Comanche ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE
Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative
P.O. BOX 729 • COMANCHE, TEXAS 76442 • (325) 356-2533

Survey Says ...

MESSAGE FROM GENERAL MANAGER RONNIE ROBINSON

Every few years, your cooperative conducts a survey of its member-owners. This survey is very beneficial to the future planning process and an indication of the job that is being done for our owners. Of those queried, 3,431 member-owners responded to the survey, which gives us a confidence factor of 95 percent in its results. Below we have highlighted some of the results:

Overall Customer Service

Excellent: 81.5 percent
Average: 18 percent
Poor: .5 percent

Reliability of Service

Excellent: 76 percent
Average: 23 percent
Poor: 1 percent

Which category does Comanche Electric Cooperative excel in?

Service and Reliability: 60 percent
Communication: 19 percent
Price: 17 percent
No Response: 4 percent

What do we need to improve on?

Nothing: 47 percent
Price: 37 percent
Service and Reliability: 10 percent
Communication: 6 percent

Member Demographics

Of those polled:

61 percent do not know how their rate compares with other electric utilities.

39 percent are retired; 25 percent are professional-technical-sales; 15 percent are involved in agriculture.

58 percent are 60 or older; 22 percent are from ages 50-59; 12 percent are from 40-49.

39 percent have been members more than 20 years; 25 percent have been members less than 5 years.

87 percent would read a quarterly newsletter.

Texas Co-op Power magazine is the preferred method of correspondence.

65 percent have home computers; 7 percent have visited our website.

Comanche Electric Cooperative Comparison

88.5 percent are satisfied with the cooperative; 83.9 percent rate it as "Exceeding Expectations"; 82.6 percent rating for "Ideal Electric Utility"; 82.1 percent rating for "Choice of Electric Providers"; and an 85 percent "Overall Customer Rating."

Overall Customer Rating for Utilities

Here is how the overall consumer rating of 85 percent for Comanche compares with other averages:

Average Touchstone Cooperatives: 81 percent.

All electric utilities, national average: 73 percent.

AEP: 75 percent.

TXU: 65 percent.

The board of directors and employees would like to thank you for the very high marks. This survey indicates that although we have been very successful in providing dependable power at affordable prices, we will have to continue the spirit of cooperation in the future to meet your expectations and our goals. Your board of directors and employees will use this survey's results in our upcoming improvement plans and membership communication. Thanks to all of you who took the time to participate in the survey.

DON'T DISCOVER ELECTRICITY WITH YOUR KITE

Flying kites is one of the few spring pastimes that has survived in the video-game era and can still captivate children. But when electric lines and telephone poles dot the skyline, kids need to take special care when flying their kites.

Parents should supervise kite-flying children. Fly kites only in a clear, open and level field, well away from any overhead power lines. If a kite gets caught in a utility line, don't try to untangle it. Instead, call your electric cooperative to report the tangled kite, and leave it to the experts to get it away from the power line.

For safe kite flying, follow these rules:

- Remember Ben Franklin? He discovered that lightning was made of electricity when his kite was struck during a storm. He wasn't hurt; you might be. Never fly a kite in stormy weather, as wet kites and string can conduct electricity.
- Use a strong, dry cord for string, and do not buy or make kites using metal or wire parts or cotton-wrapped wire string. Metal parts will conduct electricity if they touch an electrical wire.
- Keep your eyes on the ground when running with a kite to avoid tripping over rocks and holes.
- Choose an area away from highways or streets when flying.
- Do not fly kites on rooftops.

Thanks for Your Understanding and Kindness During Ice Storm

Here in Central Texas, we don't often have the ice and snow that the northern part of our great state experiences. So, when it does come, we as individuals are not always prepared for it. When the ice and snow of January 2007 hit, many residents were stranded at home, not willing to venture out on the slick roads, or to face that cold winter wind.

But not so with Comanche Electric Cooperative. Here at your cooperative, we have an Emergency Response Plan (ERP) to cover any emergency and get your power back up and running as soon as possible. And that is exactly what we did in January during the ice and snow.

