

# E L E C - O - N E W S



## ***URECC Scholarships for Graduating Seniors***

In 2017, Upshur Rural Electric Cooperative will award scholarships to graduating seniors living at the residence of their parents or legal guardians who are active members of URECC. Upshur Rural strives to provide quality service as well as provide a commitment to our communities.

One example of our dedication and commitment to education is our URECC College Scholarship Program that was established in 1999 when House Bill 3203 was passed by the Texas Legislature. This bill allows non-profit electric cooperatives to use unclaimed capital credit monies, previously collected by the State Comptroller's Office for the State General Fund, to be used to fund scholarships for students in rural areas.

The URECC College Scholarship Program, for graduating seniors in 2017, will provide:

- \*Two (2) \$4000 scholarships, payable at \$1000 per year for four (4) years, paid at the rate of \$500 per semester (fall and spring).
- \*Two (2) \$2000 scholarships for technical school, payable at \$1000 per year for two years, paid at the rate of \$500 per semester (fall and spring).
- \*Thirty (30) \$800 scholarships, payable for one year at the rate of \$400 per semester (fall and spring).

URECC College Scholarship Applications are available from:

- 1) URECC's website at [www.urecc.coop](http://www.urecc.coop) (click on the Community tab, then Scholarships)
- 2) Your school counselor's office
- 3) URECC Business Office in Gilmer during the hours of 8 am —4:30 pm



The scholarships may be used for tuition, books and expenses at any accredited university, college, junior college and technical or trade school. Completed applications must be received at URECC's Business Office by Monday, April 17, 2017. Any scholarship application not completed in its entirety, with all required attachments, will be disqualified.

The URECC Board of Directors Scholarship Committee selects the scholarship winners. The selection of scholarship recipients will be made in April and notification will be in early May.



## **2017 ANNUAL MEETING**

The URECC Board of Directors has set the Annual Meeting of the Members for Thursday, April 6, 2017 at 1:30 p.m. An official notice of the meeting will be mailed to each member of the Cooperative as required by the Bylaws. There will be entertainment and registration beginning at 12 noon. The business session will begin at 1:30 p.m. At the end of the business session, there will be a drawing for door prizes. The prizes will include electric bill credit vouchers and small electrical appliances. The mail in ballot door prize is a \$150 electric bill credit voucher.

## Ask the General Manager



Submit your question to Mr. Rob Walker, our General Manager at [ask@urecc.com](mailto:ask@urecc.com) and he will select a question and address it in the following months' newsletter.

Upshur Rural Electric Cooperative (URECC) typically receives questions in the later winter months about members' bills and why they are so much more expensive than the prior months. Many members' questions seemingly arise out of the unexpectedness of the amount's increase and are seeking answers concerning why it occurred. Why a bill is more expensive than a prior month's bill can be a complex puzzle to work through for sure. There are so many factors going into the calculation of a bill from the cost per kWh of the energy to how much energy was actually utilized that it may seem difficult to pin point a single answer.

The key to many answers lies first in the bill itself and the explanations on it. A good first place to look on a bill is at the amount of "Usage" or, in other words, the amount of energy or kWh's, consumed during the billing period. If the kWh Usage is higher than normal or expected that is the key explanation to a higher bill. URECC's primary charge on any bill is a multiple of the Usage in kWh times the energy charges. For every unit of kWh used the bill increases. While there are many reasons why a bill's Usage is higher, and some are discussed below, the amount of usage is the first place to look.

A second place to look on the bill is the billing period or what URECC terms the Billing Cycle. Not every month has exactly the same number of work days. A monthly Billing Cycle can be shorter or longer respective to the month. Billing Cycle is simply a term to describe how many days for any particular bill the kWh's were counted. Some months may be as low as 28 or 29 days and other months may go up to 32 or 33 days. In the end, they add up to a full year but do fluctuate some month-to-month. So if a higher than expected bill has 32 days of Billing Cycle on it, then there are a couple of more days than an "average month". While one month might be 32 days, some month, either before or just after, will have less than the expected 30/31 days in it.

