

# Making Life Better



MESSAGE FROM  
**GENERAL MANAGER ALAN LESLEY**

**WHAT WOULD MAKE LIFE BETTER** in our service territory? More jobs? Better health care? Improved parks? Renewable energy options? Those are improvements that could benefit everyone in the area.

Comanche Electric Cooperative exists to power communities and empower you, our members, to improve your quality of life. The cooperative business model offers the perfect tool for tackling tasks too big for one person to handle alone, but we need a common purpose to effectively wield the power of cooperation.

Think about the impact electricity had on rural areas about eight decades ago. People began living longer because they no longer had to work from dusk to dawn at backbreaking chores. Farm production jumped. Running water, lights and better food storage became possible—and with those leaps, our ancestors had new opportunities.

A few of you might remember our beginnings from your younger days, so you know full well the power of neighbors uniting behind a common purpose. Yet most of our members weren't around when this area rolled up its sleeves and worked

together to get the lights on, when cooperation changed the landscape of the communities we serve.

Does that mean we don't need a cooperative anymore? Is our job done? Are there no more challenges left, no roadblocks to a brighter future for our children? What should come next for us?

That's up to you.

Your co-op is more than a power provider. We're proof that when folks unite with a single focus, they can turn

dreams into reality and make lives better. So think about it: What's important to you? What would make life better?

Please tell us what you're working on to improve the quality of your own life. We're here to support your efforts, and we want to know how we can help bring people with common needs and interests together. Remember, electric co-ops can be a mechanism you use to make life better. Send your ideas to [memberservices@ceca.coop](mailto:memberservices@ceca.coop) or P.O. Box 729, Comanche, TX 76442, or call us at 1-800-915-2533.

We exist today because co-op members like yourself decades ago believed they could turn darkness into daylight. Thanks for sharing your ideas with us. We can't wait to work cooperatively with you!





**CECA IS COMMITTED** to supporting the education of the members we serve. Therefore, we are once again awarding six \$1,000 scholarships through our Scholarship for Excellence and Operation Round Up programs.

Members who have a qualifying high school senior graduating in 2017, or are adults pursuing higher education, are invited to apply for the scholarships.

Details and applications can be found at [www.cecacoop.com](http://www.cecacoop.com) under the Youth Opportunities tab. Students are encouraged to apply for both scholarships to increase their chances of receiving an award.

Deadline for applications is March 24, so get your applications in! Questions concerning the scholarships can be directed to Shirley Dukes at 1-800-915-2533 or by email to [sdukes@cecacoop.com](mailto:sdukes@cecacoop.com).

## CECA Vehicle To Be Auctioned

**CECA WILL AUCTION OFF** a retired vehicle through a closed-bid process. This vehicle has a few battle scars and is well broken-in, as you would expect from a work vehicle.

You may come by the office at 201 W. Wrights Ave. in Comanche to inspect the vehicle in person.

Sealed bids can be mailed to CECA, Attn: Sealed Vehicle Bid, P.O. Box 729, Comanche, TX 76442, or dropped off in person at the office in Comanche.

In all correspondence, please include a phone number where you can be reached. Questions can be directed to Monty Cunningham at 1-800-915-2533.

The deadline for bids is noon, March 21. Bid winner will be notified March 22.

CECA reserves the right to reject any or all bids at the discretion of the board.



**Truck #599—2011 Ford F-150; extended cab; 5.0-liter engine; 6-speed automatic transmission; mileage: 157,700 miles\*; minimum bid: \$5,000**

*\*Mileage current as of January 13 but is subject to change, as vehicle could still be used.*



P.O. Box 729, Comanche, TX 76442

Operating in Brown, Callahan, Comanche, Eastland, Mills, Shackelford and Stephens counties

### HEADQUARTERS

201 W. Wrights Ave.  
Comanche, TX 76442

### EARLY OFFICE

1801 CR 338  
Early, TX 76801

### EASTLAND OFFICE

1311 W. Main St.  
Eastland, TX 76448

### OFFICE HOURS

**Comanche Office:** Monday–Friday  
7:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

**Early Office:** Monday, Wednesday  
and Friday 7:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m., closed  
from 1 to 2 p.m.

**Eastland Office:** Tuesday and  
Thursday 8 a.m.–4 p.m.

### General Manager

Alan Lesley

### Board of Directors

Randy Denning, District 1  
Pete McDougal, District 2  
Ruby Solomon, District 3  
Monty Carlisle, District 4  
Troy Stewart, District 5  
Loren Stroebel, District 6  
Phil Taylor, District 7

### Report an Outage

CECA crews are available 24/7 in the event of a power quality issue by calling 1-800-915-2533.

