

## Manager Fred Toombs retires from CBEC

By Merlyn Robinson

After 20 years as manager of Columbia Basin Electric Co-op, Fred Toombs has retired. Jerry Healy, formerly the office manager, now holds that position. Fred and his wife, Nadine, can now catch a few extra winks as they will no longer be disturbed in the night by telephone calls about power outages.

Those outages can occur when severe storms raise havoc with the system. But in spite of the hardships those outages create, Fred says there have been some humorous moments. Often crews have to manually scrape ice from heavily laden lines. On one occasion, says Fred, an irate customer called to say that it would be more convenient if that type of work were accomplished in the summer.

Fred knows all about utility work-from the top of a very tall pole to a jumbled desk. Before beginning his "learn on the job" experience, he and Nadine both grew up in Wells, NE. After high school graduation, he enlisted in the Navy. Following basic training in California, he served four years as a construction engineer with the Seabees. During the construction of roads and airplane runways, he experienced a gamut of weather conditions, from the chilly days in New Foundland to the heat-searing tropical climate of the Bahama Islands.

Fred was discharged from the Navy in 1958 in Jacksonville, FL. He returned to his hometown, hoping that he wouldn't be recalled during the following two years. It was then that childhood acquaintances became lifetime mates. Fred and Nadine were married on Jan. 10, 1959. For a short time after, he worked for a Standard Oil Company distributor.

Without prior experience Fred was hired as a lineman for Wells Rural Electric. Wells was a small co-op that provided electricity for about 500 customers. More generators were built before this co-op opted to receive central station power from Idaho Power Company. At a time when all power pole holes were hand-dug, these crews worked long hours to build additional transmission lines. Fred recalls climbing 21 poles in one day to make updates. As a result, that weary pole climber collapsed on their floor upon arriving home.

Another painful experience occurred when Fred was climbing a very slick power pole. About 35' from the ground, his climbers failed to dig in and he slid feet-first to the ground. His scraped body was festooned with large splinters.

That job experience led to a position at Wendover, UT, in 1961. For five years, Fred wore two hats, as district manager and lineman for Wells Rural Electric Cooperative, which had purchased the Wendover system. Before becoming a full-time stay-at-home mom,



Fred Toombs

Nadine worked in that utility office. Because they had no two-way radios, she frequently had to track Fred down when he was needed elsewhere.

A career move took the Toombs back to Wells in August, 1969. Fred became the member services manager, a fancy title for promoting the use of electricity by selling appliances and providing customer hookup services as the use of electricity expanded. Fred says he kept rolls of Lifesavers in his pocket to give to children. By making friends with the youngsters, he thought he would have a better chance of introducing and educating potential customers about modern appliances.

In April, 1975, the Toombs moved to Sidney, NE. But, after a few months, he was hired as manager for Wheatland REA in Wheatland, WY. In 1978, Fred decided to interview for the CBEC manager position in Heppner. Nadine says she was not happy about moving again, but Fred told her that it was unlikely that he would be hired. But if he did get the position, he said they would probably only be in Heppner for two to three years. Like a dutiful husband, he told her that someday he would build her a new home.

"So much for promises," Nadine said. After so many moves, the Toombs now have a remodeled, modern home on South Court Street in Heppner. And despite many relocations, the Toombs have provided a nurturing environment for their four children who now have families of their own. Their children are Lourinda Beierle, of Pinedale, WY, the mother of Megan and Tarrin; Ronald Toombs, of Boardman, the father of Michael and Anthony; Patti Nairns, of Bend, whose sons are Nathan and Dane; Wendy Bodley of Boise, ID., the mother of Dean, Danika and twins Dennon and Dreanna.

Along with his roles as father and grandfather, Fred said his big-

gest challenge as CBEC manager has been upgrading the system to prevent long-term outages. Improvements to the system have reduced the average outage hours from 28 to around three hours per person annually. Increasing operational costs and imposed regulations continue to be a major concern. The Washington Public Power Supply (WPPS) plan for nuclear energy failed, however it was very costly for all co-ops that bought into the proposal.

"The plus side of managing CBEC has been the support of the board of directors and the dedication of the employees," Fred said. "People throughout the co-op territory care about one another." So like others, Fred participates in community service. He served as president of the Heppner Chamber of Commerce. As a board member of the Heppner Economic Development Corporation, he helped initiate the renovation of the old hotel building on Main Street into what is now the St. Patrick's Senior Center.

Fred said that when they first came to Heppner, he was dismayed to see power poles on Main Street. Last year's Main Street renovation resolved that problem by removal of those lines. Other community enhancements aided by CBEC under Fred's tenure was the installation of new field lights for the rodeo and football at the fairgrounds.

