



### More Power to You

# 2011 Begins with Celebration Plans for Rock Energy's 75th Anniversary

By Shane L. Larson,  
Chief Executive Officer

When rural folks in southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois celebrated the New Year in 1936, they probably huddled around their wood stoves for warmth and relied on kerosene lanterns for light.

Things were different for people who lived in the cities. They had electricity and the conveniences that came with it: heat, lights, refrigerators, electric stoves, running water. For-profit utility companies had energized the more populated areas but left the countryside dark. They didn't think it would be economically feasible to construct power lines in rural areas where farms were far apart.

If private companies wouldn't supply electricity to rural people, President Franklin D. Roosevelt believed it was the government's duty to help. In 1935, he created the Rural Electric Administration, part of the New Deal. REA made loans available to local electric cooperatives, which then would build and operate the lines to distribute electricity throughout rural America.

Fourteen forward-thinking men from this area took the initiative, and on April 23, 1936, filed the articles of incorporation for Rock County Electric Cooperative Association, which became Rock Energy Cooperative in 2007. Now, 75 years later, think of these men and many others in the local cooperative movement every time you turn on a light or TV, crank up the thermostat to get the chill out of the air, or use one of the many electronic gadgets in your home.

As we enter 2011, Rock Energy is planning its 75th anniversary celebration, which will begin with our 75th Annual Meeting on Monday, March 28, at the Eclipse Center in Beloit. In addition to the usual activities, we'll reminisce about the early days of rural electricity and pay tribute to the co-op's founders and leaders through the

years. Please mark your calendar now so you can join the celebration, and watch this magazine for further details.

The beginning of a new year also is a good time to look back at the year that just ended and anticipate what the future might hold. During 2010, I wrote several times about the proposed federal cap-and-trade program. After much hype, Congress failed to pass a comprehensive climate change bill last year. That's good news, but the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has taken steps

to begin regulating carbon emissions from power plants through the federal Clean Air Act—something the law was never intended to do.

More stringent federal restrictions on power plant emissions and increased state renewable energy requirements will affect Rock Energy and its members. No one can predict the future, but it seems clear that increased government involvement is going to increase the cost of doing business and add to consumers' energy bills. New regulations won't be the only culprit. Prices for fuel, materials, and equipment will continue to rise.

Throughout the coming year, I will keep you informed about changes

that will affect your energy bill, and I promise that Rock Energy will do everything it can to keep your energy costs affordable. That's our commitment to you.

At Rock Energy, we also are committed to providing you with safe and reliable energy, but people who damage and steal co-op property continue to diminish our efforts. I'm referring to the story on page 5 about the theft of copper wire. Not only are the culprits putting their lives on the line by carelessly dealing with high-voltage electricity, they also are creating the potential for outages and other electrical problems. If you see any suspicious activity around electrical equipment, please call the authorities.

(Continued on page 28 ►)





# Theft of Copper Wire Can Turn Deadly

## Report Any Suspicious Activity You See Around Electric Equipment

In October, Ameren employees in southern Illinois were sent to repair an outage and found the cause—a man had cut into an energized wire while attempting to steal copper. He was dead, and his two accomplices fled the scene.

In August, a man broke into a North Carolina electric cooperative's substation to steal copper. He was perched atop a high-voltage regulator when he apparently cut a wire. The jolt of electricity knocked him 10 feet away from the regulator, and he was pronounced dead at the scene.

In West Virginia, two people are facing first-degree murder charges because of a botched copper theft attempt in an Appalachian Power substation. Three thieves broke in and were stealing copper wire when one was severely burned. The current left a large hole in his leg where it left his body. He was surrounded by copper wire. He died a day later, and his accomplices, who were engaged in the felony that resulted in his death, are facing murder charges.

Members of Oklahoma Electric Cooperative are facing an estimated \$1 million repair bill because copper thieves wrecked a substation for just \$100 worth of copper. The damage caused an outage and destroyed regulators and a large transformer valued at \$600,000. Given the fire and destruction, co-op officials are amazed they didn't

also find a burned body in the substation.

As the value of copper has doubled in recent years, the metal is becoming more tempting to would-be thieves.

A few incidents of copper wire theft from Rock Energy equipment have occurred in the past several years. Fortunately, however, no one has been injured or died in the pursuit of copper from the co-op, said Denny Schultz, director of utility operations.

"It's extremely dangerous to tamper with any electrical equipment," Schultz said. "People should always assume that there is live current flowing through those wires."

He asked everyone to be on the lookout for suspicious activity around substations, poles, towers, transformers, and storage sites. If you notice anything unusual, such as an open substation gate, open equipment, or hanging wire, call Rock Energy immediately at (866) 752-4550.