## Contact Us

### CALL US

**1-800-915-2533** toll-free

### FIND US ON THE WEB

[www.cecacoop.com](http://www.cecacoop.com)



[facebook.com/CECA.coop](https://facebook.com/CECA.coop)

# It's All in the Roots

**IF YOU ASK LARRY DON WOMACK THE SECRET TO THE SUCCESS OF HIS NURSERY, HE WILL TELL YOU IT'S ALL IN THE ROOTS ... FAMILY ROOTS, THAT IS.**



**WOMACK NURSERY WAS CREATED OUT OF NECESSITY.** The nursery's roots run back as far as the Great Depression when Larry Don's grandfather, James H. Womack, moved from the town of West to Erath County looking for work. The job market was saturated and declining, and jobs that were available were quickly scooped up by any able-bodied man willing to

put forth the effort.

Fortunately, Womack, along with seven other families, found work at Fitzgerald's Nursery in Stephenville. He became enchanted with the idea of planting roots, both figuratively and literally. The fate of his future was born during those early working days, when he determined that the nursery industry was where he wanted to build his future.

In 1937, James H. Womack uprooted his family once more to relocate them 25 miles west in Comanche County. There he purchased the 180-acre tract of land where Womack Nursery Company sits today.

"Everybody laughed at him because it was just old, rough, raw country here in Comanche County," said Larry Don. "But after about 20 years, they quit laughing!" With so many families looking to provide food for their households during the Depression, seed companies and nurseries were some of the few businesses flourishing. Womack Nursery was blessed to become one of those companies.

In the company's early stages, James Womack sold trees out of the back of his truck at town squares and when necessary would ship packages via parcel post. His marketing strategy at that time was pretty much word of mouth. Sometime during the mid-1940s, he began publishing a mail-order pamphlet, the first of which was more of a leaflet than a catalogue. Owing to the demands of the times, James discussed rationing in addition to his nursery items.

The pamphlet, which has now been developed into the Womack Nursery catalogue, is now mailed all over the United States. "At one time," said Larry Don, "we were mailing out about 15,000 catalogues a year." But like all other businesses, the explosion of the internet changed all that. Currently they only mail out about 8,000 paper copies of the catalogue.

James' son, Larry Jim Womack, soon followed in his father's footsteps. After graduating from Texas A&M University in 1958, Larry Jim came back to assist his father in operating his growing business. After the passing of the elder Womack in 1964, Larry Jim continued to operate the nursery with his wife, Lajoice.

Larry Don came to work at his father Larry Jim's side after he graduated from Tarleton State University in 1983. Having been raised at the nursery, he knew the business and was prepared to jump right into the family profession. His dad, however, had other ideas. Larry Jim told Larry Don to get a job outside the nursery, as he wanted him to learn what it is like to be an employee.

"The nursery was Dad's deal," said Larry Don. "I worked at the nursery on salary and farmed peanuts on the side." But when the peanut farming industry took a downturn during the quota buyout, it became necessary to increase the nursery work to accommodate the two families. Internet sales were becoming big business, and Womack Nursery turned to the web in an effort to increase sales. Within three years, the nursery sales had tripled, allowing the Womacks to increase the size of the organization.

Fifteen years ago, Larry Jim decided it was time to semiretire, and he turned the office and employees over to Larry Don. "My Dad is 80 years old," said Larry Don. "He has a lot of miles on him, but he's still out here every day." Larry Don says the other hands are not about to allow Larry Jim to outwork them, making Larry Jim his best hand.

"He's old-school," said Larry Don. "If we need a tree, and we don't have it here—it's in the field—he'll get someone to help him, and he'll go get it with a shovel. He's not afraid to grab ahold of one and go out there." When Larry Jim was 65, Larry Don equipped him with a pedometer. Turns out, he had been walking approximately 10 miles a day, 100 days a year, for 60 years!

Womack Nursery offers a plethora of products: pecan trees, fruit trees and shade trees, as well as grapevines, berries and vegetables. "The odder it is, the better it sells," said Larry Don. "Pomegranates, olives and hops, for instance." As for demand, there is no set formula as to how many of each species to plant and maintain. "With 17 different varieties, you

never know what to grow or how many to plant," he said. "It's all in my head. There's some varieties I have 5,000 trees of, and there's some I have 500. It's a guessing game."

Larry Don says 50 percent of his promotion is word of mouth, the success of which is mostly due to the nursery's reputation for longevity, coupled with experience. (Between Larry Jim and Larry Don, the two have an accumulated 100 years of experience: Larry Jim with 60 years, and Larry Don with 40.)

The nursery ships anywhere between 30 and 70 packages per day via UPS, and averages around 15 walk-in customers per day. For large orders, the nursery personally delivers the trees. "We've got a trailer in the yard that's got 1,080 pecan trees that we'll head out [to Austin] Sunday morning after the temperature gets above freezing. And we'll be taking him trees for probably the next five weeks. And then about the time the guys in South Texas quit, we have a big commercial following in Oklahoma, and we'll start delivering trees in Oklahoma."



**Womack Nursery sells up to 20,000 pecan trees per year. These 8-foot trees are the average size sold. Once they grow past the 8-foot stage, they become harder to transplant.**



**Larry Don Womack, left, with Darrell Westfall, a five-year repeat customer who made a seven-hour drive from Glencoe, Oklahoma, to purchase these 15 pecan trees.**

Many of their customers will drive three to four hours just to get to them.