Yes, we did have power interruptions. It seems that the area from Zephyr to Gorman was the hardest hit. But our crews worked around the clock—day and night—through snow, sleet and ice storms to get that power restored as quickly as possible.

The board of directors, management and employees would like to take this opportunity to say, "Thank You" for all your patience and understanding as our crews worked through the night and battled the elements to restore your power. It is your patience, understanding and your words of encouragement that make all our efforts worthwhile.

Ice covered everything in sight, leaving even the rain gauges sheathed.

The ice storms affected a wide swath of country, coating power lines in Kansas (above) as well as in Texas.

When the Lights Came On

BY SHIRLEY DUKES

Without a doubt, one of my favorite parts of my job is listening to our members tell their stories and recording their memories for today and future generations. Last week was certainly no exception, as I sat in the living room of Eldon Ray and Melba Tupin. Eldon Ray and Melba both remember, as children, the day that electricity came to their respective homes.

Melba had written down what they remembered of the days when they received electricity, but as often happens, once we began talking, the old stories began to flow. She has a very vivid memory of the history of her family, and it made such a fascinating story that I said, "Melba, this all needs to go in your story. Can we add it?"

I started taking notes, but Melba said it would just be so much easier if I could give her the weekend, so she could write it all down for me. She was true to her word, and below is her story and the history of a pioneer family, and how they came to live in Comanche County, Texas, and have that fascinating thing we call "electricity" delivered to their homes.

Pioneers to Electricity

BY MELBA RUTH THOMAS TUPIN

Eldon Ray Tupin and Melba Ruth Thomas Tupin are members of two pioneer families that lived in the southern part of Comanche County.

My grandfather Robert Johnson Thomas homesteaded the land where I grew up. My father, Calvin A. Thomas, and his three brothers inherited the 128 acres. They "batched" there for a number of years before my dad and Uncle Lindsey Thomas bought the other two out. Later, in 1912, Calvin had enough money, $1,200, to buy out Lindsey. I suppose the single life got old, because he married Miss Noliah Boone, a pretty little schoolteacher who was teaching at Mercer's Creek school. The year was 1914.

My parents added to the original land and farmed and ranched in the Harmony Community until the 1950s. My sister, Elizabeth, was born in 1918, and I came along in 1930. I was raised on stories of my mom and dad cutting stove and fireplace wood to haul to Comanche in a wagon to sell for cash to make the land payments. Thanksgiving and Christmas, we carried turkeys to town to sell, along with eggs and cream. The once a week trip to town was a real treat because there were wonderful things there that were very different from the country.

My mother asked my dad why the house was built on such a rocky hillside. His reply was that it was the only spot on the place where you could not grow cotton and there was no use in wasting good land for a house and yard. Cotton was king. He also raised cattle, sheep, mules and horses. Barns were much more valuable than houses, according to my dad, as houses made you no money. Then an early cold spell with several days of heavy rain. My mother had been wanting a new roof on the house because it had been leaking when it rained. After trying to find a place to sit by the wood-burning cook stove where it did not leak on him while he read his *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, Dad went to town and bought shingles for the house.

Electricity came to our ranch in the summer of 1941. The line came to us from the east, coming approximately down what is now Highway 229. Then, it was a dirt road that passed the Claytons, Roberts, Lukers, T.J. Williams Ranch, Delmar McDaniels, Earl Albin and Clarence Albin, where it was going to stop because it was too far a jump to the John Henry McKinzie and Calvin Thomas ranches. This brings us to a man named Tom Holmsley who was a banker in town. He did not live on his ranch but was the best of neighbors. He had a meter set at his ranch so the distance would be within limits for the line to come on to the McKinzie and Thomas homes.

