



Rio Grande
Electric
Cooperative, Inc.

UP  DATE

Brackettville, Texas

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A Message From The General Manager/CEO

By Daniel G. Laws



Theft, in any form, is a very serious matter and speaks volumes about folks who engage in such practices.

Most of us would not entertain the idea of theft, no matter what the provocation. However, of late, there have been an alarming number of members that have made the decision to steal electric service. One symptom that seems common is the failure to understand that theft of electric service is no different than, say, shoplifting. In fact, the laws of Texas do not distinguish between the two. Both are criminal activities, both can result in incarceration.

Recently, a member owning a rent house called and asked that cooperative staff change the existing meter into his name because the renters were moving out. Area Operations Manager, Danny Samaniego, informed the member that the meter was already disconnected. The response from our member, the owner of the house, was somewhat alarming. He said, "The lights were on last night". His statement was alarming because Cooperative employees had disconnected the renters of the house for nonpayment ten months earlier.

Apparently, once Rio Grande's personnel were out of sight, the renters in question decided to connect themselves back up and consume electric energy at no cost. Fortunately, a phone call from the member owning the house put a dent in the renters' plans to skip out unfettered. The Sheriff's Department was called, photographs were taken and charges were filed. All of this resulted in an indictment being handed down by the Grand Jury and a warrant for the arrest of the renter being issued.

You may be wondering at this point in the story how much the renter stole. Well—that is the problem. With no meter present to register usage, there is no way to know with certainty. Rio Grande's tariff allows us to calculate the greatest amount of usage possible for the greatest amount of time we believe the theft took place. In this case, we took the highest monthly usage the renter had consumed to date, and applied it to all of the months the renter was disconnected. This resulted in theft in excess of \$4,000, which is a felony.

Knowing some more about the details, you may wonder why I am taking time to tell you about such distasteful business. The answer is obvious, if you understand your ownership of the cooperative. The victim in this crime is you! When consumers steal from the cooperative -- they steal from you. Unaccounted for kWhs are automatically rolled into the PCA adjustment on everyone's bill.

I had an elderly gentleman tell me one time that what bothered him the most about stealing is the fact that the thief has made the decision to, "Get theirs off someone else". I think implicit in what he was saying, is the notion that thieves place their own needs above any and every other individual.

The Board of Directors, employees, and I are very committed to not allowing theft to go unchallenged or unpunished. There are currently three pending cases like the one I have described. We make every effort to convict those responsible, though some law enforcement agencies are more vigorous in seeking convictions than others. We call it protecting your best interests ---

You can call it,

"Your Home Team Advantage".

Essay Contest Winner

The top essay in RGEC's Essay Contest, as determined by the Board of Directors at the May Board Meeting, was written by Lee Davis, 17, of Brackett High School. Lee wins a new Dell Computer System for his efforts. All the entries were great, and RGEC encourages all students ages 14-18, to try again next year!

"What Rio Grande Electric Cooperative Means To Me"

In the past, modern conveniences were less available in rural areas than urban areas. Due to the distance, electricity could not be run out to these remote places. The ranchers had to find a way to either live without electricity or generate their own.

Before electricity, most ranchers set up wind generators on their ranches to charge large batteries. These batteries in turn produced electricity for the house or barn. However, they could only generate DC current, which was only good to burn light bulbs. These bulbs were also much dimmer than today's bulbs. DC current couldn't run refrigerators, washers, or other appliances. These wind generators required maintenance like anything, which took time away from other ranch duties.

Shortly after World War II, Rio Grande Electric Cooperative was formed to provide rural communities with electricity. Electricity was provided to ranchers and they no longer had to worry about *Continued on next page.*