



### More Power to You

# Co-ops Help Build a Better World

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Chief Executive Officer

**H**ow can we build a better world? History tells us that when we band together, we can do almost anything. Together, we can make the world better, whether we're talking about the world in a global sense or focusing more narrowly on our own little piece of the planet.

In October, U.S. cooperatives traditionally celebrate National Cooperative Month. The recognition has grown this year as we kick off a yearlong celebration marking 2012 as the International Year of Cooperatives.

The theme, "Cooperative Enterprises Build a Better World," resonates loud and clear in our turbulent economy. The year offers a chance for us to showcase our legacy of innovation and achievement and reminds us of what's important in business—putting people first.

When area farmers founded Rock County Electric Cooperative Association 75 years ago, they put people first. They realized that electricity was a necessity for progressive farming and asked the local investor-owned utility to provide them with the same conveniences that city residents had enjoyed for years. But they were told it wouldn't be profitable to construct power lines in rural areas where there might be just one farm on a mile or more of line.

Rather than wait for the power company to see the light, so to speak, they banded together to accomplish what individuals alone couldn't do. They founded the co-op, signed up members, borrowed money, hired employees, put poles in the ground, and strung wire. They did all these things not to make money or to gain prestige, but to provide their rural friends and neighbors with the promise of a better life by putting people first.

This community-driven business model has thrived through the years and doesn't stop at your light switch.

There are 29,200 co-ops across the United States taking many forms—from farmers banding together to get a fair price on supplies to credit unions delivering low fees and reasonable interest rates on loans. Our business model works for dairy farmers and small business owners, financial institutions, grocery stores, insurance, housing, and child care.

One out of every four Americans is a co-op member, and there are more than 1 billion members around the world. Co-ops fill a community need, giving a voice to folks that profit-driven businesses often overlook. Co-ops also share a common set of principles and values, including self-help and democracy.



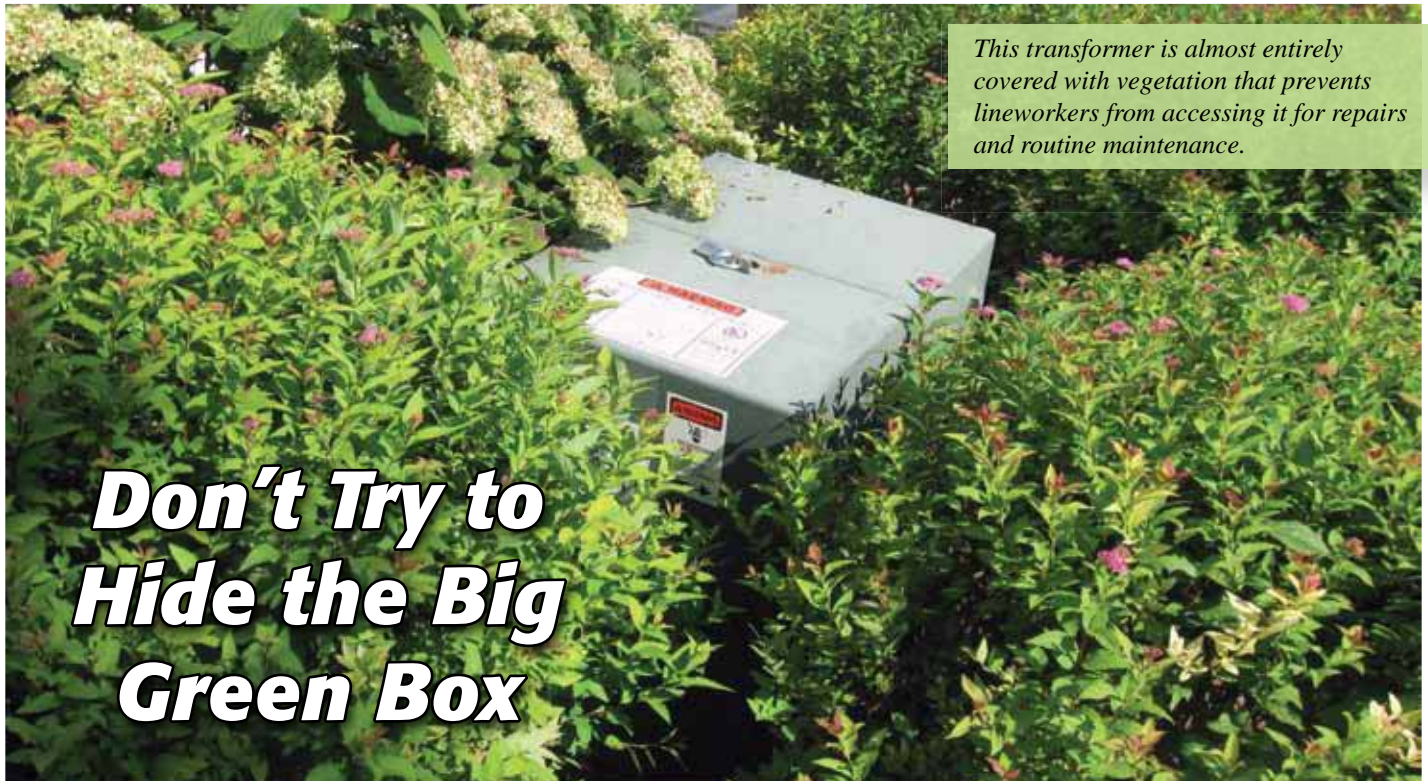
Electric cooperatives may serve only 12 percent of Americans, but our lines cover 75 percent of this great nation. By banding together, we deliver power to 42 million rural Americans in 47 states—and we're not finished. Through international programs, co-op workers are volunteering overseas to deliver electricity to 2 billion

