this heat energy into a visual representation of the thermal differences in an object.

United technicians like Bryan Phipps, an Engineering Technician III, use the infrared camera to help predict failures before they happen.

Mr. Balentine said the camera's software can produce a series of thermal analysis graphs and automated reports. It creates databases used for trending, storing and tracking images taken with the camera and can calculate the temperature differences between working and problem areas.

"We utilize this technology so we can make corrections before we experience a failure in our equipment," Mr. Balentine said. "Right now, we are one of only a few electric cooperatives in the state using this technology for this purpose."

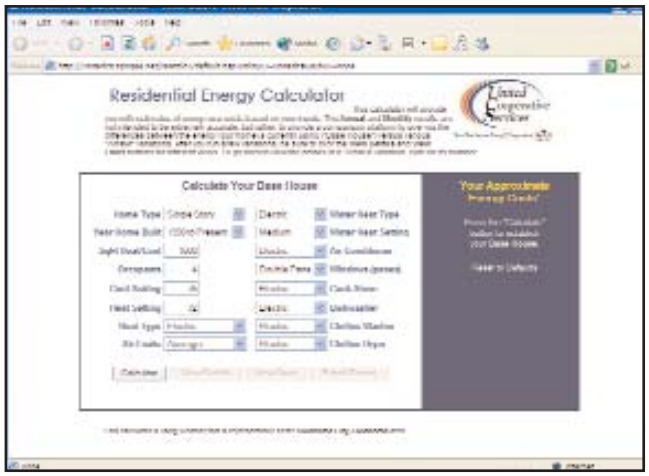
Left photo: United's Bryan Phipps uses the infrared camera to make predictive trends.

Energy Conservation Tips Just a Click Away

United Cooperative Services is dedicated to providing members information about conservation and energy efficiency. One tool for educating members is offered through an expanded Touchstone Energy® Home Program, offered through our Web site at www.united-cs.com. Click on the buttons labeled "Energy Tips" and "Energy Calculator" on the left-hand side of the Web page to dive in.

Developed in conjunction with Apogee Interactive Inc., the program offers United members an easy-to-use online energy calculator that provides estimates of energy use costs based on member's total inputs.

The calculator offers a comparison platform to give members the differences between the energy currently used in the house versus the energy that would be used after adjustments are made in heating and cooling settings, water heaters settings and changes in appliances.



"The online Residential Home Calculator enables homeowners to effortlessly compare their existing energy use with what is considered a similar-sized energy efficient home," said key accounts manager/business development Mike Majors, who also serves as webmaster for United's Web site. "In just a few minutes, residents can experiment with various home improvement options and see the overall impact on energy costs."

The Web site also offers a list of frequently asked questions and in-depth lessons on conservation for existing homes, new construction and outdoor living to further educate consumers about home energy efficiency.

These additions now provide United members access to more than 500 fully-illustrated Web pages covering 300 different energy efficiency features and considerations.

More than 500 electric cooperatives across the nation participate in the Touchstone Energy program, which operates under the guiding principles of innovation, accountability, integrity and community involvement.

Customer Service Representative Kerri McKittrick

Does this lady's face look familiar? If you drive down Highway 377 near United's office in Granbury or near the city park in Stephenville, chances are you've seen Kerri McKittrick's smiling face beaming down at you from a United Cooperative Services' billboard.

Kerri has worked as a customer service representative at United's Granbury/Hood County office for seven years. Her responsibilities include taking orders for new service, submitting connect and disconnect requests, taking outage calls and answering member's questions about their service. She also schedules appointments with engineers, takes payments and makes pay arrangements, performs meter exchanges and answers radio calls.

"My favorite part of the job is working with so many different people," Kerri said. "I've learned to never assume anything and to try and be patient when working through challenging situations."

Her dedication has garnered the attention of many at the co-op, including Customer Service Manager Eunice Wohlferd, who said Kerri takes care of the members in a professional manner.

"Rarely does she ask for advice, but rather makes decisions in the best interest of the members and the cooperative," Eunice said. "She works well with all employees and is a great asset to United and the customer service department."

