

ABOUT CO-OPS

Co-ops are an American way of life. In the very best sense they reflect the ability of Americans to work together toward a common goal. The first United States co-op was established by Benjamin Franklin in 1752 to help provide insurance coverage for a group of Philadelphia citizens. Today, over 100 million Americans rely on more than 47,000 co-ops across the country.

The important fact about a co-op is that the customers own it. A co-op belongs to the people who need and use its services; they band together to establish one because they believe they can serve themselves better and at less cost if they own the business.

Most co-ops operate on a non-profit basis. The people who make up a co-op become share-holders or "members." Any profits the co-op generates go back to the owners in the form of annual refunds called "patronage refunds" or "capital credits."

ABOUT PEARL RIVER VALLEY ELECTRIC POWER ASSOCIATION

In Mississippi, rural electric co-ops are known as electric power associations. Pearl River Valley Electric Power Association, headquartered in Columbia, is one of 26 electric power associations across the state and has been serving its members for more than 73 years.

Pearl River Valley EPA was incorporated in May of 1938 "to make electric energy available to its members at the lowest cost consistent with sound economy and good management." A membership fee was \$5, which was a lot of money in those days. But one year later, on May 19, 1939, 227 members had electricity in their homes when Pearl River Valley first began service to its customers.

One hundred miles of line were erected during

that first year and, 10 years later, 1,500 miles of line had been built to serve over 4,500 members. By 1951, nearly 90 percent of the people in Pearl River Valley's service area had electricity. Today, Pearl River Valley serves 46,975 members in 12 counties with over 6,707 miles of line. Now every residence and business in the area has access to electricity, and Pearl River Valley has branch offices in Hattiesburg, Purvis and Wiggins.

In 1960, Pearl River Valley became the first co-op in the state and one of the first in the nation to refund capital credits to its members, something the company has done every year since. To date, Pearl River Valley has paid patronage refunds of \$32,651,081. In 1988, Pearl River Valley established a new program to return accumulated patronage capital to the estates of deceased members and has already returned \$8,872,414 in that manner.

Pearl River Valley gets much of its power from South Mississippi Electric Power Association, a generation and transmission co-op owned by 11 electric power associations. South Mississippi EPA, headquartered in Hattiesburg, has two of its own generating facilities and also owns a part of the Grand Gulf Nuclear Plant.

People throughout South Mississippi are familiar with Pearl River Valley's annual meeting. Every year since 1939, members have gathered together to have a say in how their co-op will be run. Co-ops are democratic; each member has one vote when it comes to business matters, and such matters are addressed during the annual meeting. Pearl River Valley was the first electric power association in Mississippi to begin holding annual meetings.

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A Touchstone Energy[®] Cooperative



2011 AWARD WINNERS

Robert Gay, Jr., and Natalie Bourn represented Pearl River Valley EPA in the 2011 Youth Leadership Program.

A comprehensive statewide youth leadership program developed to better acquaint the future leaders of our communities with cooperative philosophy and how it relates to building leadership skills.