people living without power. Over the last 50 years, these efforts have provided light and hope to 100 million people in more than 40 countries. Globally speaking, that's how electric cooperatives build a better world.

During International Year of Cooperatives, it's important to remember that the quality of life in rural America greatly improved after electricity came to the countryside. This improved quality of life kept young people from leaving rural areas to seek better opportunities in cities.

Because we still want our children to succeed, we support youth programs. This summer, we sent three high school students to our nation's capital and another student to a state conference to learn about leadership and teamwork. We also provided scholarships to 10 local students who started college this fall. These annual programs pro-

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*This transformer is almost entirely covered with vegetation that prevents lineworkers from accessing it for repairs and routine maintenance.*

## ***Don't Try to Hide the Big Green Box***

**T**hey're big. They're green. They sit on concrete pads. Some folks don't like these "electrical boxes," a common nickname for pad-mount transformers, and try to hide them with bushes, flower beds, or fences.

But stay clear. Even small additions around pad-mount transformers pose safety hazards and electrical reliability problems.

Underground power lines often are installed around newer houses to improve aesthetics. While this eliminates utility poles and overhead wires, it requires installing pad-mount transformers to safely change high-voltage electricity to a lower voltage necessary to supply power to homes.

Pad-mount transformers can provide electrical service to a single home or up to eight houses. Don't confuse them with junction boxes, a smaller enclosure where electrical wires are safely joined together.

Some homeowners, concerned

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## **Transformer Safety Tips**

- ⊗ **Never** let anything grow closer than 10 feet from the front of a pad-mount transformer. The front is marked with a warning sticker.
- ☑ **Always** call 811 to locate underground wires before digging around transformers or anywhere.
- ⊗ **Never** enclose a pad-mount transformer with fencing, shrubs, or anything else.
- ☑ **Always** allow a 10-foot-wide gate or opening if fencing your yard so co-op equipment can get to the transformer.
- ⊗ **Never** allow children to play near pad-mount transformers.
- ☑ **Always** explain to children that transformers in their yards are not meant for playing, climbing, or touching.
- ⊗ **Never** pour waste oils, chemicals, or other liquids on or near a pad-mount transformer. These liquids can seep into the ground and damage underground cables.
- ☑ **Always** keep in mind how tall plants will become when fully grown.