As to what drives higher than expected kWh usage in any given month, first consider the weather. Weather is the key and most consistent predictor of how high or low a power bill may be. When the weather is very hot or very cold a living space will tend to absorb the heat or lose it to the outside respectively at a greater rate than in a normally milder temperature month. Weather minded people will sometimes refer to the heating-degree or cooling-degree days in a month. That is simply the number of hours above/below some average threshold, say 68 degrees, that were in a month. If there are several 100 degree, cooling-degree days in a month, for example, it would indicate that the temperature outside was much higher than the threshold temperature and hence a home would have to cool more hours to maintain that threshold. Same goes for heating degree days in a winter month. Typically anything a member can do to their residence to reduce the absorption or loss of heat from/to the outside, the lower the electric bill will be. Many folks will add storm windows or install other types of vapor barriers on their windows and doors to limit the effects. This is especially true for older, single-paned windows that have very little insulation value to them. Other residents will increase insulation above and below their home or install additional roof vents and fans for summer benefits. Another smart idea is to insulate electric water heaters with a low cost blanket from a home store. It cost very little money but will eliminate loss of heat from the water heater to the exterior air. Another way to save money is through installing higher efficiency appliances. While efficiency may come at a price of effectiveness, the benefit of lower Usage is very apparent and a longer term benefit for most.

Another common factor, also weather related but more indirectly, is the type of heat or cooling a member uses. In many instances a cooling system runs consistently year in and out. That is why a summer bill does not vary much from one summer to another unless the summer heat is in place an unusual number of days. The larger differences for cooling costs typically are whether or not it's a central system for the whole residence or a room/window unit and then secondly the efficiency of that unit. Room/window units tend to be much less efficient despite cooling less space and hence tend to cost more over the years.

For heating there are other additional factors, some of which are more weather related than you might expect. It is possible to simply add more heat into a home through operating more heating units or operating them more often than to spend the cost of making a residence more efficient. In those instances, the added heat necessary will cost money depending on the fuel used. If it's totally electric heat that is used, resistance heat or heat pump, then the fuel cost is the electricity burned in kWh's of usage. Some residence have fireplaces built in that add heat through wood, coal or gas. If so then the extra cost of fuel is the cost of the fireplace's fuel plus the electricity used otherwise. Also note that homes with taller ceilings tend to require more heat input because heat rises and you are truly heating cubic feet not just square feet.

Heat pumps are very efficient ways to heat and cool a home. The Federal standards that apply to them make them more and more efficient as the years pass. But there are instances where a heat pump can use a lot of electricity unexpectedly. In cases where the outside air drops near 30 degrees or less the heat pumps efficiencies start to fade. While this is only a few hours a year in Texas those hours can add up in any one month. Because a heat pump's job is to rob any heat it can find from the outside and bring it inside through the pressurization and depressurization of gases, the amount of heat the outside air has to offer does have some effect on how much work the heat pump has to do to achieve this job. So the colder the outside air the harder and longer it will also have to work. That is an additional hit to the natural loss of heat the residence has to the colder outside to start. Most heat pumps are equipped with heat strips that cut on in those instances to compensate. Some units label these as emergency heat. When the heat strip or emergency heat kicks on the residence is having two sources of heat not unlike an added fireplace might provide. The added heat from the heat strip adds even more kWh's of Usage to a bill. Again the question then is what is the best fuel to heat a home.

Another common electric heat is the resistance heater. These are the smaller room heaters you might find at a home store. While true that they heat only a small room and thus would tend to be lower cost based on cubic footage of heating, these forms of heaters tend to be less efficient because they don't distribute heat evenly throughout a room and will tend to work longer times and use more Usage than a central heat system to get the same affect. The key to remember here is that Usage/ kWh is energy which is both amount of power multiplied by time. So a unit running less power but for a longer time can be more costly than a larger unit running more power but less time.

A final factor is surely the cost per unit or kWh. Cost typically don't fluctuate significantly in one month to another but tend to trend upward or downward over time as fuel prices change on the larger markets and newer generation units come on to replace older ones. All of these factors tend to be trends over time versus monthly events. Also power prices to the member tend to be lagging for months behind what goes on in the larger, broader markets as it takes time for prices to trickle down.

In the end the steps one can take to keep a bill lower in the winter include turning down the thermostat so the units don't run as often, insulating windows and doors better, insulating water heaters, adding more insulation in attics and floor spaces, installing more energy efficient appliances along with adding heat at the best priced fuel cost. They all add up to a warmer and lower cost winter.