If you see anyone other than utility personnel or contractors around substations or other electric facilities, call the police.

"Our linemen are highly trained professionals who know the dangers of working with electricity and take the proper safety precautions," Schultz said. "It's crazy to think that some people would risk their lives just to steal some copper." ■

*Thieves across the country are damaging electrical equipment like these transformers for the copper they contain. Some thieves are paying for the thefts with their lives.*

# Rock Energy Employees Collect 6,023 Pounds of Groceries for Needy

Rock Energy Cooperative employees collected a total of 6,023 pounds of nonperishable groceries and household items during a six-week community service project called “Transforming People’s Lives.”

The items were donated to area food pantries operated by ECHO in Janesville and St. Peter’s Church in South Beloit before Thanksgiving.

“At Rock Energy, transformers are used every day to provide electricity to our members,” CEO Shane Larson said. “Leading up to this holiday season, we wanted to help transform people’s lives in another way—by collecting groceries for people in need in order to make their holidays a little brighter.”

The co-op’s 55 employees at its Janesville and South Beloit locations divided into two groups—Team Kilowatt and Team Voltage—to see which team could collect the most groceries—measured in pounds. Each pole-top transformer used on co-op lines weighs about 200 pounds, and



Rock Energy Cooperative employees show the 6,023 pounds of groceries they collected during the “Transforming People’s Lives” project. The donated items equal the weight of 30 pole-top transformers like the two in the photo.

employees competed to see which team could collect items equal to the weight of the most transformers.

Team Voltage collected 5,020 pounds, getting a boost from Seneca Foods of Janesville, while Team Kilo-

watt collected about 1,000 pounds.

“I am proud of all the Rock Energy employees who participated in this community service project, and I especially want to thank Seneca Foods for its generosity,” Larson said. ■

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(Continued from page 4)

On a lighter note, I hope everyone had a great holiday season. It’s a time when we count our blessings and try to make our portion of the world at least a little bit better. I want to thank Rock Energy employees and Seneca Foods for their generous donation of more than 6,000 pounds of groceries to local food pantries. (See story on this page.)

In addition, special thanks go to members who graciously made a holiday gift to Project Lift Up by

rounding up the amount they pay on their monthly energy bills or making a one-time donation. The money helps low-income members keep their houses heated and their lights burning brightly. One Santa was kind enough to add a monthly donation of \$10 to his bill to help others. Now that’s the true spirit of the season!

Throughout 2011, please let us know if there’s anything we can do to improve our service. It is a great privilege to meet your energy needs, and we hope you will join us in celebrating our 75th anniversary. ■



Jan. 7 is the deadline to apply for Rock Energy Cooperative scholarships for 2011. Go to [www.rockcoop/member/scholar.html](http://www.rockcoop/member/scholar.html) for details.

## Washington Trip May Provide Answers to Youth's Questions

As a junior in high school, you might be thinking about college and how you're going to come up with more than \$100,000 to pay for higher education. You also are trying to decide what you want to work at the rest of your life to make that college experience pay off.

Oddly enough, the people who may have answers to those questions are seated in the chambers of the U.S. Congress in Washington, D.C.

Electric cooperatives believe that young people deserve a first-class opportunity to educate themselves in the government process. Each year, cooperatives from across the country participate in Youth Tour to Washington, D.C.

In 2011, Rock Energy Cooperative will fully sponsor two high school juniors on the June 10-17 trip. Applicants must be children of Rock Energy members and reside in the co-op's service territory. The all-expense-paid trip includes transportation, lodging, meals, and admissions to events. Round-trip travel is by motor coach from Springfield, Ill. Travel to Springfield is not included.

While on the trip, students will learn the principles required to keep cooperative members working together for the co-op's success by establishing their own chip and soda cooperative. In Washington, they will meet with their congressional representatives, tour historic sites, and perhaps gain information to help determine their career paths.

Application materials are available by visiting [www.rock.coop](http://www.rock.coop) and clicking on the Youth Tour logo. The deadline to apply is Feb. 11. If you have questions, please call Barbara Uebelacker, communications specialist, at (608) 752-4550 or (866) 752-4550 or e-mail her at [BarbU@rock.coop](mailto:BarbU@rock.coop).



Rock Energy Cooperative sponsored Rachel MacDowell of Rockton, second from left, on the 2010 Washington trip. During a Capitol Hill visit, U.S. Rep. Donald Manzullo of Illinois meets with Rachel and Jo-Carroll Energy representatives Jilli Bajema and Brandon Behlke.

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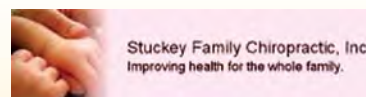


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