When the homeowner planted this evergreen, it probably was less than a foot tall. Remember to consider the size of plants when they are fully grown.



## Director Nominations Open

The Rock Energy Cooperative Nominating Committee will be selecting candidates to run for board of director positions that will be up for election at the March 26, 2012, annual meeting.

Districts up for election are:

- District 1:** Albion, Dunkirk, Fulton, and Porter townships in Wisconsin.
- District 3:** Bradford, Darien, and Johnstown townships in Wisconsin.
- District 5:** Clinton, Sharon, and Turtle townships in Wisconsin; Alden, Chemung, Hebron, LeRoy, Manchester, and Roscoe townships in Illinois.

Active members who are interested in running for a position on the REC Board of Directors must permanently reside in one of the areas up for election and meet all other qualifications. Please contact REC headquarters at (608) 752-4550 or (866) 752-4550 or send an e-mail to [questions@rock.coop](mailto:questions@rock.coop) by Dec. 1.

## Transformer Safety

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about curb appeal, attempt to hide the transformers—creating an unsafe situation for all concerned, including Rock Energy Cooperative lineworkers.

“We realize landscaping represents an investment of time and money,” said Rod Magnuson, south operations manager. “We respect the effort and care our members invest in making their properties attractive. However, landscaping around electrical equipment interferes with our ability to deliver reliable power.”

Rock Energy requires at least 10 feet of clearance in front of pad-mount transformers and recommends about 3 feet on the other three sides. Members can easily identify the front of the unit by looking for the warning label.

Transformers are inspected every five years or whenever a problem arises, Magnuson said. Lineworkers repair units while they are energized so homeowners don’t experience an interruption in service. To ensure safety, they use an 8-foot fiberglass hot stick that requires about 10 feet of space in front of the access panel.

When lineworkers can’t access a pad-mount transformer for routine inspection, they will leave a note advising that the vegetation needs to be trimmed or removed, Magnuson said. However, if lineworkers are responding to power outages that require immediate access, they will do the work themselves. That can slow down power restoration.

“We appreciate members’ cooperation in keeping the transformers in their yards unobstructed,” Magnuson said. “This helps us in our mission to provide safe and reliable electricity.”

## Get Connected

Check out these great deals offered with your Co-op Connections Card



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**10% Off All New Fire Extinguishers**

For a complete listing of current deals, visit [www.rock.coop](http://www.rock.coop). Terms and conditions subject to change as desired by participating businesses. You also can use your Co-op Connections Card to receive a discount on prescription drugs. In August, Rock Energy members saved \$1,452 on their prescriptions, a 47 percent discount.

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duce budding leaders who will work in the future to build a better world.

We also want to celebrate our legacy of innovation. The innovative practices of co-ops provide consumer-focused solutions that can adapt quickly to change. Unlike competitive, profit-driven businesses, co-ops cooperate with each other to design programs that improve service. For example, food co-ops introduced food nutrition labels long before they were federally required in 1994. Credit unions fought the predatory practices of payday lenders by introducing salary advance loans that double as savings accounts.

Whenever a community faces a need—a challenge to make life better—the cooperative business model comes into play. By putting people first and innovating to meet members' needs, cooperative enterprises build a better world. Please let us know if there's anything we can do to help improve your Rock Energy part of the world. ■



### Energy Efficiency

### *Tip of the Month*

When buying a new appliance, check the black and yellow EnergyGuide label. This label provides an estimate of the product's energy consumption and efficiency. It also shows the highest and lowest energy efficiency estimate of similar models. Most major appliances—such as refrigerators, dishwashers, and clothes dryers—are required to have these labels.

Source: U.S. Department of Energy



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