Every day, Kerri works with the other customer service representatives in Granbury and surrounding United offices. She also works with the engineers and field service representatives, line foremen, underground contractors and members of United's marketing department on certain projects.

"One of the best parts of my job is talking to members who call in to say 'thanks' after a big storm," Kerri said. "I know I don't actually go out and do the hard work to restore the power, but it really means a lot when a member comes into the office or calls and thanks us for getting the power back on so quickly. It means a lot to all of us, but especially to the crews that worked for 36 hours straight without sleep, food or being with their family."

Vickie Schlittler works as the Granbury office manager and has watched Kerri grow over the years. Vickie said Kerri always takes the initiative in handling tough situations and works to make good decisions.

"As a friend and a co-worker, Kerri has been a Godsend," Vickie said. "She handles every situation in a very caring, professional manner."

Kerri has lived in Godley, Texas for 31 years. She graduated with honors from Godley High School, where she was a member of the National Honor Society, in 1991. She married her husband Rich in 1993 and received an associate's degree from Hill College in 1994.

"I am very proud of my husband," Kerri said. "He is a hard worker, very involved in the community and really determined to be the best he can be in whatever he does."

Both Kerri and her husband are very musically inclined. Kerri plays the fiddle and Rich plays drums in the band Lakewater. She said her mom's side of the family surrounded her with lots of love and a love of music.

"There wasn't anything my mom's family could not play or sing and I grew up listening and playing music ranging from Bob Wills (my grandad's favorite) and bluegrass to gospel (my grand-mother's favorite)," Kerri said. "My mother plays piano, fiddle and guitar and we have played together a few times at our church in Godley."

Kerri has also recently gotten involved in making scrapbooks. She said fellow CSR Misty Chesshir got her started.

"I can now say I am completely addicted," Kerri said. "I can never take too many pictures."

Board Members are part of your electric co-op.

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Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

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United Cooperative Services

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

If you ever have a power outage... grab the refrigerator.

Or at least reach for the refrigerator magnet armed with the information you need to report an outage quickly to United Cooperative Services. United recently sent out magnets for all members to use in case the unavoidable happens and you need to call in and report a power outage.

We urge you to write your United account number on the magnet and when calling to report an interruption in service, please supply the United dispatch personnel with your account number and/or the meter number associated with the location of your power outage.

Knowing your account number will help crews determine the source of the problem faster and restore your power quicker.

Around the Area in February

Feb. 13 & 14 — The Glen Rose Old Time Tractor Show & Pull is always a crowd favorite at the Somervell County Expo Center. For more information on this event, call (254) 897-4393.

Feb. 13-15 — Cleburne Area Quilters Guild, Inc. presents the Heirloom Quilts of Tomorrow. Show from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Friday and Saturday and noon to 5 p.m. on Sunday at the Cleburne Civic Center. The show includes special displays, bed quilts, wall hangings, wearables, door prizes and vendor shops. Admission price is $4. For more information, please call (817) 558-2882.

Feb. 20 — The Cross Timbers Fine Arts Council is sponsoring a Ragin Cajun Dinner from 5-9 p.m. at the City Hall Building at the City Limits in Stephenville. Music will be provided by Jean Pierre and the Zydeco Angels. Tickets are $20 in advance, $22 at the door. Children under age 12 are $5. For more information, please call (254) 965-6190.

Feb. 24-28 — The Johnson County Junior Livestock Show and Youth Fair takes place at the Johnson County Sheriff's Posse Livestock Show Grounds in Cleburne. The Saturday dairy sale begins at 10 a.m. and the market animal sale starts at 1 p.m. For more information on supporting the show, please call (817) 866-2368.

Feb. 21 — The Possum Kingdom Chamber of Commerce celebrates their seventh annual Mardi Gras Parade on Bourbon Street and Shrimp Fest at the PK Chamber Visitor Center. Anyone interested in entering the parade or purchasing Shrimp Fest tickets may call 1-888-779-8330.

Power Talk
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With questions or comments, please write to Communication Director Jocelyn Janota at: jocelyn@united-cs.com

Submit community event listings for Around the Area to: powertalk@united-cs.com.
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