

Power of the People

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And the Rains Came and the Winds Blew

Like many of you, I have been a little busy since the storm hit on December 3 and haven't had time to submit my articles. I'll bring you current from the Co-op's perspective in this article.

On December 3, we had flood waters breach our office and we had to evacuate staff by boat and in the back of trucks. From the time we knew water was going to come into the building, we had an hour-and-a-half to get all of the computers and as much important files, equipment, and materials as possible up into the attic. From the time the water first came in the doors and wall, until one hour later, when we locked the doors and left, it was already knee deep in the office. In the end, the water was 7.5 inches higher than in 1996. Needless to say, it was devastating to the office building and even had 9 inches of water up in Operations. Flood waters and downed trees even trapped Line Crew at the Mist and Necanicum Substations. We lost power in Vernonia about 3:30 p.m. in the afternoon when the flood waters reached the Reclosers, shorting out the Vernonia Substation located between the Co-op office and Anderson Park. We had to wait until the water subsided enough to get into the substation to bypass the reclosers and restore power by 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday.

The west side of our system suffered massive damage, as the 130 mph winds from the coast blew down miles of distribution lines. Trees and tree limbs took out service throughout the Olney and Necanicum areas. We brought in seven outside crews to assist our own crews and together they worked continuously through the week to put lines and poles back up. West Oregon actually got our lines up and ready before the utility that provides the power to Necanicum and Olney could get theirs done. We had to wait for them to rebuild their lines to us in order for them to be able to provide power back to our substation and metering point. It was a great example of the effort and hard work of our Line Crews and the quality of outside crews that were working with us. Necanicum was restored late Friday and Olney by 5:00 p.m. on Saturday. We have experienced continuing outages from the heavy, wet snow that has sent broken trees and limbs into our lines. We also had an automobile take out one of our poles during this period. We have had to work a lot of overtime to keep the system up and going.

Just as I have been so impressed by the hard work of our Line Crews, I have been equally impressed by our Office Staff and Management Team. The Office Staff was out the day after and through the week in rain gear, masks, and rubber boots mucking out the office building, boxing up things that survived, power washing metal cabinets, and hauling out ruined materials and equipment. They worked hard and long to get things ready for the cleaning crew and for the move into a mobile portable unit. They did an excellent job of pulling it all

together to be ready to open the doors for business and to assist our members by the following Monday. We will remain in the mobile unit until our office building is restored. Operations should be able to move back in by the second week in January, but I don't anticipate the rest moving back until at least February.

Now, for the two questions I have been asked repeatedly since the flood: what about the high bills from drying out homes and is the Co-op going to stay where we are?

At this point, we are working with several agencies to obtain funds for energy assistance for those who have large bills from using heaters to dry out their homes before rebuilding. The Board has asked staff to review how many and how much the impact is on our members. When we know the extent of the increase, we can then identify which option for assistance will best fit our members' needs. We are and will be assisting our members to access rate relief. For those who have flood insurance, the increased amount in your electric bill can be claimed. Just come in and ask us to print out a historical average of your bill for the month of December and January and match that with your current bills. The difference can be submitted for insurance purposes. For those without insurance, we will be working with energy assistance to help cover the increased costs. Being part of a Cooperative means that we are concerned about the needs of our members, not the needs of shareholders. We will work diligently to meet your needs.

Where does the Co-op go from here? The Board has given me the authority to identify a new location, funding for a new office, and hire an architect to design and build a new office and warehouse in Vernonia. What is the main objective in identifying a new location? Getting us on higher ground so that in a crisis situation we can focus on keeping the power on and providing continuous serviced to our members, not on our own survival. We want to make sure that the office is in a location that will never be flooded again or the access roads to our building. An architect has been hired and possible locations are being reviewed.

The same is true of our Vernonia Substation. This event validated our decision in 2007 to include in our construction work plan to build a new substation out of the

flood plain. Had this been done before, we would not have lost power to Vernonia during this flood. As

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