

The New WOEC HQ Building: The Complete Story

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of property and construction of a new building. The Gordon Smith property was purchased and the architectural design sent out for construction bids.

The silver lining for building during an economic downturn actual ended with a huge cost savings for the members of the Co-op. The same building project that would have cost \$4.8 million from an earlier bid was now going to be able to be built for \$3.2 million. Construction bids were sent out and three responses were received by the deadline, one from Portland, one from Hillsboro, and one from Banks. We had determined from the beginning that the project would be done with as much local labor, products, goods, and services as possible. We were thrilled with the results that the low bid came from Five Star Builders in Banks, the most local of the bids. It also turned out that about a third of their employees, including a managing partner are members of WOEC. They were selected as the contractor with a bid over \$900,000 less than the highest bid and over \$500,000 less than the second lowest bid.

Five Star stayed true to our request and hired additional people from Vernonia, (one of which continues to be employed by Five Star), bought as many items as possible locally even purchasing tires for their vehicles from the hardware store. One of the best stories of staying local was when we had to change from metal siding on the truck bays and warehouse to wood due to an increase of 44% in metal prices. Five Star came up with the idea and plan to purchase a small mill from Eastern Oregon, bring it over here and using trees from one of the Co-op members, cut the majority of the wood used in the project themselves. Their managing partner Clint Jackson, a Co-op member, did the milling--making

it local trees, cut by a local member, used in the siding of the building which saved over \$44,000. The additional win was the fact we got a better looking building that is also considered more energy efficient, green qualifying--all for a lot less money.

Another good local story came when we received three bids, two from Vernonia and one from Forest Grove, for all of the cabinets and countertop work. The winning bid went to Alan MacComb and his sons who live and have a shop two doors down from our old building. Their shop, located across the street from the Vernonia Substation, had seven feet of water in it during the flood. They were not only the low bid, but are members and neighbors of the Co-op. They did an amazing job in all of the work they did in our building.

Incorporated in the design of the building were energy efficiency measures, using materials that would last for the next 60 plus years, and a promise to the City that the building would not look like an industrial facility, but instead would capture the historic and cultural heritage of the community. It was decided to construct it with as much wood as possible to reflect the fact that Vernonia has been a timber town. The lodge look approach was selected and incorporated into the design and the selection of materials. While the building looks very expensive, in reality it is not, due to the careful choice of materials and design. The building was constructed for around \$120 per square foot. To help keep costs down, we reused everything we could from the old building. Since we just remodeled it after the flood, it made no sense to discard items that the members recently purchased and have to repurchase them. Instead, we reused doors, furniture, toilets, sinks, dispensers,

cabinets, appliances, and even dismantled the entire kitchen and reassembled it in the new building. Racks for the warehouse were purchased at 50 cents on the dollar from a company that went out of business, a forklift was purchased by selling old transformers to a recycler, a crane was purchased by selling items from the old building we were not going to be able to reuse and a chipper we no longer needed. We even reused some of the landscaping from the old building including the rocks. We also traded items for carpentry work.

The size of the facilities is often questioned compared to our old building. The new facilities are almost twice the size of the old one for some very specific reasons. Our old building was not only insufficient for our current needs, but could not expand for future needs. We needed a facility that would handle current and future needs of the Co-op, allow us to operate more efficiently, and include room for items we had to keep up at the pole yard. The Co-op was losing thousands of dollars in materials, damages to property and equipment, and even vehicles stolen from our pole yard. The area was out of sight and almost impossible to secure. Metal theft was the primary problem. Now we have a building large enough to bring equipment inside and materials to a safer location. The cost savings will help pay back the cost of the new buildings.

Features were included in the new facility to make it useful as an emergency shelter for the community in case of another catastrophic event. The facility was upgraded to survive a Category 4 seismic event. Additional lighting was included so that the truck bays could be used as medical triage center with the backup generator sized to power any needs a center would need. The parking lot

was configured to be able to land medical evacuation helicopters. Garage doors were selected with the highest insulation value both for energy efficiency and to be able to allow the bays to be heated easily for shelter by the two heaters installed. WOEC also donated a generator to Wilcox and Flegel gas facility allowing fuel to be available for emergency vehicles and uses during an event with the stipulation that a minimum amounts of fuel be maintained at all times. The Board room is also available for community use.

The facilities we built truly belong to the members of the Co-op and the community that we serve. It was built to be buildings that they can all be proud of, know that it will last for years to come, be an asset to them and serve them, and represent and serve the Co-op staff as well. It is a much safer, healthier, and efficient work environment than we had before. Yes, the building looks expensive, but we built it smart, not expensive. What is the final cost to the members each month? After receiving funds from FEMA for the sale of our old building, all of the reuse of materials and items from the old building, paying cash for the property, all of the trading and selling of items to pay for things we needed in the new building, the total amount the members pay each month for a \$3.5 million facility is \$3. That's right, only \$3 per month, which stayed within the membership survey response. For this the membership has a new building built to last for the next 60 plus years that is more energy efficient, out of the flood plain, and designed to serve as an emergency shelter in case of another disaster event. The investment is a good one for the current and future of West Oregon Electric Cooperative and its members.

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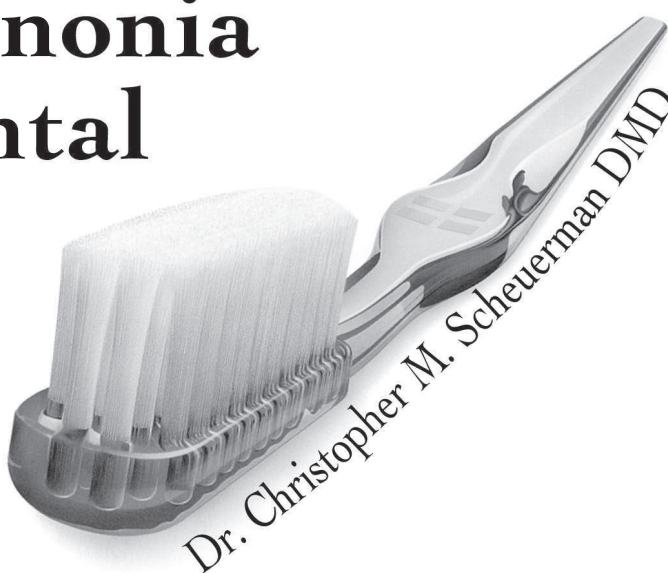
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