Pecan trees, Womack Nursery's largest crop, are planted as seedlings. During their third year of growth, the trees are grafted. "We graft around 25,000 trees a year. The next year we have to take care of them, make them grow straight, look good and all that," said Larry Don. Peaches are a two-year process, and grapes, blackberries, pomegranates and figs require one year. At any given time, they will have around 120 varieties of trees and plants, all in different sizes and varying stages of growth.

As with most root crops, the nursery trees thrive on new soil. "The thing about a pecan tree," said Larry Don, "is if it's 8 feet tall, that means it's got an 8-foot root system. Well, you get an 8-foot root system taking the nutrients, it rapes the soil of all your micro-nutrients." Therefore, once a crop of trees has been harvested, the nursery will buy or lease new land for the next crop while managing the old land to prepare it for the next crop to be grown on it. Some of Womack Nursery's first pecan trees still grow on the original 180-acre tract bought by James Womack in 1937 and are used for grafting purposes.

There are only two nurseries of this type in the state of Texas, mostly because the business is so labor-intensive and requires so much specialization to be successful. "The nursery business is hard," says Larry Don. "One hundred acres of nursery is about like 3,000 acres of row crop. And it's all manual labor." He gives much of the credit to the men and women who work for him. Womack Nursery employs 10 full time, and a number of part-time and seasonal employees, some who have been with him as many as 35 years.



**These hands can dig a load of trees in 30–40 minutes. The trees will then be taken to the barn to be processed for shipment or taken to the hill yard to be held for future orders.**

Today, Womack Nursery Company is still thriving under the leadership of Larry Don. He feels blessed to still work alongside his father, a gift he does not take for granted. The Womacks pride themselves in providing quality fruit and pecan trees to their many valued customers. While the big-box stores move to container growing, Womack Nursery specializes in knowing the weather and soil of Texas and Oklahoma, and providing product that fit the particular areas.

Visit Womack Nursery at 2551 Highway 6 in De Leon, call (254) 893-6497 or email [pecan@womacknursery.com](mailto:pecan@womacknursery.com). Find them on the web at [womacknursery.com](http://womacknursery.com) to peruse the listings of their many products and order online.

**LEFT:** Pecan trees are left in the field and dug at the time of shipment to ensure a fresh product. Fruit trees, on the other hand, are dug and placed here, in the hill yard. Berry plants are kept in the cooler. "I've got two or three individuals that that's all they do, is package strawberries and blackberries. We probably sell 30–40,000 of the berry plants every year."

**CENTER:** Trees are color-coded to better determine their variety. "There are certain trees that do better in certain areas," said Larry Don, "so we move the trees around according to soil types. Like, pecans do good in sand; the fruit trees do good in red or clay areas; and persimmons do good in kind of a black sand or darker soil."

**RIGHT:** A freshly packaged order of pecan trees ready to be loaded for shipment.



# Santa Was Good To Bangs ISD

*When Bangs ISD sent a group of 10 high school juniors to the 2016–17 CECA Student Leadership Conference, the students weren't entirely sure what to expect. Imagine their school's gratification when that group chose to follow through on the activity it chose for its conference leadership project.*

**JENNY PATRICK, COUNSELOR AT BANGS HIGH SCHOOL**, was one of 11 educators to respond to the call for leaders at the annual CECA Student Leadership Conference. She and her entourage of Timothy Hall, Ben Edgin, Alek Mendoza, Casey Ketterhagen, Luke Carroll, Josh Browning, Katelynn Gotcher, Abbey Ivey, Kylie Cook, and Tomi Catlin arrived at the Lake Brownwood 4-H Center bright and early on a Wednesday morning. They were greeted by a group of local volunteers dedicated to making the day a success.

As the day progressed, the students worked their way through a series of activities designed to encourage them to think differently, as well as to step into leadership roles. At the

close of the day, they were assigned the task of brainstorming ideas to be put in action within their community.

For their community action program, these students chose to promote literacy and spark the holiday spirit in an elementary school. The title of their project: The Story Sleigh.

These 10 students visited every classroom at J.B. Stephens Elementary, reading holiday books to the students. They also spoke to them about the importance of daily reading and all the exciting books available to them at the high school level. Each student also received a holiday treat from their high school mentors.

“We loved attending the CECA Leadership Conference,”

Patrick said. “The experience our students receive from coordinating with other school districts is truly influential. Even better, our students get dedicated time to create an intentional service project dedicated to giving back to their school or community somehow. The 2016 CECA leaders were true fans of Christmas and wanted to help spread Christmas cheer in an educational way. Their idea to promote literacy by reading Christmas stories to our elementary students was exceptional. We had a blast dressing up and visiting each and every classroom at J.B. Stephens Elementary in Bangs. We look forward to many more years of making a difference through CECA!”

Congratulations to the faculty and board of Bangs ISD for allowing these students the opportunity to learn leadership, as well as how it feels to be a part of something bigger than themselves.