My Uncle Carl Thomas wired our house for electricity. He had worked in Fort Worth and had learned many fancy new technical things. Of course, the wiring must not have been hard, as it consisted of a single, twisted yellow wire in the center of each room that ended in a light bulb. But what a change it brought. It even changed the seating arrangement in our living room. Around the old kerosene lamp, my dad sat on one side of the lamp to read his *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* and my mother sat on the other to do hand sewing or reading. My sister and I sat near as possible to read. On long winter nights, we could light another lamp and sit at the dining table to do homework. That single bulb in the room let us spread out over the entire room. I never remember my dad telling me to turn off a light if I was reading. He was a well-read man for those days and really valued reading.

The first purchase was a Philco refrigerator to celebrate the coming of electricity. I still remember that it was

Before electric lines reached their farm, Eldon Ray and his parents, Roy and Jewell, used a radio powered by a wind generator.

Eldon's brother, Kennard, sits with his dog in front of the old home place.

bought from Ray Rankin from Gorman. He must have been following the building of the electric lines because he sold a lot of refrigerators to our neighbors, and I know that we would never have driven that far to shop for one. It was a beauty. The freezing compartment was large enough to hold four aluminum ice trays. My mother and my Aunt Vera Thomas had all the ice for their tea that they wanted. I remember how good the cold milk was and what a treat it was when my mother mixed pure cream, sugar, vanilla and milk to freeze in the ice trays to make ice cream. Living 13 miles from Comanche, we did not get ice cream very often before that.

Our next purchase was a Truetone radio from Earl Ray Evans' Western Auto store in Comanche. A bonus for buying it was a set of dishes. I had the radio, which was in a wooden case about 24 inches long by 14 inches high, until someone stole it from our ranch house a few years ago. It still played, and I would rather they took something else as it was a sentimental treasure to me. The radio augmented my dad's reading, and he followed World War II on it every day.

I was much more interested in "Jack Armstrong," "Inner Sanctum," "Fibber McGee and Molly" and many others. I remember my mother listening to Stella Dallas and other forerunners of the soap operas.

Soon, my mother had an electric iron and a sewing machine as she sewed and made all our clothes. I don't know why the wringer type washing machine came so much later.

My mother was afraid of being shocked, but she soon tried out the new electric brooder. That new invention put the setting hens out of work on our farm. She did not have to set a dozen or so hens to hatch the chicks for those wonderful-tasting spring fryers. She could buy a large box of chicks from the feed store in Comanche, put them under the warm brooder and all she had to do was carry feed and water to them in the chicken house.

One day as we were cleaning up and getting ready for a new batch of chicks, she went to plug in the brooder and a wasp stung her on the hand. I was watching and saw it, but I could not convince her that it was a wasp and she had not been shocked by electricity. She would not go back in there until Dad came home from the field to check it out.

When the big steel-towered transmission line crossed our ranch in 2002, being retired, we watched a lot of the construction. Many of the main crew was from Mississippi. When the workers would take a break, and we were near, they would talk to us. In discussing the inconvenience of people not wanting the line to cross them, I said that I remembered when we did not have electricity at all and therefore I could not block progress and deprive someone from having all the power they needed. One of the young men looked at me and asked, "How old are you?" One of the others told him that was rude and told me not to answer him. I laughed and said I did not mind. He was amazed that there were people living who remembered a time before electricity. Then they all began asking questions about what we did without electricity.

I readily remembered what fun it was to hunt squirrels on the South Leon Creek with my dad when it was too wet to work in the fields. We had time in those days to visit with the neighbors, go to Sunday meeting and church socials and appreciate the things around us. I learned the names of birds, plants, clouds and what to expect from the weather by watching those clouds and directions of the wind.

Eldon's parents were Roy and Jewell McKinzie Tupin of the Mercers Gap community, which is on Highway 590 about 7½ miles south of Comanche. The land we now own was part of a purchase from the State of Texas and settled in 1853 when the McKinzie families came to Comanche County. Eldon is the only McKinzie relation who owns any of the large tracts of land covered by Texas Land Patent #175 Volume 1 signed by O.M. Roberts, Governor. Purchase price was $2.50 per acre. James E. McKinzie, great-great grandfather of Eldon, and his brother Kenneth McKinzie registered the first two cattle brands in Comanche on June 2, 1856, the day the county

Continued on page 26

Melba Tupin sits on the porch of the old home place.

