

Report from the WOEC Annual Meeting *continued from front page*

member survey that was available at the meeting, and said the Board intends to do more outreach to members through both online and paper surveys.

President Paleck made her remarks and acknowledged General Manager Billi Kohler who is entering her first full year as the head of the co-op staff. Paleck told the members that, for the first time, all WOEC Directors have completed five online courses and are National Rural Electric Cooperative Association certified as Directors.



Erika Paleck is the President of WOEC Board of Directors and was re-elected to Position 5 at the meeting; Paul Seamons was elected to represent Position 2.

Chief Financial Officer Dan Huggett told the members WOEC ended the 2021 year with a margin of \$583,000, plus the profits from the sale of LSN stock which totaled over \$10 million. He said the LSN funds have been invested and will also be used to retire Capital Credits for the first time since the year 2000. Huggett explained that \$800,000 in Capital Credits, also known as Patronage Capital, will be paid out to members who were part of the co-op from between 1970 and 1979. He asked for help finding members of the system from that time period. Huggett said the co-op is working to update their information technology while increasing cyber security.

Operations Manager Don Rose told the members it has been an active year. He said a new storage shed has been built at the pole yard, and said an inventory of all poles and a full assessment of the system, including wire and other equipment, will be conducted starting in September. He said the co-op is continuing to do a lot of tree trimming and mowing in right-of-ways to reduce fire hazard and increase accessibility to lines. He said the co-op has negotiated a new, three-year contract with the employees IBEW union. He said the industry is experiencing a shortage of journeyman lineman and WOEC has not been exempt; WOEC lost two lineman this past year, but has hired two local appren-

tice linemen. Rose said WOEC is working with Oregon Department of Forestry and Columbia County to install a high tech weather station, which can help monitor fire hazard, which he says is a big concern for the co-op. "Fire hazard is number one in our minds right now. We're very aware, especially with all the trees in our area, so we're looking to eliminate any fire hazard as best we can."

General Manager Billi Kohler reinforced the idea that the WOEC service area covers parts of five heavily forested counties, which are spread apart, making service work, outages, and maintenance extremely costly and time consuming. "We understand the economic challenges the membership faces and we have a strong internal focus on trying to operate efficiently while trying to control our costs," she told the members.

Kohler told the members the co-op had experienced multiple weather events during the past year. "We can't budget for a storm, so when a storm comes we do what it takes to get the power back on," she said. That often involves overtime for WOEC crews, but also hiring outside crews to assist. She told the members the co-op has completed a Wildfire Mitigation Plan this year, which is focused on vegetation management. She addressed the profit from the sale of LSN stock. "Those proceeds will enhance our overall financial wellbeing," and are currently being held in investment accounts, "while the Board of Directors consider how they will best benefit the cooperative and its membership."

Kohler addressed what she said was a common question – why not sell to, or merge with, another utility to reduce rates? She explained that in 2018 the Board had entered into discussions with another utility but ended those discussions when they found it would not ensure that the members would be treated the same or result in reduced rates. "We spent four years in discussions with this potential buyer. There was a thorough analysis of the economics, logistics, and legal requirements. It was clear there would be no rate relief for the membership. The efforts were necessary to provide the membership with an answer to this lingering question."

Kohler, who told the members her background as an employee of the co-op was in member services before assuming the role of General Manager, thanked the employees and management team for their work during the past challenging year. "Day or night, rain or shine, calm or storm, they are there to serve the membership. That's the culture we're trying to create."

"I am proud of the service WOEC provides," said Kohler in closing her remarks, "and I'm proud of what it means to be a member of the cooperative. And I'm confident in the future of our co-op. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to serve you."

CCCC Grant 2023 Applications Now Open

The Columbia County Cultural Coalition (CCCC), supported by the Oregon Cultural Trust, is pleased to announce the opening of its grant applications for 2023. This year, preference will be given to those nonprofits that propose projects that promote cultural tourism.

"Cultural tourism" has been defined by the UN World Tourism Organization as: "A type of tourism activity in which the visitor's essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience, and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination." Columbia County's distinctive culture is expressed in its arts and architecture, museums, foods, music, literature, natural beauty, history and traditions, and in

countless other ways. Examples of successful projects would include murals, art shows, musical and cultural events, art installations, and study tours, to name a few. Ideally, grants will be awarded to projects that draw in tourists from outside the county as well as appealing to people within the county.

Grant applications for 2023 will be available on the CCCC website from October 1, 2022 until the deadline, November 19 at 11:59 pm.

For further information or to apply for a grant, visit our website: <https://columbiacultural.org/>.



The CCCC will start accepting grant applications for 2023 on October 1st



The Columbia County Cultural Coalition's 2023 grant season is beginning! Starting October 1st, grant applications will be accepted from nonprofits that promote culture, the arts, and heritage within Columbia County.

This year, the CCCC is focusing its funding on projects that will stimulate cultural tourism—that is, that attract people from outside the county to experience what makes our community distinctive.

Applications must be received before midnight on November 19, 2022. To apply, and for further information, visit our website: <https://columbiacultural.org/>

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