With retirement, the Toombs now have travel plans in mind. The use of a recreational vehicle will provide all the comforts of home, as Fred said his days of "roughing it" are long past. While at home, Fred said he dabbles in woodworking-their remodeled kitchen attests to his carpentry skills. A picturesque, landscaped yard at the Toombs is perhaps aided by the absence of pets. Fred says he developed a dislike of dogs because of experiences during his meter reading days.

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## Shermans retire after 30 years

It's a bittersweet farewell for Cal and Bev Sherman, long-time owners of Cal's Service Center in Heppner. The Shermans are retiring from the station after 30 years of operation.

Devin Oil began operation of the gas station as of Sept. 1.

Both the Shermans say that they will greatly miss the people who come by the station, people who have become good friends over the years. What they won't miss, however, are the long hours that operating a service station require. Many years of standing (or running as his hectic pace demands) on concrete floors taken a toll on Cal's health and knee surgery, unfortunately, is in his future.

Cal was born in Heppner, but his parents, Allen and Irene Sherman, then moved to Alaska, where his father was a commercial fisherman. Cal attended grade school in Alaska and then the family moved to Seattle, where he attended high school. After high school he returned to Heppner to work on his uncle Harold Evans' ranch. (The ranch is now farmed by Bob Mahoney.)

Returning to Heppner was a good move for Cal, because this is where he met his future bride. Cal jokingly said that she agreed to marry him because he had the "prettiest car in town."

Whatever it was, Bev and Cal were married on December 11, 1952, and have now been married for 45 years.

Bev had been born and raised in Heppner. Her parents were Esther and Ted Burnside.

The Shermans have three children, Ron, who lives in Portland, and Barb Watkins and Janice Huddleston, who both live in Heppner; and seven grandchildren, Jacob and Jenny Sherman, Jeff and Julie Watkins and Kyle, Mahaley and Jared Huddleston. Three generations of Shermans have worked at the station, Cal, Ron and grandson Jeff.

After Cal and Bev were married, he worked for Caterpillar for 15 years, first in Heppner at Empire Machinery, where the Bank of Eastern Oregon and Morrow County Title and Abstract are now located, and then at Stone Machinery in Ione, in the building next to the Grange Hall. Cal often filled in at the Chevron station in town on Sundays.

Bev stayed home to raise her family and helped out by babysitting six to eight children a day, taking in ironing and cleaning houses for people.



Cal and Bev Sherman

In February of 1968 the Shermans bought the service station, which has changed names several times over the years. It was first Cal's Richfield, then Cal's Arco and Cal's Mobile before they got tired of changing names and decided to name it Cal's Service Center when they went to Union Oil. The station is now with BP.

When they first started their mom and pop operation, Bev did the janitorial work and Cal pumped gas, changed the oil, fixed tires and did all kinds of major and minor auto repair.

"It was nothing for him to work 14-hour days," says Bev. "A lot of times seven days a week." In the early days the station was open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.

"Back in those days during hunting season there were four to five gas stations in town and on Thursdays and Fridays the customers were backed up onto the streets," said Cal. "Of course gas was only 30 cents a gallon back then."

In addition to the gas prices, Cal says that what has really changed is the number of businesses Heppner has lost over the years. "There used to

be three car dealerships in town and there was even a J.C. Penney," said Cal.

State and federal regulations have taken their toll on privately owned gas stations, added the Shermans, with the DEQ "creating a lot of problems for small operators" requiring that they put in underground tanks.

The Shermans say they have no special plans other than a trip to the coast for a couple weeks, going camping and spending more time with their grandchildren. But they definitely plan to stay in Heppner. "We've met a lot of special people and we've made so many friends," says Bev. "We're so lucky to live in Heppner."

"It's going to be an adjustment," she added. "We sure will miss the people. But we're sure that Devin Oil will take good care of our customers."

## Picture day

Picture day will be Wednesday, Sept. 9, at Heppner High School and Thursday, Sept. 10, at Heppner Elementary School.

## Vinson-Way reunion set

The Vinson-Way reunion will be held at the Lexington Grange Hall on Sunday, Sept. 6, with a potluck dinner beginning at 12:30 p.m.

Friends and family are invited for visiting and fellowship.

## G-T closed Sept. 7 for Labor Day

The Gazette-Times will be closed on Monday, Sept. 7 for Labor Day. The deadline for news articles is Friday, Sept. 4 at 5 p.m. Deadline for all advertising and public notices is Tuesday, Sept. 8 at noon.

## School starts in Morrow County



School only started Monday in Morrow County, but it may be already getting old for some Heppner students. "It's boring," said Stacy Delvaux (right), 13, an eighth grader at Heppner Junior High School. "It's good, but slow," added Larena Penturf, also a 13 year old eighth grader at HJH. The two were waiting for their bus after classes Monday.

**Morrow County Grain Growers will be CLOSED**  
**Monday, September 7th for Labor Day.**  
**Have a Great Holiday!**

**MORROW COUNTY GRAIN GROWERS**

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