Continued from page 25

clerk's office was opened. The JK cattle brand is still active and is now registered in the name of Eldon Ray Tupin. One historical article states that Kin McKinzie was the first white man known to have been killed by the Indians in the county. Later, another McKinzie was killed while gathering bark for dye for his wife and another who was a sheriff was crippled for life.

Coming from a pioneering family was probably a good thing because the modern convenience of electricity was a long time reaching the Tupin household. Roy Tupin and Jewell McKinzie were married July 4, 1925. Eldon was born in 1930 and brother Kennard in 1934. The present home place was purchased from Higginbotham Bros. & Co. in 1937 because it had been forfeited in the Depression. Fun for two young boys was possum hunting, swimming in the stock tanks with friends, Sunday afternoon baseball games and hitching a ride when some farmer used his wagon and team to haul something to town.

Although Eldon's parents had a wind-charger in the early 1940s that ran a radio and one light bulb, they looked forward to the electricity that some people in the community had. They were just beyond the mile limit, and WWII came along to prevent further expansion.

Eldon graduated from Comanche High School in May 1948 and entered the army in November the same year. He recalls that when he was stationed in Fort Bliss in El Paso, his mother wrote him that they had electricity. He went to the PX and bought her a GE steam iron and mailed it to her for her birthday. He still has the iron, and it still works. It weighs more than several of today's irons, but it was a wonderful improvement over the smoothing irons that were heated on a wood stove or on the hearth. The wind-charger went down for an electric radio, and an electric refrigerator replaced the stinky kerosene one.

Melba's father, Calvin A. Thomas, sits on his front porch.

Eldon and I wonder whether the generations that come after us fully appreciate what the Rural Electrification Act did for the farmer/rancher. My dad, who was a staunch Democrat, thought that anything Mr. Sam Rayburn sponsored had to be good for the country.

IN LIKE A LION, OUT LIKE A LAMB

March is marching right on in, and if it shapes up to be a typical March, it will live up to the old saying that it "comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb." But where did this idea come from?

I always thought it was because March starts out so windy and dies down before the end of the month. But according to the Weather Guys at *USA Today*, that's not exactly right. They say it is because the average temperature at the end of the month is higher than at the beginning, giving the saying some meteorological truth to it. The phrase originally had its origins with the constellations Leo, the Lion, and Aries, the ram or lamb. It has to do with the relative positions of these constellations in the sky at the beginning and end of the month. Hmmm ... interesting.

The first day of spring is March 21, the day the vernal equinox occurs. This is when the sun sits directly above the equator on its apparent trip northward. As Earth revolves around the sun, the top half, called the Northern Hemisphere, becomes tilted more toward the sun as winter turns to spring. Meanwhile the bottom half, the Southern Hemisphere, becomes tilted more away from the sun. The beginning of spring for us is the beginning of autumn for people in Australia and the southern parts of Africa and South America.

March 17 is St Patrick's Day. St Patrick was born Maewyn Succat, and his birthplace was not actually Ireland, but Scotland or Roman England. He was the son of Calpurnius, a Roman-British army officer, growing up in Britain. As a young boy, he was kidnapped by a band of pirates in south Wales and sold into slavery in Ireland. He was imprisoned for six years, and legend has it that he was then directed by God to escape with a getaway ship.

He did escape to Britain, then France, where he joined a monastery and spent 12 years in training. He eventually traveled back to Ireland, where he was quite successful at winning converts to Christianity. By the end of the 17th century he had become a legendary figure, and the legends have continued to grow since then. Many of the Irish legends originated not in Ireland, but here, in the United States. The history of St. Patrick is very interesting and worth reading up on. There are many Internet sites devoted to the saint and to the holiday, so start your search engine and read all about it.

And last, but not least, let's not forget about daylight-saving time. March 11 is the day that we set our clocks to "Spring Forward." Don't forget!

