

Power of the People

By W. Marc Farmer,
General Manager
West Oregon Electric Cooperative



Once upon a time, West Oregon Electric Cooperative had the lowest rates in the state. While that is a nice story and a true story, it is certainly not the whole story, so now you will hear...the rest of the story.

The low rates came at the expense of the electrical system. Tree trimming and system maintenance were not being done in order to keep the rates low. On the outside the low price was very nice for the members, but on the inside it was disastrous to the system. Outages increased dramatically as trees grew into lines or fell into lines and poles. Equipment, poles, and lines were not being properly maintained or replaced, and were deteriorating rapidly. When the problems were finally addressed, the cost to get the tree trimming caught up, equipment, poles, and lines replaced or repaired was at current rates, which were much higher than they would have been if taken care of along the way. The magnitude of the work that needed to be done and the cost involved were so great that large loans had to be taken out to pay for it all. A significant portion of the power bill today services the debts on those loans. It is safe to say the ratepayers today are paying for the work that should have been done yesterday. Rates should have been incrementally increased in those days to adequately maintain and upgrade the system and trim trees, rather than a large rate increase later. Despite the

higher rates today, we do benefit with a better system, less outages, and better equipment to do the job.

When you consider the fact that we serve a million trees with 4,200 meters sprinkled through them and spread over four counties, you can understand that it is not an inexpensive, easy, or convenient system to work with. Our costs to keep trees trimmed and maintain the system are higher here than if we were a condensed system like Forest Grove. That is the reality we face in servicing a territory that nobody else wanted to serve because the costs were too much for so few accounts. We are proud to serve our members and are making sure we do not repeat, but learn from the mistakes of the past. We have a contracted tree trimming crew to maintain our lines and our Operations staff and Line Crews keep our system maintained and running. There is a fine balance between keeping rates stable, and keeping up with increasing power and system costs, system requirements, staffing needs. The board and staff review very carefully that balance during our budget process and as we meet each month. If there is a need to raise rates, it will be done for the betterment of the system and maintaining a high level of service for our members. I don't anticipate any increase for 2006 and won't know what 2007 will look like until we see what is going to happen with our wholesale power costs in October and what our system needs are during our budget process.

Next week, I will pose the question and provide the answer for the question of our rates, whether they are too high and what value you receive for the cost. I think you will be very surprised at the answer.

2006 Jamboree includes Royalty Court



The Vernonia Friendship Jamboree Royalty Court is made up of, left to right; Sahrina Smith, Jolene Botchie, Bekah Pearson, Samantha Lee, and Alanna Ogden.

The Vernonia Friendship Jamboree Committee has announced the Vernonia Friendship Jamboree Royalty Court. The princesses (all from Vernonia High School) are Sahrina Smith, Jolene Botchie, Samantha Lee, Alanna Ogden and Bekah Pearson. They will be

representing Vernonia at a number of events this summer.

The princesses have already handed out ribbons at the Columbia County Horse Show on June 3, and helped with the Senior Dessert on June 7. On June 17, they will be in a parade in St. Helens

and then will be helping at the Catching with KUPL Fishing Derby at Vernonia Lake.

Sponsors who have provided financial support to make the Royalty Court possible include Holce Logging Co., Black Bear Coffee, Vernonia Hardware & Supply, R & R Motor Co., Mike Pihl Logging, Shaw Logging, Vernonia Family Dental, Sentry Market, Betsy Miller, Vernonia Realty, Breaktime and Creatures, Vernonia Inn, and Linda and Charlie Miller.

Princesses or Queens from previous courts are asked to contact Heidi Fergason, at 503-429-5890, to provide information about past courts.

The Royalty Court will hold a fundraiser, "Parents Night Out," on June 24, from 6:30 to 11:30 p.m. with babysitting at Vernonia Head Start for \$15.00 per child. Snacks and entertainment will be provided. To register your child, contact Heidi Fergason at 503-429-5890.

Celia Gendron will spell at State Fair

Twenty-eight Columbia County students participated in the 30th annual spelling contest for the State of Oregon on May 17 in Clatskanie, and three of them – including one Vernonia student – will compete again in Salem. All those students who participated in the competition are to be commended for their spelling expertise and good sportsmanship.

The following First Place winners will represent Columbia County at the Oregon State

Competition on September 2, at the Oregon State Fair in Salem:

Division I (Grades K-5), Hunter Button from Otto Petersen Elementary in Scappoose;

Division II (Grades 6-8), Sam Lawrence of St. Helens Middle School in Columbia City;

Division III (Grades 9-12), Celia Gendron of Vernonia High School.

Following are the second and third place winners:

Division I, 2nd – Sara McMahon of Vernonia, 3rd – Hannah Peterson of St. Helens;

Division II, 2nd – Nichole Sherman of Rainier, 3rd – Tim Brown of Vernonia;

Division III, 2nd – Yolande Gendron of Vernonia, 3rd – Matt Normile of St. Helens.

The Oregon Department of Education and the Oregon Association of Education Service Districts annually sponsor the spelling contest.

Babysitter training offered in Vernonia

The American Red Cross Oregon Trail Chapter and the Vernonia Community PTA are sponsoring two Babysitter Training classes on Saturday, July 1, and Tuesday, July 25. Both classes will start at 9:00 a.m. and end at 3:45 p.m. They will be held at the Vernonia Fire Station, 555 E. Bridge St., Vernonia.

The Babysitters Training

course is designed to teach 11- to 15-year-olds everything they need to know to be a babysitter. The course includes leadership skills, good business practices, basic infant and child care, and responding to first aid emergencies. As a Red Cross trained babysitter, youth gain confidence and valuable employment skills.

Students must be at least 11

years-old in order to be eligible to receive a course completion card. The cost of this class is \$35 per student. Scholarships are available to students who qualify for free or reduced lunch.

To register, contact Lisa Brewer at 503-429-4250 or Robin Dennis at 503-429-8041.

**Now Serving Breakfast
Sundays too!**

6 a.m. till 11a.m

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**Happy Father's Day,
June 18**