Landscaping for Efficiency

BY SHIRLEY DUKES

This month, *Texas Co-op Power* focuses on gardening and wildlife. I can't think of a more appropriate time to start thinking about landscaping for energy efficiency. When we receive our electric bill every month, we very rarely think "Hmmm ... what can I do in my yard to lower my electric bill?" But our landscaping can and does play a very important part in how much energy we use to heat and cool our homes. So this month, as we look at our electric bill, let's also take a look at what's going on in our yard and garden.

"Energy Conservation Landscapes" can provide a variety of benefits. First, they can be extremely pleasing to the eye. We all love to be treated to a little "eye candy," and when that pleasant site is our own yard, it's just a little added bonus to our ego. But our landscapes can go much further than that.

Solar heat absorbed through windows and roofs can increase air conditioner use. By incorporating shading concepts into your landscape design, it is possible to achieve as much as a 30 percent energy cost reduction during the summer and winter. If planned properly, landscaping can be a water conservation tool as well as helping protect the exterior of our home from the elements and reducing the upkeep required to keep our home in good condition. It also can help control noise and air pollution, and in this day and time, we can all use a little less of those types of pollution!

The most important factor in landscaping is the shading. A 6- to 8-foot deciduous tree planted near your home will begin shading your windows the first year and should shade the roof within 5 to 10 years. This can reduce the amount of direct sun that strikes and heats up the outside surfaces of your home. It can also reduce air leakage into the house by reducing the wind velocity. The most effective strategy when it comes to shading is to place trees on the west and northwest sides of the home to protect it from the beating rays of a setting summer sun. Another strategy is to use deciduous trees to the south so that when they drop their leaves in the winter, sunlight can reach the house to help heat the home. Plant evergreen trees on the north to slow cold winter winds.

Shrubs and vines can also be good cooling tools. Shrubs can be used to shade outside heating and cooling equipment to help improve their performance. Just be sure that they are no closer than 3 feet to the compressor to provide good airflow and access. Vines can also be used to provide shading on walls and windows. Some vines, however, can be harmful to wood surfaces, so be sure to know what you are planting. It is usually best to use trellises placed close to the walls, but not touching the walls. Evergreen vines are usually the best choice since they will shade walls in the summer and reduce the effects of cold winds in the winter.

And for those nighttime visitors or family members who don't make it home till after the sun sets, such as our teenage children or farm and ranch families, try adding some solar lights instead of electric to your landscaping. They give out a fair amount of light and add beauty to any garden. Here in Central Texas where we have sun in abundance, it's one good way of tapping into that natural resource.

So there you have it, a good excuse to get outside this spring and enjoy nature, get your hands (and knees) dirty, and not only reduce the size of your electric bill but also enhance the beauty and durability of your home as well. And while you are at it, why not plant a few heart-healthy vegetables in your garden. That way, you can lower your electric bill and your grocery bill all at once.

Have a beautiful spring, and happy planting!

SPRING INTO SAFE OUTDOOR WORK

It's spring, when lawns awaken and homeowners emerge with power tools in hand for yearly repairs and yard work.

Work safely. Use this season to examine your home for electrical safety mishaps-in-the-making, and take care with electrical equipment outdoors. A few tips for a safe spring:

- Before you dig a hole—even a small one—call 1-800-DIG-TESS to learn whether your landscaping will interfere with underground utilities.
- Any contact with a power line can be fatal, so if you need work done near a power line, like trimming trees or installing a satellite dish, call a professional contractor to do the job.
- Inspect all power tools for damaged cords, plugs or cases.
- Store tools in a dry location. If you suspect that your tools have gotten wet over the winter, do not plug them in until they have dried completely and are inspected for damage by a professional.
- Do not use electric lawnmowers on wet grass.
- Use extension cords rated for outdoor use when working with electrical tools outdoors.
- Inside your home, inspect for overloaded outlets and damaged cords.
- If your home isn't meeting your electrical demands, have an electrician install new outlets and ground-fault circuit interrupters.